

# **Ready to Fly Verse**

**by**

**GleekMom**

**Kurt/Blaine || NC-17**

*See individual stories for summaries.*

WIP (Part 7: Chapter 4)

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## COMING OUT

.....

*Blaine's Coming Out Story. He knew it wouldn't be good. He didn't know how bad it would get.*

**Author's Note:** One of my lovely readers of *Way Out*, *squiggle . giggle* asked if I would ever write the violent episodes between Blaine and his father that I imagine. I said that I wouldn't, but once the seed was planted, I could not help but actually write it. And once written, I could not help but ask momaboutown if I should post it. And she told me I had to. So here it is. This coming out story lives in the world of *Running Away/Caught/Hold On/Way Out*. It precedes all. Blaine is 13 or 14 years old.

**WARNING for physical abuse/violence. Please be safe reading this if they are triggers.**

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Blaine finished clearing the dining room table from dinner and his mother sent him out to the living room to spend time with his father. Blaine didn't want to, but his mother always insisted that despite the tightness in the pit of his stomach, it was important that they spend time together. His father hadn't been the same since returning from the war, but Blaine supposed no one ever was. On days like today he wished Cooper was still around, but his older brother had made himself very scarce since his father's return, calling infrequently and never when he thought the Colonel would be home. Cooper and their mother remained close, but neither she nor Blaine ever told him of how his father had changed.

And his father had changed. The yelling behind closed doors was no different than before, but now he sometimes heard things breaking and his mother's voice had turned from anger to fear. He could sometimes hear the sound of her being pushed against the wall and once he was nearly certain his father had struck her. The dread Blaine had always felt toward his father when he'd done something wrong grew constant. Because Blaine was also discovering that he himself had changed and he knew his father wouldn't like it.

Blaine was now learning that in his father's eyes he had not only *done* something wrong but he **was** something wrong. All of his friends were constantly talking about girls and going from girlfriend to

girlfriend. At a recent Bar Mitzvah of one of his best friends, the DJ's scantily clad dancers surrounded the boys, all of whom ogled the women. Blaine instead eyed the handsome DJ, growing hot with a mixture of desire and shame. Another boy at school, Derek, had recently come out as gay, giving a name to everything Blaine felt and he searched the internet. He knew he shouldn't be ashamed. He knew it was ok. And yet it didn't stop the fear he felt around his increasingly violent father who was openly critical of people just like him. He knew what his father would think. He feared what his father would do.

Still, he'd been raised to embrace who he was. Cooper had pushed him to be proud and the Colonel had taught him to stand up for himself, not to run and not to let others push him around. It was bitter irony that the one he most needed to stand up to was his own father.

The naturally imposing man sat on the large couch reading and his mother followed Blaine into the room, sitting in the armchair, encouraging him to sit next to his father. Blaine hesitated, turning to the dining table to straighten up a little more rather than sit beside the Colonel. But there was only so much he could do before his avoidance was obvious and he turned back to join his parents.

"So I heard at the PTA meeting today that three or four of the girls have invited you to the Sadie Hawkins dance," Blaine's mother said with a smile. "Have you decided who you're going to go with yet?"

Blaine froze in place, standing within the space between the dining room table and the coffee table that separated himself from the Colonel, who had glanced up from his book to hear his son's response. The judgment on his father's face swam before Blaine's eyes as the blood in his head drained and his heart raced with anxiety. He wondered if he was dying because breathing was becoming increasingly difficult. He watched both his parents staring at him expectantly for an answer and he swallowed the lump in his throat.

"I was thinking about asking someone myself," he said with shaky breath.

His mother chuckled. "It's a Sadie Hawkins dance, Blaine," she explained gently. "The girls are supposed to ask the boys."

Blaine's eyes dropped to the floor as terror overtook his entire body and he struggled not to shake, but it was now or never and he didn't think never was an option he could live with. His mouth was dry and he licked his lips. "I was thinking of asking a boy," Blaine nearly whispered.



His father stood, leaving his book on the couch and walked, slowly and deliberately, around the coffee table to stand in front of Blaine. Blaine had been trained to look his father in the eye and he did so now though what he truly wanted to do was run out the door and never come back. "As friends," his father clarified, staring at his son intently, in what was more a statement than a question. "You were thinking of asking this boy to go with you as friends. Stag."

Blaine wasn't sure how he was still on his feet, with the power of his father's stare causing his knees to buckle and he wondered if this is what an impending heart attack felt like. He still had a choice now though. His father had given him a way out. Tell him yes, as friends, and his father would step back to the couch and go back to his book as if the conversation never happened. And Blaine would go back to hiding who he was for another day. It would be so easy.

His eyes shifted to his mother, and she sat rigid in her seat, transfixed to the scene before her, the panic evident. She knew. She knew about him, though he didn't know how or when, and her eyes begged him to keep it from his father, keep the secret just as he kept hers from Cooper. But her secret was hers to keep, and his was his to tell, and today was the day, damn the consequences.

"No, Sir." Blaine looked up defiantly at his father whose eyes blazed. "Not as friends. As a date."

There was a moment when time stood still. And then he felt himself be flung backwards. He felt the back of his head hit the dining room chair as he skidded against the floor before he even felt the sharp stinging on his cheek. Tears flooded his eyes as his father stepped closer and over him.

"Get up," his father ordered and experience had taught Blaine to do what he was told and quickly.

Blaine's eyes closed as his father grabbed his arm and threw him face down over the dining room table. Blaine folded his arms underneath his forehead, the tears soaking his shirt until they pooled beneath him on the smooth hardwood as he waited for what he knew was to come. The sounds of the metal clink of the buckle, then the hiss of leather being released from its hold, reverberated in his ears.

He heard the terrifying swish through the air before he felt the sting but once it started it seemed never ending. Had he earned it, as Cooper had on occasion throughout his youth, his emotions may have been different. But he had done nothing wrong to deserve this. The rage that stood behind every blow turned Blaine's fear into hate and his pain into resolve. He refused to let this be his defining moment. Any respect he'd felt for his father before disappeared and was replaced with contempt.

When it was finally done and his father stood him up and turned him face to face, their eyes met and fire met fire. Blaine said nothing.

"You will not mention this again. You will not bring that *filth* into this house," the Colonel spat. "And if you choose to go to this dance with your little boyfriend, today will pale in comparison to what awaits you when you get home, is that understood?"

Blaine understood completely. "Yes, Sir," he answered.

"Go to your room. I don't want to see you anymore," the Colonel demanded.

Blaine climbed the stairs, every step hurting more than the last. He stopped himself from slamming his bedroom door at the last moment, knowing it would only invite more trouble. He kept the light off and fell face first down onto his bed, fully clothed. His tears were exhausted, there were none more to flow. He tried just to sleep, but he couldn't sleep. He reached for his cell phone, given to him so that his parents could always keep track of him, and hit the speed dial. His brother answered on the first ring.

"Hey Blaine, nice to hear from you," Cooper said cheerfully. "What's up, you alright?"

Blaine winced as he shifted in his bed and lied to his brother. "I'm fine, I just can't sleep. Can you sing to me?"

"Sure, Squirt," Cooper answered, worry in his tone but never seeking more.

Blaine closed his eyes and allowed himself be lulled to sleep by his brother's voice, his world changed forever.

It was the last phone call he and Cooper had for a long time. The dance was three weeks later and Blaine and Derek had both ended up in the hospital by the time the bullies were done with them. Despite his broken arm and bruised ribs, his father made due on his promise as soon as he arrived home. Cooper didn't come to visit him. Cooper didn't call. Blaine transferred to Dalton, and Blaine did not give him the phone number. When Cooper came to see his shows with the Warblers, Blaine was completely different. He had learned to shut off his emotions and thoughts, hiding his pain behind a confident and dapper mask.

Until one day an angel descended a staircase and his world changed again. This time for good.

## **RUNNING AWAY**

*Season 2 from Silly Love Songs to Prom, with my Blaine backstory mostly from Blaine's perspective.*

**Author's Note: Running Away is the second in my Blaine series, called Ready to Fly. It follows season 2 from Silly Love Songs to Prom, using my backstory to fill in Blaine's thoughts, feelings and missing scenes. Given that, there are huge spoilers for that story as well as my subsequent stories, so read at your own risk.**

**I often hear that Blaine's behavior in these episodes, especially BIOTA are "out of character." For me, they define his character. I don't think Blaine is perfect. I think Blaine is flawed and in pain, and that he puts on an act of perfection. We learn a lot about the true Blaine Anderson in Season 3, but there is still so much more to discover in Season 4. I always thought that the coffee shop scene in BIOTA is the first and best glimpse into Blaine's true self and I still feel that way.**

**So thank you to those that inspired me, and thank you to those who encouraged me. This is for you.**

**I do not own Glee. There are many words in this story that are owned by Glee. I trust you know which ones those are.**

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### ***Chapter One: Silly Love Songs***

*A love not fought for, is a love not worth fighting for.*

Blaine was excited about Valentine's Day this year. It had been always his favorite holiday. For someone who grew up without much love, there was something magical about a day devoted to it. This year, for the first time, he was safe as well as out, far from the hateful eyes back home. The Sadie Hawkins dance last winter had been a disaster in so many ways, but this year he was determined to turn it around. He had his best friend Nick, he had a potential boyfriend, Jeremiah, and of course, there was Kurt.

Blaine was never able to get Kurt out of his head, as hard as he tried. When he had first seen him on the staircase, Blaine somehow knew his life was about to change forever, and he had some pretty wonderful

ideas about how. Then Kurt transferred to Dalton and the game changed once again. He loved having his new friend at school with him, but dating was now out of the question. His father had made one of his many deals with Blaine, warning him that if he dated a Dalton student that he would not only be withdrawn from the all boys school, but that he would make him pay the price at home. So Blaine had promised, there was really nothing else he could do. He knew his father would make good on the threat and it terrified him. He had finally found a place he could call home and he wasn't about to lose that, not even for thrill of kissing Kurt's beautiful lips. So he pushed the feelings aside, and refused to allow the thoughts of what could be to enter his mind.

He was, therefore, thrilled that he had met the handsome blonde Jeremiah that day when he went shopping at the Gap, and was even more thrilled that Jeremiah had agreed to exchange numbers and meet for coffee. They had met twice now, and both times had gone well. Jeremiah was cute, nice, and most importantly for Blaine, he did not go to Dalton. Although nothing happened between them yet, Blaine could sense those butterflies creeping in, excited at the prospect of maybe having a boyfriend for the first time in his life; and not only for the first time, but for Valentine's Day. Although older and likely more experienced, Jeremiah had not made the next move so Blaine realized that if he really wanted this Valentine's Day to be special, he had to take matters into his own hands. So he enlisted the help of the Warblers at an emergency meeting of the council, and thanks to Kurt, the council agreed to help him sing to Jeremiah at a Gap Attack.

The teasing at the Warblers meeting had been relentless of course. It was always good natured, but the boys were never ending in their "kissy, kissy" faces and their snide remarks. He knew he should be angry, but he couldn't be. It was exactly how they treated Jeff every time he busted a move for a girl at a party, or Wes, whenever he went to serenade his girlfriend. He had missed out on this good natured teasing back in public school, his brother wasn't around anymore to do it, and truth be told, he secretly welcomed feeling like "just one of the boys."

The Warblers were fired up the day the boys went to the Gap, Blaine noticing that only Kurt was quiet. The guys' teasing had only gotten worse, and though it still didn't bother Blaine at all, Kurt had confided in him that he didn't like it at all and it felt a little like bullying. As much as Blaine tried to explain that it was ok, Kurt wanted no part of it. He had hoped that Kurt would at least be excited that the Warblers were finally breaking out of their stoic performances he found as conforming as the uniform they were made to wear. But Kurt had been quiet in rehearsals, and seemed distant on the ride over.

"Everything ok?" Blaine asked him as he drove. His own hands were shaking a little from nerves.

"What?" Kurt said, startled away from staring out the window. "Sure, I'm fine. Just nervous. I'm so used to things being thrown at me during performances."

"What are they going to throw at you at the Gap?" Blaine teased. "Socks?"

"Well, whatever they throw is mine to keep," Kurt retorted. Blaine felt Kurt taking in his nerves, and Kurt sighed. "You're going to be great Blaine. Who couldn't fall in love with you?"

Blaine's heart skipped a beat. He shook his head to clear it and glanced back at Kurt. "Thanks. I'm glad you're here."

Of course, the Gap Attack had ended in disaster. And it didn't escape Blaine's notice that out of everyone, Kurt was the one who was there as he saw his hopes fade of ever being able to just love someone with no cares or concerns. As everyone left the store after the performance, Nick halfheartedly asked Blaine if he should wait for him, but Trent and Jeff were pulling at him to go shopping at H&M.

"Don't worry," Kurt said, stepping up behind them, "I'll wait with him."

Blaine turned to Kurt and smiled his thanks. He'd never expect Kurt to give up a chance to go shopping, but his company was very much appreciated. Kurt just always made Blaine feel better, and right now he was nervous as hell. He felt kind of bad about Nick. After all, Nick was his best friend and he felt like he had been abandoning him lately to spend more time with Kurt. Blaine had convinced himself that it was because Kurt needed him. Nick, on the other hand, knew what Blaine refused to acknowledge and was happy to back off a bit to let Blaine figure it out. Besides, Nick had seen Jeremiah's reaction. He thought it was best if Kurt was there to pick up the pieces of Blaine's broken heart.

Blaine and Kurt sat outside the Gap, freezing, waiting for Jeremiah. Blaine was jumpy.

"Was it too much?" he asked turning to Kurt. At Kurt's silent look, he knew the answer. "Yeah, it was too much." He looked away, embarrassed.

Kurt was about to respond, when Jeremiah exited from the store. Blaine took a deep breath, gathered his courage, and jumped up. "Jeremiah, hey."

Jeremiah put his hood up and stared at Blaine, "What the hell were you doing?"

"What?" Blaine feigned innocence, trying desperately not to break down. This was not at all going the way he had hoped.

"I just got fired," Jeremiah told him. "You can't just bust a groove in the middle of somebody else's work place."

"But they loved it," Blaine insisted, desperately trying to hold onto both his dignity and his chances with Jeremiah.

"But my boss didn't," the blond answered. "Neither did I." Blaine's heart dropped. "No one here knows I'm gay."

Blaine could barely hear Kurt say something in the background. He had thought that Jeremiah was out. It was never his intention to out anyone. Blaine knew more than anyone how devastating that could be. But he also couldn't help but be angry. He had put himself out there, made a fool of himself. And now, he felt like Jeremiah had lied to him and led him on.

"Blaine, let's just be clear here. You and I got coffee twice. We're not dating. If we were I'd get arrested, cause you're underage." Jeremiah patted him on the shoulder, pulled his coat closed and walked away.

Blaine stared after Jeremiah, then looked at Kurt. He had no idea what had just happened, other than utterly humiliating himself beyond anything he could have ever imagined. Kurt looked at him regretfully.

"Come on," Kurt said, putting his arm around Blaine. "Let's get back to the guys. We'll do a little retail therapy."

"Uch," Blaine sneered at the Lima Bean the next morning. The Valentine's Day decorations were making him sick. He had been up all night thinking about Jeremiah; about how he had wanted someone to love so badly he had made it all up in his head. He had wanted this year to be better than last. He wondered if his desperation came from wanting to prove his father wrong. His father kept him hidden away in the closet. Having a boyfriend would have given him a small victory. Now he felt even worse. "Don't they have anything here that isn't covered with stupid little hearts? Gross."

"Well you certainly changed your tune," he heard Kurt say.

"I don't think I've *ever* made that big a fool of myself," he said turning to Kurt. "Which is really saying something because I've performed at theme parks." Kurt said nothing, but stared at Blaine with those blue-green eyes that drew the other boy in. Blaine took a deep breath and looked away, embarrassed. "I just can't believe I made it all up in my head." Blaine stared at the ground, afraid to look back at Kurt. He was supposed to be a mentor to him, and here he was, showing Kurt exactly what not to do.

"Ok, can I ask you something?" Blaine heard hesitation in Kurt's voice and turned to him. "Because we've always been completely honest with each other. You and I, we hang out, we sing flirty duets together, you know my coffee order. Was I supposed to think that was nothing?"

Blaine panicked. His stomach began to flutter, his head swam, while he fought to maintain every ounce of composure and nonchalance he could. He had no choice. It had to be nothing. "What do you mean?"

Kurt closed his eyes, and those gorgeous lashes, that beautiful face made all of Blaine's feelings for the boy rush to the surface. He was getting used to these moments though and he fought them as hard as he could as he listened to Kurt. "I thought the guy you wanted to ask out on Valentine's Day, was me."

Blaine turned away. That wasn't enough. He stepped away. This could not be happening. "Wow. I really am clueless." He wanted to turn to Kurt and shout *Yes, it was!* But he couldn't. He would lose everything; Dalton and the Warblers, the only place he ever felt safe and home, the friends that had become his family. Not to mention what his father would do to him for breaking his promise. When he thought only he had feelings, it was easy to forget. But now, it would always be there. And he just couldn't take the risk. His mind spun as he tried to find the right words. "Look Kurt, I don't know what I'm doing. I pretend like I do, and I know how to act it out in song, but the truth is..." Truth. He had to look away. What was doing even saying the word? He longed to tell Kurt the truth. He almost did, but he learned long ago that some secrets had to be kept. "I've never really been anyone's boyfriend," he finished.

"Me neither," Kurt smiled shyly.

Blaine hated himself. Yesterday he had been angry at Jeremiah for lying to him and today he was doing the same thing to Kurt. Lying to Kurt was something he never wanted to do. Kurt made him feel special and loved and important, in a way that no one else ever could. From the moment he met him, he knew that Kurt was sent to him. It was something he couldn't explain. But there were some secrets that weren't meant to be told and the things that happened in his family was one of them. Instead, he tried to express all he felt, in the only way he could. "Let me be really clear about something. I really, really care about you.

But as you and about 20 mortified shoppers saw, I'm not very good at romance." He stared into those blue eyes, wanting more than anything to tell him how he truly felt. No, to show him how he truly felt. The pain he strangled his heart was almost more than he could bear. "I don't want to screw this up."

Kurt smiled. "So it's just like when Harry Met Sally. Only I get to play Meg Ryan."

"Deal," Blaine said before thinking. Blaine gazed at Kurt, both of their eyes so full of sadness, they needed to look away. Then it hit him. "Don't they get together in the end?"



## ***Chapter Two: BIOTA Part 1***

It had been a couple of weeks since Kurt had told Blaine about his feelings, and despite Blaine's better judgment they continued to spend much of their time together. It was becoming more difficult every day. Blaine fought his own feelings as much as he could. On more than one occasion, he had to physically stop himself from taking the tall, porcelain, beautiful young man in his arms. The eyes Kurt made toward him drove deep into his soul, and before he could think, Blaine would lick his lips, or feel the nerves begin in his belly, or worst of all, he'd have to leave the room to escape complete embarrassment. This wouldn't do. Blaine had to do something, drastic and quick.

Nick had begun to notice. In one of those rare moments when Blaine wasn't attached at the hip, phone or computer to Kurt, he sat down with his best friend in the dormitory common room Saturday morning over a game of bridge.

"What the heck is wrong with you lately?" Nick asked.

"Nothing, I'm fine," Blaine lied, clasping the mask firmly to his face.

Nick just shook his head and laughed. "You may have the others fooled Anderson, but I know you better than anyone at this school. Except maybe Kurt," he instigated, glancing up at his friend.

"You know me better than Kurt," Blaine said sadly.

"Ah, but you don't want me to!" exclaimed Nick.

"Just drop it!" Blaine said a little more forcefully than he had meant. Nick took the hint though and dropped the subject. He was worried for Blaine. He knew there was so much more under the surface than what the other guys could see. Whenever Blaine was upset, people assumed that it was about the stuff that went down at his old school. But Nick wasn't sure. He had noticed for a while now that Blaine was very different whenever he came back from visiting his parents. He never mentioned it, but he kept an eye out. He also knew that he had feelings for Kurt, but continually pushed them away. He had tried a number of times to get to the bottom of that, but Blaine fought him each time.

"Any plans for the weekend?" Nick asked innocently.

"Kurt texted me earlier that there was a party he wanted us to go to. His friend Rachel, from his old school is throwing it. You remember her, from the Valentine's Day dinner?" Nick nodded. He remembered Kurt hugging her. "Do you think I should go? I don't want to get in trouble for fraternizing with the enemy."

"Of course I think you should go," Nick said. "You need to loosen up, have some fun for a change. Hang out with some regular high school kids, not stuck up yuppies like us."

"You guys aren't yuppies," he joked, laughing until his phone rang. He looked at it, and the smile dropped from his face. It was his father. Ignoring it wasn't an option. "Yes, Sir?"

Nick politely returned his attention to his cards, studying them as if there would be an exam the next day, but he listened intently to Blaine's conversation.

"Yes, Sir, actually I do have plans this weekend. I was invited to a party." Pause. "No Sir, it's not at Dalton," Nick heard Blaine hesitate and his voice shook as he explained. "Well, I'd be going with a friend from Dalton, but it's at his friend's house." Pause. "Her name is Rachel." Pause. "Yes it's a girl's party," Blaine rolled his eyes. "Yes Sir there will be other girls there." Pause. "Next weekend? Yeah sure, I can come if Mom really wants me to. Ok, see you then."

Blaine pressed the end button and put the phone on the table. He was sweating, his heart was racing, and he realized he needed to breathe. Just as he thought he might pass out, he heard a voice and his tunnel vision disappeared.

"Guess you're going to the party then, huh?" Nick smirked at him.

Blaine exhaled strongly and laughed. "Guess so," he smiled.

It had taken Blaine a while to decide what to wear to the party. He had wanted to make a good impression on Kurt's friends. The boys had all encouraged him to go. Jeff had told him to get piss drunk. Nick said maybe not *piss* drunk, but did encourage him to loosen up and have a good time. He told Blaine that if he needed to be picked up for whatever reason, he'd be around. Blaine assured him that he would be fine.

It wasn't long after they arrived that he got his first drink, once Puck had opened up the liquor cabinet. He wanted to loosen up, as Nick said, but he didn't want to make a fool of himself. He found though, that after

that first Rum and Coke, Kurt was starting to look a little too damn good. His red shirt, black tie, and amazingly sexy tight black pants were driving him crazy. He quickly grabbed another drink to try and drown those feelings.

So it was no surprise that he was excited as hell to play Spin the Bottle. He was too drunk by that point to be nervous about kissing Kurt. At least then he'd have an excuse. In his head he was yelling, *Kurt, Kurt, Kurt*, as he tried to magically make the bottle follow his commands. Sam and Brittany kissed, then Rachel took a turn. He again cheered the bottle on, then saw it point to him. He cheered and looked up to see Rachel leaning in.

"Blaine Warbler, I'm gonna rock your world."

Blaine broke out into a goofy grin. He had never kissed a girl before. He had only really kissed a boy once before. When he was this drunk, his mind just thought, *experience is experience, right? All the better for when I finally do get to kiss Kurt*. Then, before he had time to analyze that thought, Rachel's lips were on him. It was wet, and sloppy, but her lips were soft and though his belly didn't flutter, it felt nice. He thought he should pull away, but she wasn't and he didn't. Instead he leaned in further and gently placed his hand in her hair. He closed his eyes and gave in to all of his pent-up feelings for Kurt, putting them on Rachel. *If only my father could see me now*, he thought.

He was awoken the next morning by the sound of someone screaming. He put his hand to his head.

"Oh, where am I?"

He didn't remember at all where he was, or how he got there. He remembered little of last night. He put his head back down. *Wait, was that Kurt? Was that Kurt's Dad?*

"I'll deal with my Dad, Blaine, don't worry about it," he heard Kurt say. "I left some towels in the bathroom for you, whenever you're ready. Some ibuprofen is in there too."

A few minutes later he sat up, alone, in what he could only imagine was Kurt's bedroom. Of course it was Kurt's room, it smelled entirely of Kurt. How he had gotten there, and what had happened last night, was a blur. He remembered drinking. He remembered singing with Rachel. He remembered kissing Rachel. He remembered thinking maybe his father would like him then.

He needed to get out of there. He grabbed his phone from the little shelf next to Kurt's bed and checked his messages. Two from Nick last night and one from this morning.

**N: Hope everything is going well. Call or Text if you need me.**

**N: Guess things are going fabulous, because you just missed curfew. See you in the morning, lover boy.**

**N: We're all headed to the mall. Please at least let us know you're ok.**

Blaine sent a quick text back to Nick, telling him he was fine and would be coming back to Westerville soon. He left out the part about being at Kurt's house. He really didn't want any of them to get the wrong idea.

He took a shower and got dressed. Kurt had left him a clean shirt and he put on his pants from the night before. Thank goodness he hadn't gotten sick, although they still smelled a bit like alcohol. He figured he would just change as soon as he got back to campus. Well, maybe he would keep Kurt's shirt on.

By the time he got downstairs, Kurt's Dad had left to go to the garage already.

"Do you want some breakfast, Blaine?" Kurt asked him.

"I really should get going back to school," Blaine said, embarrassed about everything.

"Take some toast at least," said Kurt, handing him two slices on a napkin. "It won't be good for you to drive on an empty stomach."

"Thanks Kurt," Blaine said earnestly, looking him in the eye. "Really. Thank you for inviting me."

Kurt stood still for a moment, then smiled with puppy dog eyes. "Anytime, Blaine. I'm glad you had fun."

"See you tomorrow?" Blaine asked politely.

"Of course. See you tomorrow."

Blaine returned to Dalton and was happy to see the dorms fairly empty as most of the guys spent their Sundays off campus. He knew his friends were hanging out at the mall and seeing a movie this evening. They had invited him, but he politely declined with the excuse of a hangover. Which was not very far from the truth. Blaine reached his room, kept the light turned off and lowered the blinds in his windows. He crashed on his bed and closed his eyes. He fought his psyche between replaying the events of the night before and trying to forget all about him. He had kissed Rachel. In front of Kurt. What the hell had he been thinking?

But he knew exactly what he had been thinking. He had to stay as far away from Kurt as possible. His feelings for the boy were starting to become overwhelming and he just couldn't let that happen. Even in his drunken state he knew where danger and safety lay. Kurt was dangerous for him, more dangerous than anyone understood. Rachel, on the other hand, could be a live saver. A floatation device. Something to keep him above water until he was able to go for what he truly wanted. The kiss had felt nice. It wasn't amazing, there were no fireworks, but it wasn't bad. And as much as he hated it, he could not erase the image of his father proud of him; his mother happy. He refused to lie to himself, he wouldn't become someone he was not for their sake. But if he couldn't have Kurt, maybe it was worth trying to see if something like that could make him happy for the time being.

Blaine spent the entirety of Warbler rehearsal being teased by each and every one of his chorus brothers after Kurt told them what had happened at the party. Blaine was starting to get mad. He hadn't wanted everyone to know. He took the good-natured teasing about Jeremiah as a sign that he was one of the boys, but this was different. He could see Nick looking at him funny. He got through it all as best as he could but Kurt didn't stop when rehearsal was over. Blaine considered not going to the Lima Bean with him, but he loved that time together.

"I didn't drink that much," Blaine insisted, trying to end the conversation. When Kurt Hummel was on a roll though, it took a lot to stop him, especially when his sarcasm came from his own nerves and discomfort.

"Are you kidding, you spent the entire night sucking Rachel Berry's face." Kurt laughed. "That Sir, is what we call rock bottom."

Blaine's was thankful when his cell phone vibrated, but his heart leapt when he pulled it out from his coat and glanced at the number. "Oh my God, speak of the devil." He hit the answer button. *Just stay calm*, he thought while his heart raced. "Hi Rachel, Kurt and I were just talking about you." Blaine could tell that Rachel was acting a bit funny on the other end of the phone, and when Kurt asked if she was drunk, he felt pretty sure that she was. She asked him to go on a date. He looked away from Kurt and an image of his parents flashed in his mind. He said yes and hung up the phone.

He thought of not telling Kurt, but news traveled faster amongst New Directions than even amongst the Warblers. He was sure Mercedes already knew. Better Kurt hear it from him. "Rachel just asked me out," he laughed nervously to Kurt.

"That is amazing," Kurt laughed back. "She's got a girl crush on you."

Blaine couldn't look at Kurt. He had told Kurt he cared about him. He had told him he didn't want to mess it up. And yet, here he was, doing exactly that. And on purpose too. He felt the urge to run, and took the opportunity to throw out his coffee trash and grab another sugar. He had kissed her. And it hadn't felt bad. He hated living his life to please his father, and yet, wouldn't life be so much easier if he did? At least for the visit this weekend?

"Wait a second," Kurt asked, "Why did you say yes? You can't lead her on."

"Who says I'm leading her on?" He turned back to Kurt. He tried to look at him, but he couldn't. God those eyes could make him melt. He wanted to be perfect in those eyes. But he wasn't perfect at all. He and Kurt were an impossibility. It killed him, but it would destroy everything. No, he had to give Rachel a chance. Not for his father, but for himself.

"You can't be serious." Kurt's face was full of anger and pain and Blaine knew that he had caused it. And yet, he didn't stop.

"When we kissed," he looked at Kurt. He was determined to look at Kurt, to convince Kurt. "It felt good." He was determined to convince himself. Kurt's anger grew but Blaine wasn't going to change his mind about this. He needed Kurt to stop. He needed to do this, whether Kurt liked it or not. The last thing in the world he wanted to do was hurt Kurt or make him mad, but Kurt was going too far. And yet he cared too much to just walk away.

"Why are you so angry?" Blaine asked, knowing exactly why he was so angry.

"Because I look up to you. I admire how proud you are of who you are," Kurt said.

Blaine looked away. At this moment, he didn't feel proud at all. He wasn't strong. He wasn't courageous. He tried desperately to be all those things, but at every turn, his father ripped it all out from under him. He knew what he was to Kurt, what mask he had put up for Kurt. He had made a mistake trying to be a mentor to Kurt. What the hell kind of mentor was he really when he spent half his life hiding who he was.

Kurt continued. "I know what it's like to be in the closet, and here you are about to tiptoe back in." The words hit Blaine as sure as his father's fist. He couldn't listen to Kurt's arguments and reprimands anymore. It was his own fault for lying to Kurt, to Nick, to everyone, for so long. But it didn't matter how true Kurt's words were, and they were true, because he couldn't let himself be talked out of this. All he could imagine was one weekend of telling his father about a date with Rachel. One weekend of freedom, of acceptance, of love. That was all he was asking for. Damn everything else.

"I'm really sorry if this hurts your feelings, or your pride, or whatever. But; however confusing it might be for you, it's actually a lot more confusing for me. You're 100% sure of who you are. Fantastic." He thought of Kurt's father and how much that support must have helped Kurt. Jealousy boiled up. "Well, maybe we all can't be so lucky."

"Yeah, I've had a lot of luck, Blaine, I was really lucky to be chased out of High School by a bully who threatened to kill me."

"And why did he do that?" Blaine asked angrily.

"Because he didn't like who I was." Kurt rolled his eyes

"Sort of exactly what you're saying to me right now, isn't it." Blaine paused. He didn't want to hurt Kurt. His heart and emotions were flying away from him where his brain didn't want him to go. He wanted so much for Kurt to understand. He was only trying to survive in the best way he knew how. "I'm searching, ok? I'm honestly just trying to figure out who I am. And for you of all people to get down on me for that, I didn't think that's who you were." He had to leave before he said something he really regretted. Kurt had never seen his temper before and he really didn't want to start now. "I'll see ya. I'd say *bye*, but I wouldn't

want to make you angry." Too late. Blaine turned to the door without looking back. Maybe it was too late for everything.



### ***Chapter Three: BIOTA Part 2***

Blaine returned to Dalton after his date with Rachel, with no concerns of missing curfew, they were both home before 10pm. He had a really good time seeing Love Story at the Revival Theater, even dressing up as the characters, but he spent much of the date imagining how much better it would have been if Kurt had been there too. Blaine found Rachel to be very fun to hang out with, and he could imagine that the two could have a very special friendship. But there was something missing. He hadn't kissed her. He had frankly been afraid to know for sure that there was no spark.

Blaine went to his dorm to freshen up. He braced for the comments, hoots and hollers from the boys, but there were none. Even Jeff and Wes just greeted him warmly without pressing him for details. He saw David eyeing him and texting. Nick must have talked to them all after noticing how uncomfortable he was with the teasing earlier in the week. Nick noticed things that others didn't, and he always took care of Blaine. Blaine tried to lie down in his bed, but after only a few minutes of restlessness and inability to sleep, he decided to make his way to the Warbler rehearsal room. He still had an hour before curfew, and he needed some music to think.

Nick received David's text that Blaine was back, and a few minutes later that he had headed out of the dorms. He was very concerned about his friend. Blaine had been especially tight-lipped about this date with Rachel. Plus, he could see that things between him and Kurt had been strained ever since they left after Warbler rehearsal on Monday. Nick had a pretty good idea why. Kurt had been one of the boys harping on Blaine the most, telling everyone about Blaine's scheduled date. It had been very out of character for Kurt; Kurt was usually so supportive of everyone. He was sure that the idea of this date was uncomfortable for and hurting both of his friends, and he hated to see it.

Nick found Blaine in the rehearsal room, sitting at the piano. His hazel-eyes seemed to be elsewhere, staring blankly at the wall and not at the piano keys where his fingers danced. Nick could clearly make out the tune of Baby, It's Cold Outside, and a small smile crossed his lips. He walked over to the piano and leaned on it. Blaine snapped out of his daydream and looked over to Nick.

"Hi," Blaine said. Nick noticed he looked tired. Sad and tired.

"Hey yourself. It's a little late for Christmas," he said with a smirk. "But sometimes it's nice to remember the good times."

"Kurt hates me," Blaine grumbled.

"You're an idiot." That caught Blaine's attention. "Kurt does *not* hate you. He may be angry. He is definitely confused." Nick paused, looking at Blaine. "Must admit, he's not the only one."

Blaine turned back to the piano keys, playing something Nick didn't recognize. Likely an original song Blaine had penned but not yet shared. They sat wordless for a minute, then Blaine broke the silence. "Is your Dad proud of you Nick?"

Nick understood the question was loaded, but answered honestly. "Yes, he is."

"I want to know what that feels like, even if it is just for a day."

Nick reached to Blaine's hands, and clasped one off the keyboard, pausing his music. Blaine looked up at his best friend, tears in his eyes. "If you pretend that you're straight Blaine, he won't be proud of *you*. He'll be proud of himself," Nick said. "But what's most important is that *you* won't be proud of you."

Blaine took a minute then rose from the piano. He walked over to the window, hands in his pockets, shoulders hunched. Not at all the confident and dapper young man he typically portrayed himself as. He gazed out the window at the sprawling Dalton Academy campus; his freedom, his home. "You don't understand," he told Nick quietly.

Nick looked at him, the vulnerable little boy inside the shell he showed the world. His heart bled for him. "You're right, I don't understand everything. But there is one thing I do understand. You are running away. You are doing everything you can to run away from Kurt." He paused, letting his words sink in. He knew Blaine heard, but the boy remained quiet. "Blaine, you have your reasons, and I know you think you're doing what you have to, for whatever those reasons are. But when you are ready, there will come a moment," he said walking closer to him, "when you will decide it's time to stop running."

Blaine turned to him with tears in his eyes, but his throat was constricted. He had no words. He couldn't imagine how long it might take him to get to that moment.

"Come on," Nick said, putting his arm around his friend, "it won't do for either of us to miss curfew. You have a visit home tomorrow."

Blaine turned to him and, to Nick's surprise, laughed. "I thought you were supposed to be cheering me up?"

"Well," Nick said as they walked out together, "Just think of it as a reprieve from Jeff and Wes and David. You think they can hold back from teasing you for the entire weekend? Rachel Berry...I mean really, Blaine?"

Blaine playfully shoved Nick away as both boys broke out in giggles as they returned to their dorms.

Kurt hadn't called or texted him all weekend. Blaine had struggled at home, but tried have a good time with his Mom. The two went to the mall to go shopping, and their day was pleasant. Blaine checked his phone frequently, so used to Kurt texting him throughout the day, but there was nothing. Dinner Saturday night had been uncomfortable as usual. Blaine sat across from his father, after having avoided him as much as possible all day.

"How was that party you went to last weekend?" Colonel Anderson asked expectantly.

"It was fine, Sir," he answered, his heart starting to race.

"Meet any interesting girls," he asked with his eyebrow raised. "Maybe someone you could bring to the next event at the base?"

He had planned to tell his Dad about his date with Rachel...his *kiss* with Rachel at the party. He had anticipated this moment for a week. He had pictured his father's smile, maybe a pat on the shoulder or a hug. A moment of camaraderie that he had seen other fathers and sons engage in and had wistfully always dreamed of. But staring back at the stern and unemotional man in front of him, a man he feared as much as loved, he thought of Nick's words. At Dalton, it was easy to focus on the dreams he held dear, of a father who loved him and accepted him. But sitting across from the man, Blaine realized that indeed his dignity was more important than his father's conditional affection. His father's pride, at the expense of his own, was not a sacrifice he was willing to make. He had come too far for that and he was far too strong. It didn't change his confusion about things with Rachel, but he would figure things out on his own without regard for what anyone else thought.

"No, Sir," he told the Colonel. "I guess I'm still waiting for the right person."

Blaine walked into the Lima Bean Monday afternoon, heading straight to the line. He was lost in his own world, after an exhausting week. He hadn't made his usual plans with Kurt. It seemed the boy was avoiding him all day at school. Warblers rehearsal today had been demanding for him, reducing the awkwardness between him and Kurt. The council had kept him busy with vocals with Wes, while the rest of the guys worked on choreography. Blaine glanced over to Kurt a number of times, and he always caught Kurt just looking away. Neither had said anything to the other, and Kurt left rehearsal talking to Jeff and Trent. Blaine drove off to the Lima Bean alone.

Blaine hadn't noticed Rachel or Kurt sitting at a nearby table, and was surprised when Rachel approached him in the line. He had never seen her at the coffee shop before. But in a way, he was glad. After everything over the weekend, he had wanted to talk with her.

"Hey Rachel," he said with a smile, "what's going on..."

Rachel melted just a little at the way his eyes crinkled with that smile. She stepped in and grabbed him by the shoulders, pressing her lips firmly into his. Blaine stood there in shock, then closed his eyes. As he felt Rachel's soft, warm lips on his, he waited for the butterflies, the heat, the dizziness that overtook his body when he dreamed of kissing Kurt, but he felt...nothing. She pulled away, smiling softly at him, but he only stared at her in wonder. He was certain that this was not at all what he wanted. It wasn't even a game that he could play along with any longer.

A small smile came across his lips as he stared over his shoulder at Kurt, beautiful Kurt, who stared back at him expectantly. Suddenly, it was so clear. He nodded his head slightly in acknowledgement. He wouldn't lie to his father, not about his sexuality. He wouldn't pretend to be someone he wasn't. Someday, somehow there would be a moment, when he was safe to love who he wanted, with no threats and no repercussions. And he would wait patiently until that moment came.

He glanced back and forth between Rachel and Kurt with resolve that only strengthened since dinner with his father. "Yup, I'm gay. 100% gay. Thank you so much for clearing that up for me Rachel." Blaine looked once again at Kurt and felt the need to freshen up. He turned back to Rachel. "Listen save my space in line, will ya? I have to go hit the restroom."

Blaine returned to the dining area a few minutes later, to see Rachel had gone and Kurt was waiting for him, leaning against the counter, holding two coffees in his hand, looking sexy as ever.

Kurt smiled smugly. "Medium Drip, Sir?" Kurt held out the coffee for him and Blaine reached over with a smile to take it. Neither moved, as they studied the other, smiles fading.

Blaine thought about all that had happened the last few weeks. He was very well aware that he had hurt Kurt. He had acknowledged Kurt's feelings for him, told him he didn't want to mess it up, and then, of course, did everything in his power to do so. And yet, Kurt was standing here, gazing at him with love and insecurity in his eyes. "I'm sorry," he admitted softly. While he wasn't sorry for the journey he took, he was most definitely sorry that Kurt had been hurt in the process.

"I'm sorry too," Kurt admitted, shuffling a bit and cocking his hip out to the side, an unconscious move that did not go unnoticed by Blaine. "I shouldn't have said those things I said."

Blaine resisted every urge to kiss him, instead holding his hand out for Kurt. "Truce?" he asked.

Kurt did not hesitate to take Blaine's hand in his. "Truce," he said, as the two walked to their usual table, hand in hand, and immediately started catching each other up on all that they had missed.

## ***Chapter Four: Sexy***

"How are we supposed to get up on the stage at Regionals and sell sexy to the judges when I have as much sexual appeal and knowledge as a baby penguin," Kurt yelled.

Blaine smiled at him adoringly. "We'll figure something out." Kurt looked back at him in shock.

Blaine felt an overwhelming need to erase every ounce of Kurt's embarrassment. He never wanted Kurt to feel that way. He held his arms out, "Come here."

Kurt looked up at him, eyes wide with too many emotions behind them for Blaine to decipher, then slowly got up and fell into Blaine's arms. Blaine loved the feel of Kurt in his arms, and he tightened his hold just a bit, relishing in the warmth.

"Kurt, you're trembling!" He held the boy closer, closing his eyes and placing his chin on Kurt's shoulder. This was dangerous territory for Blaine, but he allowed himself, just for a moment, to breathe in Kurt's scent of vanilla and lavender that was now mixed with the aroma of bubble soap. His felt his body stir, and he immediately pulled away. Of course his body would betray him, especially when all he wanted was to stay as close to the boy as he could, for as long as Kurt would let him.

"Blaine, I can't do this. I'm not sexy. I have no idea how to be sexy. It's going to be my fault if the Warblers lose at Regionals."

Kurt's lack of self-confidence always pulled at Blaine's heartstrings. To Blaine, Kurt was the sexiest, most beautiful, and most endearing person he had ever met and he wanted Kurt to know it. Blaine gave a small start as an idea popped into his head.

"Come on," he said grabbing Kurt's hand.

"Where are we going?"

"Back to your house. We are going to get you sexified!"

Sitting next to Kurt, alone in his bedroom staring into the mirror, Blaine realized this may be the worst idea he had ever had. He constantly told himself he needed to stay away, but Kurt was like a favorite song taking hold in his mind all day; no matter how hard he tried, nothing could replace him. Now, against every better judgment, he found himself in Kurt's bedroom helping him discover how to display his sex appeal to the entire world. On the one hand, he wanted to keep it a secret just for himself, but he knew that wasn't fair. He wanted Kurt to know; no he *needed* Kurt to know just how desirable he was. If Blaine couldn't show him in all the ways he had dreamed about, the least he could do was help Kurt see it in himself.

"Alright, so give me," Blaine said, staring at Kurt and himself in the mirror of Kurt's bedroom, "Sexual. But don't make fun of it, like really try."

Blaine watched as Kurt made a face in the mirror that reminded him of a cat growling. *Curious*, he thought.

"Alright, now give me...sultry," he said, demonstrating himself. Kurt made another attempt that looked remarkably like the first. Blaine couldn't help but laugh. Kurt had no idea how truly sexy he just was when he didn't try so hard.

"Uh...Kurt, they're all kinda looking the same," he pointed out, amused.

"That's because the face I am actually doing is uncomfortable." Kurt got up and walked away. "This is pointless, Blaine, I don't know how to be sexy because I don't know the first thing about sex."

Blaine's heart stopped for a moment. He knew that Kurt was innocent, but he had imagined that by 16 years old, Kurt would have known at least as much as he did. While his own father would never talk about sex with him, it surprised him that Kurt's father had not. The red in Kurt's cheeks made Blaine's blood rush through his veins. "Kurt you're blushing." If that wasn't the most adorable thing Blaine had ever seen, he would eat his Dalton tie.

"I've tried watching *those* movies," Blaine stared at Kurt. His mind spun out of control with images, and his face blushed while he fought to maintain his composure. Blaine had seen the movies that Kurt talked about, and for a second he considered the idea of them watching one together. He quickly pushed that disastrous but breathtaking thought out of his mind. "But I just get horribly depressed and I think about how they were all kids once and they all have mothers and God what would their mother's think and why would you get that tattoo there?" Kurt rambled uncomfortably.

"Then maybe we should have a conversation about it? I'll tell you what I know," he said swirling to sit cross-legged on Kurt's bench.

Kurt vigorously shook his head and cut Blaine off. "No, I don't want to know the graphic details. I like romance. That's why I like Broadway musicals, because the touch of the fingertips is as sexy as it gets."

Blaine loved Broadway musicals for the songs. Somehow, the words of the great lyricists were always able to express how he felt when his own brain just stumbled. He wished he could just sing to Kurt now.

"Kurt, you're going to have to learn about it someday," he said seriously.

"Well, not today," Kurt said with extreme discomfort. "I think I've learned quite enough for today, thank you. I think you should leave."

Blaine considered trying to change his mind, but he could see that the conversation had made Kurt incredibly uncomfortable. He got up and left the room without another word. On his way through the house, he saw Finn sitting on the couch with a bowl of chips. They greeted each other, and Finn looked at Blaine confused as he took off out the door to his car.

Blaine drove around for a while, not wanting to go back to Dalton. He was still thinking of Kurt. He couldn't get out of his head how scared and confused and embarrassed Kurt was just to talk about sex with him. If that were the case...no, he couldn't let his mind even go there. But if he couldn't be with Kurt, he was terrified about the guys that might try and take advantage of him when he wouldn't be able to protect him. Blaine knew of only two people Kurt might talk to about this, and he'd already been sent away. But the idea of going to the other terrified him. He'd barely met Kurt's father, and that was when he had woken up in his son's bed. He didn't think Mr. Hummel liked him very much at this point. Not to mention that Blaine and fathers didn't tend to get along. Or at least, he didn't get along with his own father. He drove around town one more time, but once again, landed right in front of Hummel Tires & Lube. His heart was telling him to stop the car and go in, and Blaine was well aware that if he didn't do it now he never would. He parked in one of the spots in back of the shop, and took a deep breath, putting on the mask he showed the world. He tucked in his scarf, put his hands in his pocket, and walked in. He found the man working under the hood of a gold Chevy Camaro.



"Need a hand?" Blaine attempted to be casual, as if it was an everyday occurrence for him to stop by. Mr. Hummel glanced up and stared him down. Blaine felt his confidence waiver. Perhaps this was a bad idea.

"Yeah, why don't you hand me that carburetor."

Blaine turned to the box of parts and quickly identified the carburetor, saying a silent thank you to his father for the first time in a very long time. Mr. Hummel came alongside him. "How'dya know which one it was?" Kurt's father asked curiously.

"My Dad and I rebuilt a 59 Chevy in our driveway 2 years ago." Blaine thought back to that summer when he had just told his parents he was gay. It was not a pretty time in the Anderson household, but as he always did, Blaine tried to laugh it off. "One of his many attempts at bonding."

"You here looking for parts?"

"No, actually, I wanted to talk to you about Kurt."

"Is he ok?" Blaine was surprised at Mr. Hummel's instant concern for Kurt. He allowed himself to wonder, just for a moment, what that might be like, but it hurt too much and he turned away.

"Have you ever talked to him about," he hesitated, "sex?"

Mr. Hummel instantly jumped on him. "Are you gay? Or Straight? Or what?"

Coming from the intimidating man, the question made Blaine bristle, but he was here for a reason and wasn't going to back down now. He looked Mr. Hummel straight in the eye with all the courage he could muster, and admitted, "I'm definitely gay."

"Ok good," Burt answered, "I mean, whatever, but good for Kurt, he needs someone like *you* to talk to."

"Well, that's kind of my point, I've tried talking to him but he basically puts his fingers in his ears and starts singing."

"Well when he's ready," Mr. Hummel turned to him with a small smile of satisfaction, "he'll listen."

As awkward as this was, Blaine couldn't give up. "I'm worried that it might be too late." Mr. Hummel looked up at him. "You know Dalton doesn't even have sex ed classes? Most schools don't and the ones that do almost never discuss what sex is like for gay kids." He understood Mr. Hummel's embarrassment, he guessed he'd never taken the time to educate himself, but Blaine was desperate to convince him. He allowed himself, just for the moment for Kurt's sake, to lower the walls and the mask and expose his true feelings. "Kurt is the most moral and compassionate person I've ever met."

"Well, he gets that from his mother."

"And I am blown away by your guys' relationship. Do you think my Dad built a car with me because he loves cars?" Blaine's anger and sadness showed through clearly. "I think he did it because he thought getting my hands dirty might make me straight."

"He talk to you about this...kinda stuff?"

Blaine nearly fainted at the thought of his father even entertaining the idea of talking to Blaine about sex once he came out. "No, I had to go find it for myself. The internet is great and all the information is out there, but I went searching for it. Kurt won't. And one day he'll be at a party and maybe have a few drinks and he'll meet some guy and start fooling around," he told himself this was why he was having this conversation, but the thought almost broke Blaine's heart. He continued despite himself. "and he's not going to know about using protection, STDs." He paused, approaching Mr. Hummel. "I don't have the relationship with my Dad that you have with Kurt." He felt his walls almost crumble to the ground, and he knew he had to get out of there before he made a huge mistake. "I think it would be really cool if you took advantage of that. I'm sorry if I'm overstepping."

"You are," Mr. Hummel responded.

Blaine just nodded and backed out of the shop. He nearly ran to his car, and sat behind the steering wheel waiting for his adrenaline to slow. There were only a few moments in Blaine's life so far where he had come close to telling someone about all he suffered at home. This was one of them. Mr. Hummel was embarrassed, but there was no doubt in Blaine's mind that Kurt had all the love and acceptance and support from his father that Blaine had always dreamed of from his own. He suddenly realized that he wanted Mr. Hummel's respect almost as much as he wanted Kurt's love. He prayed that nothing he had said today had ruined that.

Kurt went up to his room, threw his pamphlets on the shelf, and crashed on his bed. He had never been more embarrassed in his life. Ok, that may not be true, but this was definitely up there. He had just rubbed away the red in his face when his phone rang. He saw the caller and his blush returned as he answered.

"Hey!" Blaine said cheerfully before Kurt could say a word.

"Hey."

Blaine could hear the distress in Kurt's voice and grew concerned. "What's the matter?"

"Oh nothing," Kurt said sarcastically. "My Dad just decided to give me 'the talk', pamphlets and all."

"Oh...cool," he said hesitantly. His heart beat a little faster. He was glad that Mr. Hummel had talked to Kurt, but he nervously wondered if Mr. Hummel had said anything about their conversation.

"Yeah," Kurt scoffed. "It's cool if *you're* not the one talking about sex with Burt Hummel."

Blaine was quiet. Clearly Kurt didn't know that it *was* him who had talked about sex with Burt Hummel. He had planned on telling Kurt, but had wanted to do it in person. He wasn't sure if Kurt would be mad at him or thank him and it would be easier to calm Kurt if he was in front of him. Still...

"Blaine? You still there?" Kurt interrupted Blaine's thoughts. He decided to be honest. He knew it would be even uglier if he found out later from his Dad.

"Kurt, there's something I need to tell you."

"I'm listening."

"So, I kind of ran into your Dad after our conversation and maybe suggested he talk to you about sex."

Blaine heard the phone crash. "Kurt? KURT?" The phone shuffled for a moment, and then Kurt picked it up off the floor and screeched in his ear.

"You WHAT?" Kurt's pitch was higher than Blaine had ever heard and his voice dripped with sarcasm. "What, was my Dad in the music store when you were picking out new guitar picks? Or in the comic book shop as you browsed the TinTin paraphernalia? Or maybe he just happened to stop by the Lima Bean for a nonfat caramel latte for the first time ever."

"Kurt, you're frantic, stop," Blaine pleaded. This conversation would have gone so much better in person. "I just stopped by the garage."

"Oh, of course, you just stopped by the garage." Blaine could almost feel the acid on his tongue. "Car needed an oil change? Oh, by the way Mr. Hummel, while you're doing a lube job on my car, let's talk about Kurt and how he knows nothing in the world about sex."

"Kurt please, it wasn't like that. I was worried about you after I left your house. I just...want you to be prepared. What happens when you go to a party at Puck's house and get drunk? I don't want some guy..."

"There aren't going to be any gay guys at a Puckerman party, Blaine," Kurt spat back.

"Well fine," Blaine conceded, trying desperately to salvage the conversation. "What about Regionals? There are plenty of guys there who would be interested in you and the parties that are thrown afterward are legendary. What if you hook up with someone from Vocal Adrenaline?"

"Stop, Blaine, just stop," Kurt insisted. "Why are you doing this?"

Blaine closed his eyes. If he couldn't be with Kurt, he wanted him to be safe and happy with someone else. "I just want you to feel comfortable and safe. I don't want you sitting off on the sidelines because you're scared. I want you to put yourself out there," he attempted to explain.

"I *did* put myself out there Blaine! To you!" He heard Kurt take a deep breath, and tears welled up in Blaine's eyes. This wasn't at all the conversation he had planned for this evening. "I can't do this Blaine. I have to go." Blaine tried to stop him, but he heard the phone go silent.

Blaine had to restrain himself from hurling the phone across the room. He slammed himself down on the bed, tossing and turning restlessly for a few minutes. He had done it again. It seemed he had a great knack for making Kurt angry at him. His continual sabotaging of the relationship between him and Kurt was going so well he didn't even need to do it consciously. "Damn it!" he swore to no one. Kurt was so important to him; possibly the most important person in the world to him, why did he have to keep

running away from him? Maybe a romance was out of the question, but he just seemed to keep trying to mess up their friendship too. His chest constricted at the thought of losing the boy. He squeezed his eyes shut. He wasn't strong enough to be satisfied with friendship, and yet he didn't have the courage to challenge the deal with his father. He hated having Kurt so close, and yet so far. He knew that he could not live without Kurt in his life; he could not withstand that kind of misery.

Suddenly, his eyes popped open. A grin exploded on his lips. Blaine jumped out of bed and ran out the door to his friends.

"Wes! David! I need to talk to you!"

## ***Chapter Five: Original Song***

*Oh Yeah! Oh Yeah!*

Blaine had kept Wes, David and some of the other Warblers up for half the night walking them through the number. Perhaps he was selfish; no he knew he was, but he needed Kurt to understand. Blaine was never good with words, too many secrets that could too easily be revealed with one slip up. He had to think before he spoke, carefully calculating his conversation. But he wanted so much to tell Kurt how he felt, to explain to him his horrible decisions and hurtful actions. He needed Kurt to understand both how desperately he wanted to be with him, and all the reasons why he ran away. Every word of Misery spoke straight from Blaine's heart. If only Kurt could listen and hear it.

*So scared of breaking it that you won't let it bend*

*And I wrote two hundred letters I would never send*

*Sometimes these cuts are so much deeper than they seem*

*You'd rather cover up, I'd rather let them be.*

Blaine immediately saw Kurt's annoyance at him, still angry from the phone call the night before, and from going to his father behind his back. And he had every right. Kurt had put himself out there to Blaine, told him he was interested. And Blaine had been, continued to be, too scared to give in. No matter how hard he tried, he kept running. He wanted Kurt to understand that it wasn't because he didn't care, because he did more than he could ever say. He needed Kurt to know that the cuts he felt, were truly so much deeper than they seemed.

*So let me be and I'll set you free*

*I am in misery, there ain't nobody who can comfort me*

*Why won't you answer me?*

*The silence is slowly killing me.*

Once again, Blaine covered his feelings with the mask of upbeat and fun music and choreography, and he was fairly certain Kurt knew it. He barely got a smile out of the boy as he sat next to him, head on his shoulder, begging Kurt's forgiveness. But he continued. For Kurt's sake, not his own, Kurt had to let him go, Blaine had to set him free. The silence between them, the words Blaine refused to utter, were indeed slowly killing him.

*Your salty skin and how it mixes in with mine*

*The way it feels to be completely intertwined*

*Not that I didn't care it's that I didn't know*

*It's not what I didn't feel it's what I didn't show*

The dreams Blaine had of Kurt were impossible for him to shake, and he believed that no matter what happened they would continue forever. Out of fear, for a long time he had hidden his feelings even from himself, but they continued to grow. They started to invade his dreams. He ran from them as desperately as he could, but even that didn't work. Now he had to fight desperately to keep them from Kurt.

*You say your faith is shaken you may be mistaken*

*You keep me wide awake and waiting for the sun*

*I'm desperate and confused so far away from you*

*I'm getting there I don't care where I have to go*

He was in every way desperate and confused. He didn't want to give up. Some day their moment would come. He didn't think it would be soon, he thought it could be years away, after he was able to break away from his father's grip and influence. When Dalton was behind him and he was free to be with whomever he wanted. He didn't expect Kurt to wait. That wouldn't be fair to either of them. But he had faith, and he hoped Kurt could too, that their someday would come. Maybe Kurt wouldn't understand these words right now. But maybe he would hear them and think about them, and come to believe them himself.

*Girl you really got me bad, you really got me bad*

*Now I'm gonna get you back, I'm gonna get you back.*

"So what did you think of the song?" Blaine asked, nerves rattling, his famous smile hiding every true feeling.

"Can I be really honest with you? Because it comes from a place of caring?" Blaine shrugged, terrified. If Kurt was throwing "caring" back in his face, he really didn't think Kurt had stopped being angry. "Been there, done that. Look, you're amazing Blaine, your solos are breathtaking. They're also numerous."

Blaine stood shocked for a moment. This wasn't about the phone call at all. He had no doubt that Kurt was still angry at him, but also knew something else about his diva friend. "Kurt, the council decides who gets the solos. Do I detect a little jealousy?"

"No, you detect a lot of jealousy. Look, Blaine, sometimes I don't feel like we're the Warblers. I feel like we're Blaine and the Pips."

Blaine stood silent, watching as Kurt walked off with Pavarotti. No one at Dalton had ever confronted him before about his role in the Warblers. Blaine liked to blame the solos on the council for Kurt's benefit, but the truth was, if Blaine stepped aside for someone else to solo, or even duet with him, it would happen. Blaine was the Warblers' front man. Despite being only a sophomore, he had the star power and he knew it. He got what he wanted, and Kurt was right. If he wanted someone else to sing, all he had to do was say it. Blaine hogged the spotlight, craving the attention and the acceptance it earned him. In his own desire to fill every empty place in his heart, he had forgotten that others, that Kurt, needed it as well.

Why was it, he wondered, that every time he tried to make things easier between him and Kurt, it always got more complicated.

Blaine had been texting Kurt all day, but received no answer. His heart was heavy all morning, knowing that Kurt was still mad at him. He had done the best he could the past few days to make Kurt understand, and it wasn't enough. Maybe, he thought, it was just better for Kurt to be mad.



But then, when Kurt didn't show up for Warbler's rehearsal, Blaine began to truly panic. So as he always did when he got extremely nervous, he hid behind his mask of leadership, and started arguing that the Warblers should wear jackets with red ties and blue piping. No it didn't matter in the slightest, but it kept his mind off of Kurt.

Silence struck the room as Kurt threw the doors of their rehearsal room open, and came striding in dressed, not in his Dalton Academy uniform, but a striking outfit of tight black pants, a black top and black jacket. Blaine's mouth went dry and his heart went to his throat, as he stood on the far side of the room.

"Kurt what's wrong?" he asked, expecting the worst. His mind went to thoughts of his friends at McKinley, or God forbid his father. He could see that Kurt was near tears and it took every ounce of self control not to run to him and wrap the boy in his arms.

"It's Pavarotti. Pavarotti's dead."

Feeling returned to Blaine's arms and fingers as his blood began to flow again, he was so full of relief. But he could also see how hurt Kurt was by the loss. Kurt had been very taken with the bird, and had put a tremendous amount of love into caring for him. To Kurt, love was everything.

"I suspect a stroke," Kurt finished.

"Oh my God, I'm so sorry." Blaine poured all of his feelings into the words he knew would bring Kurt little comfort.

"I know it's really stupid to be upset about a bird, but," he took a deep breath, staring at Blaine. Blaine felt as if he stared into Blaine's soul. If he didn't know better, he would have thought Kurt was talking about him. "He inspired me with his optimism and his love of song. He was my friend."

Blaine couldn't help but wonder in those moments if Kurt really had listened to the words of Misery yesterday. Blaine knew his grief as heartfelt. But he almost felt as though Kurt was also mourning the death of the possibilities between him and Blaine. The thought nearly broke Blaine's heart.

"Now I know that today we need to practice do-wopping behind Blaine as he sings every solo in the medley of Pink songs, but I'd like to sing a song for Pavarotti today."

Blaine sat slowly as Kurt handed over a tape to go into the tape deck. His thoughts were racing as Kurt began to sing. He couldn't meet Kurt's eyes; couldn't even look at him, or Nick who sat across from him. His mind was too full.

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night*

*Take these broken wings and learn to fly*

He heard the words broken wings and images invaded, of many a horrible night, cowering, wanting to fly, but trapped. Broken. He was so broken.

*All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise*

Blaine started to sing backup, helping him focus his feelings. He listened to the words Kurt sang. He didn't know if the words were meant for him or not, but it didn't matter. Because he felt them, deep in his soul. He was the blackbird.

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night*

*Take these sunken eyes and learn to see*

*All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to be free*

*Blackbird fly, Blackbird fly*

He glanced at Kurt quickly, but again looked away. The words stabbed at his heart. He had been living, sunken in a world of fear, unable to see what was really there. He had spent his entire life waiting; waiting for permission to be himself, to love and be loved, to fly into the night. He glanced at Nick and met his eyes. Perhaps it was time to stop waiting.

*Into the light of the dark black night.*

He looked up at Kurt, with sunken eyes, and he saw...beauty. He saw compassion. He saw honesty beyond anything he had ever experienced in his life before. He saw the opposite of himself, a boy who wore every emotion on his sleeve. Someone who put it all on the line. He saw courage. He saw freedom.

*Blackbird fly, Blackbird fly*

*Into the light of the dark black night.*

He saw someone he could walk with. Someone he could share everything with. Someone he could face the world with. Someone he could face his father with. As he made his decision, the ever present knot in his stomach unraveled. His heart settled. His fear vanished. A small smile crossed his lips. With Kurt he could do anything. With Kurt he could fly.

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night*

*Take these broken wings and learn to fly*

*All your life*

*You were only waiting for this moment to arise*

Blaine knew, with every fiber of his being, that if Kurt let him in, there was no one and nothing that could stop them. This was their moment.

Blaine stood outside the room, watching for a minute as Kurt decorated a box with excruciating detail. The boy would never cease to amaze him. Blaine was terrified. It had taken him a few days to make everything perfect, to secure the duet for him and Kurt. There were times when he wondered if he could wait until everything was just right. But now, standing here, he was sure that this was his moment. This was his moment to choose; whether to remain a child, tied down in dread of his father's hatred and bigotry, or whether to be a man, and love with all his heart. This was his moment to choose freedom.

He took a deep breath, straightened his tie, and walked in.

"What's that?" he asked casually.

"I'm decorating Pavarotti's casket," Kurt sighed.

"Well, finish up," he said anxiously. "I have the perfect song for our number and we should practice."

"Do tell," Kurt said with great interest.

"Candles." He wished desperately the nerves would go away, but he was pretty sure that Kurt could hear his heart pounding. "By Hey Monday."

"I'm impressed," Kurt said with a satisfied smile. "You're usually so top forty."

"Well, I just wanted something a little more...emotional." Blaine sat down. The way Kurt looked at him with his perfectly coifed hair and baby soft skin, made the butterflies in his stomach go aloft. He risked a quick glance to Kurt's beautiful and, he suspected, soft pink lips, then looked away, struggling to look Kurt in the eye.

Kurt appeared to be having a similar struggle and turned away. "Why did you pick me to sing that song with?" Kurt asked. Blaine hesitated, the words escaping him, the overwhelming fear returning momentarily. He breathed in Kurt's honesty and courage and for the first time since they met, breathed it out, shaking those feelings away.

"Kurt, there is a moment, when you say to yourself, oh there you are." He looked into Kurt's eyes, and his breath caught, his heart settling. "I've been looking for you forever." Forever. Someone to trust. Someone to love. Someone to tell his secrets to. Someone to save him. It was all Kurt.

He took Kurt's hand, startling the boy. *A touch of the fingertips*, Blaine remembered. He hoped that Kurt felt in his own fingertips everything he always had wanted to feel. "Watching you do *Blackbird* this week," He wished he could tell him everything. Every fear, every moment, every dream. He couldn't. Not yet. But he could tell him this. "That was the moment for me. About you. You move me, Kurt. And this duet would just be an excuse to spend more time with you."

Kurt smiled, and released the breath he had been holding. Blaine couldn't hold back anymore. He leaned in, placing his hand on Kurt's cheek and met Kurt's soft, delicious lips. Everything he missed in the kiss with Rachel was there now; the butterflies, the heat, the dizziness. He was gentle, always allowing Kurt to pull away if he wanted, but Kurt didn't. Instead he soon felt Kurt's hand on his own cheek as Kurt pulled him into the kiss even more strongly. It wasn't what Blaine had expected, it was so much better. Even his dreams underestimated the passion one kiss could make him feel. Neither wanted to let go.

Blaine pulled away from the kiss and stopped midair, gazing upon the face of the exquisite boy in front of him, lids heavy, eyes dilated, lips swollen and face blushing. Kurt hadn't stopped him, had even encouraged him. But if Blackbird had been Kurt's goodbye, he wondered if he was too late.

Blaine prayed he wasn't, blushing as he sat back down. Self-conscious and unsure, he laughed away his doubts, bringing his arm to his head in a poor attempt to hide his feelings. "We should...we should practice."

He turned back to Kurt, who was looking at him, happier than he'd been in a very long time. *I did that*, Blaine thought. It warmed his heart, and eased his mind to know that he had put that smile on that beautiful face. "I thought we were."

Blaine leaned forward without hesitation, meeting Kurt's lips as he rose out of his chair. Blaine pulled Kurt up to standing as they kissed, breathing in deeply the smell, the taste and the feel of each other's kiss. It was still new and neither moved to deepen it, but it was the most loving and romantic feeling either had ever experienced. Every other kiss, Brittany, Karofsky, Rachel, became distant thoughts in their mind, never to haunt them again. When they each thought of their first kiss, this would forever be etched in their memory. When they finally pulled apart, neither could breath.

Cupping Kurt's face, Blaine eyed Kurt's swollen lips as he softly brushed his thumb over them. His gaze moved up to meet Kurt's eyes, his fingers caressing Kurt over his ear as if to tuck back a stray hair. He tenderly placed a hand on Kurt's neck. "I'm sorry it took me so long."

"It's ok." Kurt trembled at the gentle touch and laughed breathlessly. "It was worth the wait."

"Kurt Hummel," Blaine asked, "will you do me the honor of being my boyfriend?"

Blaine watched as Kurt brought his soft hands to Blaine's dark curls and moaned as Kurt pulled him in on his own for another kiss.

As Nick passed by the room, he glanced inside to see Blaine and Kurt locked together. He smiled. Blaine must have found his moment.

"Blaine Anderson," Kurt whispered pulling away slightly, leaving their foreheads touching. "I would love to be your boyfriend."

The Warblers were coming down from their post performance high as they quickly took their seats in between their performance and New Directions. Blaine took his backpack off and placed it on the floor, just as Rachel Berry took the solo microphone center stage. As he let go he felt a vibration in the bag, and despite his better judgment, unzipped it and grabbed his phone. He opened the text message that had arrived and his heart stopped.

**Dad: We need to talk. You are to come home this weekend.**

*What have I done*

*I wish I could run*

*Away from this ship going under*

What had he done? His mind immediately began to create excuses, stories, lies to delay the inevitable assault. Blaine quickly scanned the crowd, searching for the person who had outed him, but all he saw was a sea of faces, none of whom stood out. He calmed his breathing, reined in his panic and concentrated on Rachel's words.

*Just trying to help, hurt everyone else*

*Now I feel the weight of the world is*

*On my shoulders*

*What can you do when your good isn't good enough?*

*And all that you touch tumbles down?*

*'Cause my best intentions keep making a mess of things*

*I just wanna fix it somehow*

*But how many times will it take?*

*Oh, how many times will it take for me?*

*To get it right*

*To get it right*

He knew Kurt had whispered something to him but he didn't hear the words. Kurt. How could he have done this to Kurt? If his father sent him away, it would break both of their hearts now. Staring straight ahead, he grabbed Kurt's hand and squeezed tightly.

*Can I start again with my faith shaken?*

*'Cause I can't go back and undo this*

*I just have to stay and face my mistakes*

*But if I get stronger and wiser*

*I'll get through this*

He wouldn't let go of Kurt. He would do whatever he had to in order to stay with him. Honesty would have to wait. He had been naïve. He would have to keep hiding. Hide his relationship with Kurt from his father. Hide his father from Kurt. Until he was stronger and wiser.

*So I throw up my fist*

*Throw a punch in the air*

*And accept the truth, that sometimes life isn't fair*

*Yeah, I'll send down a wish*

*Yeah, I'll send up a prayer*

*And finally, someone will see*

*How much I care*

Life for Blaine wasn't even close to fair. All he wanted was to love freely, openly, without fear or hesitation. He closed his eyes, and sent up a prayer that someday, his father would just accept him and allow him to be the man he was. He blinked back the tears that threatened to roll down his face.

*What can you do when your good isn't good enough?*

*And all that you touch tumbles down?*

*Oh my best intentions keep making a mess of things*

*I just wanna fix it somehow*

*But how many times will it take?*

*Oh, how many times will it take?*

*To get it right*

*To get it right.*

Kurt turned to him and smiled as the crowd gave Rachel a standing ovation. Blaine let the love of his friends, his pride for Rachel, and the strong, protective hands of his boyfriend wash over him. The weekend was days away. He was here and this was now, and for a few more moments, he was still free.



## ***Chapter Six: Night of Neglect***

Blaine had to pull over twice on the side of the road to stop his panic from taking over on his way home. The last few days, with Kurt always at his side, were both magic and torture. He adored the boy, and the thought of losing him, or of Kurt losing Blaine, broke his heart into a million pieces. And he knew that if his father had found out about them because of their Regionals performance, it was precisely what would happen. He finally pulled into the driveway and got out of the car. Blaine inhaled deeply as he placed his hand on the doorknob. He closed his eyes and said a silent prayer to a God he knew would not answer, and walked inside, shutting the door carefully behind him.

Colonel Anderson was neither a big man nor strong, but there was no doubt in anyone's mind that he was a man to be listened to and obeyed. It had been drilled into Blaine's head since he was a little boy, his only reprieve the years his father was gone in Iraq. Even then, the invention of computers, cellphones, and video conferencing was a curse for the boy who didn't behave the way his father wanted him to. Blaine found him sitting on the living room sofa reading some sort of manual. He stood by the doorway, waiting to be acknowledged.

Finally his father closed the book. "Have a seat Blaine," he ordered.

"I'd rather stand," Blaine said defiantly, moving to lean against a hutch on the wall across the room from his father. His defiance often got him into more trouble, but it was the only measure of control he ever had with his father and he clung to it dearly. "Where's Mom?"

"She went out." Blaine knew that this did not bode well at all. His mother left when she knew it was going to get bad between them. It broke Blaine's heart, but he also understood she needed to protect herself as well. He had long ago realized that he was on his own. He gripped the table edge tightly with both hands, trying desperately to contain his fear. He concentrated on breathing as his father rose.

"I have certain expectations in this house, you know that. And I do not take kindly to you not following them." The Colonel's stare penetrated Blaine's steely façade and he shivered. He began to grow dizzy, but remained silent. He could almost see Kurt being ripped from his grasp but tried to blink away the image. He still was not certain what this was about, and he refused to take any chances at revealing something his father didn't already know.

His silence only made his father's anger grow, however. "An explanation Blaine," he demanded. "Now."

Blaine tried to swallow the heartbeat that had climbed to his throat. He willed his voice to be steady, but it came out more like a squeak. "For what, Sir."

The Colonel's gaze fell to a manila envelope on the coffee table. Blaine noticed it for the first time, seeing the Dalton seal in the corner. His face creased in confusion. Blaine stepped forward tentatively and grabbed it, opening it slowly. He pulled out a report card, and breathed a sigh of relief. He nearly broke out laughing, then realized he must be delirious.

"You think this is funny Blaine?" The Colonel's booming anger brought Blaine back to reality. Dalton and Kurt were safe, but he was not.

"No Sir, not all," he said and studied the report card. Blaine frowned. Two C's amongst the A's and one B. A suitable report card for most families, but not in the Anderson household. He wasn't happy with it himself. Blaine looked up at a face raging, and panic returned. "I'm sorry, Sir."

Blaine stepped back as the Colonel moved toward him until he was inches from the hutch. "Sorry is not going to cut it, young man. I do not pay tens of thousands of dollars a year for grades like these." His tone shifted, mixing condescension with taunting. "Tell me Blaine, is the work too hard for you or are you just too busy with your ridiculous singing and dancing all the time to bother with your classes?"

Blaine couldn't respond. He knew what his father was really asking: *Was he too stupid or too gay?* And the fact was, there was no good answer. He would never blame his grades on the Warblers, even if it were true, which it wasn't. On the other hand, saying he couldn't handle the work was a lie he would never tell. There was no way he would give his father another reason to think less of him. Kurt was the true reason his grades had slipped. He always tried to concentrate in class and complete his homework after Warbler practice, but his mind had been a mess the past few months, wanting so badly what he spent hours convincing himself he couldn't have. But that was another answer he could never give.

And suddenly he was reminded precisely why. His father never took to silence well, when he wanted answers he got them. As Blaine got lost in his own world, searching desperately in his mind for some excuse he could divulge, his father snapped him out of it with a shove that slammed him forcefully into the hutch. Blaine felt a shooting pain in his back as the air was swept from his lungs. Tears came to his eyes.

"You're out of the Warblers," Colonel Anderson yelled. "I will not have you hanging around those boys, doing whatever it is you do, instead of concentrating on your studies."

"No!" Life without the Warblers would be like living without air. Music and his friends were the only thing that kept him afloat. And Kurt. No, he couldn't think about Kurt right now. "Please, Dad," he begged, "competition season is done. It will take less of my time. I promise I will keep up in school. Straight A's next semester."

Blaine struggled to breathe as his father got directly in his face and hissed. "You have wasted my money this year and spit on my generosity in letting you attend that school. If you think that I am going to just let you waltz back with no consequences for your actions and nary a reminder that your academics are more important than anything else, you've got another thing coming."

Blaine looked at the floor. No matter how hard he tried, somehow his father always won. "I'll take whatever I have coming, Sir," he nearly whispered. With every ounce of strength he raised his eyes to meet his father's, pleading. "Just please, let me stay with the Warblers."

His father stared him down for what felt like an eternity. Finally, he took a step back, making space between him and his son. "Here's the deal. You can walk out that door now and I will call the headmaster to inform him that you resign from your choir. Or you can head up those stairs and wait for me in your room. The choice is yours."

Blaine's skin bristled and his heart pounded, but he did not hesitate. He stepped out from under his father's glare and, like a prisoner facing execution, slowly climbed the stairs.

Blaine lay on his bed at Dalton, chin in his hands, trying desperately, but failing, to focus on his history book that lay open beneath him. It had been 4 days since he'd returned, but his mind kept straying to his weekend home. The soreness had virtually disappeared, but the pain in his heart remained. So many thoughts and feelings were at war within him as his mind shifted from his father to Kurt and back again.

It wasn't the first time since he'd been at Dalton that he'd come back this way, but it was the first time since Kurt had transferred. None of the boys ever seemed to notice, his circumstances had turned him into a damn fine actor. This time he told everyone he had a football injury from playing with his Dad over the

weekend. Most of the guys bought the story; even Kurt didn't really question him. But one person did notice - Nick. He'd seen it before and he was good at picking up patterns. Blaine had always known he wouldn't be able to hide it from his best friend forever.

Nick asked him to stay after following rehearsal and Kurt went off to dinner with the other boys, a fact for which Blaine was grateful. Blaine had no intention of telling Nick anything, but Nick had a way about him that made a person feel safe, loved and accepted. He ended up admitting only that yes, his father had hurt him. He swore Nick to secrecy, which he very reluctantly agreed to. Lying on his bed now, he had quite mixed feelings about telling Nick. On the one hand, he was so very grateful that someone knew and understood. On the other hand, he felt guilty that he told Nick and not Kurt. But Kurt could never know. Blaine knew that Kurt would immediately tell his father, and Mr. Hummel would either storm over to his house or call child protective services. Either action had only one result: Losing Dalton and losing Kurt.

A knock on the door Blaine recognized immediately as Kurt's, broke his reverie. "Come in," he called.

Kurt came in and went straight to sit on the corner of Blaine's bed. "Hi," he said happily.

Blaine rolled over and sat up, placing one hand on Kurt's knee and giving him a peck on the cheek. "Hi beautiful," he smiled.

Kurt blushed. "I never thought that Wes and David would let me out of rehearsal. You are lucky you weren't there, they were on a rampage. They made me do Blackbird about ten times. Never knew they were so serious about their nursing home shows."

Blaine chuckled to himself. Nick had asked them to keep Kurt busy, knowing that Blaine needed time on his own. "You know Wes," he said. "He's a perfectionist. Of course, maybe he just wanted to hear you sing Blackbird over and over. I know I do."

Kurt grinned. "So, you seem to be feeling better." Blaine had told Kurt he had a headache the past few days. It was true, in a way. He tried never to lie to his boyfriend, but he had grown over the years to be a master of half-truths.

"Yes," Blaine answered. "I am feeling better."

"Good!" Kurt beamed. "Because I have a date for us."

"Oh?"

Kurt bounced a little on the bed with excitement. *That boy is too adorable for words*, thought Blaine. "New Directions is doing a little fundraiser concert, and I got about 10 separate texts saying that we better be there. They say they are going to have a big audience, but chances are we could be the only ones there."

"Then we better go. Wouldn't want your friends to come after you here for not showing up," Blaine answered. Blaine was so grateful that Kurt had his friends at McKinley. He knew that if the worst ever happened, they would always be there for him, even while Blaine was left alone. His frowned at the thought.

"Hey, look at me," Kurt said suddenly. Blaine looked up and met Kurt's gaze. "Your eyes look so sad. They have for days. What's going on?" Kurt placed a hand in Blaine's curls, gently stroking them.

Blaine shook his head. "It's nothing, I'm fine. Don't worry about me."

"Of course I worry about you," Kurt said. "You can tell me anything you know that, right?"

It broke Blaine's heart a little bit, but he couldn't say anything. He wouldn't say anything. Kurt could not know. Some secrets were meant to be kept.

"Let's go to dinner," Blaine said, grabbing Kurt's hand and pulling him off the bed.

"You're changing the subject," Kurt said wryly.

"I'm hungry." Blaine tried to be cheerful.

"You're changing the subject!" Kurt said more emphatically.

"Let's find Nick and Jeff!" Blaine yelled opening the door and pulling him into the hallway.

Kurt just shook his head. "What am I going to do with you Blaine Warbler?" he wondered aloud as Blaine raced them down the corridor to find his friends.

Blaine strolled the hallways of McKinley High School as Kurt showed him all the sights of his old school. Blaine walked, hands in his pockets, smiling at Kurt. They always held hands at Dalton, but without speaking of it, neither felt fully comfortable doing it in these hallways. Blaine had promised himself that he would put everything behind him tonight and just have a wonderful night with his boyfriend. Kurt looked so happy here, but at the same time sad. Blaine could easily tell that for Kurt, this was home, not Dalton, and he missed it terribly.

Brittany and Artie came by smiling, encouraging them to get a good seat in the auditorium. "Gonna be a full house?" Blaine asked with a smile.

"Got to get there early to get a good seat," Artie replied.

"We'll be there in a minute," Kurt assured them.

Blaine turned to Kurt and studied him as he stared after his friends. "Aww...you miss them," he said lovingly.

The moment was ruined by a voice behind them. "What the hell are you two doing here." They both turned to see Karofsky approach them. Blaine immediately felt his defenses shoot up. He had been too close to fight or flight all week. He hated Karofsky. He had tried to be understanding, months ago before he knew what the football player had done to Kurt. But Karofsky reminded Blaine way too much of his father, especially today. The only difference was that the boy had no power over him and he was free to give back everything the kid gave them. Adrenaline raced through his system.

"We're here for the benefit," Kurt said. "Don't tell me you're going."

"I wouldn't be caught dead," the bully snarled at them. "I was pumping iron at the gym when one of the guys told me you two were here spreading your fairy dust all over the place."

"Would you just give it up!" Blaine fought desperately to keep himself together for Kurt's sake, but every muscle in his body tensed and every reflex wanted to lash out. "You can live whatever lie you want, but don't pretend that the three of us don't know what's really going on here."

"You don't know squat, buckboy!" David yelled.

Blaine lost it. He was smaller, but he was strong, and he was done being called names and taking abuse. Every ounce of hate and anger and humiliation that he had suffered over the years, from both the bullies at school and the bully at home rushed through him and he couldn't stop himself if he tried. He charged Karofsky and shoved him, making an impact despite his size. David immediately responded, pushing back. Blaine's vision narrowed and the blood rushed through his ears.

Blaine felt Santana jump in and push him away, stopping him from punching Karofsky. He vaguely heard Kurt and the other two talking, but couldn't make out the words. Slowly, his vision and hearing returned to normal.

"First of all, anything you do became my business, when you decided to toss that slushie up in my grill," the black-haired girl said.

David eyed her back. "Think I can take a couple of queers and a girl."

Blaine's blood began to boil again, but Santana acted more quickly. "Heh, okay, see here's what's gonna go down, two choices: You stay here and I crack one of your nuts, right or left that's your choice, or you walk way and live to be a douchebag another day. Oh and also I have razor blades hidden in my hair, tons, all up in there."

The speech allowed Blaine a moment to catch his breath and return his thinking. He quickly glanced over to Kurt, who looked frightened. He wasn't sure who he was more scared of, Karofsky or Blaine. The football player walked away, and Santana turned back to them, meeting Blaine's eyes.

"We could have handled that," he told her, although he realized it was probably a very good thing that she had ended it when and how she did.

"It was more fun doing it together," she said, smiling at Blaine. He gave her a small smile back when she got a text and ran off in the direction of the choir room. Blaine's thoughts quickly returned to his hands, which were still clumped into fists.

Kurt turned anxiously to Blaine. "Are you ok?"

"I'm fine," Blaine said quickly, brushing him off. "Are you alright?" he asked trying to clear his mind.

Kurt stepped toward Blaine. "Yes," he said placing his hands on Blaine's forearms. "You're shaking!" he exclaimed with concern.

Blaine stepped back, causing Kurt's arms to fall and he looked around. The last thing they needed to do was instigate any more violence by them touching. "Come on, let's get our seats," Blaine said quietly turning to go, avoiding Kurt's hurt look, and nearly running off to the auditorium. Kurt caught up to him in their seats, but Blaine avoided his gaze. With the embarrassment at his behavior, coupled with the rage he felt and the secrets he kept, he knew that if he looked at Kurt's beautifully innocent face he would lose it.

Blaine was grateful when Tina took the stage. Music always calmed his nerves and the racing thoughts, and he did his best to let himself relax. But the audience made it impossible. Kurt was right, no one showed up and those that did just heckled the poor girl, who was trying her best to work it up on the stage. Blaine had been told about how New Directions was treated at school, but seeing it first hand made his heart ache for Kurt. He turned to his boyfriend, and discreetly took his hand, as Mike took the stage. Staring at the beauty on the stage, he found himself finally relaxing. His dancing amazed Blaine, to the point that he was mesmerized. The guy was incredible.

Blaine leaned over to Kurt. "Think we can get him to transfer to Dalton?" he whispered wagging his eyebrows.

Kurt turned to him and smiled. "You are terrible," he kidded.

The two gave Mike a standing ovation.

When Mercedes sang, he nearly melted. He had never heard her sing before, but her voice was incredible and he lost himself entirely in the song.

*Ain't no way for me to love you,*

*if you won't let me.*

*It ain't no way for me to give you all you need,*

*if you won't let me give all of me.*



Although he didn't sing it, Mercedes voice drove into his heart and carried his feelings on the wind, to God, to his father, to anyone who would listen. Every bad feeling, every doubt, and all his anger disappeared. Once again, music said everything he needed to say. And a huge smile returned to his face. Tears were in his eyes when she finished, and he joined Kurt and his friends in a standing ovation. The power of music amazed him every time. He would do anything, take whatever he had to, not to lose that. He had always known, but he knew with complete certainty in that moment, that he had made the right decision.

## ***Chapter Seven: Born This Way***

Blaine sat with Kurt and his friends at the Lima Bean. Blaine had realized at the benefit concert how much Kurt had missed them and he encouraged him to call and invite them out. They sat with Santana, Mercedes and Tina. Rachel had been busy doing something with Finn. Blaine knew that Mercedes and Tina were close to Kurt but he was surprised when Santana decided to tag along. That was until he noticed her eyeing Brittany and Artie, who were on a date at another table, since the moment they had sat down. And Blaine was fairly certain that Santana did not have her eye on Artie. Blaine may be clueless about his own love life, but he could be pretty astute when it came to other people's.

"You haven't asked us anything about our New York trip," Mercedes mentioned.

"Is it because it's too painful?" Tina asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact." Kurt's sarcasm dripped. "But while the New Directions are preparing to perform at Nationals, the Warblers are preparing to perform in a nursing home, in a strip mall next to a national bank." Blaine smiled. It was killing Kurt. His boyfriend hadn't stopped complaining about the irony and unfairness of the situation since the rehearsal Wes had with Kurt. Kurt had made Blaine swear never to leave him alone with Wes again. It was one of the reasons Blaine had suggested this meeting. "I'm so proud of you guys!" Kurt finished caustically.

"We miss you so much," Tina assured him.

"Isn't there any way you can come back to McKinley?" Mercedes begged, looking at the two.

"I told him I would be all for it if it wasn't for Karofsky." Blaine hated seeing Kurt miserable. Kurt was desperate to perform with his friends. He belonged on a stage, not in the dining hall of a nursing home serenading old ladies who wanted nothing more than to pinch his cheeks. And Blaine had another motive. He was growing fearful that someday his father might decide to just stop by Dalton to make sure his son was following through on his promises. With Kurt there, that scenario could only end in disaster. No, he was definitely safer with Kurt at McKinley...where he should have always been. But only, of course, if Kurt were out of harm's way.

"Wait, what did you just say?" Santana asked.

"Kurt needs to be safe," Blaine stressed.

"Can we please change the subject?" Kurt urged, rolling his eyes embarrassed. The two boys had discussed this a few times over the past few days and they kept coming to the same conclusion. Of course, Kurt didn't know about Blaine's situation, and the boy had no intention of telling him. It didn't matter. Kurt's safety was paramount to Blaine. He had been taking care of himself for a long time and he would continue to do so if necessary.

Suddenly, Santana stood up. "I've gotta go... go! I've gotta go!" Blaine grinned widely and watched Santana leave. He knew it!

"I hate to say it guys, but we should go too," Kurt said linking his fingers with Blaine.

"Yeah," Mercedes said, "we all have school tomorrow. Love you Kurt!"

"Love you baby girl." Kurt hugged Tina and Mercedes and Blaine gave them a wave as Kurt and Blaine walked hand in hand to their cars.

"You're awfully quiet," Kurt said, leaning against his car.

Blaine combed his fingers carefully through Kurt's hair. He had learned that the later it was, the less Kurt cared about the perfection of his hairdo. "I just want you to be happy. And I don't think you are. Not at Dalton and not at McKinley. I want you to be safe and happy."

"I am," Kurt promised him. "Anytime with you. I am safe and happy."

Blaine smiled and pulled Kurt in for a soft kiss. "I am happy with you too," Blaine said, opening Kurt's door and closing it behind his boyfriend.

He went to his own car, his stomach twisting. He was happy with Kurt, always happy. But safe was something he believed that he would never be.

"Kurt where are you?" Blaine answered his cell. Kurt had missed class and Warblers practice. "Are you ok?"

"I'm fine Blaine. My dad and I went in to talk with Principal Figgins at McKinley this morning. Seems Karofsky has changed his mind about killing me and is instead going to protect me."

Blaine rubbed his head. Nothing Kurt said just made sense. "Kurt, I don't understand."

"I don't know exactly Blaine. Santana is behind it so goodness knows what she really has up her sleeve. But the point is, I'm safe at McKinley. David's not going to do anything to hurt me."

"Oh." He should be happy. This is what he wanted. This was what he needed. Kurt safe. Kurt not at Dalton. Why wasn't he happy? "That's great Kurt." He tried desperately himself upbeat.

"I'm...um...on my way to Dalton now. I'll finish up classes today and then... get my things." Blaine heard the sadness in Kurt's voice as well. Despite it being what they both wanted, they were losing a lot as well.

"Ok, I'll see you when you get here. Bye."

As he hung up the phone, he turned back to the guys. He was in Nick and Jeff's room and the boys were playing video games after a pretty rough rehearsal with Wes and his gavel. He sat on the bed in disbelief.

Nick noticed first. "Blaine, what's the matter? You look like someone died."

Blaine looked at Nick and struggled to even say the words. He swallowed hard. "Kurt's leaving."

Blaine stood against the wall across from the lockers in Dalton's classroom building. He watched sadly as Kurt slowly gathered up his belongings from his locker. Kurt had just finished up his last class at the private school and was packing up to head back to McKinley on Monday morning. Blaine had so many mixed emotions going through his head, but right now his heart just felt heavy.

Kurt closed the locker and turned to Blaine. Blaine had been having trouble looking at Kurt all day, and he realized Kurt was having the same problem. When their eyes finally met, they both saw tears and Blaine reached his hand out. "Come on," he said, "I think you have a few things in my room."

Kurt took his hand, and Blaine knew that more than classes, more than lunch, more than Warblers practice, he would miss having Kurt's hand to hold in the hallways of Dalton. They had been doing so since the day they met.

The two headed up to Blaine's room and the dormitory was thankfully mostly empty as boys were off at their various after school activities. Blaine laid down on his bed as Kurt started going through the room gathering up his things. Kurt packed some hair product and moisturizer and some extra clothes he had kept here. Hard as Blaine tried to convince Kurt he wouldn't need them, years of being slushied made Kurt anxious to not have a clean outfit or two at the ready. Besides, occasionally the boys went out after school and Kurt sometimes preferred to change out of his uniform.

Blaine noticed Kurt was very quiet, far from his usual bubbly and talkative self. He got up and walked up behind him, placing his arms around his boyfriend's waist and resting his head on Kurt's shoulder. The two just stood like that for a minute, and Blaine closed his eyes, breathing in Kurt's scent, feeling the softness of his body against his own. Suddenly, he felt Kurt trembling beneath him.

Blaine turned him around to face each other. "Hey, hey don't cry," he hushed, wiping Kurt's tears as moisture pooled in his own eyes. "It's going to be ok, we'll see each other all the time," Blaine said, assuring himself as much as his boyfriend.

"I know," Kurt sniffled. "And in a lot of ways I'm so happy to go back. But there is so much about Dalton that I will miss."

Blaine again took Kurt's hand and held it tight as he walked his boyfriend over to sit together on his bed. With his other hand he stroked Kurt's cheek, again wiping away the tears. "Tell me," Blaine urged.

Tears formed in Kurt's eyes again as he listed everything he would miss. "I'll miss walking down the hallways without the fear of a slushie facial. I'll miss the smiles as I pass and applause when we sing. I'll miss a show choir that works hard and rehearses for perfection. I'll miss the guys' crazy antics and even Wes' gavel." Blaine grew lost in Kurt's eyes and his own began to tear once more as Kurt continued. "I'll miss being able to escape with you up to your room when things get hard, or just when we have a free period together. I'll miss kissing you anywhere and anytime I want." Kurt ran his fingers through Blaine's locked away curls and pulled him in for a quick kiss. "But most of all I will miss holding your hand down the hallway as we walk from class to class, or building to building, not afraid of anyone or anything, being with each other openly and honestly in just the little moments. I will miss the little moments most of all."

Blaine did not hesitate. He grasped Kurt firmly and pulled him toward him in a desperate kiss to hold onto this moment as long as he could. He was letting Kurt go, letting his father win, knowing all the time that it was once again him running away, even though this time it was Kurt leaving. He poured his emotions into the kiss and moved to deepen it, sucking in Kurt's bottom lip and nearly begging Kurt for entrance. Kurt's lips parted for him and allowed Blaine to taste him for the first time. Blaine reigned in his passion, deliberately slowing his movements. He grew soft and gentle, wanting in no way to frighten Kurt or make him uneasy. Kurt moaned into the kiss, and Blaine couldn't help but smile. Kurt pulled away and smiled as well.

Blaine gazed deeply into Kurt's eyes, still holding his boyfriend close to him. "I will miss everything about you, Kurt," he whispered. "Every second I don't see you I will miss you. The halls will be empty without you."

"Remind me again why I'm going?" Kurt begged him.

"Because McKinley is your home and New Directions is your family. You were never meant to be one of a hundred Kurt, you were meant to stand out. You were never meant to do-wop behind me, as you so eloquently pointed out," he teased smiling softly. "You were born to shine."

Blaine took a deep breath as he and the Warblers arrived. Petrified would have been an understatement if he tried to describe how he felt. This wasn't the Gap. It wasn't Sectionals, or Regionals. This was the courtyard of McKinley High School, in front of hundreds of students who enjoyed throwing food and slushies at performers. And who never helped Kurt for one day when he was being bullied for being gay. And here he was, about to declare his love for Kurt in front of every one of them.

Just as he decided this was a horrible idea and turned to walk away, Jeff patted him on the back. "Come on dude, this is gonna be awesome. Kurt's gonna love it!"

Blaine looked at the other Warblers and they all smiled at him. They had his back. And New Directions now had Kurt's. Blaine walked down the steps with Wes and David behind him and there he was, his gorgeous boyfriend in a black top hat and white jacket, looking stunning and so very very happy. Blaine smiled. That was what it was about, seeing that smile on Kurt's face. Watching his friends embrace him. It settled his stomach as he reached the landing and Kurt turned to him.

"Kurt, Dalton's gonna miss you. You were a great addition to the Warblers, and you made us a better team. I'm sad to see you go, but we all know that this is something that you really want." He spoke as the lead singer now, for all of his brothers. Blaine's personal feelings, well, they would come out much better in song. "And I'll still have you after school and on the weekends but these guys won't, so, we wanted to say goodbye."

"And thank you, Kurt," Wes said.

*I walked across an empty land*

*I knew the pathway like the back of my hand.*

When Blaine sang, he felt every word. He didn't know when, and he didn't know how, but Kurt had slowly turned from the hardest thing in his life to the simplest. He had become Kurt's rock, the only one he could truly rely on. The idea of going each day without seeing him broke the singer's heart, but he also knew it was for the best for both of them right now. As he sang, he was so overcome with emotion for Kurt; love, he knew he was falling in love. It scared him, for so many reasons. And he knew that Kurt's move to McKinley allowed him to keep doing what he always did...run away. But this time, it wouldn't hurt Kurt in the process, and maybe in the long run, it would even bring them closer together.

*And if you have a minute why don't we go*

*Talk about it somewhere only we know*

*This could be the end of everything*

*So why don't we go, somewhere only we know.*

He had to start letting Kurt in, or it would be the end of everything. Now that they wouldn't be together all the time, the distance that Blaine tried desperately to keep would tear them apart. It was time to start tearing down the walls. Time to start opening up and letting Kurt know more about him. It was time for Blaine to start being more honest. Slowly, carefully, but he had to let him in.

He watched Kurt say goodbye to the Warblers, tears streaming down his face, and he watched as Kurt embraced his brother and his best friend. Tears pooled in Blaine's eyes as well. No matter how surrounded by the Warblers he was, every minute without Kurt would be lonely.

*Somewhere only we know, Somewhere only we know.*

They gazed into each other's tear filled eyes until Kurt fell in Blaine's arms and Blaine rushed forward to embrace him. "I'll never say goodbye to you," he heard Kurt whisper in his ear and chills went up his spine. If only there truly was a place that was free of both their fathers, somewhere that only they knew.

But Blaine knew there wasn't and he knew that if he didn't let go of Kurt he would kiss him and never let him walk away. So he let go and he walked away, his Warbler brothers offering comfort as he did. He turned back, he couldn't help it, to see Kurt's smile as his friends surrounded him. Blaine smiled and nodded. This was right. As hard as it was, this was right.

**Blaine: I'm here in the parking lot whenever you're ready.**

**Kurt: Be there in a minute, we're just finishing up.**

Blaine rocked out to Katy Perry in his car while he waited for Kurt to finish up with New Directions. It bothered him that he felt a need to take a look around for Karofsky before relaxing. Kurt had assured him that things were different now, that Karofsky wasn't a threat, but there was still no love lost for the guy that had threatened his boyfriend. Still, he thought, without the bully he and Kurt maybe never would have gotten together, so perhaps he owed him something. Blaine shook that thought from his mind immediately. No, if Kurt had never transferred, it all would have been so much easier. Well, at least he was back here at McKinley now.

Blaine was startled out of his reverie by Kurt who opened the door and breathlessly dropped himself down in the passenger seat. "Oh my gaga, Blaine, it was amazing! It went so well. I so hope we can do that number in front of an actual audience. I totally think we should do it for Nationals, but Mr. Schuester thinks it would be too controversial...well, I would be too controversial. I think it would be amazing."

Blaine laughed at the extremely excited animation and the ramblings of his adorable boyfriend, and wanted desperately to just kiss his lips to make him stop. Instead, he reached over to Kurt's button down and began undoing the buttons. "Let me see!" He grinned widely.

Kurt giggled as he brushed Blaine's hands away. Blaine unbuttoning his shirt was making his mind wander to activities far too inappropriate for the McKinley High parking lot. He finished unfastening the shirt and



opened it dramatically to reveal his "Likes Boys" shirt. He looked at Blaine, who studied it quietly. "Well," Kurt said, a little anxiously as his grin turned to a concerned frown. "Don't you like it?"

Blaine frowned as well. "I don't know Kurt," he said. "I'm not sure I like this "S" here at the end. I mean, who are these *boys*?" Blaine slowly grinned at Kurt. Teasing was so much a part of their everyday conversation. It eased the tension for Blaine...the hated tension that his secrets created and...other tension that he loved, that Kurt created by being the most interesting, incredible and sexy boy in the world that Lord, he missed so much.

Kurt rolled his eyes and stuck his chin in the air. "Well, I *am* pretty popular with the gentleman," he taunted playfully. "Of course there is kind of a special someone."

Blaine felt his stomach flutter and his body flushed with heat. "Well, I bet that if that special someone were here right now, he would want nothing more than to take you in his arms and kiss you until you gasped for air."

Blaine gave a satisfied smile when he saw Kurt's face blush, but Kurt did not miss a beat. "Well then good sir, you best take me to him, because I think he can be kind of jealous," Kurt eyed him sideways as he put his seatbelt on. "And you are a pretty handsome gentleman yourself, if I do say so."

Blaine's laugh was bursting as he put on his own seatbelt and shifted into gear, racing to the Hummel/Hudson household for Friday Night dinner. "Then there is no time to lose!"

## ***Chapter Eight: Prom***

"Go on a date with me tonight. You and me at Breadsticks," Kurt asked over the phone, though it sounded far more like a demand to Blaine's ears.

"Breadsticks Kurt? It's a school night, I've got Warblers practice and homework..."

"Don't you miss me?" Kurt's voice suddenly got high, and Blaine knew he had hurt his feelings.

"Of course I miss you, Kurt, I miss you every minute of every day I don't see you. It's just," Blaine hesitated. The last thing in the world he wanted to do was hurt him. He reminded himself that now that they were apart he needed to make more of an effort. He had to start taking risks and letting him in. He shared everything with Kurt, except his pain, and it wasn't going to be enough forever. So instead of making excuses of rehearsals and homework he tried to tell Kurt the truth. "I'm just...a date?"

"Yes Blaine, a date." Kurt said with exasperation. "You know, those things where two people who really like each other and sometimes kiss go out to a restaurant, at night, and share a meal? I mean, I haven't really been on one, but I hear they can be wonderful."

Blaine sighed. He wanted desperately to go out on a date with Kurt. His only fear was the same as always. Someone would see them together and tell his father. But Kurt wasn't going to hide away forever and damn it, he didn't want them to have to. So he agreed, and Kurt nearly screeched his ear off on the other side of the phone.

The dinner had been going fantastically. Kurt was dressed to the nines and his hair was perfectly coiffed. He looked gorgeous, and Blaine had been staring at his delicious lips all night, lamenting that they were not returning to Dalton after this date where he could get a good taste of them. Their meals had been delicious as well, and their plates had been cleared away. Blaine had stayed quietly vigilant throughout the meal, but he had yet to see anyone that he recognized. It took time, but he finally relaxed.

Suddenly, Kurt held his hand out on the table, holding it open. "Give me your hand," he said nervously.

Blaine glanced down, hesitating for only a second before placing his hand in Kurt's. Kurt covered it with his other. "Blaine Warbler..." Blaine noticed Kurt's adorable face was slightly flushed as he took a deep breath and his face lit up with hope. Blaine's heart raced a little. "Will you go to junior prom with me?"

Blaine couldn't hide his shock. "Prom?" And then the memories returned.

"It'll be the social event of the season," Kurt said encouragingly, but he could tell Blaine's mind had drifted and he panicked. "You don't want to go to prom with me?"

"No, no, of course I want to go with you, it's just..." Kurt pulled his hands away upset. *No excuses Blaine*, he thought, *it's time. Let him in*. He took a deep breath. "Prom." The word was heavier than the weights he lifted in the gym. It held so much pain in it. So much hurt. He couldn't tell Kurt everything. But he could tell Kurt something.

"What about prom Blaine?" Kurt was upset, and Blaine knew he had every right to be. He lowered his eyes, shame pouring over him. He was sure Kurt thought that Blaine didn't want to be seen in such a public event with him. And although his fears of them being discovered were always on the surface, Blaine forced them away. That wasn't what was important now, he'd deal with that later on his own.

His stomach tied in knots as he thought back. It had been a horrible period in his life and he always tried to put the memories behind him, although it was never possible. "At my old school there was a Sadie Hawkins dance." Blaine glanced up at Kurt briefly, but it was too hard and he looked away, his eyes growing distant. "And, I had *just* come out. So, I asked a friend of mine, the only other gay guy in the school. While we were waiting for his dad to pick us up, these three guys, um," The memories poured in and his brain told him to stop, but his heart told him he needed Kurt to know this. He found it very difficult to find the right words to describe what happened to him and his friend that night, but he finally finished. "Beat the living crap out of us." He looked up into Kurt's shocked and dismayed expression, and he was sure of only one thing. What happened when he returned home from the hospital to his father's anger was a story he never wanted Kurt to hear.

Kurt's eyes were full of love and sorrow when he heard the story from Blaine. "I'm so sorry."

But Blaine hadn't told Kurt for his sympathy, just his understanding. "I'm out and I'm proud and all that," he assured Kurt, "this is just a sore spot," he mumbled.

Kurt's face though grew excited and mischievous. "This is perfect. You couldn't face up to the bullies at your school so you can do it at mine." Despite everything, Kurt's optimism made Blaine smile, and he was forced to remember every reason he was willing to take the risks with Kurt. "We can do it together." Blaine took a sip from his drink and he marveled briefly at the similarities between Kurt and Nick. Despite their wisdom, they both still had a certain naiveté that came from growing up with hope, something that Blaine had lost long ago. Kurt must have suddenly realized it himself, because he continued. "But I have to say Blaine, if it makes you feel uncomfortable at all, we'll just forget about prom. We'll go to a movie instead."

Blaine looked at him in wonder. Kurt was willing to sacrifice so much for him when he had been so selfish and so distracted by his own needs. His heart was overwhelmed. "I am crazy about you."

"So, I'll take that as a yes?" Kurt said slowly and slyly.

There were going to be more things in the future that he wouldn't be able to give Kurt. But he could give Kurt this.

"Yes," Blaine conceded and Kurt squealed in delight, shooting out of his seat. "You and I are going to the Prom."

Blaine sat on the couch, legs crossed and arms folded. While he loved Kurt's outfit for prom, the truth was, it scared the hell out of him. It had been hard enough for him to agree to go to prom, and even harder to settle the deep set fear in his stomach that something was going to go horribly wrong. Kurt's kilt only added one more thing to stir the pot and like Kurt's father, it made him extremely nervous. Things like this had a way of making local news. And if that happened, his world would be over. But that was his issue, not Kurt's. Blaine Anderson did not back down from his choices, and he lived with the consequences of his actions. He would never make a decision to let his problems come in the way of Kurt's happiness.

"Just give him a minute," Burt said to Blaine after Kurt stormed off upstairs. "He'll come around."

"No he won't, sir. No offense, but Kurt is the most stubborn boy I know. Once he has something in his mind there is no changing it."

"That's definitely true," Burt nodded. "But going to prom with *you* matters more than what he wears. He'll realize that."

"Dude," Finn said turning to Blaine. "What did Kurt mean, about what you've been through? I thought things at Dalton were cool?"

Blaine looked at Finn and panicked. He looked to Burt, who was staring at his newspaper but was clearly listening intently for Blaine's response. He started to sweat. He was angry at Kurt that he had brought that up in front of Burt and Finn. His secrets were his alone to share, and he had no desire for Kurt's brother and father to know about his personal life. "I'm going to go talk to Kurt."

Blaine slowly climbed the stairs to Kurt's room, where he found the door open and his boyfriend studying himself sadly in the mirror. He leaned against the doorway. "Kurt." His voice was soft, his eyes dark.

"I know Blaine," Kurt said rolling his eyes miserably watching himself and Blaine in the mirror. "What matters is that you're there with me, not what I wear. So if you want me to just wear a regular tuxedo, I'll just wear a regular tuxedo."

Blaine shook his head. "What matters is that I'm there with you, so please. I want you to wear what you want." His tone was dismissive and his face was grim. His eyes were distant though transfixed to Kurt. This wasn't the argument he needed to have.

Kurt must have realized that and he turned to Blaine, concerned. "Then what's the matter?"

Blaine glanced into the hallway, then stepped in the room and shut the door behind him. He kept the space between them. "Kurt, you know I'm a private person."

Blaine's voice was soft and Kurt answered in kind, nodding. "Of course."

Blaine's stomach twisted and he bit his lip as he struggled for the words. "You know I don't...easily...talk about my past...or my family," his voice caught in his throat and his eyes cast downward. "I don't tell people things."

"Like about being bullied?" Kurt whispered, taking a step forward.

Blaine nodded. "Yes, like about being bullied. Now, I realize that I need to start letting you in. But I can't do that if I can't trust that when I tell you something, it stays between us."

Blaine saw Kurt nod, then his eyes open wide. Recognition flooded over the boy and he nearly ran to Blaine. "Oh my god, Blaine, I'm so sorry. I didn't even think about it! I was angry that you were all ganging up on me. I shouldn't have said what I did about the dance in front of Finn and Dad." Kurt went to hug Blaine, but Blaine stopped him.

"This is important to me Kurt," he said with tears in his eyes. "Really important. I need you to understand that."

Kurt looked at him with the blue-green oceans that Blaine loved to get lost in. He nodded firmly. "I understand, Blaine, truly I do. I'm so sorry." Kurt went to hug Blaine and Blaine took him in his arms, holding him tightly, never ever wanting to let go. Prom terrified him, for so many reasons. But he didn't want to run away anymore. So he would face this with Kurt, and he would hope that the evening was everything that Kurt imagined and more.

Blaine picked up Kurt for prom at the Hummel house, looking extraordinarily dapper in his simple black tuxedo. As much as Kurt's outfit worried him, he had to admit that his boyfriend was the most beautiful man in the world. Kurt's smile lit up his face, as did Burt's and Carole's. He allowed himself one moment of envy, to dream of having a family this happy for their son's first prom with a boyfriend. Then he put it behind him. He was proud to be able to give this moment to Kurt and to his Dad. He happily took the hundred pictures that Carole had in mind, together, separate, with Mr. Hummel, with Carole, standing, sitting, even one kissing. When they posed on their way out the door, Blaine couldn't help but stare at Kurt adoringly.

"You look amazing," he blushed.

"You've said that a few times tonight," Kurt answered with a grin. "Not that I tire of hearing it in any way."

"I'm so happy to be able to make your dreams come true," he told Kurt, eyes sparkling. "And I'm so grateful that you care about me enough to make mine come true as well."

The two finally made it out the door with hugs and kisses from Burt and Carole, and they drove straight to McKinley. Finn had gone earlier to pick up Quinn, and he knew they were stopping by Breadsticks for a pre-prom meal. They had invited the pair, but this was a very special night for Kurt and his family, and they had agreed to spend the time before Prom with them.

Blaine had forgotten one thing about Prom, and that was that the entire night was rocking out with music. As soon as he heard New Directions and the band playing when they arrived, the fears that had crept up on the drive over settled and he lost himself in the music. He still had doubts about being at McKinley, and seeing Karofsky here with Santana didn't help, but he and Kurt agreed to just stay in the back. They hadn't talked about it, but it seemed they hadn't needed to. They danced standing next to each other during the fast songs, but during ballads they just watched. Kurt was cognizant of Blaine's concern of stirring the pot, and no matter how hard Blaine tried, in those quiet moments, his fears quickly resurfaced. It was then that he looked around. He noticed the eyes on them, the whispers in their general direction, even some pointing. But no one said anything directly to them, and both boys took that as a good sign.

Blaine's time to sing came and he squeezed Kurt's hand as he went up on the stage. He had sung in front of these kids before, when he crooned to Kurt in the courtyard with the Warblers, but this was performing and he lost himself in it. Everything left his mind except the pure joy of singing and dancing. He forgot about the whispers, and the stares, and the fact that he wanted to dance with Kurt but was scared, and he just grabbed the mic and rocked the house. He could see Kurt dancing in the back and it made him smile even more as he put on some extra sexy moves just for him. They may not be able to satisfy their passions on the dance floor like others could, but there was always after prom, and he was going to use this number to his advantage.

When he finished he raced off the stage and back to Kurt's side. "Well?" he said wiggling his eyebrows, breathless and flush with exhilaration.

"You were so amazing Blaine that you caused a riot!" Kurt laughed.

"What?" Blaine's face scrunched with confusion.

"You didn't see? No of course you didn't, you lose yourself completely when you perform. Finn just got into a fight with Jesse, Rachel's date. Punched him right in the face after a pretty intense shoving match."

Blaine looked surprised looking around the room then back at Kurt. "Is Rachel ok? Your Dad and Carole are gonna flip."

Kurt looked at him with mischief in his eye. "Guess that means they won't be paying too much attention to us. I don't think that I will ever get over the things you do with microphones. Good thing I'm not the jealous type or I'd think you like them better than me."

Blaine looked at him, delight in his eyes, trying desperately to keep his hands off his boyfriend. "First of all you *are* the jealous type and second of all, that microphone stand doesn't hold a candle to you."

"Aw, Blaine, you say the most romantic things," Kurt said sarcastically.

"Yeah, well, get used to it. I've got plenty more where that come from," he joked.

They waited for the Prom King and Queen to be announced. Neither was happy when Karofsky won Prom King. Blaine knew that Kurt was rooting for Lauren for Queen, and now that Karofsky was King, he did as well. He thought maybe Lauren would kick his ass.

"And now, your 2011 McKinley High Prom Queen, with an overwhelming number of write in votes is...Kurt Hummel."

It took a moment. It took a moment for the name to register in Blaine's ears, and travel to his brain. It took a moment for him to turn to Kurt and see the look of shock on his boyfriend's face. It took a moment for that shock to turn into humiliation as a single clap broke the silence in the gymnasium. And it took a moment for Kurt to run out of the room. So much could happen in a moment, Blaine thought.

"Kurt." He ran after him, he didn't care what anyone thought; the only thing that mattered was Kurt. "Stop, Kurt." He followed him out the door that slammed behind him and he followed him into the hallway as Kurt ran and cried. "Stop, Kurt, please," he called.

"I've never been so humiliated," Kurt sobbed as he ran.

"Just stop, come on," Blaine begged. Kurt finally hit an empty part of the school and he turned to Blaine, tears running down his face. The sight was devastating to Blaine.



"Don't you get how stupid we were?" Kurt yelled. "We thought because no one was teasing us or beating us up that no one cared. Like some kind of progress had been made. But it's still the same," he covered his face, unable to go on.

Blaine didn't know what to say. He had seen the whispers, the looks, the pointing. He had the dread the entire night of the wrong person seeing them. He knew that there were people who cared. He knew that people who hated them for loving each other were still out there. Soon enough, he would be going home to one. But none of that mattered to him now. The only thing that mattered in *this* moment was making everything ok again for Kurt. "It's just a stupid joke," he said quietly, knowing that it didn't make a difference. Kurt's heart was broken, and he had no way to fix it.

"No it's not. All that hate, and they were just afraid to say it out loud. So they did it by secret ballot. I'm one big anonymous practical joke," Kurt's tears flowed even more heavily as he pushed past Blaine. Instinctively, Blaine grabbed Kurt's tuxedo sleeve and pulled him back to him.

"Don't walk away from me Kurt." Blaine's eyes were desperate to make things better. "Please," he begged. "We can do this together."

"Together?" Kurt yelled, his voice getting high. "This isn't about you Blaine, they didn't crown you Prom Queen. You think I didn't notice how afraid you were all night to even touch me?"

Kurt's words stung like a knife and he let go of Kurt's sleeve. He wished for just second that Kurt understood everything. "Kurt," he started. He had let Kurt down all night.

"God, I'm sorry Blaine. I didn't mean that. I mean I did, but you were right." Fear and humiliation and panic plagued Kurt's feature and he nibbled on his nails and paced. "I'm not going back in there," he said pacing the floor tears finally abating. "No way." His eyes darted back and forth, glancing briefly at the hallway back to the dance.

Blaine watched him for a minute then walked over to the lockers. "Come on try to relax," he urged as he sat down himself against the locker. Kurt was too worked up and continued to pace. Blaine watched him for a minute. He recognized the caged look in Kurt's eyes, he'd been here before, hurt by what others had done to him, pacing the floor weighing his options. The shame, and the fear, and the sadness always caused him to make the wrong decisions at first. Nick had talked him down plenty of times at Dalton. At home and at his old school, he'd been on his own. But it was much harder to watch someone else go

through it, especially someone he cared about as much as he did Kurt. He understood one thing. He had to get Kurt to talk. If Kurt could talk himself through this, he would find his answer.

"Would you at least sit down," he tried again. Kurt said nothing, continuing to walk the floor. "Do you want to go? We don't have to go back in there."

That was what Kurt needed to turn back around and Blaine knew it. Blaine was the runner. Not Kurt. It was what the one thing that he admired about Kurt more than anything else in the world.

"Wasn't this prom supposed to be about redemption? About taking away that lump you had in your throat from running away." Blaine closed his eyes and looked away. Kurt didn't know that his lump would never go away. "If we leave all it's gonna do is give me a lump too."

He looked back at Kurt. "So what do you want to do?" he asked quietly.

Blaine watched as Kurt looked down the hallway and contemplated his options. When Kurt made his decision, he couldn't have been more proud of anyone than he was of Kurt in that moment. "I'm gonna go back in there and get coroneted." Blaine's heart swelled with admiration as Kurt walked toward him. "I'm going to show them that it doesn't matter if they are yelling at me or whispering behind my back, they can't touch me." As Kurt knelt down beside Blaine he leaned forward. "They can't touch us or what we have."

Blaine reached over and touched Kurt's cheek. "I want to kiss you right now," he whispered.

"Then do it," Kurt whispered back.

Blaine closed his eyes, not allowing himself to look around to make sure no one was watching. He very gently leaned forward, and kissed Kurt softly on the lips. Kurt returned the kiss, neither doing more than just brushing the soft surface, but it was enough.

Blaine then reached into his pocket and pulled out a packet of tissues, letting Kurt take one. As Kurt dried his tears, he got up and brushed off his tuxedo, watching as Kurt took a deep breath. He held a hand out and smiled at the most remarkable boy in the world, offering every ounce of strength and courage he could muster. "Are you ready for this?" Kurt grabbed his hand and pulled himself up. Together they walked back to the gymnasium, and Blaine let go of his hand as they reached the door. "I'll be out there for you," he said.

As Kurt made his way inside alone, Blaine went looking for the only person he could think of who could help them. He passed Artie and found her in the hallway outside her office, heading back to the gymnasium. He jogged up to her and he fell in stride with her as she walked back to the dance.

"Coach Sylvester, do you mind if I talk to you for a minute?" he asked.

"Sure, Porcelein's Boyfriend, what can I do for you? Porcelein ok? I heard about what happened."

Blaine nodded. "He's ok and I'd like to keep it that way." The two walked inside the gymnasium and they both took a minute to see Kurt crowned. When the crowd cheered for him, Blaine smiled.

Sue stopped and placed her hands on her hips. "What do have in mind?"

"You work for the local news station right? A story like this would be a hot one," Blaine said knowingly, indicating toward Kurt.

"That's true, Boyfriend," Sue said thoughtfully.

"Keep it off the air," Blaine said strongly. Sue looked down at him, considering. "Please," he implored her.

She placed a hand on his shoulder and squeezed slightly. "I'll do what I can," she promised. She glanced over to where Kurt was gone from the stage and searched him out. "Looks like your boyfriend might need a little help," she advised him with a nod in Kurt's direction and a twinkle in her eye. As soon as Blaine looked over, she disappeared.

Blaine made his way forward and watched as Karofsky and Kurt walked off the stage and onto the dance floor. The girls started singing and he saw David walk away from Kurt and leave him by himself. Kurt looked around, once again horrified, and Blaine rushed over. He had done the best he could for Kurt tonight, damn whatever consequences there might be, and there was no way he was leaving Kurt on that dance floor alone. "Excuse me," he said and Kurt turned to him surprised. "May I have this dance?" He reached a hand out to him, nervous, but sure. Right here, right now, this was where he belonged.

Kurt looked around at all eyes on them, and he turned back to Blaine, smiling with relief and love. "Yes," he whispered. "Yes you may."

Blaine took him in his arms and they danced, tentative at first, then with growing confidence. Blaine thought back to his Sadie Hawkins dance at school and all the dances he had been to since, at the country clubs and the base, forced to dance with everyone's daughter. As Rachel and other members of the New Directions joined in, followed by everyone else at the school, he felt the lump in his throat lessen. It wasn't gone yet, not by any means, but this was one obstacle he had faced and survived. And if he could do this with Kurt by his side, maybe in time he could face everything else as well. Taking their pictures, dancing together, singing *Dancing Queen* to Kurt, he felt freedom outside the safe walls of Dalton for the first time. Summer was coming, and it was going to be both wonderful and terrifying at the same time. But he knew one thing. With Kurt by his side, he was done running away.

## CAUGHT

*After Kurt transfers back to McKinley, Blaine and Kurt struggle to find time alone. When they break curfew one night, Burt has something to say about it! Klaine/Burt Fic, takes place between Prom and the New York Finale.*

**Author's Note:** Hi everyone! Welcome to my second fanfiction, *Caught*. This is sweet, not smut, so if I leave you wanting more, I apologize! Thank you to Ficklepucker for the inspiration for Kurt/Burt/Blaine. It was going to be a one-shot, but I'm pretty satisfied with the first half and not the last half, so thought I'd separate it while I kept working.

If you have not read *Hold On*, please do so. It is my love letter to Klaine, my Blaine backstory, and the one story that I have always wanted to tell. *Caught* takes place prior to *Hold On*, after "Prom" and during "Funeral." You could read it before or after, but please, if you haven't ready *Hold On*, please do!

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### *Chapter One*

Kurt and Blaine sat in the dark movie theater, staring at the screen, quietly holding hands beneath the seats. Next to them Finn and Quinn made out shamelessly, as did most of Kurt's McKinley High classmates surrounding them. Kurt was both repulsed by and jealous of the affections on public display here. Occasionally, Kurt and Blaine made eyes at each other, but they both knew it could go no further than that. Despite the support they received at Prom, outside of school events they were still cautious. They were surrounded by letterman jackets from both the football and hockey teams, and even with Finn there to back them up, they weren't interested in ruining the evening with a fight.

Kurt wasn't sure why he agreed to this double date. He and his boyfriend typically tried to stay closer to Westerville than Lima, where it was a bit safer for the two of them to be together. However, Finn wanted so much to go out with them; it was hard for Kurt to say no. And he knew that Blaine was trying to foster a relationship with his boyfriend's stepbrother. Truth was, the conversation over dinner went very well. Quinn was on her best behavior and chatted with Kurt about Nationals and Coach Sylvester's worsening attitude, while Finn and Blaine went on about sports. Every once in a while, Blaine would look over to

Kurt with a huge grin on his face, and Kurt could almost see the "thumbs up" in his eyes. Kurt blushed, thinking about how important it was to him that Blaine and Finn got along.

The movie ended and Blaine and Kurt headed to the bathrooms, leaving Finn and Quinn outside. The boys had shared a giant diet coke, while the other couple had been too occupied to bother with the snacks they had bought. When they came back out to the lobby, they could not see the other two. Blaine leaned against the wall casually to wait in case they came back. Kurt stood in front of him, restlessly scanning the crowd. Blaine soaked in the perfection before him. Kurt Hummel stood in black skin tight jeans that made Blaine's heart race and his mouth turned into a smile. *Teenage Dream indeed*, he thought!

"We need to find them so I can get home. You should go, you need to get back to Dalton," Kurt said, darting his eyes into the crowd, trying to find his brother.

"I don't want to let you go yet," Blaine said, with a hunger in his eyes.

Kurt turned to look at his boyfriend, with a smirk. "Blaine Warbler, are you trying to seduce me?" Kurt teased as quietly as possible.

"Let's not go home yet Kurt." Blaine's eyes glistened. "I want to hold you, and kiss you, and run my fingers down your chest to your..."

"Blaine!" Kurt hissed, looking around to see if anyone is listening.

"Come on baby, let's go somewhere," Blaine pleaded, taking his hand.

Kurt pulled his hand away, even though he wanted to just melt into Blaine. "I'll miss curfew. You'll miss curfew. Come back to my house. Dad will let you stay for a few minutes before you have to go back."

"We can't be alone at your place," Blaine whined, hands rubbing his neck in an attempt to keep them off of his absolutely gorgeous boyfriend, "I want to be alone with you."

Kurt smiled a giddy grin. Blaine wanted to be alone with him! He almost jumped for joy at what Blaine was saying. How could he possibly think of saying no? "Where would we go?" Kurt asked breathlessly.

Blaine thought for a minute. He couldn't think of a better choice. "Come back to Dalton with me," he said.

Kurt stared at him. "Blaine, by the time we get there, it will be after curfew. If we get caught..."

"We won't get caught," Blaine said with surety. "I know a place. Please Kurt," he said with such need in his eyes that it made Kurt's heart leap. "Watching everyone else...I just want to hold you so badly right now."

Kurt stared at his boyfriend in his tight blue jeans and close fitting black crew neck. He knew he should say no, but he had lost all power to resist the beautiful man in front of him. "Fine," Kurt said quickly, "I just have to let Finn know." But at that moment he heard Finn and Quinn in the crowd, fighting over something. *Something ridiculous, no doubt*, thought Kurt. *Something I don't want to get in the middle of.*

His brain told him not to, but he didn't listen. "Fine, let's go," he said, and he and Blaine rushed out of the movie theater to Blaine's car.

Blaine grabbed Kurt's hand and led him to a quiet and secluded spot on the beautiful and sprawling campus of Dalton Academy. They arrived only minutes after curfew, so the dorms and buildings were locked. Unable to wait any longer, Blaine pulled Kurt down into the grass and pushed him onto his back. Blaine slowly leaned over his boyfriend, and kissed him longingly. They had not been alone since Kurt transferred back to McKinley. Their relationship had grown since then, especially after prom night. But they had rarely had the chance for romance. Kurt was always so careful, so watchful of everyone around him. And Burt never left them alone in the house. *Tonight*, Blaine thought, *is a luxury and I want to take advantage of every moment.*

Kurt's heart swelled, as Blaine kissed him. He was nervous, but he was also excited to finally be alone with his boyfriend. When Blaine carefully touched his tongue to Kurt's lips, he hesitated only slightly to allow Blaine entrance. He felt Blaine's skin heat with passion, and Kurt leaned into him, moaning slightly at the deliciousness of Blaine's lips and tongue. He grabbed Blaine's hair, and worked his fingers through to release the curls from their gelled prison. He twirled a curl around his finger and pulled slightly. He could feel his own pulse race when Blaine's hand worked its way down Kurt's chest, over to his hips and down to his thigh. Kurt held his breath as Blaine massaged his more tender spots that had yet gone unexplored. He felt Blaine hesitate only a moment before starting to make his way toward his inner thigh. *Was he going to...?* Kurt flinched instinctively.

Blaine wanted to explore every inch of his boyfriend's body, but he felt Kurt tense up as he moved his hand slowly lower. Blaine understood that Kurt needed to take things slowly, although he ached for more. He returned his hand to Kurt's chest, and caressed him while he tenderly kissed Kurt in reassurance. Kurt relaxed beneath him and leaned in hungrily for Blaine's lips, instantly forgetting Blaine's wandering hands. When Kurt pulled away for a moment for air, Blaine whispered to him, "Did you go through those pamphlets your Dad gave you?" Blaine had been amazed when Kurt told him what his father did. While it was his idea for Burt to have "the talk" with Kurt, Blaine found himself jealous of how supportive Burt was.

Kurt was shocked and embarrassed at the question. He found it hard to answer, so he only nodded. Even in the dark, Blaine could see Kurt blush and his forehead furrow. He cursed himself for asking such a forward question at a time like this. Blaine traced Kurt's blush with his finger tips, stroking his thumb gently on Kurt's cheeks, kissing each dimple. He then brought his hand up to Kurt's eyes. Blaine brushed his fingers over Kurt's eyebrows, and Kurt closed his eyes, allowing Blaine to place one gentle kiss on each gossamer eyelid. He brought his kisses to Kurt's forehead, erasing the worry lines from his perfect complexion. He moved his lips to Kurt's neck and suckled for a minute before nibbling on a silky soft earlobe.

"I'm scared too, you know," Blaine whispered in Kurt's ear soothingly.

Kurt's eyes shot open and he looked deeply into those compassionate hazel eyes. "Really?" he asked with uncertainty. Blaine had seemed so confident that day when he offered to tell Kurt what he knew about sex. He remembered the kind of excited look Blaine had at the time, eyes gazing up at him. Then and now, he didn't see fear in Blaine's eyes, he saw longing. It was that longing that scared Kurt the most. What if Blaine found out Kurt wasn't really the boy he wanted?

Blaine saw Kurt's trepidation and wanted more than anything to soothe him. "I think everyone must be their first time. Kurt, I'm not saying I'm ready tonight. But I know that when I am ready, when *we* are ready, there is no one else I would rather share my fear with than you. The *only* person I want to share myself with is you," Blaine said with surety.

"How are you so sure?" Kurt asked breathlessly. He watched as Blaine's hazel eyes bore into his own, darting back and forth considering...something. For a moment, Blaine had a faraway look in his eye, but before Kurt could question it, it turned into a fierceness as Blaine leaned into Kurt and kissed him as if his



life depended on it. When they both needed to take a breath, Blaine pulled away slightly meeting Kurt's eyes. Kurt saw pain in them.

"Because you are my light in dark places, when all other lights go out," Blaine said.

Kurt's eyes watered, and he blinked away tears. "What dark places?" Kurt asked, worry in his voice, reaching his hand out to cradle Blaine's cheek.

Blaine hesitated to answer, when both boys heard a noise behind them and a flashlight shine in their eyes. "Ahem..." They quickly sat up to see one of the Dalton teachers, Mr. Remy, standing over them. "Headmaster's office," he glared at the boys. "Now."

## ***Chapter Two***

Blaine stood quietly, hands clasped behind his back, before the headmaster as he was grounded to his dormitory for a week. He was allowed out only for classes and Warblers rehearsal. Kurt's father had been called as soon as the situation was explained to the headmaster, and Kurt sat in one of the two high leather back chairs, waiting uncomfortably for his life to be over. Watching Blaine's contrition was not surprising to Kurt, he had always been very respectful toward adults. Kurt on the other hand, had a poor habit of speaking his mind, and Blaine knew it. The Dalton boy was dismissed, but he asked to stay so that he might be upfront with Mr. Hummel about his responsibility for their actions. He felt he owed both Kurt and his father that much. Kurt urged him to go, but Blaine refused. He didn't want Kurt to have to face his father alone.

When Burt arrived, Kurt stood up, seeing a jumble of emotions in his father's face. He started to feel even worse when their eyes met. He had a habit of lying sometimes, but he'd never disobeyed his father before, and he could see the disappointment in his dad's eyes. But there was more than that; anger and something else. Burt had little to say, and Kurt knew that was also not a good sign.

Blaine stood behind Kurt, and could see the man's eyes were dark and blazing. It scared Blaine, he'd seen that look from different eyes before, but that wasn't the worst of it. He suddenly realized for the first time that he had perhaps destroyed any possibility of a relationship with a man he had not only grown to respect tremendously, but from whom he craved acceptance. He wasn't sure why it mattered so much, but he knew that it did.

Blaine's face betraying his fear, he stepped forward to meet Burt's eyes. Burt shifted his gaze from his son to the young man in uniform. His eyes narrowed. "Sir," Blaine said, using every ounce of courage to stand tall and not shuffle. "I want to apologize for bringing Kurt here tonight without your permission. It was my idea, not his and it was very wrong. I hope that you can accept my apology."

Burt looked at his son's boyfriend. It was taking everything he could muster to not shout at both of them. He saw sincerity in Blaine's eyes, but his own emotions were still too much at the surface to accept it right now. "Son, I appreciate your willingness to take responsibility, although I am sure that Kurt is not innocent," he said glancing at his son. Kurt quickly looked away from the two most important men in the world to him, and studied the floor. "But right now I can't accept your apology Blaine. Not tonight."

Blaine nodded, his heart feeling like it was breaking.

"Let's go Kurt," Burt ordered. Blaine watched Kurt leave with his father, glancing back sorrowfully at Blaine. The headmaster reminded Blaine that he would be calling Colonel Anderson in the morning, and sent the boy back to the dorms.

Blaine left the headmaster's office and returned to his dormitory. The further away from Kurt he got, the more agitated he became. After he was let into the dorms by the resident advisor, he stormed up the stairs, ignoring the cheerful greetings of Jeff, Nick and the few other Warblers who were still making their way from the common room to their beds. They stared at him, with quizzical and concerned expressions, wondering what the heck was going on with their friend.

Blaine slammed his door shut behind him and picked up the nearest object he could find, a geography text book sitting on his desk. He drew his arm back and threw it so hard against the wall above his bed that he thought he might have left a dent. His feelings still raw, he hurled a calculator that hit his bathroom door and reached for another item. He grabbed his binder of Warblers sheet music and threw that to the wall as well. The binder popped open. It was only as he watched the papers float to his bed in slow motion, that he realized what he was doing. He sat on his bed, head in his hands, until he heard a quiet knock on the door.

"Go away," Blaine quietly yelled to the door.

"It's me," came the voice of his best friend. "Let me in Blaine."

Blaine sighed, but remained where he was. "Door's open," he said.

Nick walked in and closed the door behind him. He leaned against the door, folded his arms across his chest and took in the scene before him. He looked at Blaine and the sheet music all over his bed. He raised an eyebrow at the lead singer. "Those are kind of important you know. Wes will kill you if he sees your complete disregard for Warbler property," he said with a small grin.

Blaine just looked at him sadly, and put his head back in his hands. Nick walked over to the bed and stacked some of the sheet music out of the way. He sat next to Blaine. "Would you care to explain what's going on?"

Blaine turned to look at Nick. "I don't know what I was thinking. No, I *wasn't* thinking."

Nick remembered Blaine's plans for the evening. "Did you and Kurt get into a fight?"

Blaine shook his head. "No. I brought him back here after our date. Ever since he left, we haven't had a moment where we could just be together without worrying about who was going to see. It's been driving me crazy." Blaine paused for a moment. "I promised him we wouldn't get caught."

Nick looked at his best friend, worried. "But you did?"

"Mr. Remy found us and brought us to the Headmaster. I'm grounded for a week. He called Kurt's Dad to pick him up. He was so...angry. He probably hates me now."

"He's probably angry, yes," Nick told his friend. "But from everything Kurt has shared about his Dad, I would be very surprised if he hated you." Nick's forehead scrunched with concern, and he asked gently, "What about your father?"

Blaine's head dropped back into his hands and he squeezed his eyes shut. "The Headmaster's going to call him in the morning. I've ruined everything." Blaine said with a quiver in his voice that did not go unnoticed by the boy's best friend.

"Nonsense. It's going to be fine," he said, trying to convince Blaine, not sure if he believed it himself.

"Fine?" Blaine yelled getting up to pace the floor. "How is it going to be fine? My Dad is going to call me home this weekend. He's going to find out about Kurt. Then, he's going to kill me, he's going to..." Blaine couldn't finish.

Nick stood up and put his hands on Blaine's shoulders to try and calm his nerves. "Blaine, do you think you're the first boy whose gotten caught after curfew with someone? The Headmaster doesn't out anyone. He won't say who you were with, or even if you were with someone."

Blaine raised his head, "What if you're wrong? He knows my family knows I'm gay, that's why I am here," Blaine said.

"He still isn't going to tell your Dad what you were doing. All your Dad will know is that you were caught on grounds after curfew. That's it."

"Are you sure?" Blaine asked, hopefully.

"Positive," Nick said, hugging him. Then he looked at Blaine with a smirk. "Tell your Dad you were with a girl. He'll probably buy you a car or something."

Blaine laughed, pushing him away playfully. It was a sad laughter though. Because what Nick said was probably true.

Kurt and his father had a quiet drive back to Lima. Kurt tried to talk to him, but Burt insisted on time to calm his emotions. When they arrived home, Kurt made an attempt to escape the impending lecture. "Night Dad, I'm just gonna go to sleep. School tomorrow, " he said as casually as he could manage, heading toward the stairs that led to his bedroom.

"Kurt," Burt said in warning, taking his spring coat off and hanging it on the coat rack.

Kurt stopped and turned around to face his father. His father looked stern, and it made Kurt feel like a little kid again. He waited for the lecture to start.

"I am very disappointed in you," Burt began. "I don't ask for much, but I do expect that you respect my rules and my feelings. What you did tonight, was disrespectful." He waited for Kurt to say something, but Kurt only looked to the floor, not sure what to say. "You're grounded," Burt told his son flatly. Kurt just nodded with a quick, "ok" and turned back to go upstairs. "Two weeks," added Burt.

Kurt turned back with a flash. "Two weeks?" Kurt was incredulous. "Blaine was only grounded for one week! That's not fair!" *How am I going to survive two weeks without seeing Blaine?*

Burt looked severely at his son. "Blaine is not my son. You are."

"Why are you making such a big deal out of this?" Kurt demanded, his voice getting higher. "If Finn was out with a girl after curfew there is no way he would be grounded two weeks!"

Burt shook his head at his son, "You and Finn are different," he said bluntly.

"Why?" Kurt yelled, "Because you don't want to think about what Blaine and I might be doing while we're alone? I'm sorry if the thought of us being together disgusts you so much Dad. Doesn't bother you that Finn might be having sex, does it?" Kurt was furious. He knew he was being dramatic, but hearing his father say that he and Finn were different brought back all of Kurt's old fears of rejection. All the progress he thought they'd made, especially after they had that dreaded sex talk, was it all just talk?

"Yes," Burt answered calmly, "When Finn is late, I worry about him and his girlfriend having sex. I worry that she might get pregnant. You kids already went through that last year, and it doesn't need to happen again. That's enough to keep Carole and I both awake until he returns."

Kurt shook his head, shocked and angry. He couldn't believe he was hearing this.

Burt's voice rose as he continued. "But do you know what I worry about when you and Blaine aren't home by curfew? I worry that one or both of you is lying hurt or dead in an alleyway somewhere." Hearing Burt's words, Kurt's anger was immediately replaced with guilt and he locked eyes with his father. "I sit and wait for a phone call, all the time dreading that the phone call I get won't be from you, but from the police station or the hospital. Every time you two go out, I sit on pins and needles until you return safely," Burt stepped toward his son, who looked back at him in a stunned silence, all clever quips having disappeared from his head. "Do you have any idea what it was like for Finn to come home at 10 o'clock and tell me that he hadn't see you two since you both went into the restroom at the movies? That he looked all over for you and couldn't find you? Do you know how I felt when I called but you didn't answer your phone?" Kurt's hand absently moved to his pocket, and he remembered that he hadn't turned his cell back on after the movie was over. "Do you have any idea what it was like for the phone to finally ring at 11:30 and have it be a stranger's voice on the other end? God Kurt, I thought it was a nightmare coming true!" Burt's panic was returning just thinking about what he had gone through that evening. "You're damn lucky that you are only grounded for two weeks."

Kurt's face had reddened as his father shared with him his greatest fears. Tears ran from his eyes, down his cheeks, and he ran to his father, hugging him tightly. "I'm sorry," he cried. "I'm so sorry to put you through that. I should have texted...or called...let you know I was ok. I'm sorry," Kurt cried, as his father placed one hand on his head to soothe his son.

When Kurt had calmed down, Burt took his son's face in his hands. "I love you son. I want you to be able to experience everything, I meant that. You will *never* disgust me Kurt. It's just that I want to lock you two up where it's safe. But I know I can't do that."

"We just wanted to be able to be with each other," Kurt sniffled, explaining. "We can't be like Finn and make out in a movie theater or a car or anywhere really, and you won't let us be alone in my room here. Dalton seemed the safest place. But I should have let you know."

"You should have Kurt," Burt agreed. "Even if you know I'm not going to like it or agree to it, if you're going to be late, or if you two are going somewhere to be alone, you need to tell me where you are. Understood?" Kurt nodded, wiping tears from his eyes. "And maybe I can make things a little easier for you here."

Kurt looked up to his father, his eyes wide with excitement. "Really?" he asked.

"I'm not saying you two can go to your room with the door closed, or have the house to yourselves." Kurt's face fell. "But, I am saying that I will make sure that if you two need some time alone, that the rest of us steer clear of the living room for the duration of a movie." He looked at his son. "Deal?" he asked, holding his hand out.

Kurt looked at his father's hand, but instead grabbed him in a strong embrace. "Deal," he whispered.

### ***Chapter Three***

Kurt and Blaine spent the next week glued to their phones, texting during the day and calling each other every night. For both of them, it was the hardest week of their lives, and Kurt couldn't dream how he was going to get through another one, knowing that Blaine was free while he was still trapped. His only escape was school and Glee Club, but even that made him miss Blaine. It was Monday morning when Mr. Scheuster announced that he was going to hold auditions for the soloist at Nationals. Kurt was thrilled and wanted so much to rehearse with Blaine before he went on the stage at McKinley in front of Jesse St. James and his teacher. He rushed home, counting the minutes until Warbler practice was over and he could call Blaine.

"Sing it for me over the phone," Blaine invited. He laid back on his bed in the Dalton dorms and closed his eyes with the phone to his ear.

"It won't be the same," complained Kurt standing in the middle of his own room, pacing. "You won't get the full impact of the performance."

"Baby, I can picture you doing anything. Now sing!" he ordered.

Kurt obeyed, putting the phone on speaker, and belted out "Some People" from Gypsy. When he was done, he picked up the phone, breathless. "Well?" he asked.

"Vocally, that was amazing, of course," Blaine said then hesitated. "But, do you really think it's the best song choice for an audition for Nationals?" He knew both his boyfriend and Rachel's on again off again boyfriend, Jesse St. James and thought it might not be the smartest move.

"Blaine Warbler, I do not know what you are talking about! This song shows off both my vocal and emotional range perfectly," he answered unimpressed and mildly hurt by the criticism.

Blaine quickly backtracked. "And I don't question that at all, Kurt." He tried to put his concern into words that Kurt wouldn't take the wrong way, but he knew it to be nearly impossible. Kurt was stubborn and when his mind was made up, there was no changing it. "Just, make sure it's not too musical theater," he encouraged cautiously.



"Blaine, I am going to steal this solo right out from under Rachel Berry!" he said with confidence.

"I know you will kill it," he sighed to Kurt, telling him what he wanted to hear. "I have to go do homework. I'll talk to you tomorrow night. I miss you," he said lovingly.

"I miss you more," Kurt sighed.

The next day, Coach Sylvester was on a rampage, and Blaine received a few choice texts from Kurt that he had to hide from his teachers. It was midday when Mr. Scheuster and the Glee club learned that Coach Sylvester's beloved sister had passed away. Having both lost someone close to them, Kurt and Finn went to her office to try and offer their support. After an uncomfortable conversation, the brothers found themselves agreeing to plan the funeral with the Glee club and to help clean out Jean's belongings. Kurt called Blaine that evening to ask if he could go to the funeral with him.

"I don't know Kurt, it's not like she's family or even someone I know," Blaine said. "I doubt they'll let me out for that while I'm grounded. They are pretty strict here, you know." Blaine didn't want to tell him there was a possibility that he'd be visiting home that weekend. He didn't want to think about it himself.

"Please just check Blaine," Kurt begged. "You know how much I hate funerals. Even Pavarotti's was difficult for me. I just want your hand to hold. I want to gaze at your face when I sing."

"I'll try," Blaine promised, believing it was hopeless. "But even if I can't come, think of me, ok?"

"Ok," he said sadly. "At least Dad's letting me out of helping at the garage to help Finn at the nursing home. And on Saturday for the funeral of course."

"A brief reprieve," Blaine said chuckling. "Wish I had one. My room is probably the most boring place at Dalton and it has only been two days. At least I'm finally catching up on my homework."

Kurt chuckled. "Don't remind me. I should go," he said sadly. "I'll call you tomorrow night to let you know how the auditions went," Kurt said. "I miss you so much."

"I miss you more. Break a leg. Don't let them get you down, babe, k?" Blaine smiled at him through the phone.

"Are you kidding? This solo is mine." Kurt said, hanging up.

The next afternoon, Blaine received numerous angry texts from Kurt until Wes took his phone away during Warblers rehearsal. When Kurt called back that evening, he was still livid about what Jesse St. Sucks had said about doing female songs.

"I hate to say *I told you so*, but..." Blaine teased.

"Says the Katy Perry and Pink singer!" he retorted. "At least I'm *going* to Nationals, Blaine Warbler, instead of singing at the Westerville old folks home."

Blaine considered those fighting words. "There is a huge difference between singing Top 40 and Ethel Merman, Kurt!"

The two proud performers spent the better part of the next 30 minutes arguing the difference between singing Pink and Ethel Merman. In the end, neither was sure who won the argument, but they certainly both enjoyed the fight.

They stayed on the phone together in silence for a moment, needing no words, only to hear the other breathing. Kurt wanted desperately to see him. "Blaine, are you sure you can't go to the funeral with me?" Kurt asked.

"I tried Kurt, I did. But I'm sorry, he said no," Blaine sighed. "I really wanted to see you too."

"Do you think the Willy Wonka idea is good or crazy?" Kurt questioned.

"I think it's amazing," Blaine responded, eyes sparkling on the other end. "You know I love that movie. Don't forget, when you sing, think of me."

"I promise," Kurt said.

Kurt had tried repeatedly to get his father to let him out of the house the second week of being grounded, but Burt stood firm. He and Blaine talked about sneaking out or meeting at McKinley, but after everything they had put Burt through, neither had the stomach for disobeying him again. His trust meant way too much to both of them. So Kurt jumped up and down when his father asked him if he wanted to invite Blaine over for Friday dinner. It had been almost two weeks since he and Blaine had seen each other, and

Kurt was leaving for New York on Sunday. When the doorbell finally rang on that second Friday night, Kurt begged his father to let him answer the door. He wanted nothing more than to run to the door and devour his boyfriend. After long nightly phone calls and no physical contact, Kurt was beginning to think that perhaps the things in those pamphlets didn't sound so bad, especially if he were to do them with Blaine.

Blaine had trouble breathing the whole way from Westerville to Lima. When Kurt told him that Burt had invited him over for Friday night dinner, Blaine grew both excited and petrified. On the one hand, he was thrilled to know he was welcome in the home and to see Kurt after twelve days apart. But on the other hand, he was certain a lecture was involved, and he had already endured a grueling one from his father the previous weekend. Thankfully, Nick was right, and the Headmaster had not told Colonel Anderson that Blaine had been caught with another boy. He was also fortunate that since his father was in the middle of major drills at the Army base, he didn't ask for Blaine to come home. But he did make clear that he had no tolerance for breaking the rules of any kind. Colonel Anderson assured Blaine that if it happened again, it didn't matter what he was doing on base, he would make sure Blaine didn't forget a third time. Blaine shuddered at the thought.

Now, he stood terrified outside the Hummel residence, hands in the pockets of his Dalton slacks as his palms sweat. In some ways, this scared him even more than facing his own father. He knew that he would never have the Colonel's acceptance, but he craved what Kurt had with his Dad. If he could have even a little bit of that for himself, maybe he would make it through the summer he was dreading. Blaine took a deep breath before placing his finger on the doorbell and calling upon the courage he'd had to remain behind in the headmaster's office two weeks ago. Mr. Hummel opened the door, and Blaine's heart went into his throat. His mouth grew dry, but he managed a brief nod and a quiet, "Hello, Sir." Blaine swallowed hard and attempted to release the tension from his body.

"Please come in," Burt said, holding the door open for the obviously nervous boy in front of him.

"Thank you, Sir," Blaine answered politely, as he looked around the room for any sign that Kurt would come in and save him.

Burt's eyes crinkled at the edges with a hidden smile as he saw Blaine search for his son. "Kurt is helping Carole finish up dinner in the kitchen. He has something special planned for dessert. Why don't you and I have a seat in the living room so we can have a chat."

Blaine had no choice but to follow his boyfriend's father and he took a seat on the loveseat, wiping his hands discreetly on his slacks as he did. Burt sat across from him in his leather recliner, looking serious, but not angry. This was a welcome sight to the boy, who had last seen the man with fury in his eyes. Perhaps Nick was right about this too and Kurt's Dad didn't hate him. Blaine had been trying to figure out for days what he might say to Mr. Hummel, and he hurried to get it out before he lost his nerve. "I'm really sorry, Sir, for what we did...what I did...that night. Kurt told me what you said." Blaine shared honestly. "About what you thought could have happened to us. I didn't realize that you would worry about us."

Burt considered the boy's words and wondered for a moment why he wouldn't think a father would worry about the safety of his son. "Blaine, you seem like a good kid. But there's something you need to know. I love my son more than anyone else on this earth, and I would do anything for him. A long time ago, I promised his mother that I would keep him safe. I think I did pretty well on my own there for a while, but I'll tell you, this past year has been a hell of a lot harder. First bullies, then a boyfriend." Burt studied Blaine. He saw the boy's hazel eyes locked onto his, listening intently, but also narrowed with a sadness Burt didn't quite understand. "The last thing in the world I want is for Kurt to be hurt by some guy who is just playing with his heart."

Blaine started at those words and he shifted forward, "Sir, that is not what I am doing at all," he vowed, wanting to erase any thought that he would be so careless. "I care very deeply for Kurt." Blaine looked to the kitchen as if he could see through walls to the porcelain boy. "He is my angel," he almost whispered.

Burt looked at him curiously. "Do you love him?"

Blaine closed his eyes and considered the question. It was something he had thought about a lot over the last two weeks. He wasn't even sure he really knew what love was. *Did it mean feeling half of you was missing when they're not around? Did it mean looking into their eyes, and seeing the person you always wished you could be? Did it mean finding courage in them when there was none before? If so...*

Blaine shook his head. "I don't have much experience with love," he said quietly. He opened his eyes looking straight at Mr. Hummel and his eyes shown with sincerity. "But I know I don't want to say it until I know for sure. Not to Kurt. I hope you understand that when I know that love is what I feel for Kurt, I would really like him to be the first person I tell."

*When, not if,* Burt took in Blaine's words. Burt found his heart swelling for this boy who he knew loved his son. He leaned forward and looked Blaine in the eye. "You were there for Kurt when everything went

down at prom, and that means a lot to me. But when you convince him to break curfew and take him back to Dalton without permission, well, I can't have that." Blaine shifted slightly in his chair, his face growing red. "I keep my promises, especially the ones I made to Kurt's mother. If you are going to date my son, I need to know that you are going to be one of the people helping me keep him safe, not someone putting him in harm's way. I do not ever want to hear of you treating him without respect or pressuring him to do things he's not ready for. He's been hurt enough, he doesn't deserve to be hurt like that," Burt finished.

Blaine glanced toward the kitchen where he suspected Kurt was likely listening to the best of his ability. He smiled, just at the thought of him, a gesture that did not go unnoticed by Burt. Blaine turned back to the man who raised the young man that he cared for so deeply. "Sir, I wish I could promise never to hurt him, but you know love's not like that," he said, blushing again as he realized too late his choice of words. "But I do promise that I will *always* treat Kurt with the utmost respect. His happiness means everything to me, and I would never intentionally do anything to harm him or risk his safety."

Burt stood up, and Blaine followed suit. "I am glad to hear that son. That's all I can ask for," he said. He held his hand out to Blaine and the boy breathed a sigh of relief. He smiled slightly as he took Mr. Hummel's hand and shook it firmly. "I hope that I didn't scare you too much Blaine," he said with a small smile. "I expect that when Kurt meets your father he will have the same conversation with Kurt," he said confidently.

Blaine eyes dropped to the floor and his smile quickly disappeared. Burt heard him snicker under his breath. "I highly doubt that, Sir," he said shaking his head.

Burt raised his eyebrows and started to respond, when Kurt came into the room. Kurt's face lit up at the sight of his boyfriend, and was pleased to see that neither he nor his father were yelling or crying. He smiled widely and clapped his hands, "Dinner's ready!"

Burt looked at Blaine, who had turned to gaze at his son with nothing but pure adoration. Kurt raised his eyebrow at his father, and Burt squeezed him on the shoulder as he walked into the kitchen. As soon as they were alone, Kurt ran to Blaine and the two held each other as close as they could, soaking in the breath, the smell, and the beating heart of the other. Kurt looked down at Blaine, and whispered, "Are you ok?"

"Never better," Blaine shared, eyes shining as he held Kurt tightly in his arms. He wasn't ready to say those three little words, but he knew for the first time, it was what he felt. Reaching out to his angel, he cupped

his hand to Kurt's cheek and pulled him close to kiss the lips he had missed so much over the last twelve days. Kurt sighed as he remembered the taste of Blaine, and deepened the kiss for more. For a moment the rest of the world faded for both boys.

True to his word, Burt allowed Kurt and Blaine the privacy of the living room following a very pleasant dinner and dessert of Bibingka, a delicious Filipino cake that Kurt had baked special for Blaine. The boys cuddled on the loveseat beneath a blanket, Kurt leaning back against Blaine's chest. They had decided on Moulin Rouge, a movie that Kurt could never get anyone else to watch with him. Truth was it made Kurt a little nervous to watch the love story with Blaine. But while Kurt blushed, Blaine pulled him in closer, clasping his hands around Kurt's waist.

*The greatest thing you'll ever learn, is just to love, and be loved in return.*

Blaine had been truthful with Kurt's father. He really knew very little about love, and he was so grateful to be witness to the love between Kurt and his father. Blaine kissed the back of Kurt's neck, and Kurt leaned into him. Blaine took hold of his hand and turned Kurt to face him. Kurt looked at him with an awkward grin. Blaine pulled him in for a passionate kiss, slipping his tongue past Kurt's silky lips. They took their time and when Kurt paused to breath, Blaine nuzzled his neck, nibbling his way along every tasty morsel of Kurt's skin.

"I am going to miss this so much," Blaine whispered in between suckling.

Kurt shot up immediately. "What do you mean miss it?" he cried, voice almost breaking it was so high.

Blaine laughed and pulled Kurt back down to him, kissing him in reassurance. "When you leave for New York in 2 days. I just got you back and now you're leaving again. You are going to be enthralled by the city, surrounded by noise, lights, fashion and Broadway. Everything you've ever wanted. You're going to forget to call and text me. You're never going to want to leave," he said with a playful pout.

Kurt thought about how excited he and Rachel had been for their first trip to New York City, and Blaine was right, he would be spellbound by the city. But he also knew Blaine was wrong about something. He looked into the darkened hazel eyes before him, and brushed his fingers through Blaine's hair. "There will be one thing missing though," Kurt whispered, his eyes shining.

"What's that?" Blaine asked, his heart racing.

"You," Kurt answered. He leaned into Blaine and kissed his delicious lips, slipping his tongue between them to memorize the taste of him for their time apart. Then he slid down to Blaine's neck. He loved to kiss Blaine's pulse, feeling the steady beat of the boy's quickened heartbeat. It elicited a look on Blaine's face of utter delight that Kurt treasured so much. Kurt knew he loved Blaine. He'd known since the first time Blaine had sung to him at Dalton Academy. He didn't know if Blaine felt the same way yet. Sometimes it seemed the boy hid so much from him, while at other times he was so open and honest. But he did believe that if Blaine could wait for him, then he could wait for Blaine.

"And when you come back," Blaine was telling him, pulling Kurt from his thoughts, "we will meet for coffee first thing, and you can tell me every detail of your trip. Then we will spend the whole summer together, with all the time in the world."

Kurt smiled. "And next year," Kurt said with little doubt that they would still be together, "When I go to Julliard or Parsons, you'll be there too. Right?" he asked expectantly.

"As long as I get into NYU," he said taking his lips away from Kurt's skin. "You and I will be taking Manhattan by storm." Blaine had been dreaming of the day when he was free from his father for most of his life. To experience that life with Kurt was all he could ever ask for.

*Never knew I could feel like this,*

*Like I've never seen the sky before.*

*Want to vanish inside your kiss,*

*Everyday I'm lovin' you more and more.*

Blaine and Kurt both turned back to the television screen, holding one another, thinking their own thoughts. Kurt cried not only for the movie characters, but for his own overwhelming feelings of love toward the boy in his arms. He wanted to sing, but he was too scared to say those words and have them not be said back.

*Listen to my heart can you hear it sing,*

*come back to me and forgive everything!*

*Seasons may change winter to spring,*

*I love you till the end of time...*

*Come what may*

*Come what may...*

*I will love you!*

*Until my dying day*

Blaine felt Kurt weep in his arms and he squeezed him closer, kissing his head sweetly, gently laughing at the boy. Here, in this moment and in this house, he felt happy. He didn't know what the future held for them. He understood they had obstacles to climb. He saw a storm coming that he wanted desperately to run from but part of him realized that it was too late. He loved Kurt. And though he wasn't ready to admit it to anyone, he knew that one day soon, he would have to.

*Come on and stand your ground,*

*For freedom, beauty, truth and love!*

*One day I'll fly away!*

*My gift is my song!*

*Come what may*

*Come what may*



*I will love you,*

*Until my dying day!*

They were both crying by the end of the movie, losing themselves in the characters sorrow as well as their own emotions. The thought of being without each other again was too much for either boy to bear. They clung tightly to one another until they settled halfway through the closing credits. Kurt turned to Blaine again, and wiped his tears away. Blaine did the same. They both leaned in, to say all the things in a kiss that they could not yet tell each other with words. Their lips separated and their eyes met, this time both hazel and blue shining with longing. Their hearts raced and their breathing grew heavy as they each took in the beauty of the one he loved. Their bodies responded, and they pressed together aching to feel the other. Blaine's hands hungrily caressed the exquisite curvature of Kurt's slender form, finally resting his palms on Kurt's hips. Closing his eyes, he pulled his boyfriend even closer into him, pressing his own hips tentatively into Kurt's. This time, Kurt did not stop him, instead surrendering to the waves of nerves and pleasure Blaine's hands and body were creating in him. He stared at the enraptured face below him and gently kissed Blaine's closed eyes, as Blaine had done to him at Dalton. Blaine opened his eyes in a sultry gaze and slowly moved his lips to the sensitive spot in Kurt's neck below the ear. Kurt moaned softly, grasping Blaine's curls in his fingers as he shivered from both the heat and the cold of Blaine's breath on his neck. That shiver thrilled every muscle in Blaine's body and he moaned as he once again thrust his hips up to Kurt's. They both closed their eyes as they vanished into the rhythm of their dance. Kurt was beginning to think he could get lost in Blaine's embrace forever.

"Ahem..." Burt cleared his throat, startling the boys. Kurt looked up to see his father quickly look away toward the television holding in an uncomfortable laugh. Kurt quickly scrambled off of Blaine and Blaine grabbed the covers from Kurt while his breathing and blood flow returned to normal. Both boys faces reddened at once again being caught. "Looks like the movie's over," Burt said, nodding toward the screen. "Time to say goodnight."

"Yes Sir," Blaine said with as much dignity as he could muster. He slowly stood up and reached out his hand to Kurt. "Walk me to the door?" He asked with a smile. Kurt smiled back and hand in hand they walked to the front hallway, still flush.

Kurt opened the door and a very welcome cool breeze hit both of their faces. "I'll see you when I get back?" Kurt asked hopefully.

"The very next morning," Blaine assured him. "I will count the minutes until you return." He kissed his beautiful angel, never wanting to let go. "Good luck at Nationals," he said.

"Thank you," Kurt said, eyes shining. *I love you*, thought Kurt.

Blaine kissed him one more time before walking down the steps to his car. Kurt closed the door behind him disappearing into the house. Blaine turned back to look at it. "I love you," he whispered, words carried on the breeze.

## HOLD ON

*Summer is almost over, and while Blaine has spent a lot of time with the Hummels, Kurt still has not been invited to the Anderson home. Blaine has a secret, that he is trying desperately to keep. When it's revealed, nothing will ever be the same.*

**Author's Note: In my darkest hour, Klaine kissed, and reminded me that there was still good in the world. This is my love letter. I do not own Glee. But if I did, this would be Blaine's story. I'd like to thank Darren Criss for giving me the courage to put this story out there.**

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## Chapter One

Kurt and Blaine sat at their favorite table at the Lima Bean, Blaine with his medium drip and Kurt with a grande nonfat mocha. They laughed loudly as they remembered the conversation at last night's dinner. Sunday supper at the Hummel house was always fun. Blaine avoided them at his own house like the plague.

Burt had been playfully chiding his son for missing work at the shop in favor of writing his musical of the summer. Kurt retorted that his work on *Pip, Pip, Hooray* was complete, but he had no intention of bringing his new Michael Kors collection into the greasy garage.

"I just still can't believe that Finn thought Michael Kors was the inventor of Coors Beer!" Kurt laughed.

"I have to admit, that I almost lost it when your Dad took it as an opportunity for a lecture on alcohol use," Blaine laughed. "It was all I could do to keep a straight face."

"Dad is nothing if not the master of the teachable moment," Kurt said, rolling his eyes. "I'm sure he appreciates your *yes sirs* and *no sirs*."

"Your Dad deserves all the respect I give him, Kurt," Blaine told his boyfriend. "Besides, he'd shoot me if I rolled my eyes at him like you and Finn do."

"Well, I just thank goodness for Carole, to bring the conversation back to some semblance of sanity," Kurt said, and they both laughed.

Blaine had been spending a lot of time at Kurt's house this summer, and he was getting along great with the Hummels. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays he had evening shows at Six Flags. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Sundays, he had dinner with Kurt after his daytime shows. Sometimes Rachel joined them as well, and those nights were a blast. Though, Blaine was sure that Burt went to bed exhausted from so closely supervising both couples.

"Do you think that your Dad will ever let us be alone together?" Blaine asked.

"Of course," Kurt said, wryly. "When we're 30."

Blaine understood of course. Burt was protective of his son, and Rachel, he thought with a chuckle. He was glad Burt kept an eye out for Rachel. Blaine had a soft place in his heart for her. He knew that he had broken Rachel's heart a little bit, and he wanted her to be happy. He also knew that given the chance Finn might go too far too soon, now that he finally had Rachel back. And Blaine understood *that* too. He looked tenderly at his stunningly beautiful boyfriend across the table, as a slight blush began to fill his cheeks. Kurt glanced back at him, and tilted his head as if to read Blaine's mind. They both smiled, embarrassed at their thoughts, and looked away.

They grew quiet as they drank their coffees. Blaine wondered if he would ever get used to the love that the Hummel family so freely displayed toward one another. He greatly admired the respect that Kurt's dad showed not only his son, but him as well. At the beginning of summer, it was difficult for Blaine to be at ease with them, but he quickly allowed himself to be welcomed and embraced by his boyfriend's family. Sometimes he soaked it in until it filled him with the quiet confidence he had so far found only at Dalton. Sometimes it hurt so much, it overwhelmed him and he had trouble breathing.

"So, when do you think I can come over to your house for dinner?" Kurt asked with his big smile and wide eyes, bouncing in his seat. It broke Blaine out of his revelry. "I still haven't had the pleasure of meeting your parents," he gently reminded his boyfriend.

Blaine's eyes immediately closed as he clutched his coffee cup tightly. Kurt wondered, and worried about what was going on behind those beautiful eyelashes. He had asked before, and there was always some excuse. *"Not today."* *"Maybe some other time."* *"Let's watch the game with Finn and your Dad."* *"Didn't you*

*promise Carole you would help her cook dinner tonight?"* To be honest, Kurt was getting frustrated, and rather sick of the excuses. He knew that Mondays was the one night that Blaine always spent with his parents. Next week, Blaine returned to Dalton. This was his last chance.

Blaine stared at the table and held his head in his hands, unable to look at Kurt. His mind was spinning. His hands started sweating and his face began to burn. He couldn't breathe. He wanted to tell Kurt. He had tried so many times this summer to explain, so desperate for Kurt to know the truth that he thought he might explode. The words were on the tip of his tongue. He thought, *maybe this time I can do it*. But when he opened his mouth, the words he wanted did not come out. Instead, he felt himself shake his head, and he heard himself quietly say, "I don't think it's a good idea, Kurt."

Kurt slammed the table in front of him and stood up, startling Blaine into looking back at him. Kurt was angry...and hurt.

"You don't want your parents to meet me, do you?" Kurt shrieked, voice high. "You're ashamed of me, aren't you? I'm not prim and proper enough for the Anderson clan? Too...well-dressed...perhaps?"

Blaine quickly reached for Kurt's hands. "No Kurt, that's not it at all. Please, calm down. Sit down," he begged, looking around him at the other customers, who were beginning to take notice of the dramatics. The last thing Blaine wanted was for Kurt to make a scene.

Kurt looked around and with pursed lips, slowly sat himself back down in the chair. Blaine held Kurt's hands tightly so that he couldn't let go.

Blaine took his time to try and find words that would at least somewhat explain. "Kurt," Blaine said when his boyfriend had calmed down a bit, "I would love nothing more than for you to have dinner with me at my house, like we can do at yours. But..." he broke off, looking down at the table again, "not everyone's family is like yours Kurt. Not everyone's Dad," he paused again, studying his coffee cup, "is like yours."

Kurt knew how lucky he was to have Burt Hummel for a father. Despite his fears of coming out, his father had fulfilled every hope that a boy could have for acceptance and support. He knew that most kids didn't have that. He knew that Blaine didn't have that. But it was all the more reason why Kurt felt a need to meet Blaine's father and mother. After all, if he could win over Karofsky...

"Look at me Blaine," Kurt ordered. Blaine slowly lifted his eyes, and Kurt could see a glimmer of tears in them. It reminded Kurt of the day he returned to McKinley, when Blaine had sung to him in front of all the kids at school. If Blaine could have such strength and courage then, not to mention Prom, Kurt struggled to understand why he couldn't have the same courage in his own home.

"This is important to me, Blaine." Kurt said firmly. "It doesn't have to be perfect, it doesn't have to be dinner, but I do want to meet them." He reached across the table and gently brushed away a single tear that had fallen on Blaine's warm cheek. He pulled him closer and leaned across the small table to kiss him. Blaine returned the kiss, as if it was a fleeting moment in time. *Perhaps, Blaine thought, it is.*

"See you later," Kurt whispered, and Blaine watched as Kurt threw out his empty coffee cup, and walked out the door.

Blaine gripped his cup so hard that he crushed it. "Crap," he said, jumping up and grabbing napkins to clean up the spill. His hands were shaking, his head was spinning and he found that his legs gave way beneath him. Frozen with a mixture of fear and sadness, Blaine sat back down and tried to regroup. At a loss for what to do, he texted the only person in the world who knew and understood. Only fellow Warbler Nick, wise beyond his years, had ever seen the truth in Blaine's eyes and had the courage to confront him. Only Nick had ever been able to offer him just the right words to get him to open up.

*Blaine: I tried to tell him. But I couldn't. I just froze.*

*Nick: Then you're not ready. When you are ready to tell, the words will come.*

*Blaine: What do I do now?*

*Nick: Hold On, Blaine, Hold On.*

*What you've got to do is finish what you have begun.*

*I don't know just how, but it's not over 'til you've won.*

Nick's words had gotten him as far as his car, but Blaine could not get himself to drive home yet. He sat in the front seat, eyes closed, iPod on, headphones blasting. Blaine's iPod had always been filled with a mix

of Top 40 hits, Disney, and his favorite Broadway shows like Rent, Wicked, and Cabaret. But Kurt had gotten a hold of it shortly after transferring to Dalton, and loaded it up with every Broadway musical imaginable. Then he found his lifeline.

*When you see the storm is coming,*

*See the lightning part the skies,*

*It's too late to run*

*There's terror in your eyes!*

*What you do then is remember*

*This old thing you heard me say:*

*"It's the storm, not you,*

*That's bound to blow away."*

Shortly after they had lost at Regionals, Blaine returned from a weekend visit home. Nick realized that something was wrong when no one else did, not even Kurt. Nick asked him to stay for a few minutes after rehearsal. And he ever so gently and lovingly confronted Blaine. Blaine couldn't find the words then either. Nick asked him if there was a song that would help. So he sang, trembling at first. Until Nick joined in.

*Hold on,*

*Hold on to someone standing by.*

*Hold on.*

*Don't even ask how long or why!*

*Child, hold on to what you know is true,*

*Hold on 'til you get through.*

*Child, oh child!*

*Hold on!*

Alone in his car, Blaine let his mind be filled with images of Kurt. Kurt always thought that Blaine was the strong one, he knew that. And he wanted to be Kurt's protector, his knight in shining armor. At Dalton he could do that. Of course, at Dalton, Kurt didn't need that. But Kurt didn't know Blaine's secrets. Kurt didn't know that sometimes Blaine held on so strong, so that he wouldn't slip away into the darkness.

*When you feel your heart is poundin',*

*Fear a devil's at your door.*

*There's no place to hide-*

*You're frozen to the floor!*

*What you do then is you force yourself*

*To wake up, and you say:*

*"It's this dream, not me,*

*that's bound to go away."*

*Hold on,*

*Hold on, the night will soon be by.*

*Hold on,*

*Until there's nothing left to try.*

*Child, hold on, There's angels on their way!*



*Hold on and hear them say,*

*"Child, oh child!"*

Kurt had been his angel, he knew that. Blaine cried as he sang, shedding tears he never let anyone see. Tears that he so wanted to share with Kurt, but was ashamed to.

*And it doesn't even matter*

*If the danger and the doom*

*Come from up above or down below,*

*Or just come flying at you from across the room!*

*When you see a man who's raging,*

*And he's jealous and he fears*

*That you've walked through walls*

*He's hid behind for years.*

*What you do then is you tell yourself to wait it out and say*

Blaine started the car and headed home.

*It's this day, not me,*

*That's bound to go away.*

*Child, oh hold on.*

*It's this day, not you,*

*That's bound to go away!*

## ***Chapter Two***

Kurt sat in front of his mirror, fixing his hair for the last time. It had taken him a couple of hours to decide what would be the best outfit for tonight. He must have tried on a hundred combinations, until he finally decided on his current ensemble. He looked again at his choice of Michael Kors Grosgrain-Trim button down, tie and muted stretch pants. *Understated, but still stylish*, he thought. Hopefully, it was perfect. He double checked that his collar was just right.

He bounded down the stairs to meet his Dad in the kitchen. "Dad, can I have the keys to the car?" he asked.

"Where you headed?" asked Burt, with curiosity.

"To dinner. With Blaine," he said as earnestly as he could.

Burt looked at him curiously. He knew something wasn't quite right, given that look in his son's eyes, and he squinted at Kurt suspiciously, "Isn't it Monday?" he asked.

"Dad come on," Kurt said, ignoring the question.

"Why isn't Blaine picking you up like he always does?" Burt wondered.

Kurt thought fast, "Well, we're going closer to his house than here, so I suggested we just meet there."

Burt knew when his son was hiding something. But he also trusted Kurt. He reached in his pocket and tossed him the keys. "You be good...and stay safe. I don't know what you have up your sleeve Kurt, but it better not get either one of you into any trouble."

Kurt swallowed hard. He hated lying to his Dad, but this was something he had to do. He hadn't even told Mercedes or Rachel. He knew that if he did, they would immediately text his boyfriend, and then it would all be over. Like trying to stand up to Karofsky, this was something he needed to see for himself, damn the consequences.

"We'll be fine Dad," he said, and gave Burt a hug. "Love you. See you later."

And Kurt was off to meet Blaine's parents.

Blaine couldn't really remember the drive home, but before he knew it, he was pulling into the driveway of his parent's house. It was still early and his Dad wouldn't be home for hours. *Time to breath*, he thought.

He unlocked the front door and entered the living room. Blaine felt constricted in this house, but ironically, he understood that returning to it offered him the freedom he needed. "Mom, I'm home," Blaine called.

No one answered, and Blaine looked in the kitchen for her. Instead he found a note. *Ran to the store for dinner. Be back soon!* Blaine smiled. He enjoyed having the house to himself. He put Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone into the blue-ray, and relaxed on the couch while he lost himself in the movie. Blaine understood how Harry felt. Sometimes he too felt like he lived in the cupboard under the stairs. His freedom was Dalton Academy.

As the movie ended, his mother returned home and Blaine immediately went to help her unload the groceries from the car. She kissed him on the cheek and they chatted while they put the groceries away.

"How was your day, Sweetheart?"

"Fine, Mom. Just met a friend at the coffee house, then came home. "

"Did you have a good show last night?"

"Oh yeah, the funniest thing happened..." Blaine continued to tell his story without even thinking about it. Lying had become second nature to him in this house. It was a matter of survival really. He didn't want to lie to his Mom, but the truth was he had no choice. As far as his mother knew, he had all nightly shows. He couldn't tell his mother where he really spent his evenings. They talked for a while, small talk, as he helped his Mom start supper.

They had settled into their Monday night routine, Mom cooking and Blaine entertaining her, when the doorbell rang. They both looked up, curiously. "Can you get that honey?" Mrs. Anderson asked, since her hands were deep into making meatloaf.

"Sure," Blaine said and he walked to the front door and opened it. As soon as he saw the figure standing before him though, Blaine's heart fell to the floor and he suddenly felt dizzy. He grabbed the doorknob hard to steady himself. "What are you doing here?" he asked with a mix of anger and fear.

Kurt smiled at him, holding a bouquet of flowers. "And hello to you too," he said with a smile. Blaine just stood there, staring at him. Kurt glanced inside, "May I come in?" he asked expectantly.

"You shouldn't be here," Blaine hissed at him, and just as he was about to step outside with Kurt and close the door behind him, he heard his mother yell from the kitchen, "Who is it, sweetheart?"

Kurt raised his eyebrows at Blaine, and Blaine stood frozen, not sure what to do. If he let Kurt in, everything as he knew it would be over. But if he refused, Kurt would turn away from him, he was sure.

He ushered Kurt inside quickly, and shut the door after peering outside to make sure no one was watching. Kurt gave the living room a once over, and observed the décor to be tasteful with a traditional style. Here and there were hints of what he could only guess were Blaine's touches. On the walls, he noted numerous pictures of a man in military uniform with what Kurt assumed to be the unit he commanded. He hadn't realized that Blaine's Dad was a military man. Maybe that explained things.

"It's just a friend, Mom" Blaine quickly said, then turned to Kurt angrily but quietly, "What do you think you are doing here?"

"I told you I wanted to meet your parents," Kurt said, somewhat hurt at Blaine's reaction. "I figured today was my last chance."

"Aren't you going to introduce me?" Mrs. Anderson said, as she joined the boys in the living room. Blaine turned to her with a frightened look, but Kurt smiled widely and strode over to the striking woman holding his hand out. "Kurt Hummel, Mrs. Anderson. These are for you," Kurt said handing her the flowers. "I am so happy to finally meet you."

Mrs. Anderson politely shook his hand and thanked Kurt as she looked him over head to toe. Kurt continued to smile at the scrutiny, until she looked up at her son in distress. Blaine's expression was pleading and she shook her head at him. She took the flowers into the kitchen, and Kurt followed her, not ready to give up yet. Blaine slowly followed as well.

Concerned about everyone's reaction to his surprise appearance, Kurt sought to keep the mood light. "Let me help you with those," he said and he filled the vase she had taken out of the cabinet with water. "Add a dash of sugar and they will last longer. A beautiful woman deserves beautiful flowers."

Mrs. Anderson smiled at Kurt with tight lips, but kept her eye on her son. "What are you thinking, Blaine?"

"Blaine didn't know I was coming, Mrs. Anderson." Kurt quickly told her. "I've been asking to meet you and his Dad for months, but Blaine always says no. I figured I would have to take matters into my own hands," he explained, looking somewhat apprehensive.

Blaine looked at his Mom, who never took her eyes off of him. "Are you two..." and she made a gesture with her hands back and forth between Blaine and Kurt.

"Yes Mom," Blaine almost whispered. "Kurt and I are together."

"Oh God Blaine," she said with her hand on her forehead as though she might faint. "He can't be here. You have to get him out."

Blaine looked at Kurt, his beautiful, naïve Kurt, who looked like he might start to cry. Blaine couldn't do this to him, despite how angry he was right now. "Dad won't be home for at least another hour. Couldn't he stay, just for a little bit?" Blaine asked. His heart melted at the smile that returned to Kurt's face. *How does he do it?* He wondered briefly if Kurt could melt an iceberg.

"I'm great in the kitchen, Mrs. Anderson" Kurt said, with a little more gusto. "Much better than Blaine!"

With that, Mrs. Anderson laughed at Kurt and hugged her son. "He can stay for a bit. But he goes before your father gets home." Even in these brief moments, despite being terrified for her son, she could see what Blaine saw in the boy. Kurt was a charmer and clearly a free-spirit who was comfortable with who he was. Maybe he would be good for Blaine...out there.

When all the food was in the oven cooking, Kurt asked if he could see Blaine's room. Mrs. Anderson agreed, but warned them they only had about twenty minutes before Blaine's father came home, and Kurt had to leave before that. Kurt was disappointed of course, but he had at least managed to meet Blaine's Mom, and she was pretty great.

Kurt was somewhat shocked to see Blaine's room. The drum set and the guitar stands he fully expected, but what surprised him were the displays of both sports and military memorabilia. "Interesting décor," Kurt teased his boyfriend.

"It's to my father's liking," Blaine said with resentment. "He was in Iraq until I was about ten years old. He used to send us pictures and souvenirs." Blaine sat on the edge of the bed, exhausted. "You shouldn't have come," he said quietly.

Kurt walked over to stand between Blaine's knees, and put his arms around his boyfriend's neck. "Your mother likes me," Kurt said, smirking.

Blaine smirked back at him. "Yes she does."

Kurt leaned in to kiss him, and Blaine pulled back instinctually. He had never dreamed to kiss his boyfriend in his father's home. Kurt just smiled, gently pulling Blaine back toward him, and kissing him softly on the lips.

Blaine sighed, and said "We better go before the Colonel gets home."

"Colonel?" Kurt exclaimed. "You keep too many secrets Blaine Warbler."

*You have no idea*, thought Blaine.

Blaine and Kurt came down the stairs, hand in hand, laughing. They didn't realize, until they were halfway down on the landing that Blaine's father was staring up at them. Blaine froze and immediately let go of Kurt's hand. But it was too late. Kurt saw Colonel Anderson's recognition, and Blaine's face turned white.

"What the hell is this?" Col. Anderson said coolly and calmly.

Blaine stood petrified on the landing. "Dad..." he said with great unease. "You're home early."

"I asked you a question, Blaine Anderson."

Kurt looked at Blaine, but he made no move to respond or continue down the stairs. Kurt took the initiative. He pulled himself as tall and confident as he could, and strode down the steps over to Col. Anderson. He held his hand out firmly. "Kurt Hummel, sir. It's a pleasure to meet you. "

"Is it now?" Col. Anderson responded with a leer, looking up at his son. Blaine struggled to meet his father's eyes. Col. Anderson ignored Kurt and walked up the stairs, past Blaine to stand on the step above him. Blaine's father stared down at him with contempt in his eyes. Blaine looked tiny beneath the towering figure of his father, but Blaine gathered every ounce of courage and strength to look back up at the man.

Kurt's heart was in his throat and he thought he could cut the tension in the house with a knife. In the doorway of the kitchen, he could see Mrs. Anderson, grasping a hand towel, clearly anxious. *Maybe this was a mistake*, Kurt thought for the first time, feeling frightened.

"We had a deal Blaine." Kurt could see Col. Anderson's anger grow. "When you got yourself beat up at your old school, your mother begged me to enroll you in Dalton Academy. I agreed with the understanding that you would keep that...stuff...out of my house. "

"And I have Dad," Blaine said firmly.

"This is keeping it out?" Col. Anderson roared. "Flaunting it in my face, having that boy in your room, holding hands down the stairs is keeping it out?"

"He has a name, Dad," Blaine said, defiantly.

"Don't get smart with me, young man!" he warned with a finger in Blaine's face.

"Dad, please," Blaine shrunk back glancing at Kurt. Alone he could fight back, but not in front of Kurt. It would provoke his father too much and he couldn't let that happen now.

"Did you meet him at Dalton?" Col. Anderson demanded, linking his thumb over his belt buckle. "I warned you what I would do if you started dating there."

Blaine closed his eyes. *No, not in front of Kurt*, Blaine prayed, *please God not in front of Kurt*.



When Blaine didn't answer, he grabbed his son by the shoulders and shook him. "I asked if you met that boy at Dalton?"

Kurt was devastated to see the anguish in his boyfriend's face as Blaine stood before his father and whispered, "Kurt goes to McKinley."

"Don't you lie to me, boy!" Col. Anderson raised his hand. Blaine started to plead, but it was too late. He felt his father back hand him across the face and he fell onto the banister, clutching his left cheek.

Kurt stood in horror and his hands flew to his own face. Kurt knew it was bad for Blaine at home, but he never dreamed of this. Burt had never laid a finger on him and never would, no matter what he did. Kurt wanted to do something, wanted to scream, wanted to go to Blaine and gather him in his arms and never let go. But no sound came out, and he couldn't move. *Look at me Blaine*, Kurt urged in his head, *just look at me*. But silence rocked the room and Blaine did not look up at him.

Blaine burned with fear, anger, and most of all humiliation, as his face burned in pain. As he held on to the banister with his right hand, his hand reached to his left cheek. He tasted blood in his mouth. He risked a quick glance to his father's hands. That was always the key. And he knew it wasn't over. His father was still raging, towering over him as he stood one step up from Blaine, hands ready to do far worse to him, just waiting for Blaine's next move. Blaine could not let Kurt see any more. He had done this alone before, and he would do it alone now. He couldn't bring himself to look the boy he loved in the eye. So he looked at Kurt's hands, his delicate yet strong hands that would never hurt a fly. And he whispered, almost pleading, "I think you better go."

*What have I done?*

~~*Why I couldn't*~~ *My friendship going under*

Rachel's words rang through Kurt's ears. What had he done? He knew this was his fault. He should have respected Blaine's wishes. *God, why did I have to be so selfish*, he thought. *Why didn't I just listen?* Suddenly, everything made sense; Jeremiah, Rachel, pushing away his feelings for Kurt for months. Then Blackbird...*Take these broken wings and learn to fly*. That had changed everything, given Blaine the courage to act. Blaine's strength had been a lifeline for Kurt over these past few months. Utterly humiliated at Prom, Blaine had reached a hand down to him. "*Are you ready for this?*" he had said. Kurt felt Blaine's strength pulse through him that day. And today, he would give it back.

Kurt looked at Blaine's mother. She stood still in the doorway, with a pained almost apologetic look on her face, but she made no move to intervene on behalf of her son. Kurt could see that Blaine didn't expect her to. They had been here before, and this is how it went. But Kurt had not been here before, and he would not just stand by.

Kurt stepped forward to the base of the stairs. He looked up at the precious soul before him, as if for the first time, and fell in love all over again. He reached his hand up to Blaine, and firmly told him, "No. *We* better go."

Blaine had been lost in his own head, the world moving around him like a nightmare. He was startled awake by his boyfriend's words and finally looked Kurt in the eye. He looked at his father, who stared at him daring him to leave. He looked at his Mom. Blaine could see she was scared for herself and for him. He pleaded with his eyes; *please tell me what to do!* Mrs. Anderson glanced to her husband and studied Kurt. Then she slowly turned back to her son, the one she had never been able to protect, and gave him the smallest of nods. Blaine thought of Nick's words, the words that they had sung together; *Hold On*. And here was his angel, Kurt Hummel, offering him a hand to hold onto. Blaine took it.

Kurt exhaled, not realizing that he was holding his breath. He squeezed Blaine's hand as hard as he could as if to tell him it would be all right, and he pulled him to the front door.

Colonel Anderson turned to the boys with rage. "If you leave this house, do not expect to come back Blaine Anderson," he threatened his son. "And do not even think about packing your bags for Dalton. That is over."

Kurt looked at Blaine with surprise. Blaine did not turn back to his father or to Kurt, but only nodded ever so slightly, staring at the closed front door. He had known what tonight meant, the minute he saw Kurt at the door, the minute he let him in. He had made a deal with his father. He would stay in the closet at home, he would not date at Dalton, or there would be no Dalton. Blaine had hoped, had tried, to keep his secrets from both his father and Kurt. But secrets have a way of getting out. And he knew that nothing would ever be the same.

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night*

*Take these broken wings and learn to fly*

*All your life*

*You were only waiting for this moment to arise.*

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night*

*Take these sunken eyes and learn to see*

*All your life*

*You were only waiting for this moment to be free*

*Blackbird Fly*

*Blackbird Fly*

Blaine reached for the doorknob and opened the door. With a deep breath, he squeezed Kurt's hand, and stepped out into the light of the dark black night.

### ***Chapter Three***

There was nothing but silence as they drove back to Lima. Kurt had asked if there was anywhere he wanted to go, but Blaine just shook his head, staring out the window or down at his phone. Blaine had texted someone, although Kurt did not know who. Kurt's mind raced and he had only one goal in mind. Get Blaine safe.

When they arrived home, Burt was sitting by himself watching the game on the TV. He looked up at the boys, and immediately saw Blaine's bruised cheek and cut lip.

"What the hell happened?" Burt exclaimed as he went to get Blaine an icepack. Neither one of the boys spoke, and Burt could feel the tension in the air. He looked at Kurt, who just shook his head, anguish in his eyes. In everything that had happened, Kurt had forgotten he had lied to his Dad. Burt ignored that for now and took to caring for Blaine. He sat him on the couch, making sure that he was comfortable and kept the ice pack on his face. Burt went back to the kitchen and came out with an anti-inflammatory and a glass of water. Blaine managed a whispered, "thank you, sir."

"Are you ok here?" Burt asked kindly, and Blaine nodded with a faraway look in his eyes. Burt then gestured for his son to meet him in the kitchen.

Blaine sat in his boyfriend's living room, a place that had almost come to feel like home over the summer months. He briefly wondered where Finn and Carole were and hoped that neither of them were here. He closed his eyes and tried not to think, but it didn't work. The same visions played over and over again in his head: his father swinging at him, the shock on Kurt's face, his mother standing paralyzed, Kurt's hand reaching out to him. Whenever he flashbacked before, he would escape to the Warbler choir room, or hang out with the boys. There was no escape now. Instinctually he reached for his phone and re-read Nick's last message:

*Nick: We will always be here for you. You're our brother, and we love you. The boys are praying.*

Blaine's eyes started to tear, but he fought it back, shaking the emotions away, which made his head hurt more. He winced in pain. He wondered what Kurt was telling Mr. Hummel. He was glad he didn't have to tell the story himself, but so much of it shamed him, did he really want another person knowing? It was bad enough that Kurt witnessed everything. He never wanted that. Blaine was a very good secret keeper.

Dalton made it easy...put on a Warbler face, throw your papers in the air, and with it all your cares fly away. And now that was gone. *No*, he said, pushing those thoughts back. *I can't deal with that right now.*

Kurt and Mr. Hummel returned from the kitchen. Kurt hung back leaning against the wall just outside the living room. He hugged himself in comfort, feeling very unsure of where he stood with Blaine. Burt; however, walked over to Blaine and sat down next to him. "Is it feeling any better with the ice?" he asked.

"Yes sir." Blaine answered automatically.

Burt took Blaine's hand, turning him away from Kurt so the boys could not see each other. He smiled softly and said, "Call me Burt. Please."

Blaine looked up at him and felt the tears creeping into his eyes. He pushed them back again and looked back down at his hands, embarrassed. He couldn't remember if his own father had ever held his hand. "Ok...Burt."

"I'm sorry, I don't want to make this hard for you, but I have some questions I have to ask." Burt said gently. Blaine just nodded. "Has your father hit you before?" Blaine hesitated, and then nodded again.

He did not want to answer these questions. He didn't want to talk about this at all. But it was Mr. Hummel. It seemed they were getting used to uncomfortable discussions.

"Has it always been like this?" Burt asked.

"It definitely got worse after I came out," Blaine said, remembering.

"When was the last time?" Burt asked, wanting to get an idea of how frequently it happened.

Blaine hesitated again. Burt squeezed his hand for reassurance, and Blaine was comforted to feel Kurt's strength in his father's hands. He quietly answered, "Just after Regionals, Dad called me home for a weekend visit. I thought maybe he had found out about Kurt, but it wasn't that. Report cards had come out and my grades had dropped." Blaine shook his head at the memory, just wanting to forget it. But Burt encouraged him to keep going.

Blaine took a deep breath. "He asked me to tell him if it was because the work was too hard, or I spent too much time singing. I knew what he was really asking, 'Are you too stupid or too gay?'" Blaine remembered

disdainfully. "I explained to him that competition season was done and the Warblers wouldn't take up as much of my attention for the rest of the year. I promised I would get my grades back, but he said it wasn't good enough. I would have to leave the Warblers. He always hated that I sang with them. I begged him to let me stay, pleaded with him. So he...gave me another choice..." looking down, rubbing the back of his neck, Blaine paused. "I don't want to talk about this."

Burt waited for a while, but Blaine did not continue. Burt looked up at Kurt, who looked terribly worried. He then looked back at the young man in front of him. "You know Blaine, Kurt doesn't know this, but I made a promise to raise Kurt differently then how I was raised. In my day kids weren't grounded, there were no cell phones to take away. When you did something wrong, parents made sure you remembered it." He paused for a moment and studied Blaine. Blaine glanced at him and nodded in recognition. Burt did not need him to say more.

Burt let go of Blaine's hand and stood up. "I'd like your permission to go talk to your father."

Blaine's first instinct was to shout *No!* But it was Burt Hummel. And it was all out on the table, there was really nothing else to hide. So instead, he glanced at Burt and said, "Thank you."

Burt walked over to where Kurt was standing, took his car keys from Kurt, and gave his son a squeeze on the shoulder. "We will talk more later," he whispered to Kurt. Turning to Blaine so they both could hear, he said, "Finn and Carole won't be back until late tonight, so you boys will have the house to yourselves until I get home." Kurt looked up at his Dad quickly, surprised. Burt slightly nodded to him. Blaine made no move. "See you boys later." He opened the door to the garage, when Blaine stopped him.

"Mr. Hummel? Please make sure my Mom's ok," he asked.

Burt looked at Blaine and nodded. "Of course," he said, and he closed the door behind him.

Kurt waited a minute, scared that Blaine hated him and wouldn't want to be near him. Slowly, he walked over and sat on the arm of the couch, testing the waters. "You really think your Dad would hurt your Mom?" Kurt asked carefully.

"I know he would," Blaine responded without hesitation.

It broke Kurt's heart. "Oh Blaine, I am so sorry," Kurt exclaimed, sitting on the couch next to him.

"Kurt, don't," Blaine responded angrily, and Kurt snapped back like he had been slapped. Blaine took a deep breath, and gently said, "Please don't be sorry. Not tonight. We both made mistakes. But let's not do this tonight."

Kurt was afraid that anything he said might be wrong. Blaine's head was so full of everything, he couldn't think. They sat for a few minutes in silence, until they were both startled out of their revelry by the vibration of Blaine's phone. Blaine swiftly reached for it.

*Nick: We will all be at your show tomorrow. Stay strong bro.*

Blaine tried, but he could no longer hold the tears in any longer. As the floodgates opened, Kurt reached over and pulled Blaine to him. Blaine melted into Kurt's arms, wrapping his own around Kurt's waist, holding tight like a lifeline. Years of hurt, fear, and shame poured out of Blaine and he wept as never before. Kurt cried too, for the pain that Blaine had suffered for so long.

"Shhh..." Kurt comforted, springing loose Blaine's curls as he brushed his fingers through his hair.

Buried in Kurt's chest, Blaine whispered, "I'm so scared."

"Don't be scared," Kurt tried to reassure him, "Everything will be alright."

Blaine tried to believe him. He tried to think how things could possibly be made alright. But all he could think of was everything he had lost; Dalton, the Warblers, his friends, his family...

Then he heard the voice of his angel. Kurt sang quietly, like a whisper just for the two of them.

*Nothing's gonna harm you,*

*Not while I'm around.*

*Nothing's gonna harm you, no sir,*

*Not while I'm around.*

Blaine's sobbing slowed, although the tears kept flowing. He was drawn to Kurt's beautiful blue-green eyes, and in them he saw warmth and determination.

*Demons are prowling everywhere, nowadays,*

*I'll send 'em howling,*

*I don't care, I got ways.*

Kurt relaxed as he got a small smile out of Blaine. He grabbed a handkerchief from his pocket, and he wiped away years of heartache from Blaine's cheeks.

*No one's gonna hurt you,*

*No one's gonna dare.*

*Others can desert you,*

*Not to worry, whistle, I'll be there.*

*Demons'll charm you with a smile, for a while,*

*But in time...*

*Nothing can harm you*

*Not while I'm around...*

Blaine thought about all he had done to protect himself. He had tried desperately not to fall in love with a Dalton boy, and when he first laid his eyes on Kurt, he prayed that he was not a transfer. When Kurt did move to Dalton, Blaine pushed his feelings away so far that even he didn't recognize them anymore. He fought as hard as he could, for as long as he could, until something small inside of him realized that he deserved to be free.

*Being close and being clever*

*Ain't like being true*



*I don't need to,*

*I would never hide a thing from you*

No more secrets, Blaine promised himself. Those days are over. He would tell Kurt everything.

*Nothin's gonna harm you.*

*Not while I'm around.*

*Nothing's gonna harm you, darling*

*Not while I'm around.*

*Demons'll charm you with a smile, for a while,*

*But in time...*

*Nothing can harm you*

*Not while I'm around...*

Kurt gently kissed his boyfriend, and Blaine felt a solace sweep over him. It was worth it. He would survive without Dalton and the Warblers, and certainly without the dysfunction that was his family. Having to pretend to be someone he was not in his own home was slowly suffocating him, and keeping him from the love he craved. It kept him from *this*, and he couldn't do it anymore. Despite all his faults, Kurt moved Blaine to feel safe and alive and passionate and he never, ever wanted to lose that. When Kurt pulled away, Blaine held their bodies together, "I love you so much," he sighed. Wasting no breath, he leaned in and kissed Kurt more deeply and passionately than the two ever had before. Everything he felt, all the anguish and sorrow turned into desire and his world became clear. He untied Kurt's tie and began to unbutton the shirt he had soaked with his tears. "I want you so much right now," he muttered, lips barely leaving Kurt's, pushing him deeper into the couch, feeling Kurt beneath him. He moved his lips to Kurt's neck and breathed in the scent of his skin. It filled him with such pleasure and hope as he made his way down Kurt's chest, kissing every inch he could. He reached for another button.

Kurt wanted this so much. *And oh, did it feel so good*, he thought. Then why did he suddenly become so scared? He didn't want to let go, he wanted to feel Blaine's kisses forever, but he felt himself pull away and he jumped from the couch.

"What's wrong?" Blaine asked, worried and disappointed.

Kurt fidgeted, as he always did when he was nervous, playing with his fingers, staring at his shoes. He felt Blaine move toward him, exuding that quiet confidence that always made Kurt's heart race a little bit. Kurt was pleased to see its return. When Blaine took hold of his hands, Kurt felt Blaine's strength back. Blaine looked up at his angel, lifted his chin so that their eyes met and ever so tenderly asked again, "What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry. I want to. At least part of me does. But...I'm not ready yet." Kurt explained.

Blaine cupped Kurt's chin in his hand and kissed him lovingly on the lips. He smiled up at the boy who craved romance more than anything. He looked at Kurt's shirt, half unbuttoned and ran his finger from Kurt's lips down his chest to the fastened button. "We won't do anything that we're both not ready for," he promised.

Blaine was impossible to resist, and Kurt realized, he really didn't want to. Romance was not Blaine's forte, but passion sure was, and Kurt did understand passion. He reached out for the top button of Blaine's shirt, and began to do his own unfastening. He smiled coyly at Blaine and teased, "Well then, what are we waiting for?"

Blaine laughed, took Kurt's hand in his own, and led his boyfriend upstairs.

Lying in his bed, Kurt peaked over at his boyfriend next to him, sleeping soundly dressed only in a sheet. As terrible as the day had been, the night had been magical. Blaine had told him everything that evening; showed him every scar, and Kurt kissed each and every one of them away – even the ones Blaine hadn't known about. He explored every inch of Blaine's beautiful body, much to his boyfriend's delight, and Blaine embraced Kurt tightly, wanting to feel his every muscle against his skin. They moved together like a song, until Blaine was overcome with pleasure beyond anything he had ever imagined. Kurt had smiled at him, delighted.

*"Are you okay?" Blaine asked, checking in.*

*"I'm wonderful," Kurt had assured him. "Tonight was perfect."*

*"Whenever you're ready..." Blaine said for the hundredth time that evening, grinning at Kurt.*

*"Go to sleep," Kurt responded with a smile.*

Blaine kissed Kurt goodnight and, exhausted from everything he had been through that day, fell into a deep sleep.

Kurt; however, was wide awake, worry returned, waiting for Burt to come home. He had heard Carol and Finn about an hour ago, but they seemed to go straight to their rooms and bed. He glanced at the clock – almost midnight. Kurt decided to get up and go downstairs.

He pulled a t-shirt on over the shorts he already wore, and went downstairs to fix some toast. He had just settled down at the table when Burt arrived home. Pleased to see Kurt, he pulled him in for a hug and asked, "Where's Blaine?"

"Upstairs asleep," Kurt answered, taking a bite of his toast.

"Is he ok?" Burt asked with great concern.

"Yeah," Kurt nodded. "I think he's going to be ok. Did you meet with his Dad? What did he say?"

"He agreed to meet with Blaine tomorrow night. I think I'll wait to talk about the rest with Blaine," Burt said, making himself some coffee.

"I hope you punched that son of a bitch." Kurt muttered under his breath.

"Hey!" Burt yelled at his son, "You be respectful of your elders."

"That guy doesn't deserve respect after everything he did to Blaine!" Kurt shrieked.

Burt brought his coffee over to the table and sat down calmly. "Even more reason to be respectful." Burt said. "Look, I know you're angry for Blaine. I get that. But that anger won't help him. No matter what he

did and how much he was hurt, Blaine will always love his father. Your being disrespectful of his Dad will not help anyone." He looked at his son, who did not answer. "Understand?"

"Yes, Dad," Kurt said quietly, not sure if he really meant it.

"Good," Burt said, taking a deep breath. "There's something else we need to talk about."

*Here it comes*, thought Kurt. He tried to look his father in the eye, but found it difficult.

"You lied to me tonight, about where you were going and why," Burt looked intently at his son and Kurt nodded in acknowledgement. "That's not the way this works, between us."

"I know Dad, I'm sorry, but..." Kurt started.

"But you knew you were doing something wrong," Burt finished.

"I didn't think it was wrong at the time," Kurt said, without real conviction.

"Part of you knew, Kurt, that's why you lied. Kurt, I love you. And I think you are the most amazing human being I know. But it's my job to tell you when I don't like your behavior."

Kurt looked at his father somewhat hurt. He swallowed his pride and said, "go on."

"People have boundaries, Kurt, to protect themselves. And you seem to have trouble respecting those boundaries. I noticed it first with Finn, and now with Blaine. People deserve their privacy, Kurt, and you need to do a better job at allowing them that. You asked to meet Blaine's parents, and he said no. No means No, Kurt." Burt finished.

Burt's last words cut like a knife. He couldn't help but think of Blaine this evening, as they explored and experimented. Blaine was so comfortable in his own skin, so ready for everything, but Kurt was not. And each time Kurt said no, Blaine would ever so lovingly stop and whisper, "when you're ready." He never pushed, he never sounded disappointed. He went at Kurt's pace, and because of that, Kurt felt entirely safe and loved. Kurt realized that he had not given Blaine that same consideration when it came to his family. He hated himself for that, and cried.

Burt took his son's hands in his own. "We learn from our mistakes, Kurt. That's part of growing up. There is so much about what you did tonight that I am so proud of. And you'll make the rest right, I know you will."

Kurt wiped his tears away and nodded at his dad. "I think I'd like to go back to bed now," he said. "Are we done?"

"Not quite. The car keys are mine for the next week, Kurt," Burt informed him. "For lying to me. The rest is between you and Blaine."

Kurt nodded, and started up to his room.

Burt noticed Kurt's tie on the couch and called out, "Kurt." Kurt turned, and saw his father looking up at him curiously. "Did you two...um..."

"Do everything?" Kurt finished for him. Burt nodded, uncomfortably but waited for the answer. "No...not everything. But what we did was wonderful," he said with a smile and bounded up the stairs.

Burt sat down at the kitchen table with his head in hands. "And so it begins," he whispered to himself.

## Chapter Four

Blaine awoke with a start, forgetting for a moment where he was, then turned his head to see Kurt lying next to him. He smiled, wondering *how on earth could I have forgotten that?* The light streamed in the window, but Kurt was still fast asleep. He rolled over to embrace his angel, and nuzzled into Kurt's neck. He breathed with Kurt, allowing himself to soak in the warmth and innocence of his boyfriend. *Well, I may have done a little to shatter some of that innocence last night,* Blaine thought with a smile.

Kurt stirred, and Blaine chuckled, wondering if Kurt had read his mind. Kurt rolled over and smiled sleepily at the man looking down at him.

"Hello there," Blaine said, with a huge smile.

"Hello yourself," Kurt said, pushing Blaine away as Blaine tried to kiss him. "I don't do morning breath."

"Oh...are we *there* already?" Blaine said, pouting.

"I have always been there," Kurt said. "Besides you have to get ready for work today." Kurt rolled out of bed and rummaged through his closet to find some suitable clothing for Blaine and himself.

"Why do I feel like we're already an old married couple," Blaine joked.

"Because we've already been through hell and back," Kurt said, and the mood instantly changed. The immense guilt he felt after the conversation with his father last night returned, and softly, Kurt asked, "How are you doing this morning?"

"Right now I'm good. But I've yet to let my thoughts wander," Blaine sighed. "Thank you," he said as Kurt handed him an outfit. Kurt noticed that Blaine's cheek was still a bit black and blue, and his lip was slightly swollen. His eyes too were puffy from crying.

"The towels are in the closet in the bathroom." Kurt told him. "So is an extra toothbrush and toothpaste," he said with a wink. "When you're done you can use my eye gel and makeup to cover the bruising," he offered.

"Thanks," Blaine answered. It wouldn't be his first time covering his father's work. He went to take a shower and get dressed. Blaine contemplated for just a moment asking Kurt to join him as he turned on the water. But he knew the answer would be no. Blaine found it ironic, and quite endearing, that Kurt was so open and bold to the outside world, yet so reserved in the intimacy of the bedroom. He supposed though, that opposites do attract. Blaine had always felt quite comfortable with his body and his sexuality on a personal level. It was putting it out there in the public, genuinely and without the performance that had always scared him. He wondered if maybe that could all change now. He hoped that after yesterday, he would start to find it easier to stop hiding and playing it safe. His thoughts continued to wander, until he heard a knock on the door.

"You can't spend all morning in there Blaine, you have to get to Six Flags, and I still have to get ready."

"You could always join me," Blaine sung to him playfully.

"My Dad and Carole and Finn are here," Kurt sung back to him.

Kurt heard Blaine turn off the water, and smiled. As if to taunt him, Blaine immediately came out of the bathroom, sopping wet and covered only with a loosely draped towel. Teeth brushed, he kissed Kurt good morning, and laughed as Kurt wiped away the wetness Blaine left on his cheeks. Blaine just smiled at him as he returned to Kurt's room to get dressed and closed the door.

*Damn you Blaine Anderson,* thought Kurt as he started his own shower. *Why do you have to be so damn hot!*

Blaine rushed downstairs as soon as he was dressed, had his hair gelled and bruises covered. He wanted to talk to Mr. Hummel before Kurt came down. The smell of delicious waffles lured him to the kitchen, where he found Finn at the table eating, and Mr. Hummel reading a newspaper.

"Morning," he said, somewhat shyly, to everyone.

Carole came right over to hug him, "Morning sweetheart, how are you today."

Blaine looked to Finn, who looked uncomfortable and to Mr. Hummel who peaked out from behind his newspaper with a strange mix of concern and suspicion. Blaine wanted desperately to know what his

father had said last night, but he didn't want to talk in front of Finn. He turned back to the friendly face of Carole, and said, "I'm doing ok so far, thank you. Those waffles smell delicious."

Carole immediately went to get him one ready and Blaine sat down at the table. He kept glancing over to Mr. Hummel, who quietly finished his newspaper. The three men sat in silence, until Mr. Hummel closed his paper. "Finn," he said, "would you mind going out to mow the lawn? I think it is supposed to rain fairly early today."

"Sure Burt," Finn said slowly, "Or I could just go upstairs to give you two some privacy, because that's what you really want."

"I also want the lawn mowed," Burt said with raised eyebrows.

Blaine was glad when Finn left. He liked Kurt's stepbrother and had a great time hanging out with him. But Blaine was a private person. It was uncomfortable enough the day Kurt tried on his prom kilt and had brought up the issues of his last school dance right in front of Finn. That wasn't something he had wanted Finn to know about, and neither was this.

Blaine sat in silence, waiting for Mr. Hummel to start. He had so many questions but he feared the answers and couldn't find his voice. He had tried not to keep his hopes up. But this nagging voice in the back of his head, that strangely sounded like Kurt, said if anyone could turn his father around, Burt could. Blaine found himself holding his breath. Burt glanced up at Carole and then back to Blaine. "I met with your father last night. I wish I could say that I was able to change things for you, but I don't think I was. He agreed to meet with you tonight, after you get off work. Although he was quite angry that you've been lying to them about your work schedule all summer," he added apologetically.

Blaine lowered his head into his hands. "Dammit," he muttered. *Just one more thing*, he thought, *one more reason for his father to take everything from him*. Fear of what his father would do to him immediately rushed over him. His eyes watered again, but this time it was easy to push the tears back. He was too angry to cry. He was angry at his father for hurting him over and over. He was angry at Kurt for pushing his way into the hornet's nest. He was angry at Burt for telling his father the truth. But most of all, he was angry at himself for thinking that there was ever any possibility that his father would change. He got up feverishly and knocked over the chair, but he didn't care. He brought his palms up to his eyes and squeezed them hard. Why had he allowed the Hummels to give him hope that things could be different between him and his father? He knew it never would be.



Kurt came downstairs to see Blaine upset and pacing around his kitchen, like a caged animal. Not wanting to see his boyfriend like that, he walked over to calm him. He cautiously placed his hand on Blaine's shoulder, and Blaine hit it away yelling, "Get off me!" Kurt startled, and Burt shot up out of his seat, but Blaine immediately turned to him, realizing what he had done.

"Oh god Kurt, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it," he said, taking Kurt in his arms. Kurt looked at his father, confused as they stood that way for a moment. Then Kurt took Blaine's two hands in his own. *Hold On*, Blaine thought looking at his hands in Kurt's. Blaine turned to Burt, "Did he say he was sorry? Did he say anything about Dalton?" he asked with whatever shred of hope he had left.

Burt hesitated, then shook his head. "No. I'm sorry."

He bowed his head. "Did you see my Mom?" Blaine asked worried.

"Yes. She was...ok," Burt said, "She left when I got there and we met at a local coffee shop after I left your Dad."

"What did she say?" He asked nervously.

"I think we can talk about that later," Burt said placing his strong hand on Blaine's shoulder. "After we meet with your Dad and see how that goes." He paused for a moment, then clapped his hands together, "For now, it's time to get you to work. Get your stuff together and I'll drive you boys there."

"Isn't Kurt taking me?" Blaine asked gathering up his bag of clothes from yesterday.

Burt raised his brow at Kurt, and Kurt turned uncomfortably to Blaine, "I kinda lost my car privileges for the next week. For lying to Dad about where I was going last night."

"Oh," Blaine said. *So that's how it works in a normal house*, Blaine thought.

"Come on boys. I'll take you both there and we'll bring Kurt home when you're done. Then we'll head over to your Dad's house," Burt said.

"Sounds like fun," Blaine muttered to no one in particular.

Kurt sat in the front row of the small outdoor arena at Six Flags where Blaine performed during the morning and afternoon shows. Blaine had shared with Kurt that the morning show was a mix of music and dance in a sun inspired show. It was a bunch of fluff, but Kurt enjoyed watching Blaine dance and perform in a co-ed group. It gave Blaine some time to cool down and let off some steam, and he began to understand how important the Warblers must have been to Blaine's sanity. When Blaine was done, he came bounding off the stage, all smiles looking much more like himself again.

"See, I told you I'd make a fool of myself," Blaine said playfully.

"I think you were adorable," Kurt told him. "I think *you're* adorable."

"Hmm..that sounds awfully familiar," Blaine laughed. "Come on, we've got about 2 hours before I need to perform again. The next one's more of a bunch of us doing solo performances."

"Any news from the guys?" Kurt asked.

"Yeah, Nick said he and the others would be here by 2:30 for the show."

Kurt reached out his hand to Blaine, who hesitated looking around. Kurt raised his brows at him, and Blaine took a deep breath and clasped hands. Kurt squeezed hard. "You don't have to worry about somebody seeing you and telling your Dad now, you know," Kurt reminded him.

"I know," Blaine said, "But old habits are hard to break," he said, thinking back to his instinctual fear this morning.

The two walked around for a while, watching the people enjoy the amusement park, occasionally going on a ride here and there. Blaine won Kurt a teddy bear at the baseball toss. Kurt insisted that they get their caricatures done. Then, Blaine took Kurt's hand and ran to the Ferris Wheel. "The most romantic ride in the whole park," Blaine commented to Kurt with a wink.

They sat together in their red car and snuggled close. Kurt put his head on Blaine's shoulder as they waited for the ride to start. As they jolted to a start, Kurt quickly grabbed Blaine's hand, and Blaine laughed fondly at his little scaredy cat. For a few moments, they sat in silence. It allowed Kurt's guilt for everything he had done the day before to resurface.

"I really am sorry," Kurt said quietly.

"I thought we weren't going to talk about that," Blaine said a bit more harshly than he intended.

"First of all, *you* said we weren't going to talk about it, not me. Second of all, you said last night. You said nothing about today."

"Well, there's nothing for you to be sorry about it," Blaine said dismissively and without feeling.

"That's not true and you know it," Kurt challenged him. "Look, I know what I did was wrong. Dad and I talked about it last night." He lowered his head, "I invaded your privacy, I didn't accept your wishes, I didn't respect you," Kurt said. "I didn't respect that no meant no," he added shamefully, looking over to Blaine.

Blaine sighed. "I would be lying, Kurt, if I said I wasn't angry and hurt by what you did. Because it wasn't right," he paused. "But to be honest I'm angry with myself more for not telling you the truth from the beginning." He closed his eyes, and Kurt found himself wanting more than anything to kiss those beautiful lashes. "Most of all I'm angry that someone didn't do what you did years ago."

Kurt wanted to cry at Blaine's pain, but instead he took Blaine's hand and stroked it gently. They sat wordlessly again for a few minutes, soaking in the silence caused by years of secrets. Suddenly, the Ferris Wheel hit the top and the car abruptly stopped.

Blaine looked to the sky, feeling so close to the heavens. Here he was, holding his boyfriend's hand, free from his father's wrath, able to love the most amazing boy in the world. Quietly he said, "I used to pray for someone to come save me, and my mom, from my father's rage. I always thought God didn't answer..."

"You know I don't believe in God Blaine," Kurt interrupted.

"But people say that God answers at the right time, not in your time," Blaine continued, ignoring Kurt. "I think he had a plan for us, and I think this was part of it."

Kurt was quiet, looking at his boyfriend thoughtfully.

Blaine studied him back for what seemed to Kurt like an eternity. Finally, he said, "Please don't ever do what you did again," Blaine reprimanded him. "I won't keep any more secrets from you, but I need to know I can trust you."

"I won't Blaine. I promise, you can trust me," Kurt said, eyes shining. "I love you more than anything."

Blaine said nothing. Instead he cupped Kurt's head in his hand, and pulled him in for a deep kiss, exploring every nook and cranny of Kurt's tongue, lips and mouth. The Ferris Wheel started moving again for its final descent, and the two did not part until it reached the bottom.

Blaine and Kurt rushed to the commotion by the stage, only to find a gaggle of girls surrounding a small group of young men in uniforms. Kurt and Blaine made their way through, and were both bombarded with hugs when they reunited with the Warblers. Kurt was greeted warmly by Trent and Jeff, while Wes, David and Thad each thumped Blaine hard on the back. Everyone was smiling, when finally Blaine turned to Nick.

"Come here man," Nick said, with his arms open wide. Blaine fell into them, and his tears started falling again. "Did the words come?" Nick whispered in his ear.

"Yeah," Blaine answered. "Most of them," he paused. "Thank you. For everything."

Jeff walked over to Blaine, and held something out to him...his Dalton blazer.

Blaine looked around at everyone and shook his head, "Oh man guys, I can't. I'm sorry. I really don't think I'm going to be coming back."

"You haven't left us yet," Nick said, smiling. "Besides, once a Warbler, always a Warbler."

Blaine looked at it wistfully, then slowly put the blazer on. He had to admit, it felt wonderful. All the guys piled on top of him, patting him on the back. Kurt stood to the side, smiling.

"Blaine," yelled the stage manager from behind the stage. "You got 15 minutes."

"I gotta go guys," he said waving to everyone and giving Kurt a quick kiss. "Hope you enjoy the show."

The boys sat down and chatted about their summer vacations until the stage lights went on and the first performer came out. Blaine and three others alternated singing a variety of solos and duets. Blaine sang "Teenage Dream", which of course drew screams from the crowd, as well as "Somewhere Only We Know."

He sang one love song with a pretty blond girl, which made the Warblers cackle. Blaine was honored with the final performance, and Kurt sat tall, listening, as Blaine gazed out at his boyfriend and best friends from behind the piano. Then he looked out at the crowd.

"Thank you everyone for coming this afternoon. The last song I am going to sing for you today was written by a dear friend of mine," Blaine said, glancing at Nick. Nick smiled, and the Warblers all nudged him grinning. Kurt looked at Nick surprised. "He gave it to me a while ago and told me to sing it when I was ready. Well, I think I am. It's called '*Ready to Fly*'."

Blaine closed his eyes and started playing the beautiful piano introduction. He remembered back to the times when his mother would leave the house after his father's rages. All alone with his father, he wondered why she could be safe while he remained. He slowly came to understand that a real man's job was to protect and defend, and he did what he must to keep his mother safe. He sang to the audience, to Kurt, and to himself, to tell the world all he wanted to tell his father.

*Firefly summers and butterfly springs*

*A little boy sings and looks to the sky*

*As a mother whispers through her tears*

*"It's time, come kiss me goodbye."*

*Floating and falling, riding the breeze*

*Gliding with ease, I'm flown through the sky.*

*And I'm told that when I'm strong enough*

*I'll be ready to fly.*

*Scared, confused, and angry as hell*

*That I'm left on my own*

*No I refuse to fly into the crystal clear*

*Lose the things I've held so dear*

*If I stay here, my heart will turn to stone.*

And turn to stone he did. He had stayed too long. He could have survived the bullies at school, if the biggest bully wasn't at home. So he did what he had to, returning home when called. He lived the deals his father made and survived his choices, so he too could escape to freedom every once in a while. He kept his secrets. But he knew now that none of it was real.

*I see my reflection, I know that it's me.*

*But all that I see is a beautiful lie.*

*Will the boy fade into memory*

*Once I'm ready to fly?*

He looked at his best friends, in their Dalton jackets. Behind the smile, the hijinks, and the music was the true Blaine Anderson. Blaine Warbler was the lie. But who would he be without everything he's known? It scared him. Then his eyes fell back to Kurt and he knew that as long as he had love, he would always be himself. He took off his Dalton blazer, and threw it into the crowd.

*Stop!*

*Take hold,*

*Put trust in the wind,*

*Have faith when it calls.*

*Wings unfold and fly into the crystal clear,*

*Letting go of ancient fear*

*Because way up here*

*Nothing ever falls*

Blaine looked at Kurt and smiled. He saw Mr. Hummel walk up behind the crowd, hands in his pocket, nodding at Blaine with approval. He sang to the man who showed him what a father should be.

*With no expectations*

*Let the journey begin*

*How can I win if I don't ever try?*

*Will I prove that I am strong enough*

*When I'm ready?*

*Am I ready?*

*I am ready!*

He looked at everyone in the crowd, all those who loved him and care about him. And he felt true freedom. He laughed as he thought of Pavarotti, the darn little bird who brought Kurt and him together.

*And a voice in the breeze starts to whisper,*

*As I think of the bridges I've crossed.*

*Finding the strength, I'm spreading my wings,*

*Put trust in the wind and see what it brings*

*And I'm ready,*

*I'm ready to fly!*

*I'm ready to fly.*

Blaine breathed a sigh of relief. He was ready to face his father, say the things he needed to say, and leave. He could leave Dalton behind him, and the Warblers, and he would be okay. No more deals. No more secrets.

The Warblers rushed the stage, hugging him and patting him on the back and he beamed back at them. Blaine gave Nick a strong hug and a pat on the back. Then he turned to see Kurt grinning at him from across the stage. He walked toward him, smiling back. "I love you," he said, staring at the beautiful angel before him.

Kurt met him center stage, "I love you too," he said, and kissed him in the middle of Six Flags for all to see. Blaine hesitated for only a minute, then wrapped his arms around Kurt and kissed him back. The Warblers cheered.

Burt approached the two and cleared his throat. They kept their arms wrapped around one another, but turned smiling to Kurt's Dad. "I hate to break up the levity, but...are you ready to go?"

Blaine nodded to Mr. Hummel and Kurt, "Yeah, I'm ready," he said confidently.



## ***Chapter Five***

Burt drove Blaine straight to his father's house, after Nick offered to drive Kurt back to Lima from Six Flags. Kurt gave Blaine one last kiss goodbye and wished him luck. Of course, as soon as Blaine had gone, the Warblers decided it would be a wonderful idea for them to all meet up at the Hummel household to be there for Blaine if he returned. Kurt wasn't sure how great an idea it truly was, but once the boys got something in their head, it was very hard to change their mind. Kurt texted Finn, Rachel and Mercedes to let them know what was happening, and the next thing he knew, New Directions also planned to be at the residence to support Blaine. Kurt just sighed, and decided to just be grateful for the love in their lives. He texted his father to let him know after it was all over how things went. Kurt would send everyone home if he had to.

Kurt had never really spent much time alone with Nick before, or with any of the Warblers really. He got along with them all great as a group, but one on one it was always just him and Blaine. He had learned over the last 24 hours that Nick and Blaine shared a greater friendship than he had been aware, and he had to admit he wanted to know exactly what that was all about. So he was pleased for the opportunity for the two of them to be alone.

"So," he asked Nick as they sat listening to the radio. "How did you and Blaine become so close?"

Nick looked at him carefully then turned back to the road. "Blaine and I hit it off the first day he came to Warblers rehearsal after transferring from his old school. The other boys were throwing papers at each other, doing ridiculous tricks, and talking about girls. I noticed him sitting off in the corner, a little nervous, so I thought I'd check in with him. We started talking about music, philosophy and acting and just never really stopped. *The old souls* everyone called us. But it was true."

Kurt thought that made sense, but something still worried him. "Were you two anything ever..." he hesitated slightly, "more than just friends?"

Nick looked over to Kurt, laughed, and shook his head. "No. Blaine's not my type. Besides, an old soul needs its balance," he said smiling to Kurt. "That's why he found you."

Kurt thought about that and grinned. So Nick thought of him as a young soul. He supposed it was true.

"How did you know about...what was going on at his home?" Kurt asked quietly.

Nick thought for a moment. "Blaine was always so present, so on, all the time. Except he would come back from home visits with a faraway look in his eye. He wasn't himself. His confidence would be gone. He would be jumpy. That smooth, easy way he moves in the world would turn into a strange stiffness. It would take a few days for him to start being himself again. Blaine covered it up as best he could. The other guys didn't really notice, but I could see it, and he knew that I could."

Kurt thought about all that Blaine had shared with him. Even the times his father hadn't gotten physical with him, the words and the lies cut him down just the same.

"For a while, it remained unspoken between us." Nick continued, "But he returned after one weekend, claiming he couldn't dance because he had hurt his knee playing ball with his Dad. He stood at the piano through the entire rehearsal, singing but only watching the choreography. I couldn't help but wonder, why stand there all night if his knee hurt? I realized there was more he was hiding. So I asked to talk to him after rehearsal."

Kurt remembered that day. He and Blaine had started to leave when Nick asked his boyfriend to stay, saying he had a personal matter to discuss with Blaine. Blaine told Kurt it was ok, and kissed him goodnight before closing the doors behind Nick and himself. "That must have been the day after report cards came out," Kurt said, recalling what Blaine had told Burt. "How did you get him to tell you?"

"Blaine has learned his whole life to keep secrets. The only way he knows how to expose them is through song. When he refused to sit with me, I told him that I knew he was hurting, in a way he didn't feel he could talk about. I asked him if he had a song he could sing that would explain it to me. So he did."

"What was it?" Kurt asked.

"Hold On, from Secret Garden. He said you had put the musical in his iPod. He told me that before he had listened to it, he'd never had the words to express how he felt, but you gave them to him without even knowing it. He sang and it was the most hauntingly beautiful and heartbreaking performance I've ever heard."

Kurt sat back, closed his eyes and imagined how hard it must have been for Blaine to sing those words to someone else.

*When you see a man who's raging,*

*And he's jealous and he fears*

*That you've walked through walls*

*He's hid behind for years.*

"I asked him if the song was about his father, and he whispered yes. I asked if it was his father that had hurt him, and he nodded. I wondered what he wanted to do, and he said he couldn't do anything, now that he had found you. I didn't know what he meant."

Kurt nodded. Blaine's biggest fears were about to come true. He would have to choose between his family and Dalton, or Kurt. It was a choice he knew would hurt Blaine terribly. He and Nick looked at each other. Kurt closed his eyes and sang as if Blaine could hear his voice on the wind:

*What you do then is you tell yourself to wait it out and say*

*It's this day, not me,*

*That's bound to go away*

Nick joined in, in prayer, for his friend.

*Child, oh hold on.*

*It's this day, not you,*

*That's bound to go away!*

The car ride to Blaine's home was pretty much silent. Blaine spent the time thinking about the things he wanted to say. He tried to stop himself from thinking about the things he wanted to hear, but it was hard. *No expectations*, he reminded himself.

When they arrived, Blaine rang the doorbell. It was strange not having the keys to his own home. He wondered if it was really his home anymore.

Colonel Anderson opened the door and let his son and Mr. Hummel into the house. Mr. Hummel shook the Colonel's hand and they all stood in an awkward silence for a moment. Blaine's heart beat with a mix of fear and anticipation.

"Where's Mom?" Blaine asked.

"She decided she didn't want to be here for this," Col. Anderson responded.

Blaine just nodded. It wasn't surprising. He was used to being left alone to handle the aftermath. Then he remembered that today he was not alone, Mr. Hummel was there with him. He looked to Burt as to what to do next.

Burt cleared his throat and said, "Why don't we all take a seat."

Blaine sat on one couch with his back to the front door. Col. Anderson sat on the other, perpendicular, as Mr. Hummel sat next to Blaine between them. Silence again filled the room, and Blaine tried to remember the last time he and his father had just sat down to talk. *The day I came out*, Blaine thought, and his stomach dropped. That day hadn't ended so well. He hunched over, elbows on his knees, hands clasped together. Today would be different. He had found his strength, and he was ready this time.

Finally, Colonel Anderson broke the silence. "Look Blaine," he said, "I'm willing to give you a second chance here. We deal with the issue of your lies, and then we start with a clean slate."

"Kurt's father took his car keys for a week for lying, Dad. Somehow, I don't think that's what you have in mind," Blaine answered, glancing at his father's belt involuntarily, before looking away.

Blaine's father looked to him. "I have always tried to do what I thought was best for you. Maybe sometimes I was a little harder on you than I should have been. Maybe I could have done things a bit differently, tried not to act out of anger so much."

Blaine didn't respond. He wanted to scream; *damn right you could have done things differently!* But he waited to hear his father out.

"But some things I won't change." Col. Anderson continued, "I don't agree with your being gay, and I won't have it in my house."

His blood started to boil, but he swallowed hard and kept calm. "It's not something you get to agree or disagree with Dad," Blaine said without looking at him, "It just is."

"This is still my house, with my rules," his father acknowledged.

"You should have stayed in Iraq," Blaine muttered under his breath, finally saying something he had been thinking for years.

Colonel Anderson rose quickly out of his seat, and Blaine flinched. But his father didn't raise his hand to Blaine, and Mr. Hummel placed a comforting hand on the boy's back. "I transferred back to Ohio because your mother was having a very difficult time with you and your behavior," he snapped. "She was worried about you. I felt you needed a man at home."

Blaine couldn't hold back any longer. "I needed a Dad at home," Blaine yelled, standing up to face his father. "Someone to support me, and love me, and protect me. I didn't need an Army colonel to whip me into shape and make me someone I was not," His heart raced but now that he had started, he couldn't stop. He was so angry and heartbroken that he forgot to be afraid. "I can't play by your rules anymore. Living with secrets, and lies, covering up who I am to earn the little bit of freedom you allow me. I'm not playing by your rules anymore. It's my turn now. "

Colonel Anderson raised his eyebrow, "Freedom isn't free, Blaine. You can't have everything you want." he said.

Blaine scoffed. "I am well aware of that, trust me. But I'm beginning to realize, it isn't worth your cost."

Colonel Anderson looked at his son, and glanced at the man sitting next to him. He took a seat and left Blaine standing alone, "I'm listening," he told his only son.

With Kurt in the room, Blaine had been terrified of provoking his father. He had been terrified of losing everything. But now that he had resigned himself to leaving Dalton and the Warblers, he realized there was nothing else his father could take from him. Blaine looked at Mr. Hummel, who nodded to him. *How can I win if I don't ever try*, he had sung. Wiping his damp palms on his pants, he took a breath. "First, you

don't get to hit me anymore. Ever. For anything." He waited for a reaction. He wasn't sure what he expected but his father just sat there.

"Go on," his father told him.

"Second, I won't hide myself, alone anymore, whether it's in the closet or the cupboard under the stairs. If Kurt is not welcome in this home, then neither am I," Blaine finished and slowly sat down next to Burt. He lowered his eyes, unable to look at his father, but he felt a sense of relief wash over him for the first time in a long time.

Burt squeezed Blaine's hand, quite proud of the boy for standing up for himself. Burt looked to the other man, with hope, but he knew as well as Blaine did that there was little.

"I can work on changing the way I handle things when I'm angry or have an issue with your behavior," Col. Anderson started. "But there is no way that I will allow you to bring a boyfriend into my house, and encourage you to tell the world what you are. I am a military officer, and like it or not, my family's conduct has an impact on how I am perceived. I will not have you and your boyfriend prancing about for all of my friends, neighbors and colleagues to see!"

"You know nothing about Kurt and me!" Blaine laughed angrily. "You don't want Kurt here because he's out and he's proud? Well Dad, so am I! Everyone at Dalton knows I'm gay. Everyone at Kurt's school knows I'm gay. The coffeehouse, Breadsticks, even the damn Gap, Dad, they all know I'm gay and you know what? Almost nobody cares. In fact, one of the only people who seems to care is you."

Col. Anderson looked at Blaine in silence. Blaine held his breath but stood his ground. He watched his father decide, and his determination grew.

"The deal's the same, Blaine. It's your choice," his father said.

"No Dad," Blaine said shaking his head. "I'm done with your deals and your choices. The only thing I ever wanted from you was your love and acceptance. Thanks to Kurt and his family, I know what real love is now, and I'm not willing to settle for less. This time, the choice is yours. You can have a gay son, or you can have no son."

Col. Anderson looked to Burt and then looked to his son. His eyes looked sad, and Blaine just nodded at the man before him. When he spoke, Blaine wasn't surprised, "I'm sorry, Blaine, I can't."

"Are you alright son," asked Burt as he helped the boy carry his bags to the car.

"Yeah, Mr. Hummel," he said. "I'm good. I'm actually really good."

"Good," Burt said clasping him on the shoulder. "Then we have one more person to see."

Blaine stood in a coffee shop not too far from his father's house, Burt behind him for moral support. Blaine's mother looked at him from across the restaurant and stood up, questioning. He slowly walked over to her and looked her in the eye. "I left him too," he said simply.

"I only ever returned for you Blaine," she said and took him in her arms, crying.

When his mother had settled, they all sat at the table together, and Blaine ordered a regular coffee. Mr. Hummel asked for water.

"I went to court this morning Blaine, and petitioned for full custody of you. It's granted, temporarily, until your father and I go to trial. I've filed for divorce."

Blaine just slowly nodded his head. He worried what this all meant for him. "Why didn't you ever do that before?" Blaine wondered.

"I thought you needed your father around. I thought he was right," she explained, shaking her head. "Then I met Kurt. I could see how much he mattered to you. I could see in your eyes how much it hurt you that he wasn't welcome in your home and I realized it wasn't fair to make you live that way. Then Mr. Hummel came and we talked for a long time. "

Blaine looked over at Burt and smiled, as he reached across the table to take his mother's hand.

"So what do we do now?" Blaine asked.

"I'm looking for an apartment for us. I actually saw a place today and put a deposit down. They need to run all the credit checks and stuff, but I should know by the end of the week."

"Oh." Blaine closed his eyes, terrified about what that meant for school, and of course for him and Kurt.  
"Where is it?" he asked quietly.

His mother squeezed his hand, and as he raised his eyes he saw her smile. "It's in Lima," she said.

Blaine looked at her stunned, and then he couldn't hold it in anymore. Tears of relief flowed freely.



## ***Chapter Six***

Blaine had called Kurt the instant he and Burt returned to the car. Kurt was sorry that things had turned out the way they did with his dad, but he was ecstatic that Blaine would be transferring to McKinley. New Directions would have a new member, and he would have his boyfriend at school with him. He couldn't hide his enthusiasm from the crowd of friends that had gathered at his home, and when he told them, his classmates cheered. But the Warblers were all disappointed. They huddled together as if in an emergency meeting.

When Blaine, Burt and Mrs. Anderson arrived at the Hummel home, Kurt met them outside. He ran to Blaine and embraced him. They kissed quickly in greeting.

"There's something I didn't tell you over the phone," Kurt said a bit sheepishly.

"Oh," asked Blaine raising his eyebrows.

"There were...a few people who wanted to be here for you when you got back."

They walked inside the home, and Blaine was greeted first by his old schoolmates, who all shook his hand, hugged him and told Blaine how much they would miss him. Blaine's tears started flowing again, and he couldn't remember if he had ever cried so much in such a short amount of time. Kurt slid alongside him and slipped his hand into Blaine's. He gave it a squeeze of encouragement.

Nick was the last to greet his old soul mate, tears in his own eyes. Blaine hugged him and said with a sigh, "I'm not sure where I am flying to."

"The future is always uncertain," Nick told him. "All we can do is trust in God that he will care for us."

Blaine nodded while Kurt rolled his eyes. Blaine elbowed him in the side. Nick just chuckled at Kurt and gave him a hug as well, as he went to go talk to his choir mates.

"I'm sorry, Blaine," Kurt said, clasping Blaine's two hands in his. "While I'm thrilled that you get to come to McKinley, I know how much Dalton means to you."

"I was never happier then when I was at Dalton. I thought it was where I belonged. But maybe it was just a bridge to cross to get to where I truly was meant to be," he said, kissing Kurt tenderly. Kurt did not hesitate to kiss him back.

"Ok, this is a lovely moment, but break it up," Wes told Kurt and Blaine, authoritative as always. "The boys wanted to send you off right," Wes said and the Warblers gathered around. Blaine and the McKinley crowd found places on the couches and floor to make themselves comfortable. Blaine wasn't surprised when Nick took the lead. They had started this road together, even before he had met Kurt.

*There was a time when we were down and out.*

*There was a place when we were starting over.*

*We let the bough break*

*We let the heartache in*

*Who's sorry now?*

*There was a world when we were standing still*

*And for a moment we were separated*

*And then you found her*

*you let the stranger in*

*Who's sorry now, who's sorry now?*

Blaine snuggled close to Kurt, and nuzzled his head on his boyfriend's shoulder. Kurt squeezed the hand he held tightly and placed the other on Blaine's thigh. Blaine thought he could sit like this for hours, even days, and never regret a moment. He finally felt like there was nothing he was sorry for.

*What, what kind of fool tears it apart*

*Leaving me pain and sorrow*

*Losin' you now, wondering why*

*Where will I be tomorrow?*

The Warblers all looked to Blaine, their lead singer, their leader, despite what the council might say. The thought of losing him was hard to bear, but they all knew that it was the right thing for Blaine. And they were so proud of him, and happy for him. Nick came to kneel before Blaine and Kurt and sang to them with a smile.

*Forever more, that's what we are to be*

*Without each other*

*We'll be remembering when.*

*There was a time when we were down and out.*

*There was a place when we were starting over.*

*We let the bough break*

*We let the heartache in*

*Who's sorry now? Who's sorry now?*

*What, what kind of fool tears it apart*

*Leaving me pain and sorrow*

*Losin' you now, wondering why*

*Where will I be tomorrow?*

Nick stood up, returning to the Warblers as they all playfully held their arms out questioningly to Blaine, singing as a group.

*Was there a moment when I cut you down?*

*Played around?*

*What have I done?*

*I only apologize for being as they say the last to know*

*It has to show when someone is in your eyes.*

*What kind of fool tears it apart*

*Leaving me pain and sorrow*

*Losin' you now, How can I win*

*Where will I be tomorrow?*

*Where will I be tomorrow?*

Blaine looked at Nick, once again taking the solo, and he felt as if he was passing the torch. He bowed his head briefly as tears once again shone in his eyes. He loved them all so much. They were everything he needed to hold on, until his angel came. And he would miss them enormously.

*Forever more, that's what we are to be*

*Without each other We'll be reme*

The small audience, New Directions and family alike, erupted in applause. Rachel jumped up and down and hugged Nick, while Brittney ran over to Wes and David. Quinn walked quietly over to Jeff and gave the blond a quick kiss on the cheek. They guys on both teams shook hands, until Nick returned to Blaine.

Nick walked over to Blaine to shake his hand. "Things won't be the same without you. But we'll see you at Sectionals, brother," he said.

"Bring it!" Blaine challenged.

"And if you ever want to join us at the nursing homes, or the next Gap Attack, we're happy to be Blaine and the Pips for the day," Nick said, winking at Kurt.

"I'd love that!" Blaine smiled widely.

"Okay, enough of this," Rachel interrupted, grabbing Blaine from the uniformed boys. "You're fraternizing with the enemy now Blaine War...uh...Anderson! It's time to get it on with New Directions!" and she stole Blaine's hand from Kurt and whisked him over to the McKinley crowd, who were turning the music back on.

Kurt found his Dad and Carole mixing together some drinks and snacks in the kitchen. He leaned on the counter.

"Thank you Dad. For being there for Blaine, I mean. Do you really think he's going to be ok?"

Burt came around and hugged his son. "Yeah, I do. Your boyfriend is a remarkable man. Almost as remarkable as you," he said giving Kurt a squeeze on the shoulder.

"Thanks Dad!" Kurt beamed.

Carole came around and hugged her stepson, "I'm so proud of you both," she said.

"Now get out there and spend time with your friends," Burt ordered.

"Yes, sir!" he said, and he crossed paths with Blaine's Mom as he went to leave the kitchen.

"Kurt," Mrs. Anderson stopped him.

"Yes Mrs. Anderson?" he said, glancing at his Dad. Burt just nodded to him encouragingly.

"I just wanted to say, thank you, for giving Blaine some happiness. And for opening my eyes," she said, and she hugged her son's boyfriend. "As soon as Blaine and I settle in, I'd love for you to come over for dinner."

Kurt's eyes teared up, and he took Mrs. Anderson's hands in his. "I'd love that," he accepted.

Blaine was dancing and singing with all his friends, old and new, enjoying the festivities, when he noticed Santana standing in the corner, a faraway look in her eye. He followed her gaze to Brittney dancing with Wes and Jeff. He walked over to her.

"Why don't you get in there and dance?" Blaine asked casually.

"What's it matter to you?" Santana snapped back at him.

"You think I don't notice my own look in your eyes?" Blaine asked, nonchalantly leaning against the wall next to her crossing his arms across his chest. "It doesn't work, you know, living with secrets. It feels like it does, like you have everything under control. But at some point, it will all unravel. And when that happens, you need people around you. You need someone that loves you," he said glancing at Kurt across the room.

Santana looked over at Blaine, and her eyes softened slightly. Blaine turned his head to study her.

"Give me your phone," he ordered suddenly, holding his hand out.

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

"Just give it to me," he said, grabbing it from her hand.

Blaine entered his number into her contacts, and handed it back. "You're not alone, Santana. I know it feels like you are, but you're not. If you need someone to talk to, I'm here. Until then, hold on," he said, giving her hand a quick squeeze and disappearing into the crowd.

Kurt found Blaine and grabbed his hand, sitting him on the couch. "The Warblers aren't the only ones who get to sing to you. New Directions has something we'd like to say as well," he said smiling. Blaine looked at him suspiciously, but Kurt just smiled at him and winked. The Warblers, Carol, Burt and Mrs. Anderson also took seats as the McKinley kids gathered together.

Blaine smiled as Mercedes stepped forward to sing to her best friend's man.

*Three little birds, sat on my window.*

*And they told me I don't need to worry.*

*Summer came like cinnamon*

*So sweet,*

*Little girls double-dutch on the concrete.*

Mercedes smiled as Kurt stepped forward. She returned to sing background with the others.

*Maybe sometimes, we've got it wrong, but it's alright*

*The more things seem to change, the more they stay the same*

*Oh, don't you hesitate.*

Blaine laughed as all his new glee mates joined in on the chorus.

*Girl, put your records on, tell me your favorite song*

*You go ahead, let your hair down*

*Sapphire and faded jeans, I hope you get your dreams,*

*Just go ahead, let your hair down.*

*You're gonna find yourself somewhere, somehow.*

Rachel stepped forward and grabbed Blaine off the couch as she smiled and sang to him:

*Blue as the sky, sunburnt and lonely,*

*Sipping tea in a bar by the roadside,*

*Just relax, Just relax*

*Don't you let those other boys fool you,*

*Got to love that afro hair do.*

Rachel ruffled Blaine's hair to bring out his curls and twirled him to Kurt, beautiful Kurt. They locked eyes and Kurt ran a gently hand through Blaine's hair.

*Maybe sometimes, we feel afraid, but it's alright*

*The more you stay the same, the more they seem to change.*

*Don't you think it's strange?*

Everyone sang, including the Warblers who got up to sing and dance with Blaine and the New Directions. Blaine and Kurt laughed as they danced together amongst all their friends and family.

*Girl, put your records on, tell me your favorite song*

*You go ahead, let your hair down*

*Sapphire and faded jeans, I hope you get your dreams,*

*Just go ahead, let your hair down.*

*You're gonna find yourself somewhere, somehow.*

Everyone quieted as Kurt again looked Blaine in the eye and sang as if no one else was in the room. Blaine didn't feel that he could ever be more in love.

*'Twas more than I could take, pity for pity's sake*



*Some nights kept me awake, I thought that I was stronger*

*When you gonna realise, that you don't even have to try any longer?*

*Do what you want to.*

And the room broke out in song, as Rachel grabbed Burt to dance and Puck pulled Carole in.

*Girl, put your records on, tell me your favorite song*

*You go ahead, let your hair down*

*Sapphire and faded jeans, I hope you get your dreams,*

*Just go ahead, let your hair down.*

*Girl, put your records on, tell me your favorite song*

*You go ahead, let your hair down*

*Sapphire and faded jeans, I hope you get your dreams,*

*Just go ahead, let your hair down.*

*Oh, you're gonna find yourself somewhere, somehow*

Blaine kissed Kurt deeply. "I have already found myself," he whispered, "with you." Kurt smiled. "Come with me," Blaine said, as he grabbed Kurt and dragged him to Kurt's room.

Burt and Mrs. Anderson both glanced over thinking to stop them, but Carole hugged Burt close and touched Mrs. Anderson's hand. "Give them a moment. They've had no privacy since Blaine got back."

Kurt followed Blaine breathlessly as Blaine nearly ran to the privacy of Kurt's room. He pulled Kurt and closed the door quickly, pressing his lips into Kurt's and savoring the feel of their bodies so close together. He poured all of his emotions into the moment, until he could finally just settle into the comfort of Kurt's arms around him. He slowly pulled away.

"Wow," said Kurt breathlessly. "What was that for?"

"I just love you," Blaine said. He went to sit on Kurt's bed. "It's not just going to go away, you know. All the feelings. I can push them away for a time, but then they all come rushing back."

"What do you feel?" Kurt asked, sitting next to him and taking his hand.

"Sad and angry mostly. I gained so much today, but I lost my father. I may have hated him sometimes, but I always loved him and just wanted his acceptance."

Kurt came to sit next to him and took his hand. "I am always here for you whether you are sad, angry, or completely full of passion," Kurt teased. He placed his hand on Blaine's chest. "I am always with you."

Blaine placed his hand over his boyfriend's, looking at him tenderly. "Like a handprint on my heart," he whispered. Kurt blushed.

They heard a knock on the door, and after a few seconds, Burt opened it slowly. "Your guests are getting ready to leave boys," he said.

Kurt and Blaine smiled at one another and returned to the crowd. They hugged all their friends from New Directions, and made plans for the last weekend before school started. Wes, David, Thad and Jeff, along with the other Warblers, shook hands with Blaine and Kurt and wished them well. Finally, there was no one left but Nick.

Nick clasped hands with Kurt. "Take care of him," he said.

Kurt nodded. "Always," he promised.

Nick embraced Blaine, not wanting to say goodbye. "I'm so proud of you, man."

"Thank you," Blaine answered, "for everything."

When they had all gone, Blaine stood with his mother, the Hummel family and Finn. He turned to his mother.

"So," Blaine said, taking his Mom's hand. "What do we do now?"

She looked at her son, and wiped his curls out of his eyes. "We hold on. We hold on to these amazing friends and family you have around you. And we wait for what is to come...together."

## WAY OUT

*It's a new year at McKinley and Blaine has joined New Directions. Kurt can't be more thrilled, but his enthusiasm is tested when Blaine develops a friendship with Santana.*

**Author's Note:** Thank you for checking out my third Fanfiction, *Way Out*! I have been intrigued by the idea of a Blaine/Santana friendship for a while now, and teased it in Chapter 6 of *Hold On*. Ryan Murphy was nice enough to provide me with some material and inspiration to move forward. Thanks Glee!

I always try to remain as canon as possible while still telling my own stories. My Blaine backstory is and always will be my own as presented in *Hold On*. So if you haven't read that yet, go do it, then come back! At this time, I plan to expand on this story after every Episode. We'll see how that goes.

And while this is a Blaine/Santana friendship story, that highly impacts Klaine. So don't worry, there will be plenty of Klaine love!

Thank you so much to Typegirl19/janemgonz for her wise words as my Beta.

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### ***Chapter One: Purple Piano Project***

*"Santana, you like playing both sides, isn't that right?"*

Coach Sylvester's words reverberated in Santana's head and she shivered, unable to force them away. Maybe getting kicked out of Glee was for the best. Away from the song and dance and drama, securely Captain of the Cheerios, well co-captain, maybe she could escape the nagging thoughts in her head. Of course, there were times when her heart still fluttered for Brittany. But for the most part she had been able to move on over the summer. *Oh who am I kidding*, she thought. It was fear that kept her inside the closet. Fear that kept her on "Team Sue." It was fear that kept her from having the one person she truly wanted and no one really understood; not Quinn, not Brittany, not even Kurt. Santana sat on her bed with her knees pulled up, flipping her phone in her hands. She stared at the number on the screen, then shut it off and threw it aside. But before she could even think of something else to do, her hand reached back out,

turning the phone back on and studying the number. She was wrong. He understood. He had told her she wasn't alone. She dropped her head on her knees, and flipped the phone in her hands again. Did she have the strength to reach out to him?

Kurt and Blaine were sitting on the loveseat in Kurt's home, where they had spent so many days and nights over the summer. Only this time, much to Blaine's chagrin, they were doing homework. Blaine had no desire to be working, he had other things in mind, but Kurt insisted that good grades would be extremely important to his acceptance to the New York Drama Academy. So here they sat, Kurt on one side of the couch with his Western Civilization book propped on the arm of the loveseat, and Blaine on the other, King Lear in hand, bare feet crossed comfortably on Kurt's lap. Kurt looked over to Blaine studying his book and smiled. *Blaine looked so serious studying, he thought, with his adorable eyebrows scrunched and forehead furrowed.* This is what this year was going to be about. The two of them just *being* together, not having to *do* anything.

As soon as Kurt returned his gaze to his history book though, Blaine's expression turned mischievous. Blaine nonchalantly adjusted his foot to just the perfect spot in Kurt's lap and massaged his toes into Kurt. Kurt's face immediately went red as he squirmed and shot Blaine an incensed look.

"What?" Blaine asked, feigning innocence. "Just getting comfortable," he said with a sly grin.

"You know exactly what you were doing Blaine Anderson," Kurt scolded.

Blaine threw his book over his shoulder, put his feet down and leaned into Kurt. "And you know that you like it," Blaine winked.

"I have to study Blaine," Kurt weakly protested as Blaine's lips slowly came closer to his own.

"So do I," Blaine whispered cupping the back of Kurt's head and pulling him in passionately. Kurt fought for only a second as Blaine sucked Kurt's bottom lip and offered him the delicious taste of his kiss. All resolve gone Kurt's hands wandered beneath Blaine's shirt to stroke the amazing skin and muscles of his boyfriend. Their breathing increased as their heartbeats started to rise. Kurt slid his hands down to Blaine's always so sexy jeans and he grasped his hips roughly. They pulled in close to each other, until both boys were surprised by the vibration under Kurt's hand.

Kurt's head fell backward on the couch in frustration as Blaine pulled away laughing and took his phone out of his pocket. He looked at the number and Kurt saw his brow crease and his eyebrows rise in question. "Sorry," Blaine whispered to Kurt, then answered the phone.

"Santana?" he asked into the phone as he got up from the couch and moved away from Kurt toward the kitchen.

*Santana*, thought Kurt? Kurt wondered how she even had Blaine's phone number. Then he remembered Blaine's audition in the courtyard earlier that week. Santana had had her hands all over him and Blaine hadn't seemed to mind. In fact, he seemed to greatly enjoy shaking his hips with her. Kurt felt an unexpected and likely uncalled for jealousy arise but he couldn't help it. He knew Santana was nothing but trouble, and he didn't want her involved with Blaine in any way. She had set the piano on fire and had sided with Coach Sylvester. Mr. Schuester had kicked her out of Glee Club. Was she trying to use Blaine to get back in? Or worse? Kurt started to feel a bit ill.

"Ok, I'll meet you in 30 minutes," Kurt heard Blaine tell her in the phone and hung up.

"I'm sorry babe, I have to go," Blaine apologized.

Kurt got up to meet him. "What could Santana possibly have to talk to you about that is more important than...this?" Kurt asked indignantly.

Blaine shrugged, looking a bit guilty to Kurt. "It's...nothing Kurt, don't worry about it," he said, kissing Kurt chastely on the lips.

Kurt looked at him, arms crossed, head cocked with both anger and concern. "Santana doesn't play fair, Blaine, remember that. Whatever she has in store for you, whatever she is trying to get you to do, it isn't good."

Blaine looked at Kurt with his earnest and comforting eyes. "It isn't like that, Kurt." He took his boyfriend's hand. "Trust me please," he asked.

Kurt softened. "I do trust you. It's Santana I don't trust at all," he said with a pout.

"I love you," Blaine responded and he pulled Kurt in for a kiss. Kurt couldn't resist his embrace and melted into him.

"I love you too," he said walking Blaine to the door.

As Blaine walked out to his car with his always endearing swagger, he stretched his muscular arm out and pointed to Kurt who still had the door open. "Now get back to studying," he said with a laugh.

"Yes Sir," Kurt snickered, and he closed the door.

## ***Chapter Two: I Am Unicorn***

Santana sat waiting for Blaine to arrive. She had already been there for about 20 minutes and she had gotten up to leave three times, each time changing her mind again to see this through. She really wasn't sure what had led her to call the boy, but every time her head had said no, her heart drew her back again. She had felt an affinity for him since the first time she had met him. He didn't know, but when she stood up to David during the Night of Neglect, it was as much for Blaine as it was for Kurt. She thought both boys could use the help. Of course, she knew now it had been unnecessary. She was blown away by Blaine's courage to stand up in front of the entire school and take Kurt's hand for the Prom Queen dance. Santana had spent the whole night dancing with David, all the while staring at Brittany, too afraid to make the same move.

Santana thought back to the night two weeks ago at Kurt's house, when the Warblers and New Directions had joined together to support Blaine after everything went down with his father. Even then, amongst friends, she had stood against the wall watching Brittany dance with Wes and Jeff instead of asking her to dance herself. Blaine had noticed and had come over.

*"Why don't you get in there and dance?" Blaine asked casually.*

*"What's it matter to you?" Santana snapped back at him.*

*"You think I don't notice my own look in your eyes?" Blaine asked, nonchalantly leaning against the wall next to her, crossing his arms across his chest. "It doesn't work, you know, living with secrets. It feels like it does, like you have everything under control. But at some point, it will all unravel. And when that happens, you need people around you. You need someone that loves you," he said glancing at Kurt across the room.*

*Santana looked over at Blaine, and her eyes softened slightly. Blaine turned his head to study her.*

*"Give me your phone," he ordered suddenly, holding his hand out.*

*"Why?" she asked suspiciously.*

*"Just give it to me," he said, grabbing it from her hand.*



*Blaine entered his number into her contacts, and handed it back. "You're not alone, Santana. I know it feels like you are, but you're not. If you need someone to talk to, I'm here. Until then, hold on," he said, giving her hand a quick squeeze and disappearing into the crowd.*

He had recognized her in himself. And she did as well. He was quite a handsome young man who could spend his life passing for straight if he wanted. And yet he chose to withstand abuse and ultimately abandonment from his father to live his life out of the closet. She wanted to know why. And how.

Yet, Santana hid herself from everyone but Brittany, the only person with whom she felt safe. She questioned how she could possibly know she was safe with Blaine. Part of her felt she was, but her head would not stop the constant noise saying otherwise. Her head started to swim. No. She couldn't come out to him. She couldn't tell him her fears. She couldn't ask him how to embrace the courage he did. She couldn't trust him. She couldn't do this. Santana got up for the fourth time to leave, when she saw Blaine walk by the window of the restaurant. It was too late, he had already arrived. For the fourth and final time, she took her seat again, and took a deep breath.

Blaine entered the Night Town jazz club and informed the host that he was meeting a young lady there. The host asked if his name was Blaine Anderson and, surprised, he said yes. He was informed that Ms. Santana Lopez was waiting for him in the concert room and was led inside. Blaine took in his surroundings and immediately felt at home in the intimate and inviting dining room, as he listened to the smooth and sultry music of the jazz musician on the stage in front of him. He was led to a rounded booth toward the back of the room, and he caught the eye of Santana. He thanked the maître d' and took a seat.

The two glanced at each other quickly, then Santana returned her gaze to the stage. Blaine knew better than to push the Latina. She had asked him here, and he would let her go at her own pace. He picked up the menu in front of him and studied it. A waiter arrived and he ordered the Chevre Chicken, which sounded delicious with goat cheese, shallots, walnuts and a cherry compote. He truly had his eye on the angus beef prime rib, but money was tighter these days than it used to be. Santana ordered on the lighter side, a Louisiana salad. Blaine smiled to himself at her choice of the spicy Cajun fair. He noted as the waiter took her order, that he seemed quite familiar with Santana.

"Come here often?" he asked nonchalantly, picking up his water glass and taking a drink.

Santana nodded. "It's a good place to be alone. To think. And the music is fantastic," she added, still keeping her eyes trained in front of her. She again went quiet.

Blaine could agree with that. He filled the silence listening to the amazing sounds coming from the artists on the stage and looking at the pictures of famous jazz musicians decorating the walls. He felt no need to force conversation. The two were comfortable, both in their element of great music and atmosphere. He had told her to call and he would come. The rest was up to her.

"Does Kurt know you're here?" Santana asked nervously.

"I was with him when you called," Blaine shared. "So yes, he knows I'm with you."

That gave Santana an opening to fall back into familiar and safe patterns. She looked at him slyly. "Hope I didn't interrupt you gettin' a piece of that..."

"Santana..." Blaine warned, blushing.

But her anxiety with the whole situation only increased her sassiness.

"Well I saw that hug in the hallway at school. Surprised you didn't just throw him up against the lockers right there," she sneered.

"Santana!" Blaine quietly admonished, his heart rate picking up.

Santana looked away. Blaine was sure that her snide remarks were entirely a deflection for her to avoid her own issues. But knowing that, didn't make it less frustrating. He breathed, trying to find his patience. As it returned, Santana turned to him, although she could not look him in the eye.

"How do you do it?" She asked in almost a whisper. "In the middle of the school...?" This time Blaine noticed she couldn't even say the words. "Don't you care what people are going to think?"

Blaine looked at her, so scared and unsure. He wished that she would show the world the real Santana. "The truth is, I care a hell of a lot more about what Kurt thinks of us than about what anyone else thinks of us."

Santana considered that. She couldn't say that about Brittany, or anyone. That was the problem. She cared way too much about what everyone thought of her. It gave her power, and she put that power before anything else. Without power she was vulnerable, and that was far too dangerous. The two again sat in silence until their drinks came. Blaine had ordered a coke and Santana peered over to him. "I have a little something you can add to that if you like," she said, patting the purse next to her.

Blaine turned to her suspiciously, looking her straight in the eye. "Do you always carry alcohol around with you, or is this a special treat for me?"

"Worked for Rachel," Santana said with a feisty smile and a wink.

"And this is why Kurt didn't want me to come," Blaine said rolling his eyes. He shot back. "Let me be very clear about something Santana. I am here to support you or help you or hang out with you or whatever you need. But I'm not here to cheat on my boyfriend or let you pretend you're something you're not. So why don't you cut the crap. We can talk or we can sit in silence and listen to the music, but I'm not playing *this* game with you."

Santana stared at him for a few moments, bitter retorts and defensive insults running through her mind. She could take his cue and leave right now, and she made a decision to do it. But standing up, once again, her heart took over. She turned to him despite herself. "Fine, Mr. Anderson. You want to listen, listen to this," she said, and she strode up the stage.

Blaine was left dumbfounded at the table, as he watched Santana speak with the piano and saxophone players. She grabbed the microphone, and gave the pianist a nod. When the B.B King song started, Blaine sat back with a grin.

*I play the street life*

*Because there's no place I can go*

*Street life*

*And it's the only life I know*

*Street life*

*And there's a thousand parts to play*

*Street life*

*Until you play your life away*

Santana sang from her heart, the words she could not say. She had never explained herself to anyone like this before, not even Brittany. Brittany would never understand. She had the innocence of a child, who never understood why anyone would need to hide their true self. But Blaine, he understood. He had lived it as well.

*You let the people see*

*Just who you want to be*

*And every night you shine*

*just like a super star*

*That's how the life is played*

*A ten cent Masquerade*

*You dress, and walk, and talk*

*you're who you think you are*

The song brought back so many memories for Blaine. Happy memories of Dalton, but also the mask the secluded school had helped him put on. The beautiful lie that he told of how everything was perfect and he was exactly who everyone wanted him to be. He still did it sometimes. He had done it the first day in the choir room at McKinley, just smiling and saying little when Finn called him out. It had only been two weeks, and old habits were hard to break. He still always tried to please. It was something he was still working on.

*Street life*

*You can run away from time*

*Street life*

*For a nickel and a dime*

*Street life*

*But you better not get old*

*Street life*

*Or you're gonna feel the cold*

Santana knew that at some point in her life, she would need to come out. She would need to be open and honest about who she was. But she knew that for now, she didn't have the skills. Maybe Blaine could face life without his father, but she wasn't sure she could. She loved her family, they were close. She knew her coming out would disappoint them. But that wasn't the worse for her. Winning and popularity were things she needed like air. She needed to be on top, and no matter how accepting everyone was, she was certain she would lose that place if they knew who she really was.

*There's always love for sale*

*A grown-up fairy tale*

*Prince charming always smiles*

*behind a silver spoon*

*And if you keep it young*

*Your song is always sung*

*Your love will pay your way*

*beneath the silver moon*

Blaine could hear the pain in Santana's voice. He could see the conflict on her face. He knew that this wasn't her. He had worn the mask quite well. He had learned so well this past summer that when someone was ready to expose their truth, the words would come. But he had long known that it shouldn't happen until someone was ready, and Santana wasn't ready. The phone call, the dinner, the song. It was only a test to see if he would be there for her when she was. Santana put the microphone away, thanked the musicians, and returned to her seat. She kept her eyes on the plates of food now being delivered, and slowly started to eat. Blaine took her hand, and she startled a moment, staring at their clasped hands and then Blaine's stunning hazel eyes. She had never seen so much sincerity in one single glance before. When he spoke, she held her breath.

"Someone once told me, when you are ready, the words will come," he looked at Santana and she stared back with eyes glistening. "And when they do, I will be here for you. Do you trust me?"

He waited as Santana studied him. For Santana, it was the biggest question in the world. And for the first time in her life, she nodded her head in response. "Yes," she answered quietly. "I trust you."

### ***Chapter Three: Slushied***

Blaine spied Kurt with his locker open, getting his morning books and supplies. He loved seeing his Warbler picture with the courage collage still inside, even now. It felt like only yesterday and a lifetime ago, but it remained an inspiration to him as much as Kurt. Blaine sauntered over and leaned back against the lockers, arms folded across his chest. He looked up at his boyfriend, eyes sparkling with love and affection. "Good Morning," he greeted with a grin.

Kurt turned to Blaine, broken out of his morning haze and smiled warmly. "Do you know how much I love having you here every morning?" Kurt asked.

Blaine shook his head playfully. "No. How much?" he asked teasing Kurt with his eyes and smile.

Kurt ignored the fluttering feelings in his stomach that those eyes caused. "So much, that I will forego my morning hairspray for fear of suffocating you," he teased back.

"Oh well, I do appreciate that! I wouldn't want to harm my lungs before the big West Side Story audition."

"Auditions aren't until later this week," Kurt reminded. "We don't even know who is directing yet." Kurt grew quiet as he concentrated heavily on something in his locker. "So tell me how your date with Santana went last night."

Kurt smiled at him, but Blaine knew his boyfriend well enough to see the anxiety behind his expression. Blaine looked at Kurt with assurance. "It wasn't a date," he reminded Kurt.

"Well then what was it?" Kurt asked with a failed semblance of casualness.

"Private," Blaine answered seriously. Kurt started to argue, but Blaine quickly stopped him. "Boundaries and respect, Kurt," Blaine reprimanded in reminder, "even for Santana." Kurt dropped his head. He had invaded Blaine's privacy over the summer and disrespected his wishes. He had promised never to do it again. He looked to Blaine's hand and reached out for it. Glancing up at Blaine, he took a deep breath and smiled feebly. "Hold On?" he asked apologetically.

Blaine studied the most adorably perfect boy in front of him. He was proud of Kurt. He couldn't even put into words how much he loved him. He nodded his head with a smile that melted Kurt's heart and grabbed his hand. "Hold On," he agreed, as the two took off down the hallway toward classes, hand in hand.

Santana watched the scene between Kurt and Blaine discreetly. She told Blaine last night that she trusted him and here was his chance to prove to her that she had been wrong. For a moment, she was certain that he would tell Kurt everything, but he didn't. He had kept their conversation private. And now the two walked down the hallways of McKinley, hand in hand for all to see. She watched them, in awe of their ease and comfort. Smiling, joking with each other, Kurt teasingly bumping his hip into Blaine's. She wished for just a moment, that she could have the courage to someday do the same. Then suddenly, SPLASH! None of the three singers saw it coming when two blue Slushies flew out and hit Kurt and Blaine straight in their faces. The boys stopped short, but the letterman jackets kept walking.

"That'll cool you off fags!" they yelled as they continued laughing down the hall.

Santana's hard shell immediately returned, blocking every precious and vulnerable emotion she'd ever felt. She was and had always been right. They would never be safe here.

Kurt stopped when the icy slushie hit him. Usually he saw it coming and could prepare, but this time he was distracted. Stupid and distracted. The cold hit him like a ton of bricks. He wanted to cry, but not for himself. He was used to it, but this was Blaine's first time and it hit him what it truly meant for Blaine to leave the safe halls of Dalton Academy. He instantly regretted everything over the summer, he wanted to take it all back just to avoid this moment. He was about to tell him all that, when Blaine turned to him and laughed.

"You're right Kurt," he said as blue slushie dripped down his face, down his shirt, and into his pants. "This is the coldest and stickiest freakin' thing that I have ever experienced in my life!"

Kurt looked at him, tears in his eyes. "I'm so sorry, Blaine."

Blaine just cocked his head and looked at Kurt with a grin. "Are you kidding me?" He leaned in closely to Kurt and whispered with the sultry teasing voice that drove Kurt wild. "The way that slushie just drips down your body into places I can only imagine, you are so hot right now. Let's get out of these clothes and..."

"Ok boys," Santana interrupted loudly, separating them and clasping both their elbows with her two hands. "Let's get you both cleaned up," she said, leading them to the girl's bathroom.



Blaine stood with his head under the water of the bathroom sink. Aside from seeing Kurt covered in the icy blue slushie, having his boyfriend run his fingers through his wet hair was definitely the best part of the frozen attack. Blaine's mind quickly daydreamed of him and Kurt in the shower together, shampooing each other's hair, letting the water run down their bodies until every last bubble of soap had run down the drain. Then slowly they would...

"I think that's enough there Kurt, the two of you are starting to smoke you're so hot for each other," Santana quipped and the boys both shot apart, their twin blushes now reaching their cheeks in embarrassment. Santana leaned against another sink and threw Blaine a towel to dry off.

Blaine blotted his head dry, then let the towel drop as he brushed his hair with his fingers. Santana stared. Kurt smiled. Blaine looked at them both curiously. "What?"

Kurt merely shook his head. Blaine knew that he preferred the curls to his slicked back look, but Blaine struggled to make the change. It was the last part of his mask and his life at Dalton, and he wasn't quite ready to give it up yet.

Santana stared at the gorgeous man before her. If she were going to go for a guy, and that was a big if, Blaine would certainly be tops on her list. If, of course, he were straight. Which clearly he was not. It pissed her off that everything couldn't just be simple.

Kurt caught Santana eyeing Blaine, and quickly grabbed his hand. "Come on, we need to get clean clothes from our lockers."

"I'll get them," Blaine said with what Kurt liked to call his perfect boyfriend smile. "You stay here."

"You don't know my locker combination," Kurt protested, not wanting to stay with Santana.

"Of course I do," Blaine said with a grin as he walked out the door.

"Wait, what?" Kurt followed him, but Blaine let the door slam behind him. Kurt turned back around to face Santana, flustered. He instinctually crossed his arms in front his chest in a defensive stance.

"So, Hummel." Kurt rolled his eyes at the sickeningly sweet sing song voice Santana used when she wanted something. Kurt had known Santana a long time and he knew this would not end well. "What did Blaine tell you about our little date last night?"

"You're kidding, right?" Kurt scoffed. "He has kept secrets his whole life. If he told you he wouldn't say anything to anyone then he won't, even to me." Santana raised her eyebrows at Kurt, but let him continue as he moved toward the girl. "I am warning you, do not mess with him, or us. I've seen you break up every couple in this school with a smile on your face. You hate to see anyone happy. You and Coach Sylvester are two peas in a pod, you deserve each other. Blaine is just fresh meat to you and probably the only guy other than me at this school you haven't slept with. Drool all you like, Santana, because those are pants you will never get into."

Santana glared at Kurt, her fury only rising. "Okay Kurt Hummel, your jealousy?" Santana snarled with a flip of her head and a finger wag, "not your best feature." Kurt just stared back at her incredulous as she continued with her typical sassiness. "So let me tell you two things. One, your boyfriend loves you and he's not going to cheat on you. Ya know how I know? I tried," she paused as Kurt's jaw dropped. "And two, your boyfriend is hot. And both girls and guys are gonna be trying to get that sexy ass his entire life. So if you're gonna be with him? You best get used to it."

Kurt stood speechless, as Blaine entered the bathroom with a smile, carrying two pairs of clean clothing in bags. His face immediately dropped; however, as soon as he felt the tension in the room. Kurt looked as if Santana had just struck him in the face, and Santana was standing facing him with her hands on her hips, attitude pouring from every fiber of her being. Blaine glared at Santana, who simply shrugged and sauntered over to the door, ruffling Blaine's uncoifed hair as she walked out of the bathroom.

Blaine stared after her for a moment in confusion, then turned his attention to his boyfriend, who still hadn't moved. Blaine tried to catch his glance, but Kurt avoided eye contact. He could see Kurt was angry and hurt. "What the hell happened?" Blaine asked.

Kurt finally turned his head to look at his boyfriend. "Did she hit on you?" he demanded.

Blaine wasn't sure if Kurt was angry at him or Santana, but he shook his head and walked over to Kurt. "I don't think..."

Kurt cut him off. "Just answer the question Blaine. Did Santana hit on you? Did she try and get you to cheat on me?"

"Kurt," Blaine started, but Kurt knew him too well and immediately took a step back and threw his hand up between himself and Blaine.

"I do not have to respect her boundaries when she crosses mine," he warned him off before his boyfriend could reprimand him.

Blaine considered that. "Fair enough," he agreed. He hesitated to find the right words, but couldn't. "She just offered me alcohol," he admitted.

Kurt didn't need to hear anymore, he understood what that meant. Since the incident with Rachel, it had been a joke with both the Warblers and the New Directions over the summer. It was a joke that no one took seriously, except Kurt.

"I can't do this." Kurt stormed by Blaine and headed to the bathroom door.

"Kurt!" Blaine yelled, grabbing him by the wrist and interlocking their fingers. Kurt stopped but stared at the door. "It means nothing. Even if she stripped naked in front of me..."

"I wouldn't put it past her," Kurt mumbled under his breath.

"It wouldn't matter." Blaine closed the gap and cupped his hand on Kurt's cheek, turning it to him. Blaine's heart dropped at the tears running down Kurt's face. "I'm in love with you." As Kurt's eyes lowered, Blaine slowly leaned in and his lips met Kurt's. He was gentle at first, waiting for Kurt to accept his words, waiting for Kurt's faith in him to return. When it did, it was Kurt that deepened the kiss, trying to discover every last morsel of reassurance he could that Blaine was truly his and no one, not even Santana Lopez, could touch them.

When they separated, Blaine carefully brushed Kurt's wet hair off his forehead and looked him deeply in the eyes. "I would never hurt you like that, understand?" Kurt quickly nodded, pursing his lips.

"I can't deal with you being friends with her knowing she's just trying to break us up," Kurt explained.

"That's not what this is about."

"What is it about then?" Kurt asked exasperated.

Blaine considered how much easier it would be to tell him, but he stood firm to his conviction that Santana had the right to withhold or reveal her own secrets in her own time. It had hurt when Kurt had forced issues with him, and he wasn't going to let him do it to Santana. "You know I wouldn't keep this from you if I didn't feel it was right. Trust me," he pleaded with Kurt.

Kurt sighed. "I seem to have little choice."

Sometimes Blaine's morality was hard for Kurt to deal with, but as Blaine kissed Kurt again, their tongues mingling with love and passion, he knew that he did and always would trust Blaine. Blaine pulled away and grabbed the bags of clean clothes, throwing one to Kurt. "Come on. It won't be good if either of us get detention for being late."

Kurt looked at Blaine, mischievously. "Guess that means no hanky panky in the school bathroom then?"

Blaine laughed at him. "I'll make up for it later," he winked.

**Chapter Four: Asian F**

Kurt watched Blaine's audition from the top of the auditorium. *God, he is just sensational*, Kurt thought, *and beautiful too*. Kurt peeked over to the directors, and could see that they were as drawn into his performance as Kurt was. Blaine was a star and he was *his* star. His heart swelled with pride. So he hated himself when the pride was quickly replaced with jealousy after they asked him to read for Tony. He should be ecstatic, but instead he felt only hurt and fear. He watched Blaine's tortured face consider whether or not to read, and Kurt couldn't stay there anymore. He needed some air.

Kurt walked off, trying to shake the pathetic sense of jealousy he felt toward the boyfriend he adored. When his head cleared he made his way to his car, realizing it was a good thing he left. He was supposed to meet Blaine at the Lima Bean at 4 after the audition, and he didn't want Blaine to know he had been watching. He raced to the coffee shop, stood in the long after school line for their coffee orders, and sat in their usual seat just in time for Blaine to come in breathless through the door.

Blaine had been nervous the whole way to see Kurt. After reading the role, he was struggling to admit to himself just how much he wanted to play Tony. He wondered how on earth he was he going to confess it to Kurt. He had to talk to him about it, he couldn't just sweep it under the rug. During his song, he saw Kurt out of the corner of his eye, watching from the balcony, but the next time he looked up, Kurt was gone. He imagined Kurt had heard they wanted him to read and ran out. As soon as he finished the scene for Tony, he dashed out of the auditorium to find him, and when he couldn't, he sped to the Lima Bean. Now his heart raced with anxiety seeing Kurt at their table, picking at his clothes looking so sad. First Santana manipulates Brittany to run against Kurt, now this. The last thing he ever wanted to do was make Kurt sad. He took a deep breath.

Kurt looked up to see Blaine walk through the door and he put on a wide fake smile. Blaine smiled back and walked over. Since Santana had ever so kindly pointed out to Kurt that every person in the world would want his boyfriend, Kurt couldn't help but notice the heads that turned as Blaine walked toward him. He tried desperately to shake the argument with Santana the other day, but he couldn't. It helped though when Blaine sat down and immediately took Kurt's hand.

"So how was your audition?" Kurt asked expectantly.

Blaine's eyes crinkled and a smirk crossed his lips, "You tell me."

Kurt ducked his head but Blaine could see a blush creep up to Kurt's cheeks. "You saw me?" Kurt asked sheepishly.

"That's our spot," Blaine winked, blushing himself a bit. "How could I have not seen you?" Blaine gripped Kurt's hand tighter, and lowered his eyes. "So," he asked, "you know they asked me to read for Tony, right?"

Kurt pursed his lips and nodded quickly. The jealousy rushed back into his veins as hard as he tried to push it away. Tears pushed their way through as well, and Blaine immediately noticed despite Kurt's desperate attempts to hide them.

"Hey," Blaine soothed, stroking Kurt's knuckles with his thumb. "Tell me what you're thinking, baby."

Kurt fiddled with his coffee cup. He couldn't look Blaine in the eye. "I'm thinking," he hesitated to tell him the truth, but he never lied to Blaine and didn't want to start now. Kurt spoke quickly to get it all out before he could think better of it. "I'm thinking you're Rock Hudson gay. I'm thinking that every girl and guy in this coffee shop wants you. I'm thinking that you are everything I am not and I can't compete with that."

Blaine cocked his head and looked at Kurt, tears now running down his face. Blaine grabbed Kurt's hand and his coffee. "Come on." He pulled Kurt away from the table.

"Where are we going," Kurt asked miserably.

"Some place more private. This isn't the place for this conversation."

Blaine pulled Kurt to his car and they sat in his backseat. He drew Kurt into him, running his fingers up and down Kurt's arm soothingly. He gently kissed Kurt's head, being sure not to mess the perfectly combed hair.

"I'm sorry," Kurt sniffled after a few minutes.

"Don't be sorry," Blaine ordered, cupping Kurt's face in his hands. "Don't ever be sorry for what you feel." Kurt nodded. "Now, where did this all come from? Santana's comments? The play?"

"They laughed at me, Blaine." Blaine's heart broke at the pain in Kurt's voice. "I auditioned for Tony and they laughed at me because I am too gay. But you? Everyone loves you. Santana is right," Kurt said shaking his head, "I'm not strong enough for this."

Blaine stared at Kurt in amazement. "Bullshit. Baby, you are the strongest person I know, and if Santana said otherwise than she was either trying to get to you or doesn't know you as well as I thought she did. You are perfect." Kurt tried to look away, but Blaine turned him back. "No listen to me, you are perfectly Kurt and I am head over heels in love with every part of you. Who cares what anyone else says? You are amazing." Blaine kissed Kurt gently, then again caught his gaze. "If my playing Tony hurts too much for you, I will give it up in a heartbeat. I will tell them I don't want to do it."

"Why would you do that?" Kurt's eyes widened. Despite what he said, Kurt had never known Blaine to give up the spotlight.

"Because your love and happiness mean so much more to me than a part in a play," Blaine explained. "I would give up anything for you. I already have."

Kurt knew those words were supposed to make him feel better, but they didn't. They made him feel sick. He couldn't meet Blaine's eyes. Flashes of the summer raced through his mind. Kurt's own guilt and selfishness shook him to the bone. He felt the walls of the car closing in on him.

"I have to go," Kurt said fumbling for the door handle to escape.

"Kurt wait!" Blaine yelled, scrambling out of the car after him. Kurt ran to his Navigator and clicked the doors unlocked. "I didn't mean it like that," Blaine tried to call, but it was too late. Kurt had started the car and was speeding away toward home.

*Blaine: I'm sorry. I didn't mean it the way it came out. Call me when you're ready to talk. I love you.*

Kurt paused in his moisturizing routine, staring at Blaine's text message from Friday night, when his father knocked on the door. Burt stole a look into the bedroom cautiously. "Mind if I come in son?"

Kurt put the phone down, "Sure."

"Everything ok?" Burt asked tentatively.

"Sure Dad," Kurt lied. "Why?"

"Well, you've been quiet all weekend, and Blaine missed his first Friday Night dinner since the beginning of summer. You've been moping around and you keep staring at your phone but not texting or calling anyone." Burt leaned casually against the dresser, arms crossed at his chest. "You two have a fight?"

"No. Well, yes. Well, sort of," Kurt babbled.

"Care to talk about it?" Burt raised an eyebrow.

Kurt put his moisturizer away and came to sit on the bed. "He's probably going to get the role of Tony," Kurt explained miserably.

"So, then shouldn't you be proud of him?" Burt asked knowingly.

Kurt shook his head. "I should be. I want to be. But I just can't shake this feeling that he always gets whatever he wants while I constantly have to fight. I'm afraid of what I might say to him, so I've been staying away."

Burt considered his son. "What did he say about how you feel?"

"He said he'd give it up for me. He said he's already given up everything for me. And it's true. He gave up his father, Dalton, the Warblers. He gave it all up for me Dad. And I loved him for it." Kurt buried his face in his hands. "I am the most selfish boyfriend on the planet and he is perfect."

Burt sat down next to his son and put an arm around him. "He did those things for him, Kurt, because they made his life better. You may have helped him to move forward, but he didn't do those things for you."

"What about the play," Kurt asked quietly. "The only reason he'd give up the role is so I can have it."

"Is that really what you want? Someone who is going to give up who they are just so you can have what you want?"

Kurt looked at his Dad with a grimace. "No, of course not."



"Look Kurt. You need to decide if you want someone who is perfect, or someone who is perfect for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Sure it's nice to be taken care of and have someone who is willing to put you first some of the time. But you need someone who is going to challenge you to be the best you can be. Asking someone to give themselves up for you doesn't make you special, it lessens both of you. I didn't raise you to ask for handouts. You win on your own, or lose graciously. Winning because someone threw the game, isn't success."

Kurt smiled at his father. "Thanks Dad."

Burt patted his son on the back. "No problem."

Kurt hadn't called Blaine all weekend, although they texted back and forth occasionally. It was partly his fault. Blaine had started a new part-time job at the local drugstore in order to help his mother out with the bills. Since they left his father, it had been much harder, and if Blaine wanted anything extra, he needed to work. At school the next few days, Kurt and Blaine saw little of each other. Being in different grades, they had only Glee together, and with booty camp continuing, Blaine wasn't attending. When they saw each other in the hallways, it was easy to sweep everything under the rug and pretend that nothing had happened. Kurt texted him from the chorus room while Blaine suffered through every moment at his lackluster job. Neither had addressed the elephant in the room. Kurt was still embarrassed and upset at his own feelings. Blaine, as always, was willing to wait for Kurt.

Blaine had rushed to work right after school on Tuesday, not even getting a chance to say goodbye to Kurt. He was in the middle of a terrible shift, with customers nearly out the door, when his phone lit up like a Christmas tree and vibrated non-stop with text messages. When he finally had enough of a break to read what Santana and Brittany had done, he was furious. As soon as the clock struck 6, he called Kurt to calm him down. Then he immediately texted Santana.

*Blaine: Jazz Club. 30 minutes. Be there.*

*Santana: Already here waiting.*

He found it interesting that she knew he would want to see her.

"I heard you and Brittany put on quite the spectacle after school today," Blaine's anger had only grown on his drive over to the club, and his face was no doubt red as he slid his way into Santana's booth.

"Got Kurt shakin' in his boots do we?" Santana smirked. "Serves him right."

"What the hell do you have against him, Santana. What did he ever do to hurt you? Were you just jealous that Brittany was spending time with him instead of you?"

Santana's amused smirk faded as the heat in her body rose. "Brittany believed in Kurt because she didn't believe in herself. And what does he do? He yells at her and puts her down in front of everyone for her brilliance. Well that ain't gonna fly with me. Kurt is selfish and manipulative and he will let anyone look bad if it means him looking better."

"You must know what that's like Santana, sounds just like what everyone says about you," he retorted. "And what about you? If you wanted to take Kurt down, why not do it yourself? You may not be prom queen material, but there is barely a person at McKinley High who wouldn't vote the head cheerleader for Class President. What does it say about you that you are always willing to hide behind Brittany, use her innocence, and then not even admit to the world that it's the one thing you love most about her?"

Santana glared at Blaine with eyes of molten lava. "You think you are so different, boyfriend? Well let me tell you, you're not. Kurt and Brittany are the unicorns. You and me? We hide in their shadow, basking in their light. We pretend to be tough and have it together with our star power and our slick looks, but the truth is we both just continue to be who others want us to be, too afraid to shine on our own and risk losing the few people left who matter to us," Santana saw the flicker of recognition in Blaine's eyes. She knew she had gotten to him, but she didn't stop. "You think he's gonna just smile and hug you when you get the role of Tony? Think again. He's gonna run out of school like a 5 year old whose best friend just stole his favorite toy. And you'll give up the part and do whatever he wants, because all you are is Hummel's puppy dog of a boyfriend."

Blaine's gaze shifted to the band, unable anymore to look Santana in the eye. It was as if Santana ripped both his mask and his rose colored sunglasses straight from his face and while his soul lay bare in front of

her, he was forced to see the truth of Kurt as well. But was it the truth? No, he couldn't believe it. "You're wrong Santana," Blaine quietly said, praying he was right.

Santana took Blaine's hand and the fire had disappeared from her eyes. "I understand Blaine, I do. Who do you think I hide myself from? Who do you think I always have to be on top for? You replaced your father with Kurt. Always the dutiful one, doing what everyone else wants of you. I get it and you know it. Coach Sylvester tells me to jump and I jump. So here's the question. When is it our turn?"

Kurt had gotten the bouquet of yellow and red roses over his lunch break, and was now headed to the stairwell to meet Blaine. The two had started the tradition of passing each other there since the first day of school, and had continued to do so the last few days despite their awkwardness at the moment. After the talk with his father, Kurt tried hard to put his insecurity and guilt aside. But it was Santana's actions and Blaine's kind words that had completely erased the horrible feeling in his stomach. He hated seeing Brittany be a puppet of Santana's whims, and he most certainly did not want to do that to Blaine. He wanted Blaine to be his own man, and the best one he could be. He was done trying to bring Blaine down.

The apprehension Blaine had felt since last night at the jazz club came upon him even stronger as he reached the stairwell. Santana's words reverberated in his mind, and though he didn't want to believe any of it, he had to admit that she had him questioning his own mind. He loved Kurt with all his heart and his heart believed nothing of what she said about him. Kurt was loving and kind. He was insecure definitely, and because of that he sometimes did things that could appear selfish or manipulative at times, but he wasn't those things. He hoped that giving Kurt time to work through his insecurities, on his own or with his dad, would be enough. In the past he may have pushed him, but those days were gone. He was Kurt's boyfriend now and not a mentor. As for himself, he recognized his faults. He knew that he tried too hard to make people like him. Santana was right. Living without the love of a father made a person crave that love and acceptance from others. But he was working on that. As he told Kurt, he knew it wasn't going to happen overnight.

He saw Kurt bound up the courtyard stairway before Kurt saw him, and Blaine noticed a return of Kurt's effervescent skip in his step that had been absent the last few days. Blaine melted at Kurt's adorable smile. He had missed that. "Cast list goes up on Friday. Are you nervous?" Kurt asked, suddenly conquering the elephant that had hung in the air.

Blaine's nerves came mostly from the fear of Kurt's reaction, and he tried to judge Kurt's expression as he spoke. This was it, the moment to see who was right about Kurt, him or Santana. "A little," he answered nonchalantly. "Trying not to think about it." He lied of course. It was all he had been thinking about since the argument with Kurt five days ago.

As Kurt told him that he believed he would get the role, Blaine studied him. He saw no jealousy or hurt in his boyfriend's face. Blaine saw only love reflected in the dazzling blue-green eyes. And then he saw a bouquet of flowers, and his heart melted.

"Kurt, they're beautiful," Blaine smiled. "But what are they for?"

Kurt stared straight into Blaine's hazel eyes, and felt only the enormous pride that had filled him when he had watched him sing *Something's Coming*. "You killed your audition, Blaine. If anyone else got Tony, including me, the wrath of Sondheim, would fall upon McKinley like a plague of Shubert Alley locusts." Blaine laughed and smelled the flowers. Kurt's apology was as unique as the boy in front of him, but it was heartfelt. "These are to celebrate. You," Kurt finished.

Blaine felt the weight of a thousand tons lift off of his shoulders, and every insult Santana threw at Kurt disappeared from his mind. His heart filled with a love greater than he ever thought possible, and he found himself laughing. "You always zig when I think you're about to zag, and I just love that about you."

Blaine wanted more than anything in that moment to sweep Kurt in his arms and kiss him until their hearts burst. He could see that Kurt felt the same. But it was McKinley High School, and the fear of violence was always at the forefront of their minds. They had both suffered abuse at the hands of their classmates before. Blaine had been seriously injured; Kurt had been threatened with his life. No matter how confident they were, no matter how much things had changed, it took longer than six months to heal from those things. It was only last week that holding hands down the hall had earned them both a slushie. Neither wanted to find out what a kiss could bring. So Blaine merely placed a hand on Kurt's shoulder and squeezed with a promise of more to come later. Neither had to say anything. They understood each other perfectly.

With the image of a slushie hitting Kurt fresh in his mind, Blaine followed Kurt down the stairs, smelling the flowers and smiling impishly at the boy he loved. He caught up to him at the bottom and whispered in his ear. "Between the flowers and the thought of slushie running down every inch of your skin, I ought to skip school now, and just take you home with me," he winked.

"Blaine Anderson, you are the biggest tease that this school has ever seen. No wonder you and Santana are friends," he joked.

Blaine laughed. "Who said I'm teasing?" Blaine yelled behind him, as he headed off toward the cafeteria for lunch, leaving Kurt to walk to history class on his own.

**Chapter Five: There's A Way Out**

"Alright guys," Mr. Scheuster started class. "You all have done a lot of hard work in booty camp, but it's given some of you some significant time off. So, new assignment!"

Rachel cheered and clapped her hands. Kurt sat up straight. Blaine leaned in, excited for his first real Glee assignment since arriving at McKinley.

"I said at the beginning of the year that unity was going to be our key to winning Nationals this year. Well, this is our chance to support each other and show our unity. With our competing show choir, I think it's even more important. So without further ado, I want each of you to pick someone to sing to. It's not duets and you don't have to tell the other person first. Find a song that will inspire them and show them what they mean to you. Starting tomorrow, you guys will get up here and start showing the love!"

Kurt nearly jumped out of his skin as he skipped down the hallway with Blaine at the end of the day. He was chattering away about this week's Glee assignment. Blaine kept glancing over at Kurt with a smile, thoroughly amused by Kurt's exuberance.

"So I definitely think that I'm going to sing *Come What May* to you. I mean, I wanted to do it as a duet, but this is the perfect opportunity for me to sing it. And then to me, I think you should sing..."

Kurt kept talking, but Blaine's attention was pulled elsewhere. Over Kurt's shoulder, at the end of the hallway, Coach Sylvester was on a tirade. Next to her was co-captain of the Cheerios, Becky, looking smug at the recipient of the Coach's wrath. Santana stood before the woman, eyes cast down, holding her books to her chest in defense of the coach's onslaught of scathing insults and orders. Brittany stood beside Santana, frowning and looking nervously back and forth between the Coach and her best friend. Despite the constant barrage, Blaine noticed that Santana said nothing in return. Finally Coach Sylvester threw her hands up and stormed back to her office, Becky running close behind. Brittany reached out a hand to hug the head cheerleader, but Santana shrugged it off and dashed in the direction of the choir room.

"Blaine Anderson, did you hear a word I just said," Kurt yelled frustrated.

"What?" Blaine turned back to Kurt and realized he had, in fact, not heard anything that Kurt had said. He looked apologetic, but Kurt could see his mind was elsewhere. He followed Blaine's gaze to the choir room just as Santana disappeared inside.

Kurt sighed. "Go," he said with resignation.

"I love you so much I could kiss you," Blaine called as he ran off to the choir room.

Blaine entered the choir room to see Santana sitting at the piano alone crying. She initially startled when Blaine cleared his throat, but relaxed when she saw it was Blaine. She wiped her tears as he settled himself leaning on the piano.

"Do you want to tell me what all that was about?" Blaine asked gently.

"No," she answered quietly, getting up and putting distance between her and Blaine.

"Are you ok?" Blaine contemplated whether to go to her or give her space.

Santana tried to hold it together, but she couldn't. Tears started flowing again and she shook her head, "No."

Blaine walked over to her and took her in an embrace as she cried. Blaine stroked her thick black hair and whispered reassurance that it would be ok. He had no idea what had happened, but he knew how important Coach Sylvester's approval was to Santana. If she walked away from Brittany, the attack must have been merciless. Or about Brittany herself.

Santana relaxed into Blaine's arms until his comfort and warmth caused her tears to subside. She wanted to want this so badly. She pulled away and looked intensely into his hazel eyes. Without a thought, she leaned in to kiss him.

Before her lips could reach his, Blaine lowered his head and met Santana's forehead with his own. "Santana," he whispered, closing his eyes and shaking his head slightly against hers.

She squeezed her eyes shut and spoke so he could barely hear her. "It would just be so easy, you know? I fall in love with you, you fall in love with me. No one cares. No fear, no threats. We stay on top. Our parents love us. Is that too much to ask?"

Blaine pulled away, taking Santana's hands in his. "Straight isn't always easier, Santana. Just look at everyone around us." He lifted her chin so that their eyes met. "I have a boyfriend I love very much out there who has saved my life and is planning on singing to me one of the greatest love songs ever written. And you have a girl who you desperately love and she loves you back. But Santana, you are going to lose her to someone else if you don't stop hiding behind Puck and Sam and any other guy you can get your hands on. You have to be willing to be open, she wants the world to know that you love her."

Santana's eyebrows raised, the sarcasm trying to sneak its way back in, though she fought it. "You're one to talk. I've seen how you and Kurt look at each other. Mike and Tina make out every chance they get while you guys shy away from each other. If you two can't be open, who can?"

"Just because we're careful Santana, doesn't mean we're not open. Perhaps you forgot the duet we sang at Regionals, or the two songs I sang to him in the courtyard, or us dancing together at prom? There is a difference between protecting yourself from violence and hiding your true self from everyone. I learned that the hard way. Maybe it's a fine line sometimes, but Kurt and I are trying our best. We're not always going to get it right." He brushed Santana's hair away from her face. "It would be easier to do it together."

Santana looked at Blaine. He always made it sound so easy, and yet he had struggled so much to get where he was at. "You know, I've tried to talk with my parents about it. They've made it very clear what their expectations are, and that is not a lesbian daughter. It's not like it was for you. I don't want to lose them. They are good to me and I love them. I can't hurt them like that."

"All you are doing is hurting yourself then, Santana." Santana looked away from those compelling eyes. "People here will support you. You just have to give them a chance."

Santana wanted so much to be strong enough, to be able to sing her love to Brittany, even if it was just in the choir room and not the courtyard. But she knew she couldn't. "No, they won't Blaine. Coach Sylvester just made that very clear."

Blaine wondered what the hell Sue Sylvester had said to Santana to make her believe that. Kurt had many negative things to say about the woman, but he always got the impression that she was supportive of him



and his sexuality. Besides, Blaine had heard the stories of Santana standing up to Coach Sylvester last year. He couldn't understand why she was letting the coach control her this year. First the purple piano, now this. He grew angry, not with her but for her. "Why do you let her rule your world Santana?"

Santana looked at him with both fear and determination. "You don't get it Blaine. You grew up in Westerville with the world at your fingertips. I grew up in Lima Heights Adjacent. Coach Sylvester is my only ticket out."

"Alright guys," Mr. Schuester called the club to order. "I gave you all the assignment to find a song to sing to another club member. I hope this will give you the opportunity to show not only your unity but your support of one another," he said glancing to Santana. She offered him a curt smile. "Is anybody ready?"

Rachel's hand shot up but Blaine spoke first. "Mr. Scheuster," he said cautiously raising his hand. It was still taking time for him to get adjusted to New Directions, where it wasn't just assumed he would always sing. Finn had been right about one thing, it was quite different from the Warblers. "I have something prepared."

Kurt bounced up in his chair with a huge grin and clapped silently. Blaine had refused to tell him what he was singing, and Kurt had many many ideas in his head about the songs he'd love to hear his boyfriend sing to him.

"Very well Blaine," Mr. Scheuster said taking a seat off to the side. "The floor is yours."

Blaine leaned over to Kurt and whispered in his ear, "I hope this helps you understand." Kurt noticed he wasn't smiling and he didn't have his usual playfulness to his words. As Blaine walked to the front of the room and whispered to Brad, Kurt sat confused. *What the heck did that mean? He was singing him a love song, right?* Kurt's excitement was quickly replaced by apprehension.

Blaine turned to face all the choir members in their seats. For the first time, he was nervous. He had never performed here for them before, and that was enough to get his heart racing but there was more. He fully expected that Kurt wouldn't be pleased with his song choice or the person he chose to sing to. But as he had reminded Santana, he had already declared his love for Kurt openly. That wasn't what was most important right now. He feared revealing secrets that weren't his to tell, but nevertheless, he felt an

overwhelming need to do this. He took a deep breath and nodded to Brad. No one was surprised, when he sang Katy Perry.

*She is a pyramid*

*But with him she's just a grain of sand*

*This love's too strong like mice and men*

*Squeezing out the life that should be let in*

Blaine's eyes rested on Santana, and she gazed back, staring as if into his soul. She immediately had known the song was for her. He was concerned that she would be angry at his song choice, but she didn't seem to be. She broke his gaze and got lost in the words.

*She was a hurricane*

*But now she's just a gust of wind*

*She used to set the sails of a thousand ships*

*Was a force to be reckoned with*

Kurt's first thought; however, was Hell to the No. First Blaine leaves Kurt to meet with her and then he's singing to her in the choir room? He had expected a love song to him, something personal and meaningful to him, to declare his love for Kurt in front of all his friends. Instead, all of Blaine's emotion was pouring out to Santana. The jealousy he hated so much rushed back, and he gripped his seat hard to contain it.

*She could be a Statue of Liberty*

*She could be a Joan of Arc*

*But he's scared of the light that's inside of her*

*So he keeps her in the dark*

*Oh, she used to be a pearl*

*Yeah she used to rule the world*

*Can't believe, she's become, a shell of herself*

*Cause she used to be a pearl*

Santana felt her eyes fill with tears despite her desperate attempts to contain herself. Blaine was singing straight to her, the whole glee club would know it and wonder why. She stole a glance to Brittany next to her. Britt was looking sideways at her and saw her best friend's tears. Quietly, she took Santana's hand and squeezed. Brittany understood. *Brittany always understood*, thought Santana.

*She was unstoppable*

*Moved fast just like an avalanche*

*But now she's stuck deep in cement*

*Wishing that they never ever met*

*She could be a Statue of Liberty*

*She could be a Joan of Arc*

*But he's scared of the light that's inside of her*

*So he keeps her in the dark*

*Oh, she used to be a pearl*

*Yeah she used to rule the world*

*Can't believe she's become a shell of herself*

*Cause she used to be a -*

*Do you know that there's a way out*

*There's a way out, there's a way out, there's a way out*

*You don't have to be held down*

*Be held down, be held down, be held down*

Santana heard Blaine's words but still struggled to believe them. Was there really a way out for her? Blaine seemed happier since coming to McKinley, despite losing so much that was important to him. Would it be the same for her? She had spent a lifetime hiding away anything that would prevent her from getting to the top. She squeezed Brittany's hand tightly and glanced to her. Brittany gave her the small smile that made Santana's heart beat fast.

*Cause I used to be a shell*

*Yeah I let him rule my world*

*My world, oh yeah*

For the first time, Blaine turned to Kurt, eyes soft, loving and soothing. He saw Kurt's anger and jealousy flicker, before it melted away for the moment. Blaine's eyes pleaded for Kurt to understand.

*But I woke up and grew strong*

*And I can still go on*

*And no one can take my pearl*

Kurt heard Blaine and did understand. This wasn't about Blaine having feelings for Santana. This was about all that had happened with his father. Being abused and confined, forced into a closet from which he desperately wanted to escape. Always the mentor and protector, Blaine wanted to give to the girl the courage that a year ago he had offered Kurt. Kurt glanced at Santana, and saw tears in her eyes as she tightly gripped Brittany's hand. Kurt didn't know what was going on with Santana and understood that it wasn't Blaine's place to tell him. Santana still scared him, but if Blaine felt a kinship with her, Kurt knew he would have to learn to accept it. Pride returned, and love, for the beauty of Blaine's soul.

*You don't have to be a shell*

*You're the one that rules your world*

*You are strong, and you'll learn that you can still go on*

*And you'll always be a pearl*

*She is unstoppable.*

Blaine's eyes bore into Santana's as he sang the last line. He desperately wanted her to feel it and to own it. His performance was profound and Santana couldn't ignore it if she tried. He made her look inside herself, made her believe in herself. Unlike anyone else in this school, Blaine had once been where she was now; scared with a secret that her family wouldn't support. As the other members of the New Directions applauded Blaine, she too applauded quietly, tears in her eyes. The two exchanged no words, but their gaze said it all. She would find a way out.

Mr. Scheuster patted Blaine on the back, bringing him out of the moment. "Thank you Blaine, that was fantastic. He sets a high bar for the rest of you tomorrow."

Everyone stood to go, and Blaine met Kurt by his seat. He took Kurt's hands. "Are you mad at me?" he asked with a knowing smile.

Kurt looked down at their intertwined fingers. "I was," he shyly admitted, looking up into Blaine's shining hazel eyes. "I was looking forward to you singing to me and I was disappointed. But no. It was beautiful. You are beautiful," he said placing a hand on Blaine's heart. "I understand, I think." Kurt paused. "I still don't love it, you and her, but I understand."

Blaine kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you," he said.

They gathered their satchels and said goodbye to the others. Kurt was going home with Finn to work in the garage. Blaine had work this evening.

"You owe me another Katy Perry song," Kurt teased him.

Blaine leaned in to whisper in Kurt's ear, "Don't you worry your pretty little head. I plan to sing you *Peacock* the next time I have you alone." Blaine smiled naughtily and let go of Kurt's hands. As he confidently walked out the door, he left an extremely flushed Kurt behind. This "tease and run" exit that Blaine kept making was really starting to wear on his resolve. Kurt would have to do something about that.

## ***Chapter Six: Phone Call***

Blaine stumbled up the stairs to the spot tower in the school auditorium. Kurt's hands covered his eyes as he carefully made his way behind his boyfriend. When they reached the top, Kurt released his hands and grinned widely. Blaine looked down to see a beautiful picnic blanket, set up with fruit, cheese, a diet coke for Kurt and a regular coke for him. Blaine turned to Kurt in wonder, eyes dancing, lips smiling.

"This is amazing, Kurt. Thank you!"

Kurt beamed. "Well then, sit down and eat. Rehearsal starts in 20 minutes."

The two sat in "their spot" where Kurt had watched Blaine's audition. Blaine took Kurt's face gently and kissed him quickly before he dove into the food. Kurt smiled. He knew that Blaine would be hungry after school and would need something to energize him before rehearsal. He enjoyed taking care of Blaine. Since Santana's scathing comments and his heart to heart with his father, Kurt had done a lot of thinking about how he treated Blaine. He was determined to become as perfect a boyfriend as was Blaine.

Blaine took a break from eating to look at his gorgeous boyfriend. He couldn't help but smile and lean in to kiss him. Here was the only spot in school, away from the prying eyes of jocks, where they both felt safe to be affectionate with each other. Kurt leaned into the warm, loving kiss and closed his eyes. He thought about how much he loved this, how much he loved Blaine, and how much he wanted moments like these to last forever.

Blaine broke away from the kiss, smiled at Kurt with sparkling eyes, and grabbed another piece of fruit. "I love this spot," Blaine said dreamily staring at the stage.

"Me too," Kurt answered wistfully. "Soon, we'll make love here."

Blaine nearly choked on the apple he had just taken a bite of and turned quickly to face Kurt. Kurt was blushing a shade of pink that Blaine had never seen before, but was grinning sheepishly at Blaine.

Blaine took Kurt's hand and intertwined their fingers. He chuckled warmly. "What did you just say?" Kurt had still been insisting he wasn't ready. For Kurt to even suggest that he might be was music to Blaine's ears, but he wanted it to be for the right reasons.

"Doesn't every thespian want to make love in an empty theater, lit only by stage lights?"

"Yes," Blaine admitted while his heart skipped a beat. He felt butterflies just from Kurt talking about making love with him. "But I thought you weren't ready. What's this about?"

"Well, maybe I am."

Blaine studied him. "Is this because of Santana?"

Yes. "No," Kurt lied.

"You're lying," Blaine knew Kurt better than he knew himself. "Kurt, please, don't do this to prove something to her, or to me," He took Kurt's other hand and squeezed them both tightly. "I am gay and I'm yours. Even if she were a gay man, I wouldn't look twice at her, because I only have eyes for you. "

"Blaine, I'm not. Please trust me. I adore everything that you just said, but I get that you and Santana are just friends. I admit I don't like it, I worry that she'll hurt you, but I get it. So it's not about that. But yes, she made me think about some things. So did this whole thing with the show."

"What did you think about?" Blaine asked seriously.

Kurt lowered his eyes. "That I need to stop being so jealous. I have to stop being afraid to show you how I feel." He looked up and loved poured out of both sets of eyes. "And I need to trust you and not hold you back. From anything."

As Blaine gazed at Kurt with pure adoration, both boys heard Artie come into the auditorium below them, with Coach Beiste pushing him behind. They smiled and started to pack up the picnic basket, Blaine stealing one more kiss before getting up. "Come to dinner at my house tonight. My mom's making Pancit." At Kurt's confusion, he added "It's a Filipino noodle dish. You'll love it."

"I'd love to," Kurt said grabbing the picnic basket. "I just have to work at the garage for an hour or two and then I'll meet you there. Have a good rehearsal!" Kurt dashed down the stairs and out to his car, smiling all the way.

"This is really delicious, Mrs. Anderson," Kurt said.



"Blaine, please get your boyfriend to start calling me Amy," Blaine's mother joked.

Both boys laughed. "I keep trying Mom," Blaine said, "But he's so stubborn."

They all sat around the kitchen table at Blaine's small apartment. He and his mother had lived there for a little over a month now, and it was finally starting to feel a bit like home. Blaine's mother had put more Filipino touches in the apartment than had been at the house with Colonel Anderson. The home had primarily wooden furniture, with an earthy décor. The windows were covered with lace white curtains. In the corner of the living room was a huge earthen pot filled with coins, and one table had a lamp made of Capiz shells. Blaine's room was the only one that remained as it had before, minus the army motif found at his father's home. Blaine's guitars had a prominent place in his room.

They three talked about West Side Story and how rehearsals had been going. Mrs. Anderson asked Kurt all about his run for Class President, and they discussed Kurt's ideas to win. In the past month, Kurt and Blaine's mom had spent a lot of time getting to know each other and they really enjoyed each other's company. Blaine spent much of their time together just watching and smiling as the two of them acted like old friends. Coming from a home where both he and his mother were terrified to be themselves, the freedom they both felt now was remarkable. Blaine's thoughts drifted to Santana. He wondered if his home was like this before, if his family had gotten along, would he have been so willing to disrupt that?

The lighthearted conversation between Kurt and Amy was interrupted by a ringtone. Blaine looked at his mother and giggled. "Mom, you know there are no cell phones at the table!" he teased.

Amy Anderson looked sheepishly at her son, who was absolutely right. She had made the rule as soon as they moved into the home. She took the cell phone out of her pocket and glanced at the text message as she laughed with her son. Blaine's smile disappeared when he noticed his mother's laughter stop instantly.

"What is it," he asked, concerned.

She shook her head. "It's nothing, don't worry about it." She tried to put the phone away but Blaine placed his hand on hers and stopped her.

"It's not nothing, Mom, I can tell." Kurt noticed Blaine's fear rise to the surface, but it came out as anger.

"Not now Blaine, we'll talk about it later," she said glancing at Kurt.

"I don't hide things from Kurt, Mom, not anymore," he said and went to grab the phone.

She pulled the phone away. "It's from your father Blaine."

Kurt turned to Blaine. Blaine had frozen in place. His mouth had dried immediately. His heart beat faster. His mind raced. Kurt reached for his hand and squeezed, bringing Blaine out of a spiral that in the past had led to flashbacks. Kurt's touch brought him back to reality. Blaine licked his lips. With a small voice, he asked "What does he want?"

Mrs. Anderson looked at her son apprehensively. "He wants to see you," she told him.

In an instant, Blaine shot up out of his chair, almost losing Kurt's grip. "No!" he yelled.

"Blaine," she said calmly. "Sit down, let's talk about this."

"There's nothing to talk about. I am not visiting him. What does he want me to do, come over and hang out like nothing ever happened? Like he's father of the year?" Blaine's eyes dashed back and forth and the look scared Kurt. The last time he had seen Blaine like this, Blaine had accidentally hit him.

"Please calm down son. He just wants you to come for dinner some time, that's all."

"Absolutely not," Blaine shook his head. "No."

"Blaine, he's willing to have Kurt join you."

That froze both boys in their tracks. Kurt's gaze shifted from Blaine to Mrs. Anderson. "What?" he asked softly.

"His text says that if the only way Blaine will come is with you, then he is willing to do that."

Kurt started to answer, but Blaine cut him off. "No!" Blaine threw his hands up in the air letting go of Kurt. "I'm not going to do this," he yelled, as he stormed off to his bedroom and slammed the door shut.

Amy looked desperately at Kurt with tears in her eyes. Kurt stood up. "I'll go talk to him," he reassured her.

"If he says no, he may not get this chance again. If his father wants to apologize, wants to develop a relationship with him," her voice trailed off as tears fell down her face. "Kurt, he can't miss that opportunity."

Kurt looked at her for a moment, thinking on what she said. "Mrs. Anderson, I will try to get Blaine to go. But with all due respect, if Colonel Anderson is only going to give him one chance, then maybe it's not a chance worth taking."

Blaine was curled up on his bed trying to stem the tide of a panic attack when he heard a knock at the door. He tried to ignore it. But he couldn't ignore Kurt's pleas. "Blaine," Kurt asked gently. "Please let me in."

Blaine got up and turned the doorknob, opening the door just slightly, then went to sit on the edge of his bed. Kurt opened the door the rest of the way, closing it behind him. He remained at the door, studying his boyfriend. Blaine's hazel eyes were frenzied. Kurt had seen him like that only twice before, but he knew enough to keep his distance.

"Don't try to get me to go Kurt, please," Blaine pleaded.

"Blaine, we talked about this," Kurt said. "We talked about how your father may change his mind, now that things are different." September 20 had been a momentous day for Blaine. As they had on July 24 when New York legalized same-sex marriage, the two boys had sat in front of the TV and YouTube all day watching story after story of gay and lesbian soldiers coming out, some even getting married. Blaine spent much of the day in tears, wondering what this meant for himself and his father. But days and weeks passed, and he heard nothing.

"I can't take that chance," Blaine said quietly.

"Why not?" Kurt challenged.

Blaine had allowed himself to get his hopes up too high too often. "Kurt, he didn't just not accept me for who I was. He punished me for it. When I finally stood up to him, he threw me out. I thought Burt could change his mind, he couldn't. I thought he might call a month ago. He didn't. How many times am I going to let him break my heart?" His eyes drifted once again into the faraway look that broke Kurt's heart.

Kurt wanted nothing more than to run to Blaine, hold him in his arms, and take all the pain away. But he knew that sympathy would get him nowhere right now. No, Blaine needed to fight.

"So," Kurt said crossing his arms, putting on a sarcastic tone. "Not only do you sing to Santana instead of me, but everything you sung to her was a lie?"

Blaine snapped out of it and shot an incredulous look at Kurt. "What?"

Kurt had Blaine's attention now. "Didn't you say that you were strong? That he couldn't rule your world anymore? Didn't you say that you wouldn't be held down by him anymore?"

Blaine looked away. "I'm just so scared, Kurt."

Kurt closed the distance between them and knelt down before Blaine, taking the boys hands in his own. He gazed upon the beautiful face of the remarkable boy that showed his vulnerability only to Kurt behind closed doors. "I know you are, Baby. But you have to practice what you preach, right?"

Blaine turned to him, eyebrows raised, questioning.

Kurt gave him a small smile. "You're helping Santana come out, right?" Kurt asked, already knowing the answer.

Blaine looked at him, trying to decide whether or not to answer, then nodded slightly.

"Then show her how it's done," Kurt ordered. "Being out is a process, not a moment. You help me. You help Santana. Help yourself. Have dinner with your father Blaine. Don't run anymore. *You* are unstoppable. *This* is your way out."

Blaine slid off the bed and onto the floor with Kurt so that they were eye level. "He's hurt me so much Kurt. How do I forgive him. How do I even try to win with him?"

Kurt knew that Blaine was talking about a deeper forgiveness than he could muster. He thought that discussion was better suited to Blaine's best friend. "Talk to Nick about forgiveness, that's his area of expertise." To be honest, Kurt hated Blaine's father, but he would never tell Blaine that. Nick had more patience, and more faith. He had also been around longer. He'd been the first to get Blaine to open up

about what was going on in the Anderson household, last winter. Nick was spiritual, believed in God, and was Blaine's best friend. Forgiveness was the type of thing Nick was much better at handling than Kurt.

"As for winning," Kurt continued, "you and I go to dinner. He invites us inside, we hold hands, he speaks to us respectfully and with interest, and we end the evening with no battles, no hurtful words, and an invitation to return. That's how you win."

Blaine wrapped his arms around Kurt, and kissed him deeply. "I love you, Kurt Hummel."

"I love you too, Blaine Anderson," Kurt said, embracing him as if to never let go.

## ***Chapter Seven: Pot O'Gold***

Santana and Brittany sat at Breadstix, having just finished their meal. The night had been magical. Everything was perfect. Brittany was beautiful. The conversation about leprechauns and Shelby's choir only fueled Santana's desire for more.

"But in the meantime, I do have one more wish," Santana said with a sparkle in her eye. "I wish you could hold my hand."

Brittany smiled, the glowing smile that made her whole face light up. She gently reached out and took Santana's hand. Santana stared at it in wonder. She would have bet a hundred dollars that true sparks flew from their fingertips meeting. She smiled in amazement, but quickly remembered they were in public. She looked around at the other guests. "Well like, under the napkin." She said, taking one of the red dinner napkins and placing it over their hands.

Brittany smiled and helped Santana cover them precisely. She smiled. "Is that better?" she asked.

Santana smirked.

The waitress came over leaving them with the desert menu. "What do you think Britt? Wanna get dessert?"

Brittany glanced at the menu and looked up flirtily. "Definitely," she smiled and winked.

Santana blushed, and Brittany was quiet proud of herself. The waitress returned. "Triple Chocolate Cake to go please," Santana asked with as bitchy a face as she could muster.

When the dessert arrived, they paid the check and drove back to Brittany's house. They met Rory in the living room. Brittany immediately went over to him and kissed him on the cheek. "Hello my leprechaun. Did you have a good day?"

Rory's grin made Santana want to throw up. "Mighty fine day today," Rory told Brittany.

Santana grabbed her hand and pulled her upstairs. "Come on Britt, let's go."

"Bye lepruchan," Brittany waved with a sweet smile as she and Santana headed upstairs.

Brittany and Santana collapsed on the bed with their chocolate cake and one plastic fork. Santana grabbed the fork first and cut a bite. She smiled at Brittany as she fed her the cake, and laughed when a bit remained on her lips.

"You missed a bit," Santana said seductively. She leaned in and kissed Brittany's lips, licking the chocolate off, but going no further.

"I love this," Brittany announced cheerily. "A real date, dessert, you and me licking chocolate off each other. I've been so lucky since the leprechaun came into my life."

Santana rolled her eyes. She knew that kid had the hots for Brittany and she had no love lost for a boy that would prey on Brittany's innocence just to get her in the sack. It was the greatest part of her best friend, and she wouldn't let anyone ever take advantage of that, not Kurt Hummel and certainly not this Rory kid.

"I don't think it's the leprechaun, sweetheart," Santana said caringly. "I've been...I've been talking to Blaine."

"Well I know that, Santana, he sang to you and everything. That was really sweet, by the way."

"Yeah well, he's been helping me...you know...be more comfortable...about all this," Santana stumbled through her explanation. "I mean, he's annoying and everything, sometimes he and Kurt are so lovesick it makes me want to hurl pompoms, but they're so..."

"Free?" Brittany offered, cocking her head to the side.

"Yeah," Santana conceded quietly, picking at an unraveling thread of the comforter.

"Is that what you want, 'Tana?" Brittany asked quietly. "To be free...with me?"

Santana knew the answer but it was so hard to say it aloud. She was quiet for a minute, then nodded her head. Her voice broke. "Yeah. That's exactly what I want."

"Oh, you know what, I get it," Santana said snarkily. "Since Mercedes is gone this year, it's going to be the Blaine and Rachel show. Yay!"

Blaine rolled his eyes, uncomfortably. Santana drove him crazy. He was used to Kurt's emotions running away with him, but Santana was so hot one minute and cold the next that it was becoming dizzying. He wondered briefly if this is what his friends at Dalton had suffered with for the months before he had finally started dating Kurt.

"You all know it's true," she said, turning to the rest of the Glee club. Kurt sat with his arms crossed, annoyed as always at Santana. But she knew she had Finn worried, and almost relished it. "Noted. Good to know," she said as she walked out the door.

"Thank you Santana," Mr. Schuester replied.

As soon as class was dismissed, Blaine bolted to go find Santana. He saw her head around the corner of the hallway, and nearly knocked over some new kid in green, apologizing profusely, as he ran to keep up with her storming off to the courtyard.

"What the hell, Santana?" he yelled, when he finally caught up with the girl.

"Don't get in my face, Blaine. I'm joining Shelby's choir and I'm taking Brittany with me. This is something I need to do." Santana bit back.

Brittany arrived at the same time and made to approach them but Santana gave her a look. The blond went to sit at a table with some of the other Cheerios, frowning every once in a while in Santana's direction.

Blaine turned back to Santana. "Those guys are your friends, and you're just going to tear them apart? The Blaine and Rachel show? Really?" Blaine was hurt and confused by her comments. "You have an amazing role in West Side Story and you are just fantastic! I'm sure when Mr. Schuester hears you, you'll get your fair share of solos. From what I've heard, he never listens to Rachel about set lists anyway."

Santana looked around and lowered her voice. "It's not about that and you know it." Santana glanced at Brittany, who was laughing with the other girls. She turned back to Blaine and spoke quietly so no one could hear. "We had a date the other night. I tried to hold her hand, but," she hesitated, "I got scared. It made me realize even more how much I want this. But I can't do it with them all around. Puck, Quinn, Finn, Artie, Kurt...it's too hard."

"Kurt would never judge you, Santana," Blaine immediately interjected defensively.



"Kurt judges everyone, you need to take off the love sick, puppy dog, rose colored sunglasses, boyfriend," Santana snapped. She took a deep breath and sighed. "All I'm saying is, I need someplace fresh. Someplace without so much history and memories. Like you had at Dalton."

Blaine shook his head at Santana. "Dalton was a place to hide, not to live."

"Well, maybe I need that first," she said quietly. "A bridge to cross. Blaine, I'm trying here. I want what you and Kurt have. Brittany and I...we've done all the stuff that you and Kurt haven't..."

"Wait a minute," Blaine stopped her, face scrunched. "How do you know what we have and haven't done?"

"Please Blaine, I can tell by looking at a person whether or not they have tapped it. You and Kurt still ooze with the innocence of lambs." Blaine stood dumbfounded, not knowing what to say. "Look, my point is, what you and Kurt have...everyone can see the love that radiates in your eyes and flows from every fiber of your being; it's so easy that people like Rachel and I could never get in the middle of it no matter how hard we try." Blaine scoffed. "That's what I want with Brittany. But I can't do it in there. Not with our past haunting us every step of the way. I have no issues with Mercedes. Shelby's group is.."

"Safe?" Blaine offered. Santana nodded.

Blaine studied Santana's face. Her eyes were sad but hopeful. Her fingers fidgeted where usually she was strong. Her gaze kept straying to Brittany, watchful and loving. He took her hand and she only startled slightly. "I'm sorry. You go after everything you want. Don't let anyone stop you from getting the one thing that means everything. It is worth it in every way. I'm proud of you."

Santana smiled shyly and squeezed his hand. He watched as she ran off to join the other Cheerios, standing strongly by Brittany's side.

"It's time to go Finn," Carole told her son. "Go check with Kurt and see if he's ready yet, please."

Finn climbed the stairs to Kurt's room and knocked on the door, entering once Kurt answered. He finally learned to knock after frequently walking in on Kurt and Blaine while the parents weren't home.

"Mom wants to know if you're almost ready," he said, glancing over Kurt's outfit and feeling underdressed.

"Yeah," he answered, "I'll be there in just a minute." Kurt answered. He was just finishing up his skin routine and putting on his last accessories.

Finn shuffled there, trying to decide whether to leave or not, then turned back to Kurt, hands in his pockets. "Is Blaine coming to this dinner?" he asked nervously.

Kurt grew tense at Finn mentioning Blaine's name. "No, Dad wanted this to be just us." Kurt turned on him, fire in his eyes. Finn instinctively stepped back. "What the hell is your problem with Blaine lately anyway? You guys got along so well all last year and all summer. In fact, you were fine until Blaine transferred."

Finn knew this argument was coming. He was surprised it had taken so long for Kurt to speak up. He had a speech prepared, but despite being smaller, Kurt could be intimidating when he got angry, and his words disappeared. "Blaine thinks that just because he was the leader of the Warblers that he can waltz into New Directions and take over. Heck, he's even got Rachel talking about him constantly, comparing me to him, begging for duets with him, despite the fact that they have a million West Side Story songs together."

"He doesn't think that Finn," Kurt yelled with exasperation, "he's just trying to fit in."

"Well, he's trying too hard," Finn replied. "He still loves those guys at Dalton. He texts them all the time, even during rehearsals. What if he's just trying to sabotage us for Sectionals?"

"You have got to be kidding me, Finn!" Kurt was incredulous. "Blaine would never do that!"

"I think there's a lot Blaine would do that you don't know about!" Finn yelled back, instantly regretting his statement.

Kurt's eyes narrowed. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Finn hesitated. "I just mean...people don't think I notice things, but I do. Blaine puts on a face for the world. He's not real. Last year he kissed Rachel, now he's hanging around Santana. I just...I worry about you Kurt. I don't want anybody hurting you," he finished quietly.

Kurt's anger dissipated slightly at the genuine concern he saw in his brother's eyes. "Blaine would never hurt me Finn. He's used to hiding, seeking people's approval. He hates conflict and he tries to erase it where he can with song. You know what he's been through."

"I do Kurt. I just hope he's not using that to charm everyone into believing he's someone he's not."

Kurt did not like hearing anyone talking badly about Blaine, but he especially hated it from Finn. "Blaine's a natural leader Finn. And instead of getting angry at him for it, maybe you just need to step it up a bit. I saw you trying to protect that new kid. It's nice."

"It's what I never did for you Kurt," he said, lowering his eyes. "He reminds me of you a bit."

"So just be *that* guy. And lay off of Blaine. He doesn't deserve it."

The boys turned when they heard a yell from the kitchen. "Kids, you ready?"

Finn and Kurt looked at each other. Finn turned to the door. He made no promises in regards to Blaine, a fact that did not go unnoticed by Kurt. Kurt sighed, and followed his brother out the door.

"All right ladies, take a break," Shelby called to Santana, Brittany and Mercedes.

The three had been working the vocals for Candyman for 2 hours now. The Troubletones were not like New Directions at all. They planned and they worked, and Shelby worked them hard. Mercedes was right, she was a fabulous vocal coach, but she could also be relentless. Mercedes was getting used to it, but it was all new to Santana and Brittany. Despite being quite used to Cheerios practice, this was different. When Shelby gave them a rest, Santana collapsed on the floor.

"Here." Brittany handed Santana water, sitting next to the black haired girl hip-to-hip facing her. She reached over Santana, placing her hand on the floor next to her, nearly hugging her. Santana initially bristled at the intimacy, but tried to relax. She sat up to drink, bringing her dangerously close to Brittany's lips. Every instinct told her to kiss them. Her eyes began to dart around and her heart sped up.

Brittany grasped her hand, bringing Santana's gaze back to her. The blond smiled at her, and though Santana's nerves relaxed a bit, her breathing continued to quicken. "I don't have any chocolate, but my lips are still sweet," Brittany quietly remarked, eyebrows raised.

Santana blushed and looked around. Shelby was not paying any attention to them, rearranging a few bars of the song at the piano before starting again. Mercedes was sitting in the corner texting, probably with

her new boyfriend. Sugar was off doing some sort of dance and singing horribly off key. Santana turned back to Brittany. *So beautiful*, she thought. She took a deep breath, and gave her a quick peck on the lips.

Brittany beamed. "Even better than chocolate!" she said. Santana checked the room nervously and was pleasantly surprised that no one had moved or even seemed to notice.

She turned back to Brittany and laughed. "Definitely better than chocolate."

Kurt waited at the chairs with crossed arms, foot nearly tapping with impatience, as Blaine shook hands enthusiastically with the new kid. Finally, Blaine walked back to him and frowned at the glower on his boyfriend's face. "What?" he asked innocently, picking up his brown shoulder bag to leave.

"Have a thing for tenors do you?" Kurt said, his own black bag already looped over his arm.

Blaine looked back at Rory, then returned his gaze to Kurt with an amused grin, hazel eyes shining. "Rory is completely straight, don't you see how he stares at the girls?"

"Rory is Irish," Kurt retorted, eyebrows raised. "I know how you like your Irish tenors."

Blaine shook his head and took Kurt's hand, leading him out of the chorus room to the parking lot. The girls had rehearsal this afternoon to choreograph "America" so he finally had an afternoon off. "I think you have that backwards, sweetheart. If I recall correctly, it was you swooning over Irish boys when we went to see that production of *The Weir* this summer."

"Well, at least I'm not letting Rachel Berry smack my ass in the middle of the choir room. An ass, I should point out by the way, that is mine," Kurt said playfully.

"Halloween is over Kurt, and yet I still see before me a very scary green eyed little monster," he teased. As they arrived at Blaine's car, he pushed Kurt up against the door, glancing around quickly. He knew the hockey team was still at their practice and he could see the football team running laps on the field. He placed his hands on the door, trapping his boyfriend between them. He pressed his hips seductively into Kurt as his eyes darkened. "Am I forever going to be having to tame your jealousy, Kurt?"

Kurt bit his lip and flushed, feeling his own body shiver between Blaine's heat and the cold of the metal door. Blaine smiled at the small moan that escaped Kurt's lips. "Forever and ever, Mr. Anderson." Kurt sighed, barely containing his desire to devour him. "Now take me home."

## ***Chapter Eight: The First Time***

Blaine shook his head to clear it as he sat in the small break room watching the lean new Warbler head off to lacrosse practice. *That* was not at all what he had planned when he had come to Dalton today to invite his friends to the show. He put it behind him and made his way to the dormitory. He had come to talk to Nick but now he had even more questions.

He found the guys lounging around the common room, talking, laughing and still congratulating Nick on his phenomenal performance of *Uptown Girl*. They were teasing Nick for flirting with the French teacher, saying he was going to get her fired. He tried to brush them off but they were relentless. Nick was relieved when Blaine entered the room and attention turned to him.

"Hey guys, do you mind if I steal Nick for a minute?" Blaine asked.

"Finally broke free of Sebastian's grasp, I see," Trent teased. "Congratulations!"

Blaine looked at his friend with a bemused side-eye. "Sex on a stick, Trent? Really?"

All the guys laughed as Trent blushed and chuckled at Blaine. "Well, it's the truth and you know it. Kurt is the luckiest guy in the world."

"Thank you Trent," Blaine smiled warmly, "But I'm the lucky one." He turned to the new lead singer. "Ready Nick?"

"You two be good now!" Jeff called as they walked away. Both boys just shook their heads laughing.

Blaine beamed as he and Nick headed out alone onto the Dalton campus. "Why didn't you tell me you were singing lead?"

Nick grinned. "Wanted to surprise you at Sectionals. Now we'll have to alter the game plan! Why didn't you tell me you were coming by to visit?"

"Wanted to surprise *you*," Blaine smiled. "And the guys. Didn't know I would get a performance out of it. Nick, I'm so very proud of you. When you sang for me at Kurt's house in August, I had hoped I was passing the torch to you. But seeing you up there, I couldn't be happier for you."

Nick placed his hands in his pockets, humbly. "Thanks, brother."

"So tell me about this Sebastian guy?" Blaine said, warily.

Nick looked over considering his friend. "He's amazingly talented. Great singer, great dancer. Smart. Worldly. The guys think he's a blast," Nick paused and stopped. Blaine turned to him, waiting for the rest that Nick was leaving out. "And he's had five boyfriends already since the start of the year. Seems to enjoy breaking hearts. Be careful around him."

And there it was. Blaine nodded and started again down the path. He had thought just as much. "He asked why I left Dalton. I," he hesitated. "I didn't tell him. I'd prefer you guys don't either."

"We would never do that, that's your business. All the guys know that." Nick assured him.

Blaine had listened to everything Nick said about Sebastian, but he was still intrigued. It couldn't hurt to meet the guy once more for coffee. Maybe it was having that connection to Dalton, the chance to be that leader again. Maybe it was just the idea of having someone to talk to who didn't know anything about him or his past.

They walked in silence for a while. Nick let Blaine lead the way. Despite the excitement of the *Uptown Girl* performance, Nick could see Blaine was contemplative and it wasn't about Sebastian. He didn't think Blaine had come just to invite them to West Side Story.

The boys slowly came upon the Dalton chapel. The landscaping here was comforting and beautiful. Trees stood giving shade to stone benches that sat amongst gardens, bushes and a koi pond. Nick watched as Blaine sat on a bench at the edge of the pond placing his head in his hands for a moment watching the fish. This was one of Nick's favorite places on campus. When he needed to think, write, or just sit still for a moment, he came here. Now though, he just studied his friend. Something was clearly on his mind, but he allowed Blaine the time and space he needed to find his own words.

Finally, Blaine raised his head to meet Nick's eyes, remaining bent over, arms on his knees, hands clasped in front of him. "What do you think about forgiveness, Nick?"

Nick breathed in slowly, then blew out a breath. He took a seat in the grass on the other side of the bench, wrapping his arms around his pulled up knees. Blaine turned to meet his eyes.

"I think forgiveness is a complicated and wonderful thing," Nick started. "What's this about?" he asked, raising an eyebrow to Blaine.

Blaine took a deep breath. He struggled even to say the words. "My father wants me to come for dinner."

Nick scrutinized him. "And you don't want to." He didn't need to ask, Blaine's feelings were written all over his face.

Blaine shook his head. Tears were forming in his eyes and he told Nick the same thing he told Kurt. "He's hurt me so many times Nick. I don't know how much more I can endure."

"I think you're stronger than you think you are." Nick laid his hand on Blaine's clasped hands. "You asked me about forgiveness." Blaine nodded, eyes shining with unshed tears. "Forgiveness is a lot of things, and one of them is putting your past behind you so that you can live in the moment. It's not forgetting or saying that what happened was ok, but it's saying that you won't let it run your life anymore. So you need to ask yourself, do you need to see him, to do that?"

"So you think I should go," Blaine said with a hint of resignation.

Nick shook his head. "I think you have to do what's right for you when you're ready. And only you can decide if and when you're ready."

Blaine's tears started flowing. "I'm not doing well Nick." He rose to his feet, suddenly restless and pacing, running his fingers through his hair. "New Directions, it's not like here. Everyone fights all the time, no one supports one another, it's just a big battle of who is better than whom." Blaine hadn't realized how much he had been holding in. Mercedes and Santana's defection was one thing, but Finn's animosity really hurt him. He only ever tried to help the group, to create the brother and sisterhood that the Warblers so naturally possessed and that he missed so dearly. Knowing someone was always there for him, always ready to help, always there to pick up the pieces when another member fell apart. "I really miss you guys, everyday."

Nick got up and hugged the boy who let out a month of frustration until he relaxed into snuffles. "I told Sebastian my heart is at McKinley, and it is...he is. And things are wonderful with Kurt, Nick, I love him so much. But no matter where I am it seems, it's never enough. When will it all just be enough?"



Nick placed his hands on Blaine's shoulders and gripped him at arm's length. "We are *always* here for you. We will be at your shows, we will answer your texts and your calls, and anytime you need to escape, we are here. But Dalton was always an escape for you. Now it's time to deal with the real world."

"Like my father?" Blaine asked sadly.

"Like your father." Nick paused for a moment, letting everything sink in for Blaine. Then a thought popped into his head. "I once heard a quote about forgiveness. Do you want to hear it?" Blaine nodded. "Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is made clean again."

"I always used to pray for a miracle," Blaine whispered staring at the chapel.

Nick let go of the boy and placed his hands in his pockets, following Blaine's gaze. "So good or bad, maybe this is the answer."

Blaine rounded the corner of the hallway of McKinley, heading to calculus, when he saw Mike and his father arguing. Blaine's instincts were to allow them their privacy, but something in Mike's father's demeanor was way too familiar and warned him to stay. He discreetly moved within earshot.

"You need to learn the difference between grown up dreams and kid dreams," his father urged.

"I'm not going to be a doctor," Mike insisted. "I will be a professional dancer." His father scoffed. "I'll pay my own way through college; I don't want your money!"

Mr. Chang stared at his son with a look that Blaine recognized. He had seen it from his own father many times before. He felt chills up his spine. "As long as you continue to waste your life with this silly fantasy, you will no longer be my son."

Mike swallowed hard, locking his eyes with the man. He never had thought it would come to this. He had never wanted it to. But going through life without dance would be like drowning. He could not give it up. "Then I guess I don't have a dad anymore," he said with a resolve Blaine knew was likely soon to falter.

Mike stared off into nothingness as his father walked out. Blaine recognized the narrowing of focus, the sudden silence of the world around the boy. He waited. Soon, Mike came out of the haze and glanced around him. He caught Blaine's eye and immediately bristled, ready to bolt, embarrassed by being publicly reprimanded and disowned by his father, ashamed of how much he wanted to just break out in tears. No one would understand how he felt. But then, he remembered; Blaine would.

Blaine saw the flicker of recognition in Mike's face and he walked over. Blaine had always admired the boy, ever since he saw him dance for the first time during their benefit concert last year. They had shared some laughs during rehearsals for West Side Story. They had had some fun during Last Friday Night. But he had no idea that they shared something much more personal. Blaine touched Mike's arm. The boy was still shell-shocked.

"Do you need to get out of here?" Blaine asked quietly.

Mike shook his head. "I don't want to get you in trouble."

Blaine smiled. "It's ok. Really, it's not a big deal. We'll go for coffee, we'll come back before rehearsal. Ok?"

Mike didn't want either of them to get in trouble, but his mind was racing, his heart was broken, and he had no idea how he could possibly concentrate in classes. If he didn't clear his head, rehearsal this afternoon would be a wash as well, and wouldn't that have just proven his Dad right? He nodded to Blaine. "Ok."

Blaine took out his phone and shot off a quick text.

**Tina, Kurt: Mike's Dad just showed up at school and they had it out. I'm going to take him for coffee. Cover for us, be back in time for rehearsal. – Blaine**

He put his arm around Mike, and guided him toward his car. "Come on," he said soothingly.

They took the drive to the Lima Bean in uncomfortable silence until Blaine suggested they run their lines to distract Mike. They arrived, just as they finished their last scene. Blaine ordered for himself and briefly wondered, as Mike ordered, what the barrista must think of him now that he had been there with Kurt, Sebastian and Mike. He resolved to find another coffee shop and stop frequenting the Lima Bean with guys other than Kurt.

He and Mike settled at a table. He was reminded of a conversation with Burt in their living room, just after his father kicked him out. He suddenly understood how Burt must have felt that night. As he did with Santana, he waited in silence, until Mike was ready to talk. Finally, staring at his coffee, Mike spoke up. "Does it get easier?" he asked.

Blaine looked at him sadly. "I don't know," he answered honestly. It certainly wasn't easier yet for him, and in many ways it was harder. Dealing with the certainty of what he was going home to was a far cry better than facing the unknown in Blaine's opinion. Although his Dad still wanted him to come to dinner he had made no further attempts to see or talk to his son. Blaine was certain his father would not show up to any of his performances, despite mailing out a flyer himself.

Unknowingly, Mike was thinking the same thing. "Do you think I made the right decision?" Mike asked with sadness in his eyes.

Blaine blinked long and hard, then looked at the boy across from him. "I can't decide that for you. I only know that I did, no matter how hard it was or continues to be. At some point, every son chooses a different path than what their father wants. Most fathers don't walk away." He took a deep breath and glanced out the window. "Some do."

"Do they come back?" Mike asked quietly.

"I'll let you know." Blaine sighed, subconsciously rubbing his neck anxiously. He hadn't planned on telling anyone besides Nick until he and Kurt had decided what to do, but it seemed right. "My father wants Kurt and me to have dinner with him." He played with the lid of his own coffee cup, uneasy still with vulnerability amongst any of the McKinley kids aside from Rachel and Santana. But if he and Mike could truly be friends, maybe it would be a start.

"Are you going?" Mike asked curiously.

Blaine looked up. "Do you think I should?" he asked.

"I would," Mike answered confidently.

They both grew quiet as they finished their coffee. Blaine really didn't know what to do. Kurt said he should go. Nick and Mike both said he should go. All of them clearly knew what he was going through. So why was he gripping his cell phone, ready to push number 4 on his speed dial?

She came striding out of the auditorium, as Mike made his way inside. He had called her impulsively, hoping that of everyone, she would tell him not to go, not to give his father the satisfaction of winning another round. "You rang?" Santana demanded, hands on her hips standing over Blaine, attitude ripe for a fight.

Now he thought better of his call. Blaine put his hands up. "Nevermind, I son't want to talk to you if you're like this." he dismissed her with annoyance. Her opinion didn't really matter, he realized. He was just looking for someone else to validate what he already thought.

"Blaine, wait." Santana stopped him. "I'm sorry. Tough day."

"You want to talk about it?" Blaine didn't really feel up for it, but despite having a million thoughts running through his head he couldn't stop himself from offering support.

She considered him for a minute. "No, not really. Stop avoiding your own problems by solving mine. Come on boyfriend, what's on your mind."

Having foregone his original plan, he was about to tell her it was nothing, when a thought came to mind.

"What do you know about Scandals?" he asked, eyebrows scrunched, biting his lower lip. He had no idea if he would be grateful or regret it, but he knew no one else to talk to about it.

Santana studied him, crossing her arms across her chest and smiling. "Well, well," she said, circling him. Blaine lowered his head in exasperation but he also blushed, knowing she was checking him out and he brought this on himself. "No...you two haven't done the deed yet," she said coming back around to meet his gaze. Blaine hated the way she knew these things. "So Scandals is...a warm up?" she asked haughtily.

Blaine's blush grew deeper and he wanted to answer but could only shrug. Yeah, he was definitely regretting it.

"Nice, boyfriend!" she nodded approvingly. "When are you going?"

"We're umm," Blaine cleared his throat. "We're meeting a friend there tomorrow. After rehearsal."

Santana raised an eyebrow. "Interesting. What kind of friend?"

Blaine was certain this whole conversation was a very big mistake. "He's just a new Warbler that's been interested in getting to know me," he explained defensively. "He's just come to Ohio from Paris, and he's really talented, and he wants to lead the Warblers."

Santana laughed, already pegging this guy for a player, and one who had his eye set on Blaine at that. She would definitely need to meet this guy. "Oh, boy, Blaine Anderson, you sure know how to get yourself into a mess." Blaine wondered if someone had suddenly turned the heat up really high at McKinley. Or maybe he was getting a fever, because sweat was starting to pour out of him. "Now, don't take this the wrong way, because I think it's a fabulous lead up to finally gettin' a piece of Kurt Hummel's ass, but are you really sure he's agreed to this plan? Because Scandals just doesn't seem to be the place for an ultra-jealous, delicate guy such as Porcelain."

Blaine frowned, then lifted his chin defiantly. "We're being adventurous. Expanding our horizons. As artists."

"Oh ok," Santana nodded sarcastically. "Because to me it seems that you are trying to prove something." She softened her gaze as his face fell and tried to reassure him. "Look, there's nothing wrong with you two trying new things and being adventurous. I think it's great that you guys go out there and experience that kind of place and have a good time. Just make sure you're doing it for you, and not anyone else."

Blaine eyes reignited as he smiled. "Thanks Santana."

Santana turned to go back to rehearsal. "And don't be stupid! Kurt doesn't like stupid!" she called behind her.

He walked nearly a mile before his head cleared of the alcohol fuzziness and the echo of Kurt yelling ceased to ring in his ears. He then realized he was going in completely the wrong direction to get back home. Stealing himself to turn around and go back the other way, he suddenly remembered that Scandals was only a few miles from Lima Heights Adjacent and he pulled out his cell phone.

Santana arrived ten minutes later to find Blaine huddled up on the side of the road, the cool air slowly chilling his bones. She stopped next to him and he got up, wordlessly getting in and slamming the door. "I told you Kurt doesn't like stupid," Santana snarked.

"Shut up," he mumbled half-heartedly as he put his seat belt on. "Just drive."

"Where to boss?" she answered.

Shit. He threw his head back helplessly onto the headrest. Now that he was sobering up and his adrenaline was finally slowing from the fight with Kurt, he realized exactly just how much trouble he was going to be in if his parents found out. He used a fake ID to get into a gay bar where he got drunk and was late for curfew. And he did it on a school night, the one night this week his mother was actually home from work. His worries about Kurt swiftly were pushed to the back burner as he sat frozen in the seat. "If my mother finds out about this, 'Tana, I'm dead."

"Well then we're just going to have to make sure she doesn't find out," Santana said reasonably.

"No, Santana, I'm serious," Blaine panicked, not truly hearing her. "What the hell was I thinking? If she calls my Dad, he'll come over immediately. It'll be worse than ever. There'll be no way I'd be able to perform tomorrow."

She took his hand and squeezed hard trying to break his thoughts and tame the wildness that was growing his eyes. She could feel his pulse beating violently beneath her fingers and she reached a hand over to his face. "Blaine, look at me," she demanded with as much force as she could muster. He blinked and turned to her and she waited until his eyes started to focus. "Blaine, I'm not going to let them hurt you, okay? Can you stay over at my house tonight?"

Blaine shook his head. "Mom knows I was on a date with Kurt. I can't say I'm sleeping over there and she'll get suspicious about me sleeping at your house."

"Ok," Santana said thinking and she turned back to the wheel and started the car. "Then we get you some coffee at the Lima Bean, make sure you're totally sober, and I take you home. What time does she usually go to sleep?"

Blaine glanced at the clock. It was nearing midnight already. "Usually around 11 when she's home, but if I'm late for curfew she'll stay up."

"Text her now. Tell her you're on your way. Tell her you had a fight with Kurt and needed to walk it off and you just realized how late it was. That'll play into her Mama Hen side and hopefully when you get home she'll only care about making sure you're okay."

"Okay," Blaine said as he did exactly what Santana told him as they drove back to the center of town. His mother quickly responded with relief and a promise to talk when they got home if they wanted. Blaine told her he was exhausted and he just wanted to go to sleep, but he promised that they would talk soon.

"You're the best Santana," he told her when she'd come back with two coffees in her hand just as the employees closed up for the night.

"Tell me something I don't know, Boyfriend," she smirked then smiled softly as she drove him home.

*"I want to go to your house," Kurt whispered.*

Blaine and Kurt lay in each other's arms, more content than either had ever felt. Blaine couldn't think of a touch he loved more than Kurt's thumb gently rubbing against his chest. They had long ago found themselves at a loss for words, but they hadn't needed them anymore. They had found a new way of communicating, and words had paled in comparison. Now, as they settled into a comfortable place, nose to nose, Blaine's mind was settled for the first time in weeks.

"I love you," Blaine whispered.

"I love you too," Kurt smiled. The night had been magical. Everything he had imagined and more.

Blaine brushed Kurt's hair with his fingers. "Kurt, when you told me tonight that you were proud of me, that would have been enough to last me a lifetime. But then, you gave me *this*. And you made me remember something I never should have forgotten. When you sang Blackbird so many months ago, I realized that with you by my side, I could do anything. I knew then that together no one and nothing could stop us. But my father made me forget." Tears started to flow.

"Hush, darling." Kurt cursed this coming between them tonight, but he also understood. The night had made them extraordinarily vulnerable and his emotions were on the surface as well. He felt his own tears fall as he wiped away Blaine's.

"I'm ready to face him again," Blaine said firmly. "We can do it, I know we can. You and Nick were right, I have to do this. I know it will kill you to be by my side, believe me, but," he was rambling and he didn't know how to say what he wanted to say. His mind went back to his conversation with Nick. "Maybe this time will be my miracle. Maybe this time it will make everything, make us, be enough."

"I am *always* with you Blaine. Mind, body, and soul. There will never be moments that I will be prouder than the moments when I stand by your side. I told you when he first asked that I would go with you, and I have never changed my mind." Kurt held his hand up, and Blaine wrapped his fingers around them, smiling softly. Kurt pulled it to his chest. "We are one hand, one heart. When your heart breaks, mine does too. And when your heart heals, mine grows even stronger. And when we fight, we fight as one. We are in this together." Kurt placed Blaine's hand on his heart and let go, wrapping his arm around Blaine's back and pulling him in closely. "And I will never, ever, let you forget again."

Kurt closed the inch gap between them and his lips met Blaine's, salty with tears and hot with passion. It began soft and tender, but grew heated with the regrets of the past, the fears of today and the promise of forever. Kurt pulled away, but only for a moment. "How about another reminder?" he asked breathlessly.

Blaine smiled and crashed his lips back onto Kurt's. He nodded urgently, not letting go. Against his boyfriend's lips, he could only whisper one word, "Please."

Blaine and Kurt found Mr. Hummel in the audience after their second night performance. Carole was off talking to Rachel and Finn. Burt took Kurt in for a tremendous hug.

"You were amazing son. Stole the show! No offense, Blaine," Burt said, smiling proudly.

"None taken, sir, Kurt is incredible," he said, looking lovingly at his wonderfully perfect boyfriend. Kurt glowed with pride dressed in a ridiculously sexy outfit ready to go to the after-party that they would not be missing this evening.

Burt side-eyed Blaine, amused, then held his hand out. "You also did a damn good job Blaine. You should really be proud."

Blaine beamed. "Thank you. That really means a lot, I really hope you enjoyed it."



"So, I know you two are going to a party tonight, and you have your matinee tomorrow. What's on your schedule after that?" Burt asked.

Grabbing Kurt's hand, Blaine grew serious. "Sir." Burt raised an eyebrow. *So he was back to the Sirs, was he?* "There is something Kurt and I need to talk to you about." Kurt glanced over to Blaine and squeezed his hand.

Burt stared the boy down. "If it's about last night, Kurt already told me," he said.

Blaine stood in a stunned panic for a minute, until he remembered he had to breathe to survive. "Oh, God, no..." Blaine blushed with embarrassment. "It's not about that," he stammered, glaring at Kurt out of the corner of his eye. He would never in their lifetime get used to the fact that Kurt told his dad everything. Kurt shrugged a sheepish grin back at his boyfriend. He'd told his father when Burt and Carole had arrived back home this afternoon from Washington, but didn't think Blaine needed to know before tonight's performance. He knew it would be enough to rattle him with his father in the audience that night, and he wanted Blaine to be perfect.

"Well son, what is it?" Burt crossed his arms over his chest.

Blaine was still trying desperately to recover and it took him a moment. "A couple weeks ago, my father asked me over for dinner." he explained hesitantly. "He invited Kurt as well."

Burt studied them. Blaine looked incredibly anxious. Kurt stared at his father. He suspected that Kurt didn't really want to go, Kurt hated Blaine's father and likely always would for the pain he caused. But Kurt would also do anything for Blaine, and he understood how incredibly important this was. He turned to his son. "Well, Kurt, what do you want to do?"

"I want to be there to support Blaine," Kurt answered definitively.

Burt thought about it for a moment, weighing all the sides and options. "Kurt, you are almost 18, I'm not going to tell you no. But I am definitely worried about your safety. I need to know your plan if things get," he tried to find the right word, "messy."

Blaine spoke up first. "I know my father, Mr. Hummel. We'll get up and leave before anything bad happens. I won't let anything happen to Kurt, I promise. I'd call the police first."

Burt slowly nodded. "You call me to meet you at that coffee shop if you need to, you hear me?"

Kurt took his Dad's hand. "Yeah Dad, sure. Don't worry. Everything will be ok," he smiled, willing himself to believe it.

"Alright Blaine, tell him that Kurt is going with you."

Blaine breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you, sir."

"Stop it with the Sirs, Blaine," Burt reminded him gently. "Now, as for tonight," he said with a hard glance but a twinkle in his eye, "you two go to that party, and Kurt, you come home immediately after. Understood?"

"Understood Dad," Kurt said smiling and kissed his father on the cheek.

Kurt and Blaine grabbed hands and walked off to get their belongings. Everyone made final plans to get to the party at Brittany's house and the boys headed out to the car. Blaine started the engine, shifted into gear then grabbed Kurt's hand. He looked over to see Kurt grinning at him mischievously and he smiled back. "Detour?" he asked suggestively.

Kurt nodded firmly. "Detour."

## ***Chapter Nine: Mash Off***

Kurt stood outside the door after knocking until Mrs. Anderson opened it up. She greeted Kurt, with a broad and warm smile and took him immediately in her arms. "Kurt, it's so good to see you!" She gave him a kiss on the cheek.

"You as well, Mrs. Anderson," he said with a smile.

"How's the campaign going?" she asked as she went back to cleaning up in the kitchen. Kurt followed her in casually and placed his coat on the back of the kitchen chair. He had been here many times since they moved in, and it was all very comfortable now.

"The campaign is nasty," he answered frowning. "Truth is I am really starting to hate politics. But I'm not going to give up, what I believe in is important to me."

"Good boy," she said proudly.

"How's Blaine?" Kurt asked tentatively.

"He left the house singing and jumping around, and he came home singing and jumping around and he hasn't stopped yet. So I'd say he's very, very nervous."

"Yeah," Kurt agreed, hearing Blaine's voice coming quietly from his room. "He did quite the performance in Glee Club today." Kurt thought back to *Hot for Teacher*. Kurt had been stressing about tonight's dinner all day at school as well, and he had hoped to just make it through Glee Club so he could get home and get ready. Although he should have known, he wasn't prepared for Blaine's ridiculously sexy coping methods. He blushed just thinking of Blaine and the microphone stand, and the rest of the amazingly hot and provocative dance. He almost had to leave the room to save himself from embarrassment. It took all of his willpower to keep himself in control. He was pretty sure that if Blaine had caught his eye during the performance he would have lost it then and there. Blaine must have known because thankfully, he did a not.

Mrs. Anderson looked at the clock on the wall. "It's almost time for you boys to go. Why don't you go check on him."

Kurt took the brief walk down the hallway, listening to Blaine's voice grow louder as he approached. He recognized the song immediately. It was another Broadway show that Kurt had put on his iPod so many months ago. Kurt quietly stood, leaning in the doorway. He saw Blaine dressed conservatively in simple slacks and a button down. He lacked the flair that he had come to wear, with Kurt's encouragement, since moving out of his father's home. Blaine was looking out the window of his room, singing softly.

*I peer through windows, watch life go by*

*Dream of tomorrow and wonder why*

*The past is holding me, keeping life at bay*

*I wander lost in yesterday*

*Wanting to fly, but scared to try*

Blaine turned to see Kurt in the doorway. Kurt was gorgeous, in tight black slacks and a sweater that sat snugly on his torso. Blaine was reminded once again that Kurt was his very own angel. He smiled from across the room. His hazel eyes were vessels of love that shone only greater with the distance between them.

*But if someone like you, loved someone like me*

*Then suddenly nothing would ever be the same*

*My heart would take wing, and I'd feel so alive*

*If someone like you, loved me.*

Blaine closed the distance between them, taking Kurt's hands and pulling him to the center of the room, never taking his eyes from Kurt's.

*So many secrets I've longed to share*

*All I have needed is someone there*

*To help me see a world I've never seen before*

*A love to open every door*

*To set me free, so I can soar!*

Kurt teared up. He could tell Blaine was terrified. But at the same time, he trusted Kurt and that made Kurt's heart melt. Because he felt just as much that Blaine was his own savior who had come into his life to show him what love truly meant. And sometimes it meant being there for someone, even when you really wanted to be anywhere else. Kurt joined Blaine in the final verse.

*If someone like you, loved someone like me*

*Then suddenly nothing would ever be the same*

*My heart would take wing, and I'd feel so alive*

*If someone like you, loved me*

*Loved me, loved me!*

"Hi there." Blaine smiled shyly.

"Hi," Kurt returned the greeting. "Are you ready?"

"No," Blaine answered definitively. "But I've got you, so that's all I need."

Kurt kissed him softly on the lips, then held up his hand. Blaine wrapped his fingers around Kurt's and kissed Kurt's fingertips.

"If things get bad, I want you to go through the kitchen and out the back door," Blaine warned Kurt.

Kurt shook his head. "It's not going to get like that," he said trying to reassure himself as much as Blaine.

Blaine would hear none of it. "Promise me Kurt. I," he looked at the floor, face flushing with the shame of bad memories. "I can't bear the thought of you seeing something like that again."

Kurt understood. Placing a comforting hand on Blaine's cheek, he answered him. "I promise."

Hand in hand, they went out to the living room, said goodbye to Blaine's mother, and grabbed their coats. So began their journey to Colonel Anderson's for dinner.

Blaine and Kurt walked up to the front step of Blaine's old home still hand in hand. Blaine stopped mid air as he reached for the doorbell, looking down at their clasped hands.

Kurt followed his glance, then looked up at Blaine, remembering what happened the last time his father had seen them holding hands. "Do you want to..."

"No." Blaine said firmly. "This is how we win, remember? He wants us, this is us." Blaine rang the doorbell and grasped Kurt's hand even more strongly.

Colonel Anderson answered the door. To Kurt's surprise, the man appeared nervous, and he didn't miss the glance down to the boys holding hands. Kurt braced himself, but there was no explosion or nasty comment. Instead Blaine's father took a deep breath and opened the door wide. "Please come in," he offered.

Blaine would not let go of Kurt's hand, and Kurt felt that it might be the only thing holding him up. The two stood in the living room, unsure of what to do. Kurt looked around and saw the dinner table set for three with two place settings opposite one.

"So, how have you been Blaine?" The awkwardness in the room grew increasingly uncomfortable by the moment.

"Fine, Sir," Blaine answered, with his head down. Kurt frowned at how the confidence was just sucked out of Blaine in the presence of his father, and he gave Blaine's hand a squeeze.

The gesture did not go unnoticed. "And you, Kurt?" the Colonel asked with even greater uneasiness.

Kurt heard in his head his father's orders to be respectful toward Blaine's father. "I am well, Sir, thank you."

He turned back to Blaine. "How's your mother?" he asked with interest.

"No," Blaine answered firmly and his eyes shot straight up to his father's for the first time since entering the house. "I am not here to talk about Mom. You asked me over. And Kurt. I'm not here to do your dirty work."

His father shook his head. "That's not what I meant Blaine." He looked at his son and sighed. "I think maybe it's time I go get dinner."

As the Colonel left, Blaine visibly relaxed for the first time and let Kurt's hand go. He ran his hands over his face and through his hair. "I don't know if I can do this," he whispered.

Kurt took his shoulders and turned him face to face. "You *can* do this Blaine. Just hear him out. No battles, no hurtful words, and an invitation to return. Remember?"

"Yeah," Blaine said nodding and he went to take a seat at the dinner table on the side with the two chairs. Kurt followed and sat next to him.

A few minutes later, Blaine's father brought out dinner, and it looked like he'd made a significant effort. There was shrimp scampi as well as garlic bread and vegetables. They each served themselves, and engaged in some small talk that was stilted and awkward but, Kurt thought, at least it was a start. They talked about school and Blaine's grades, a sore subject between the two, but Blaine was doing well and was proud to tell his father so. Col. Anderson showed an interest in Kurt, however disingenuous it may have felt, and he informed the man that he was running for student council president. He decided to leave out the part about his anti-bullying platform. Kurt thought everything was going as well as could be expected until he glanced over to Blaine and saw his boyfriend's eyes shifting. He reached a hand down to settle him, but Blaine looked up at his father.

"Why didn't you come to my show?" he asked hurt and confused. "You say you want things to be different, but I had the starring role, and you didn't even bother to come."

The accusation behind the question startled Blaine's father and he put his silverware down. "You didn't ask me to come, Blaine." His voice was calm, but there was an edge behind it.

"Like hell I didn't. I sent you a flyer in the mail."

Kurt saw a flash behind the Colonel's eyes that he fought to contain. "Do not be disrespectful, Blaine, please."

The reprimand set Blaine's nerves afire. "Why did you even ask me here?"

Blaine's father looked to Kurt for help in calming his son, and Kurt placed his hand on Blaine's back and rubbed small circles against him.

"We've been having a lot of conversations at the base, Blaine, since...the repeal." Kurt closed his eyes. He had been right. The Colonel continued hesitantly. Vulnerability was still very difficult for him, especially in front of his son. "I've been meeting with someone, a counselor, since October. He says you can come in with me sometime. If you want."

Blaine shook his head. "What for," he mumbled.

"To talk about...us...how we felt, how we feel," his voice grew stronger. "To talk about how we feel about each other."

Blaine looked up with sadness and anger in his eyes. He had tried so many times and every time he had just been hurt. How many more times could he take? "How *do* you feel about me Dad? Because the last I remember, you kicked me out of the house for loving the person that I love." Blaine was starting to lose his control, but he fought to keep the tears from falling. "I remember you hating me for who I was. I remember you never being happy with me, never being proud of me. So please, cut the small talk and tell me, what exactly has changed?"

"Being apart from you has been hard Blaine. I miss you."

"Do you miss Mom or do you miss me," Blaine asked.

"I miss both of you," he admitted, "But it's too late for me and your mom."

"Yeah, well, maybe it's too late for *me*," he yelled at his father.

"Blaine." Kurt tried to calm him, but he couldn't.



"No, Kurt! No!" Blaine turned frantically to Kurt. Kurt felt his own tears building, but he held them back as Blaine grabbed his arms. "You are the only one who knows everything he did to me. Not Nick, not Santana, just you. So you tell me why it shouldn't be too late!"

Kurt slid his hand into Blaine's, trying to remain calm but his voice was desperate and tears fell from his eyes. "Because you love him. And he's trying. And he's alive. And as long as he's alive, you should have a chance to have a father. Because once they're gone, they're gone Blaine, they don't come back."

Blaine stared at Kurt for a long time. Then he looked back at his father. "I need some air." Blaine stood up from the table and went out the front door slamming it behind him. Kurt stared after him.

"Thank you," Colonel Anderson said, and Kurt remembered where he was and who he was with. He turned back, a glare in his eye.

"I didn't do it for you," Kurt said with disdain. "Blaine deserves to have a Dad. I just hope you're really willing to be one." Kurt got up and went to the door, grabbing Blaine's coat before heading out.

He found Blaine sitting on the front steps, and he sat down next to him, taking Blaine's hand. "You're freezing," he said, as he took Blaine's coat and wrapped it around him.

"I don't know what I'm doing, Kurt." Blaine said voice cracking.

"That seems to be a common theme with you," Kurt gently teased, nudging Blaine's shoulder with his own. Blaine put his head on Kurt's shoulder.

"I don't trust him. Anything he says, I don't trust him. I feel like he's just trying to reel me in so he can throw me back when he remembers I'm not what he wants."

"It seems like he's really trying Blaine. I know it's hard to believe, but isn't this what you wanted?"

"I don't have any clue what I want anymore." Blaine got up running his fingers through his hair and walked a few steps onto the grass of the front lawn. "I don't even know how to do this."

Kurt followed him and looked him in the eye. He remembered something he had recently heard. "Baby steps, Blaine. One foot in front of the other. Going toward what you want, not away from it."

"And what is it that I want?" Blaine's eyes nearly begged Kurt for answers.

Kurt looked up to the clear night sky. There were fewer lights out here, and the stars shined brightly. He glanced down to meet Blaine's eyes. "When you wished on a star, what did you wish for?"

"I always wish for you."

"Before you met me Blaine," he said with a slight roll of the eyes, "what did you wish for?"

"I don't remember," he said shaking his head.

"Yes you do," Kurt said with quiet certainty.

Blaine was quiet for a minute, remembering, then smiled softly as a tiny light in his eye flickered. "If I tell you than it won't come true."

Kurt reached for Blaine's shoulders and turned him around so they faced the same sky. Kurt wrapped his arms tightly around his boyfriend, pulling him back close into his chest. He placed his face next to Blaine's and whispered in his ear, "Find your star."

Kurt looked up to the sky and found one that seemed to twinkle just for him. He waited until he felt Blaine do the same. "Ready?" he said softly.

Blaine nodded.

"Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish I might, have this wish I wish tonight." Kurt closed his eyes, and wished as hard as he could for Blaine to find peace in his heart. When he was done he opened them and looked out at the universe of stars until Blaine lowered his head.

"Do you remember now?" Kurt asked quietly.

"Yeah," he said, his voice so quiet it hummed. "I do."

He took Blaine's hand in one of his, turning him, and stroked his cheek with the other. "Then let's go back inside."

The rest of the night passed much better than the beginning. In Blaine's mind, they had won. It was only a small battle in a much greater war, but for the first time in a very long time, he came out of his father's home feeling a little good and he left with a little hope. Other than his own outburst, there had been no harsh words, no disrespect, and they had in fact received an invitation to return. Blaine still had no idea what it all meant, and he still had many strong feelings about his history with his father. His heart was heavy, and he needed time to think, but he had just the slightest faith that perhaps, if they both worked really hard, they might have the chance of a relationship in the future. It wore him out.

Sitting in the car with Kurt in the driveway, Blaine laid back in the seat, staring at the ceiling, and sighed loudly. Kurt looked over at him and smiled. "What do you want to do?" he asked.

"Don't I have to get you home?" Blaine looked at the clock on his dashboard. They still had two hours left before Kurt's curfew, even for a school night. "Wow. It felt like we were in there for a lot longer than we were," he said with a slight laugh.

"My father also gave us an extra hour tonight, although he had the foresight to tell your mother we weren't to be alone in your room." Kurt frowned. Blaine smirked. He knew telling Burt had been a bad idea.

"I don't want to go home anyway," he admitted. "My emotions are all over the place. I have all this nervous energy I don't know what to do with."

"Whatever you want to do is fine with me, just please don't say you want to go back to Scandals."

Blaine shook his head. He definitely did not want to go back to Scandals, not tonight. Nor did he want to go to Dalton. Running into Sebastian tonight in either place, would be a horrible idea. But it gave him an idea. He took out his phone and shot off a text.

**Blaine: Where are you?**

Kurt only raised an eyebrow as he waited for Blaine. He had a pretty good idea who Blaine was texting.

**Santana: I'm at the Club**

**Blaine: Mind if I join?**

Blaine waited a minute before getting a text back.

**Santana: I'm with Brittany**

**Blaine: I'm with Kurt**

Blaine waited another minute then:

**Santana: It's open mic night. See you soon.**

Blaine smiled and put the car in drive. Kurt had waited patiently throughout the exchange, his patience had run low. "So, where are we going and with whom?" he asked.

"You wanted to know where Santana and I go on our 'dates.' Now you'll get to see."

The car ride was quiet, as Blaine played a low key playlist. Kurt was amazed, but not unpleasantly so, when they pulled into the parking lot of the Night Town Jazz Club. The maitre d' knew Blaine by now, and led them over to one of the larger rounded booths that Santana and Brittany were sitting in. Kurt took in the intimate and comfortable atmosphere of the club, remembering his performance of Le Jazz Hot last year. He looked at the stage and for a moment considered taking the microphone. Blaine saw him staring off, and grabbed his hand, pulling him to the table. Blaine slid in next to Santana but Kurt made no move to sit, staring suspiciously at the two ladies. He hadn't realized Brittany would be there as well. Brittany had been running a vicious campaign that he was sure was Santana's doing. He hadn't said anything to Blaine, but he'd been very hurt by both girls lately. Sitting with them both after all he had been through that night already, was perhaps more than he could take.

Brittany seemed to notice. She got up from Santana's other side and came around to give him a hug. "Come on Kurt," she said with a pout. "There's no campaign and no Troubletones here. It's just us and the music. Right Santana?" she said with a knowing look to her best friend.

Santana grimaced, but looked up at Brittany and Kurt and agreed. "Fine, Porcelain. Truce for one night."

Brittany beamed and kissed Kurt on the cheek as if everything was now ok. And looking at the innocent girl, how almost believed it. He smiled and sat down. "Fine. For Blaine, a truce for tonight."

A waitress came over and took their drink orders. Blaine ordered a coffee and Kurt a diet coke. A gentleman was performing Billie Holiday's "Solitude" on the stage and Blaine found himself getting lost in the lyrics.

*In my solitude*

*You haunt me*

*With dreadful ease*

*Of days gone by*

*In my solitude*

*You taunt me*

*With memories*

*That never die*

"And what exactly brings the two of you out this way tonight," Santana asked heavily scrutinizing the two up and down. Blaine looked lost in thought, even for him, and Kurt was watching him anxiously. "Trouble in paradise?"

Kurt jumped on her. "And the truce lasts five seconds." He lost patience immediately, his nerves just too on edge. "No Santana, there is no trouble in Paradise. Blaine and I were just..."

Blaine cut him off. "We had dinner with my father tonight." His voice was low, he stared at the table, playing with his coffee cup. Santana and Brittany were silent. Kurt put his arm around Blaine and quietly stroked his hair.

Finally, Santana broke the silence. "How did it go?" she asked quietly.

"Good, I think, I don't know." His head was foggy, replaying the night, wondering what his father was doing now. Santana watched him, looking so lost and unsure. This wasn't the Blaine she knew, there was no mask here.

Brittany looked at Kurt and Santana confused, then turned to Blaine. "Wait, I don't get it? If it went well why are you so sad?"

Blaine finally looked up and found himself pulled into the blonde's blue eyes. He found her naiveté compelling, like a young child demanding the "whys" of a question you didn't know how to answer. Kurt and Santana stared at him as well. He tried to explain. "It's like...you think you know where you belong in the world, who you are, and who everyone else is. And suddenly, it's turned upside down and you don't know anything anymore."

"Well, I know who you are," Brittany said with a smile as if her answer would solve everything. "You are Blaine Warbler Anderson. And don't tell me you're not a Warbler anymore, because I've been bird watching for 10 years and I know a Warbler when I see one."

Blaine looked at Brittany askance, when Santana spoke up. "You can't let him do this to you Blaine. You have finally broken free and you're just going to let him back in to rule your world again?"

Blaine shook his head, "That's not my plan, Santana."

She grew angry. "That may not be your plan, Boyfriend, but it is exactly what is going to happen! And you, Kurt, you just let him do this? Just let him walk back in to the man who wants more than anything to keep you two apart?"

Kurt stared at her. "It was his choice, Santana, not mine. You think I wanted to go back there after everything? You think I wanted to sit across from the man who treated Blaine like he did? It killed me Santana, but I did it because I love him. Because unlike you, most people make sacrifices for the people we love, even when it hurts."

Santana looked as if Kurt had slapped her and Brittany grabbed her hand. Kurt and Santana had forgotten Blaine was even there, until he stood up.

"Coming here was a bad idea," he said, grabbing his coat.

Kurt immediately stood up. "No, Blaine, please, I'm sorry."

He looked at Kurt, then back at Santana. They both looked like they were going to cry and Brittany just seemed bewildered. "I just," he dropped his coat, but slid past Kurt, "I need to go to the bathroom," he said and he walked off.

The three of them sat in silence until Brittany spoke up. "You both just love him. That's why you're mad."

Santana looked at Brittany like she was crazy. "No, I don't."

"Yes you do," the blonde said matter-of-factly. "He'd be like your best friend other than me, if you let him. Except he scares you."

Santana looked embarrassed and her eyes flashed over to Kurt. "Why does he scare you?" Kurt asked quietly.

Santana couldn't explain to Kurt that his boyfriend was a constant mirror of what she wanted and couldn't have. And she couldn't explain that as Blaine faced his past, she felt more urgency to face her present. Blaine urged her to be honest about herself, not with his words, but his actions. She had always clung to his fallout with his father as a reason to avoid her own coming out. If he faced his father and won, what excuse would she then have?

Santana never got a chance to answer though because suddenly they heard the piano start to play, and Kurt knew instantly the sound of Blaine's rhythms. Blaine was sitting at the piano with the microphone beside him. He didn't look at the trio, but they watched him intently as he sang.

*I've never been one to live the day*

*Stand up and proudly have my say*

*So I'd hide in the shadows*

*And tuck away my dreams*

Santana bowed her head, as Blaine's eyes closed. Both remembering the moments lost, the dreams cast aside, the so many times people thought they were standing up when really they hid behind facades of sarcasm or perfection.

*I've never been one to choose to fight*

*Or insist that what I think is right*

*See it's safer to comply than be at war*

Blaine remembered the days and nights of compliance, doing what his father said, taking the pain, following the commands, nearly letting Kurt go rather than fight. Santana remembered the guys she had been with to hide from her parents, the orders she carried out on Sue's behalf, turning on her friends, keeping Brittany at bay out of fear. So many times they both denied themselves the only fight that truly mattered.

*But this is who I am*

*I may not be a god or a superhero*

*I am only who I am*

*I may not be a king or a saint or an icon*

*But learning who I was*

*Has taught me who I am*

Brittany squeezed Santana's hand tightly as tears rolled down her best friend's cheeks. Santana may not be those things Blaine sang about, but she was everything to Brittany. Kurt watched Blaine, so proud of his courage that evening. Blaine had chosen to put his fear aside, to stand up to his father, to stop hiding, and to fight for his dreams. In Kurt's eyes, Blaine was everything he sang and more.

*I've been the one who would not leave*

*And I've been the one left alone to grieve*



*And I've proven too hardened*

*For someone to deceive*

So many nights they stayed, barely able to even dream of having the safety and the freedom to love the one they wanted; alone, in homes and families that would not support them, both afraid to leave. Santana and Blaine had both proven themselves too hardened to let anyone in. And yet, despite themselves, they had. Blaine turned his gaze to Kurt, who met his eyes with love overflowing. Santana turned to Brittany and placed her head on the blonde's shoulder, while Brittany stroked her hair.

*But the person that I used to be is fading*

*Every wall I've built is crumbling to the ground*

*Though the patterns are persistent and persuading*

*I'm breaking free*

*No longer bound*

Santana realized she was wrong. Blaine had done what he needed to do in order to break free of his father's hold. Blaine prayed that Santana would get there soon. The patterns of their childhood were indeed persistent; they seemed to grab hold of both of them, trying desperately to hold them back. But together, they would continue fighting, breaking free, both in their own way and their own time.

*And this is who I am*

*I will never be a god or a Superhero*

*I'm simply who I am*

*I may never be a king or a saint or an icon*

*But seeing who I was*

*Is knowing who I am*

Blaine had realized that facing his past, facing his father, was his way out. Bad or good didn't matter. Facing the boy he was, was what he needed to become the man he would be. Kurt understood now as well. He had seen Blaine twice with his father. The first time Blaine had walked away broken. Today he had started to heal.

*I am my debts*

*I am my walls*

*I am regret*

*I am my words*

*I am my doubts*

*I am my song*

Blaine had erected walls higher than the sky, but over the last year, he had slowly lowered them and allowed Kurt in. He was owning his debts, his regrets and his doubts and moving on. It wouldn't be easy. At times, like tonight, it would be hard. But now and always, he would let music be his guide.

Santana was just beginning and she thanked Brittany everyday for letting her tear down her own walls in her own time. Brittany deserved so much more than Santana could give her, but she was doing the best she could.

*So I might not be a god or a superhero*

*And I know I am not a king or a saint or an icon*

*But being who I was*

*Is accepting who I am*

As the applause rose in the club, Blaine made his way back to his friends. Kurt nearly ran to him and, meeting him mid restaurant, threw his arms around him, kissing him eagerly in front of everyone. "You are amazing," Kurt whispered.

They walked hand in hand back to the table and both girls stood to praise Blaine. Brittany embraced him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "See?" she said, "Definitely a Warbler." Blaine smiled at her and gave her a kiss on the cheek as well.

Kurt and Brittany slid into the booth, leaving Santana and Blaine. Santana gazed into his eyes, which reflected back her own. "How do you do it?" she asked, tears in her eyes.

"Do what?" he responded with a sparkle in his eye.

"Make me want it? I hate you for it sometimes you know," she admitted.

He pulled her and held her for a minute. "I know," he whispered in her ear. He let her go, allowing his hands to trail down her arms and squeeze her hands. "You want it because it's in your heart. We can't escape it, we can't run away from it. The only thing we can do is decide how long we're going to wait until we accept it and what we're going to do once we do." Santana lowered eyes and nodded. "You were right you know?"

"Of course I am," she said with a smirk and a snuffle. "About what?"

"I can't let him rule my world again. I have to figure out how to let him in, or even if, without going back to hiding all the time. Because I can't do that anymore."

"Well," she said with a cocky grin, "anytime you need a good kick in the pants, I am happy to oblige."

Blaine laughed quietly and placed an arm around her. "Come on," he said, "our dates are waiting."

Blaine walked Kurt to the front door. He had been quiet the entire ride home and Kurt didn't push him. He'd said what he had to say at the club, and Blaine was always afraid of words that weren't put to music.

When they reached the door, Blaine looked at Kurt, his hazel eyes devoid of their usual sparkle. He took Kurt's hands. Blaine knew that what he had to say, Kurt wasn't going to take well and he tried desperately to soften the blow. "Kurt, I need some space," Kurt immediately lowered his eyes, willing himself not to cry. Ever since Blaine had said his world turned upside down, Kurt had been afraid of where he might or might not fit into that. But Blaine took his chin and gently forced his head back up. "You need to

understand this isn't about you. I love you more than anything or anyone in the world. And I want to make love to you a thousand times. I just need a little time to process this. Ok?"

Kurt did not like it at all, but he understood it entirely. "Of course. Take all the time you need."

"I love you," Blaine said, holding Kurt in his arms and kissing him deeply.

"I love you too. Goodnight."

Brittany and Santana sat on the blonde's bed after the dodgeball game. Brittany's hair was still wet from their bath, and Santana sat behind her braiding it. "You were amazing during dodgeball today," she said kissing her neck in between each twist of the hair."

"Do you think we went too far?" Brittany asked with a frown. "Like Kurt said?"

"Kurt's a baby," Santana said dismissively.

"You shouldn't say that Santana. I love Kurt. And you love Blaine." She turned to face Santana, scooting herself between Santana's knees. "And we're gonna dance at their wedding someday."

Santana lowered her eyes. "You think so?" She asked quietly.

"Of course!" Brittany said. She leaned in and kissed the brunette gently until Santana swiped her tongue against Brittany's lower lip and they deepened the kiss together. Santana started to push Brittany backwards on the bed, when Britt pulled away. "Can I ask you a question," she asked tentatively.

Santana immediately became apprehensive, and stood up off the bed folding her arms defensively. "Sure."

Brittany sat back against the headboard of the bed. Santana's stance didn't bother her at all. She was always able to push through the girl's hard exterior. "What do you want it to be like? When you come out, I mean. What do you dream of?"

Santana's brow creased and she leaned back against the desk across the room from her best friend. She sighed loudly. It wasn't that she hadn't dreamed of it. It's just that she hadn't shared it before. Ever since

she and Blaine had started talking, especially since he sang to her in the choir room, she had really started to believe that there was a way out for her someday. Not now, not as long as she had to live with her parents. But definitely someday.

She looked at Brittany, innocent as always, smiling at her expectantly. She relaxed and started to make her way back to the bed. "I dream that you and I will make it out of here and get cheerleading scholarships to college. We'll be on our own, in a town that's accepting of us." She climbed back on the bed and crawled toward Brittany with a smile. "And we can spend every minute..." She kissed below Brittany's right ear. "Of every day..." She kissed below Brittany's left ear. "Loving each other." She kissed Brittany on her lips and she felt the girl's arms wrap around her and pull her down. Santana looked at her seriously. "I promise, if you can wait for me, I will give you all the things I can't right now. How does that sound?"

Brittany smiled and pressed her body into Santana's. "I think that sounds delicious," she answered, losing herself in Santana's love.

"Dad, I'm going to stay over at Blaine's house tonight," Kurt said into the phone.

"Like hell you are. It's Friday Night." Burt responded.

"Dad look, I've already had to talk him down from going to dinner tonight just to punch Finn, and the fact is, only part of me wanted to stop him. I really don't think family dinner would end very well if we were there, and I'm not leaving him alone. We're already here and his mom is fine with it," Kurt heard nothing but silence on the other end of the phone. "Please, Dad? Blaine needs me."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Burt muttered. "Look Kurt, we need to discuss this as a family."

"No Dad," Kurt said firmly. "Carole needs to talk to Finn about his crappy attitude this year. He's been horrible to Blaine since he transferred and now he outs Santana to the world. I think it's great if you want to be a part of that discussion, but I most certainly do not, nor do I really want to be in the same house with him tonight. Please, Dad, it's just one night."

Against all of his better judgment, Burt acquiesced. He knew that Blaine did not at all take kindly to people revealing secrets that are not their own, especially when it had to do with being outed. He could only imagine that Kurt had his hands full tonight. "Fine, Kurt, but you had best be home tomorrow by lunch.

And I had better not hear anything from Mrs. Anderson about you two being disrespectful in her home, understood?"

"Understood, Dad. I love you."

"I love you too, son. We'll talk tomorrow."

Kurt put his phone away and entered Blaine's room. He was sitting on his stool strumming his guitar mindlessly. Kurt couldn't help but smile at him. He was aware that Blaine called Kurt his angel, but music was the boy's true savior.

"That mash-up was incredible. The Troubletones are going to kick our ass," he mused more to himself than Kurt.

"Mercedes was amazing," Kurt agreed. He missed her. Things weren't the same with them all broken up. Or with Blaine all broken up. Or with Finn acting like an ass. Kurt sighed. He desperately needed this all to just be fixed.

"Did you know I asked Sue last year to make sure Prom didn't hit the media?" Blaine was quiet. Kurt shook his head surprised. He never knew that. It hadn't even occurred to him. "Can you imagine if my father had found out that way?"

Kurt looked at him from across the room. He hated that distant look in Blaine's eyes. It scared him and it was heartbreaking. He hated all the reasons why it was there, and most of all he hated that it sometimes kept them apart. "Santana's going to be ok Blaine. She's just scared, but she's going to be fine," Kurt assured him.

Blaine looked up at him. "You don't know that Kurt. Not everyone is your father."

"And not everyone is yours," Kurt said gently.

Blaine looked at Kurt and put down his guitar. He got up and settled himself onto his bed. "You're right. Her family loves her." He smiled shyly and held a hand out. "And I love you."

Kurt smiled as he closed the distance and took hold of Blaine's hand. The tightness in Kurt's chest that he hadn't even realized was there disappeared. Blaine pulled him onto his lap, so Kurt straddled and faced

him. "I'm sorry for this week," Blaine shared wrapping his arms around Kurt. "I hate being in the same room with you but feeling so far away. Your speech at the debate was amazing," he added, as he began kissing Kurt's sweet spot at the base of his neck.

Kurt shuddered, he had missed Blaine's touch. "It's ok. I understand," he whispered breathlessly.

"Let me make it up to you," Blaine said with a sparkle in his eye.

Kurt smirked. "Well I don't know," he said flippantly. "It depends what you have in mind."

Blaine whispered in his ear and watched delightedly as a blush made its way up Kurt's body from his neck to his perfect cheekbones. Kurt found himself pulled into the darkened expanse of Blaine's eyes. "I think that could definitely be arranged," he answered, as he felt Blaine slowly begin to peel away his many layers.

Blaine and Kurt lay cuddled in post-coital bliss, Kurt's head on Blaine's chest, feeling each other's breath rise and fall. They listened to the other's heartbeat, as they both began to drift off to sleep. Blaine's dreams began to take hold when an awful vibrating and the melodic tones of Katy Perry rudely woke him. He tried to gently move out of Kurt's grasp not to wake him, but Kurt grabbed him back. "Don't go," he whined.

"Kurt, my phone is ringing," he mumbled, still half asleep, "I need to get it."

Kurt reluctantly moved off of him, sighing as Blaine reached over. Without even opening his eyes to see who it was, he pressed the answer key. "Hello?" he asked into the phone.

He heard shuffling and tears on the other end, and then Santana's voice. "Blaine, I need you."

## ***Chapter Ten: I Kissed A Girl***

"Kurt, my phone is ringing," Blaine mumbled, still half asleep, "I need to get it."

Kurt reluctantly moved off of him, sighing as Blaine reached over. Without even opening his eyes to see who it was, he pressed the answer key. "Hello?" he asked into the phone.

He heard shuffling and tears on the other end, and then Santana's voice. "Blaine, I need you."

Blaine immediately shot up and gripped the phone to his ear. "Santana, what's wrong, are you ok?" he asked alarmed.

Blaine's tone woke Kurt completely, and he sat up as well, placing his hand on Blaine's thigh.

"Blaine, I've been talking to Britt, but she said to call you." She paused. "I can't let my family find out on the television, you know? It might give my Abuela a heart attack or a stroke."

"What are you going to do?" Blaine questioned.

"That's why I called. How did you...how did you tell your parents?"

Blaine closed his eyes and thought back 2 years ago to his freshman year. The Sadie Hawkins dance at school was coming up. He was sick of pretending, sick of dancing with girls, and masking his feelings with kisses on the cheek. Even if he went by himself, he knew that's how the night would end up; as it had since his first 5th grade dance. He hadn't planned it, he knew his father's reaction would not be a good one. But at the time it was what he needed to do.

"When the time was right, when the need was there, I decided to be honest," Blaine explained hesitantly.

"But what did you say?" Santana asked.

Blaine's eyes met Kurt's, and he felt warmth, love and security pouring out. He was sure Kurt could hear Santana on the other end of the phone. He remembered back to the night Kurt had asked him the very same question. "I basically just told them I wanted to date boys instead of girls."

"And what did they say," her voice shaky with a nervous edge.



Kurt's eyes stayed on Blaine and sadness crept into them. Blaine thought back to those few weeks. The things that were said and done the day he came out and the days after the dance he had shared with no one but Kurt, and only Kurt ever needed to know.

"Santana, your family is not my family. It doesn't matter how mine reacted, your story is your own," he said echoing Kurt's earlier words. He had a very hard time believing that Santana's parents would accept her, no matter what Kurt said, but he was trying. Kurt smiled at him and silently kissed Blaine's head, wrapping his arms around Blaine's waist and placing his head on the boy's shoulder.

Santana was silent on the other end, and Blaine continued. "No matter what happens, I'm always here for your Santana."

"I know," she whispered.

"See you Monday?" Blaine asked.

"Yeah, sure Boyfriend, whatever," she said dismissively.

"Night," Blaine chuckled, quite used to Santana's defense mechanisms by now, and hung up the phone.

Kurt cuddled into Blaine, kissing his bare chest. "Everything ok?" he asked.

"I hope so," Blaine answered.

Kurt locked his blue eyes with Blaine's hazel. "I am so very proud of you. So proud of the boy you were, and the man you are."

"I will never grow tired of hearing you say that," Blaine replied, his eyes tearing. "I love you," he said, aiming his lips for Kurt's.

"And I will never grow tired of hearing *you* say *that*," Kurt answered, allowing him a quick kiss before pulling away. "But, it's a good thing Santana called and woke us. Now I can get dressed and move to the couch before your mother finds us like this in the morning and reports back to my father."

"It's your own fault for telling him in the first place." Blaine frowned as Kurt found his clothes on the floor and put them on. "You are no fun, Kurt Hummel," Blaine said with a pout.

Kurt turned to Blaine with a smirk. "Now you know that's not true." He winked, leaning across the bed for a quick goodnight kiss, before leaving the room.

Blaine grabbed Kurt's pillow and snuggled up to it, easily falling asleep as he breathed in the perfect scent of the one person he knew was proud of him.

Finn jumped up from the kitchen table when he heard the keys rattle in the front door at exactly noon. He had been waiting all morning for Kurt to return. Actually, he had been waiting all night since Carole and Burt finally finished lecturing him and sent him to bed. Burt and his Mom had helped him understand his own thoughts, as well as Santana. The truth was, he had a lot of feelings for Santana that he didn't even know he had, and was afraid for her. He wanted her to be as secure and proud of herself as Kurt was. Finn felt horrible for letting his anger get the best of him with Santana and he had a great idea to make it up to her, but he wanted Kurt's opinion.

Kurt arrived back home at the stroke of noon. He had spent the morning wrapped in Blaine's arms, watching Saturday morning cartoons and eating a fruit cup while Blaine downed four pancakes. He hadn't wanted to return home, but Mrs. Anderson knew he was due home for lunch and made sure he headed out the door with enough time. Kurt walked through the door and was immediately accosted by Finn.

"Kurt, dude, I really need to talk to you," Finn begged.

"Finn, even if I had gotten in the door yet, which I haven't, I still really wouldn't be in the mood to talk to you right now," Kurt answered, with an exasperated eye roll. He ignored Finn as he brought his bag, stuffed full with yesterday's clothes, to his room.

Finn followed him, determined to speak with Kurt so he could prevent things from being awkward between them. "Kurt please let me say something," he implored.

Kurt gently put his bag on his dressing table chair and turned to Finn with his hands on his hips. "Speak," he ordered.

Finn opened his mouth, then closed it. Now that he was on the spot, he couldn't think of the words.

Kurt stared at him. He had suffered Finn's rudeness toward Blaine because Blaine hadn't wanted him to rock the boat too much, but outing Santana was the last straw. He had no patience left, brother or not.

"Finn, either say something or get out of my room," he demanded.

"Look, Kurt, I'm sorry," Finn finally said. "I'm sorry for what I did to Santana. I know that saying what I did in the middle of the hallway isn't something that you approve of. I know that you don't believe in outing people. Your dad explained it to me." Kurt mentally thanked his father for being the man he was. "I never meant to hurt Santana or anyone, but you least of all. You're my brother, Kurt."

Kurt studied Finn. He wanted to stay angry with him, but he knew that Finn really didn't understand what he did half the time. It was utterly frustrating. Still, Finn was his brother and because of that he had to offer him a little leeway. "Make it right with her, and you're good with me," Kurt said.

"About that," Finn said smiling but shuffling his feet nervously. "I had an idea."

"Please don't tell me it's to dress up in Lady Gaga outfits again and prance through school protecting her like the bully whips," Kurt said never underestimating Finn's logic.

Finn looked at him confused, then shook his head. "No. I think that we should get New Directions and the Troubletones together to sing all girl songs this week. You know, to support Santana."

Kurt stared at him. "Finn, that's a terrible idea. Santana will hate it."

"She might at first," Finn acknowledged, "but she'll come around."

"And how do you know that?" Kurt challenged him.

"Because," he said quietly. "I know her. And I know that unlike you, she believes she has no one there for her. You always had Burt, and even though it scared you, deep down you knew he'd always be there for you and nothing could stop you. Santana doesn't know that. She thinks this is the end of everything. She thinks that when she tells people she's in love with Brittany, that no one will stand by her."

"That's ridiculous, Finn, of course we will. Blaine's been telling her that all year."

"Yeah, well, maybe she needs to hear it from someone other than Blaine," he said rolling his eyes. "Maybe she needs to hear it from you and me and the girls and everyone."

Kurt looked at Finn, and he realized, that though he stood by Blaine's side, he had never stood up for Santana. The two were always so constantly at war with one another. Only Blaine had always remembered that they needed to stand together. And he had an idea.

"You're right," Kurt said.

"I am?" Finn asked surprised.

"Yes. Now if you don't mind, I need to call Blaine."

"Oh sure, of course. Thanks Kurt!" Finn said, leaving the room.

Kurt pulled out his phone, and immediately dialed Blaine. "Hey, I want to sing something for Santana on Monday. That is, if you don't mind sharing one of our songs with her."

Blaine and Kurt had practiced all day Sunday in front of Finn to perform for Santana. Unlike when he'd done Katy Perry's "Pearl," Blaine would have Kurt by his side this time, and he adored his boyfriend for suggesting the song. Blaine had warned Kurt that Santana might not accept it, and he understood, but they were both willing to go forward, knowing that no matter what she said, the words would get through to her.

"Santana, Kurt and I have a song we like to sing to each other in the car, and we want to sing that for you right now," Blaine explained.

"While there's nothing I'd love more than having to pretty ponies serenade me, I think we'd get further staging a *gellervention* for Blaine than singing lady music," she quipped.

"I know it's hard," Kurt said trying, for Blaine's sake, to remember what he said about Santana's sarcasm and just ignore it. "It was hard for me too. But you can get through this."

"If you would just stop being so defensive," he eyed Santana in familiar warning.

"I'm trying," she interrupted. Her friendship with Blaine was one thing outside the halls of McKinley, but she couldn't allow him to bring it in. "But you're hideous bowties are provoking me."

The two shook off Santana's insults, and Blaine leaned on the piano, watching Kurt. The first verse spoke so truly to Kurt's heart, and he remembered all of Kurt's stories of his years at McKinley before he'd transferred to Dalton; the mistakes he made before coming out, the bullying once he did, despite it all, Kurt had always believed in himself and had survived it all growing stronger because of it.

*Made a wrong turn, Once or twice Dug my way out, Blood and fire Bad decisions, That's alright Welcome to my silly life*

*Mistreated, misplaced, misunderstood Miss "no way, it's all good", it didn't slow me down Mistaken, always second guessin' Under estimated, look, I'm still around*

Though she knew very well the things that Kurt sung about, Santana recognized herself in the song as well, and it made her extremely uncomfortable. Santana kept her feelings and her experiences deep inside, and she didn't like Blaine calling them out onto the table. "Pearl" had been one thing, him singing just to her, but adding Kurt to the mix, she felt, was flaunting everything she wanted and couldn't have. Blaine watched her, singing "Perfect" to Kurt and her, and she couldn't help but hate in that moment the feelings that he caused in her.

*You're so mean When you talk About yourself, you are wrong. Change the voices In your head Make them like you instead.*

The second verse belonged to Blaine, and the words were so personal, it felt like sharing a secret with everyone that so far he had only shared with Kurt. Kurt first sang this song to him one day when the Colonel's words had been running circles in Blaine's head. Blaine always remembered, and he hoped that he could pass along to Santana the wisdom of the words Kurt had given him.

*So complicated, Look happy, you'll make it Filled with so much hatred Such a tired game.*

Though they came from someone else, those words meant everything to Blaine as if he had born them out of his own soul. He had tried so long to cover the years of hatred, at home and at school with a happy face, and it was exhausting. He truly felt it must be the same for Santana. And it was. Years of hiding who she

was, afraid of the hate at McKinley and in Lima, she hid behind walls of sarcasm and sass, but she really was so very tired of the game.

*It's enough, I've done all I can think of Chased down all my demons, Seen you do the same.*

Blaine had done all he could for himself. He came out at home and school, facing his father and the bullies at school. He'd chosen Dalton, then he'd chosen Kurt, choosing his own freedom, while letting his childhood dreams of peace at home go forever. And now he was facing his demons, tiptoeing back into a relationship with his father, carefully protecting his heart while he allowed himself a little faith. He looked at Santana, hoping that his journey toward honesty would encourage her to face her own demons.

*The whole world stares so I swallow the fear, The only thing I should be drinking is an ice cold beer. So cool in line and we try, try, try, But we try too hard, & it's a waste of my time. Done looking for the critics, cause they're everywhere They don't like my jeans, they don't get my hair Change ourselves and we do it all the time*

While Brittany could see others greatly enjoying the song, she could also recognize it was too much for Santana. It was too much, too soon, before she told her parents and she wasn't ready. Up until now, Santana shrunk away from the stares and the critics, unable to swallow her fear. She had changed herself for everyone. Now she needed to change herself *for* herself and Brittany knew it was terrifying to Santana. And Santana answered fear with biting sarcasm.

"Thank you guys. Thank you Finn, especially. You know with all of the horrible crap I've been through in my life," Santana shrugged, "now I get to add that."

It had taken some time for Blaine to settle Kurt the other day after Santana's insults, but Kurt eventually let it go. He had also decided that Finn had indeed earned Kurt's forgiveness for outing Santana, after his moving version of Girls Just Want to Have Fun. Kurt had meant it when he said they were good after he made it right with Santana, and Finn had done just that. So he was in a good mood when the girls burst into a wonderful rendition of I Kissed a Girl, and he and Blaine pulled their phones out to post the song on YouTube for the Warblers to see. Kurt had been thrilled to learn that Santana's conversation with her parents went well. He grabbed Blaine's hand and squeezed it, and Blaine smiled at him, though he noticed that the smile didn't quite reach his hazel eyes. Kurt had been feeling pretty good when Principal Figgins called him out of class. He looked at Blaine concerned, not sure if the Principal had good news or bad

news. Kurt was never one to get in trouble and he felt very conspicuous leaving the classroom just minutes before the bell rang.

Blaine was worried about Kurt, he had something else he needed to deal with as well. "Santana," Blaine called after her as she left the choir room alone. Brittany had stayed behind to discuss something with Mike and Tina. "Wait up!"

Santana stopped and looked back at Blaine with annoyance.

"Why didn't you tell me you told your parents?" he asked gently with a tilt of his head, hands resting on his hips.

"Didn't realize I had to report back to you, Blaine," Santana snapped back crossing her arms across her chest.

Blaine could handle her bitchiness when it stemmed from her insecurities, but after her biting comments to them after Kurt had gone out of his way to sing their song to her, he'd had enough for one week. "You know what? You don't," he said, throwing his hands up in surrender. "I'm sorry to bother you." He turned to walk away.

"I didn't know how you'd react," Santana called, tone softening.

Blaine turned back, slowly, considering. He had never believed her family would be accepting, and just like he sometimes felt with Kurt and his Dad, he was jealous of Santana. But he never wished her ill and he was relieved. "I didn't either to be honest. But I'm glad. I wouldn't want you to have to go through what I did."

Santana dropped her arms to her side. "I still have to tell my Abuela. But she's always been so proud of being who she is. I know she'll stand by me."

Blaine smiled warmly, wanting to reach for her hand, but thinking better of it in public. "I'm happy for you Santana." And he meant it with all his heart. "Really, really happy for you."

"Thank you," Santana smiled genuinely, then lowered her eyes. "And thank you for earlier too. The song, I mean," she added bashfully.

"You're welcome," he said, surprised by her sudden graciousness. "But thank Kurt. It was his idea."

She nodded and walked off to class. Blaine shook his head, and headed off to the library.

Brittany sashayed into the seat across from Blaine in the library as he sat studying during his free period. He looked up to see her bright eyes and smiling face.

"So I want to throw a victory party and I want you and Kurt to come," Brittany beamed.

Blaine looked at her askance. "You're throwing yourself a victory party before the votes even come in?" He asked. "I'm not sure if Kurt would really be up for going to that," he said doubtfully.

Brittany looked at him confused. "No, not for me. For Santana. Like Kurt did for you this summer when you, ya know, stood up to your Dad."

Blaine's eyes darkened, but he smiled at the innocent girl. "Do you really think Santana would want that?"

Brittany frowned. "You don't?" she asked a little hurt.

Blaine started to answer but was interrupted by Kurt rushing in, tears streaming down his face. Blaine immediately raced to his boyfriend and hugged him. "Baby, what's wrong?" he said trying to calm Kurt's hysterics.

"They think I cheated, Blaine," he tried to explain through his tears. "They think I stuffed the ballot boxes. But I didn't," he said, grabbing Blaine's arms and pleading with him. "You know I wouldn't!"

"Of course!" he tried to reassure his boyfriend. "Of course I know you wouldn't. Come on, come sit down," he urged, ushering Kurt to the seat next to his. He turned it so the two were facing each other, Brittany completely forgotten in the commotion.

"I'll just talk to you guys later," Brittany said, pushing her chair back, concerned. Kurt didn't acknowledge her while Blaine waved her off, and she went off in search of someone who could explain what was going on.

Blaine placed his hands on the arms of Kurt's chair, leaning into him. "Tell me what happened." Blaine said.



"They called my father in. Apparently the ballot boxes were stuffed which made it seem like I won by 190 votes." He sniffled, wiping his nose on his hand. Blaine reached into his pocket and passed over some tissues that he always carried for Kurt. "But Brittany really won, not me."

"Kurt, I am so sorry, that's awful." Blaine knew that there were no words that would comfort him right now, but when he hated when Kurt was sad and he wanted to make it all better.

"I just keep thinking it's another horrible joke like prom. What if someone was trying to get me suspended, or worse expelled?" he asked, becoming frantic again.

Blaine settled him. "No, Kurt, you can't think like that. It's probably just a horrible misunderstanding."

Kurt looked up at him. "My father says I can't come after school today for our study date. I have to go with him to the shop," he apologized looking miserable.

"Why?" Blaine didn't understand why he would be in trouble if he didn't truly do anything wrong.

Kurt looked sheepishly at Blaine. "I may have sort of said in front of my father that I had thought about cheating. Whether I did it or not, he is, without mincing words, livid that I even thought about it. I don't think I'm grounded, but he told me to come to the shop after school so that we could," he made air quotes, "have a little talk about honesty and fair play."

Blaine chuckled and shook his head. "Oh Kurt, you really need to stop telling your Dad everything."

Kurt laughed through his tears and fell into Blaine's arms again. "Yeah, I think you just might be right."

Santana held herself together as best she could until she got to her car, then she let it all go. She cried and screamed until her makeup ran everywhere and her voice was hoarse. She had been worried about telling her parents, but her Abuela she loved and trusted and she never expected to be shunned by her. Santana was beyond devastated.

When she finally settled herself, she pulled out her phone and dialed. "Britt? It's me."

Brittany could hear in her voice that something was wrong. "Santana, what's the matter?"

"I need to see you. Can you meet me at my house?"

Brittany breathed a little sigh of relief. For a moment she had thought Santana's parents had changed their mind and kicked her out. "Of course, where are you? Should I come get you?"

"No," Santana said, sniffing as she started the car. "I'm at my Abuela's house but I'm going home now. Please, I just need to see you."

Both girls raced to Santana's house and as if the universe was always on their side, they arrived in the driveway at the same time. They both got out of their cars, and Brittany immediately grabbed Santana's hand, as she saw the Latina's face reddened and streaked with mascara.

The girls silently went inside, and ran into Santana's mother before starting to head up to her bedroom. "Hi Mrs. Lopez," Brittany called.

Santana's mother turned to them. "Santana! What happened, sweetheart?"

Tears welled up again in Santana's eyes and she pursed her lips, shaking her head. "Can we talk later, Mama. Can I just go upstairs with Brittany now?"

She looked at her daughter and nodded, her body immediately full of sadness and regret at her daughter's pain. Mrs. Lopez had told Santana that telling her Abuela was not going to end well, but the girl was stubborn and refused to listen. She had prayed and hoped for her daughter, who had believed in her grandmother's unconditional love. Now her heart just broke for her little girl.

Brittany curled up on Santana's bed and held her arms out for her girlfriend. Santana hesitated only slightly before climbing into Brittany's warm embrace. The blonde hugged her and rocked her, kissing her head. "Shhh," she said quietly, "it's all going to be ok."

Santana's tears started rolling down her cheeks again. "I thought she would accept me, you know Britt? I mean, I was terrified to tell my parents but they were so amazing. With my Abuela, I wasn't scared at all."

"What happened?" Brittany asked cautiously.

"She kicked me out," Santana explained, taking a deep breath and wiping her tears away. "I begged her but...she told me it would have been better to keep it all a secret. She kicked me out and told me she never

wanted to see me again. She told me I had made my choice and she made hers." She suddenly recalled that Blaine had shared his father saying something similar. She shook the thought away, not wanting to compare her beloved Abuela to Blaine's father.

Brittany squeezed her tight and kissed Santana's neck. "I'm so sorry. It's her loss then."

Santana turned to her. "Is it?"

"Of course!" Brittany pulled away slightly to look Santana in the eyes. She helped dry her tears, and fix her hair. "You are the most amazing girl in the world, and if she can't see that, then maybe she's gone blind or something. But you can't let her tear you down. You are the bravest girl I know."

Santana sat up straighter and sniffled. "So then what do I do now? How do I live with someone I love and trusted hating who I am?"

Brittany scrunched up her face not sure of the right thing to say. "Maybe you should call Blaine about this," Brittany offered.

"No," Santana said firmly. "Blaine doesn't come to me to talk about things. He goes straight to Kurt. If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this right."

Brittany tipped her head to the side and linked pinkies with Santana, smiling. "I was going to throw you a party. You know, like the one Blaine had?"

Santana looked at her sweet, innocent Brittany. "I love you," she said, leaning in to kiss her soft and cherry flavored lips. For the first time kissing Brittany, she felt no doubt, no regret, and all her walls came crashing to the ground. She smiled and pressed forward, deeply and passionately, and Brittany responded in kind. When they pulled away, Brittany giggled and Santana gazed into her eyes.

"Do you think it would be ok if we just kept the party between the two of us?" Santana asked, almost shyly.

Brittany wrapped her arms around Santana, pulling her down onto the bed, reveling in the love and warmth of her girlfriend. "I think that would be perfect," she answered.

Kurt finished the application to NYADA and sealed the envelope, still feeling defeated. "When are things going to start going my way, Blaine," he mumbled, placing his head in his hands.

Blaine stood behind Kurt as he sat, rubbing his back soothingly, and moved his hands up to massage his shoulders. "Nick would say that everything happens for a reason."

Kurt rolled his eyes, "I hate to burst your bubble Blaine, but Nick can be naïve at times."

"Yes, he can," Blaine acknowledged with a slight laugh, "But this is not one of those times. Look at me," he said grabbing Kurt's hand and pulling him around to face him. "The way I see it there are two possibilities here."

"What?" Kurt said looking at him with a frown.

Blaine smiled. "First possibility, you get accepted to NYADA, you go to New York with your best friend, I meet you next year and all your dreams come true."

"Yes, Blaine, that was the plan that is not even close to happening now. What's the other option?"

Blaine knelt down to Kurt, making sure he heard every word. "You don't get accepted, and you stay in Ohio another year, building your resume. You and I turn 18 together, while your Dad moves to Washington, and we get to spend every day in each other's company."

"Technically, I turn 18 five months before you," Kurt interrupted, chin in the air.

"Hush," Blaine ordered placing his finger on Kurt's lips, barely pausing before continuing. "Then, we both fill out college applications next fall, you and I go off to New York together next summer, and all your dreams still come true." He looked at Kurt with sparkling eyes. "So, the way I see it, either way it works out, things go your way. It's a win-win," he smiled softly.

Kurt lowered his eyes, and grasped Blaine's hands. He pulled them to his lips and kissed them lovingly. His gaze shifted up to Blaine's eyes, and in them he saw hope. Kurt thought for a moment he might get lost in those eyes forever, but he knew that he couldn't. Like Santana, he had dreams of getting out of Ohio. And like every kid in Lima, he feared being stuck forever.

"I love you, you know that, right?" Kurt asked, bringing his hand to Blaine's cheek.

"Of course," Blaine said, concern clouding his face. "What's wrong?"

"If by some miracle I get into NYADA, Blaine, I'm going. I will miss you like crazy, but I can't let myself stay for you. It happens to kids here every year and it just gets people stuck in Lima forever," he said, trying to explain.

But Blaine did not need an explanation. He grasped Kurt's face with both hands and his gaze bore deep into Kurt's. "I would *never*," he emphasized, "ask you to stay here for me. New York is *our* dream, and whether we go together, or you blaze a path for me to follow, we will make it. What's one year in a lifetime of Perfect?"

Kurt couldn't stop the tears from streaming down his face, as he fell into Blaine's arms. He didn't care who was around, he didn't care who saw, and he didn't care if a slushie was about to cool them off. Kurt had never dreamed that a love so deep was possible, at such a tender age, but he knew that no matter what happened in the future, their love right now was absolutely perfect.

Holding Kurt close to him, his head over his boyfriend's shoulder, he saw Santana and Brittany walk by the entrance to the library hand in hand. The girls looked in, noticing him and Kurt, and Brittany smiled and wiggled her fingers hello. Santana stopped, and she and Blaine exchanged a glance. When he had heard about her Abuela's reaction, his stomach tightened. Despite Santana's constant need to push him away, Blaine understood her better than anyone. They were survivors, facing both their demons and their triumphs together. Santana hated having so much in common with him, but in many ways, they followed similar paths. Though she wouldn't admit it to anyone, she was so grateful to Blaine for his friendship. She smiled softly at him, and he nodded at her. He was so very proud of her. And though her journey had only just begun, he would be with her every step of the way. The New Directions came and went, loyalties changing by the week, but Warblers are forever. Santana's struggle did continue, but he would never ever let her be alone.

## ***Chapter Eleven: Hold On to Sixteen***

**Blaine! We won sectionals! ~ Nick**

**Bro! That's awesome! ~ Blaine**

Kurt looked up to see Blaine staring at his phone with a huge smile on his face. "Now, I had hoped that a smile like that would be reserved for *my* texts alone," he said looking at Blaine askance. "What has you so excited?"

"The Warblers won their sectionals! Which is fantastic. But it also means that we **so** need to beat the TroubleTones. I am **not** sitting this one out!"

"Then we better get back to practicing," Kurt smirked at him. The boys were in Kurt's room, iPod docked and set to their sectionals music, but that music had been paused for a while now.

"Hey now," Blaine said, climbing over Kurt and pushing him back down onto the bed. "I thought we were practicing." Blaine grinned and pressed himself into Kurt, crashing his lips against his boyfriend's, where they had spent the better part of the last half hour before Nick's text interrupted them. Kurt's shirt was half unbuttoned and Blaine went to finish the job when they heard a knock at the door.

"Hey," Burt called into the door. "I do not hear the dulcet tones of the Jackson family in there."

Kurt scrambled up from beneath Blaine and quickly straightened his hair and clothes, fixing the buttons on his shirt in case his father decided to come in. "Blaine was on the phone Dad," he called, thinking to himself that technically it wasn't a lie. "Getting back to it now."

"Mmmhmmm..." he heard his father murmur. "I won't hesitate to open that door if I think I need to," Kurt heard him call before hearing the footsteps disappear down the hall.

"Wipe that smirk off your face," Kurt ordered as he turned to face Blaine with his hands on his hips. Blaine shrugged with the innocence of the guilty. "Let's rehearse. I have no intention of letting that pom-pom throwing, bootie shaking, ungrateful, daughter of Satan win sectionals."

Blaine frowned. "Still haven't forgiven her, have you?"

"I told you, forgiveness isn't my strong point." He stepped forward. "*You* would be best to remember that. Now come on, we need to get these moves right if we want any chance to beat the TroubleTones without Rachel."

"My moves are already pretty good," Blaine said seductively as he slinked up to Kurt to pull him towards him once again.

"Dance moves Blaine, dance moves!" Kurt stomped away to the iPod, exasperated. "If you want to win like you say you do, then you better teach me that footwork or I'm going to douse you with a bucket of ice water and drive over to Mike's place for a proper teacher."

"Alright, alright," Blaine gave in. "Hit play, let's go again."

Blaine got up from the table at the Lima Bean feigning the need for another coffee. Truth was, he just didn't want to discuss New Directions with Sebastian. He *could* maybe whip New Directions into a legitimate threat *if* anybody would listen to him. He knew how to lead a Glee Club and he knew how to win. But no one would listen to him as long as Finn wouldn't, and he had no idea what Finn's problem with him was since coming to McKinley. He hadn't wanted to rock the boat. He hadn't wanted to pit Kurt against his stepbrother. He hadn't wanted to do anything to break up New Directions more than Mercedes and Santana already had. They were too fragile. Hell, he was too fragile. He didn't want a fight. So he just let it go.

Blaine returned to the table hoping that Kurt had said something to get rid of Sebastian. When he finally left, Blaine just rolled his eyes at the Warbler, unable to contain his amazement at the guy's forwardness.

Kurt stared back at Blaine, eyes blazing.

"What?" Blaine asked as innocently as possible.

"Would you care to explain why he was seeing you online *before*?"

Blaine couldn't miss Kurt's eyebrow raised accusation if he tried. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair, fumbling for an answer. "We...um...we Skyped a few times just after we met, Kurt, it was no big deal."

"And you stopped when?" Kurt continued to glare.

Blaine tried to meet his eyes, but he found himself staring down at the table instead. "The night I walked home from the bar. He tried to Skype me, but I just ignored him. In the morning I blocked him."

"How very passive aggressive of you," Kurt mumbled under his breath, but his sarcasm wasn't lost on Blaine and he grew defensive.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Blaine asked, his eyes growing dark with hurt and anger.

"Come on, Blaine, when are you going to stand up for yourself? You walk away from Sebastian and let him think he has a chance in hell with you, this thing with Finn is eating you up inside and yet you just smile and nod your way through it, and you let Santana use you when it works for her, but God forbid she acknowledge your friendship in public anytime you try to reach out to her."

"Kurt, you know how I get when I lose control. I can't think straight. I hate myself like that. The day I pushed you..." he trailed off, shaking his head, hating even the thought of being violent like his father. "I choose not to fight Kurt."

Kurt's frustration grew into anger and sarcasm. "I know, Blaine, you sang it at the jazz club. You said it was safer to comply than to be at war. Those words stuck in my head. Well Blaine, it may be safer to be who others want you to be or run away from issues, but it's not better, for you or for anyone else. After everything with your father you should know that." Kurt looked across the table into Blaine's always so expressive eyes and he saw only distance. He wondered if he'd gone too far.

Blaine's every instinct was telling him to get up from the table and leave, walk away from Kurt, from the conversation, from the confrontation. And as he got up to leave, he realized that Kurt was right. He was once again running away, and he had promised himself long ago he would never run from Kurt again. He grabbed Kurt's hand and squeezed.

"I'm just so afraid all the time," Blaine answered softly.

"Afraid of what?" Kurt asked, voice full of love but almost desperate.



"Losing the only things I have left," he whispered, staring at their hands as he unconsciously circled Kurt's palm with his thumb. He looked up, pain in his eyes. "What would I do without New Directions? It's not like I can go back to Dalton, to the Warblers. Sometimes I wish I could, but I can't."

"Blaine, Baby," he said gently. "When you let people walk all over you, control you, then you lose yourself. And then nothing else matters. New Directions isn't as fragile as you think it is. The Warblers are a band of brothers and they stick together, but what have they ever overcome? What have they ever had to fight for? The color piping of the blazer or the ties they're going to where? New Directions has been through thick and thin and somehow we always end up back together in the end. We are a family. And right now, we need *you*. You just need to make Finn see it."

"How?" Blaine asked.

"Well," Kurt said with his head cocked. "Talking to him rather than sitting down when he tells you to, or agreeing with him when he mocks you, or walking away when he treats you like crap might be a helpful start," he smirked. "And it would of course make Friday night dinners a little more pleasant as well," he added.

Blaine nodded and smiled. "Always with the sarcasm, aren't you?" he asked wryly.

"Yeah," Kurt smiled broadly. "Pretty much."

"Come on, let's go," Blaine said grabbing his old coffee cup to throw out, then going back to get his new one. "Guess I really didn't need a second," he said staring at it blankly.

"No," Kurt laughed putting his arm around Blaine's waist and his hand in Blaine's back pocket. "No you didn't."

"So what did you and Sebastian talk about while I was gone?" Blaine asked as they walked out the door.

"Haha," Kurt chuckled. "That's for me to know and you never to find out."

As everyone left the choir room after rehearsal that afternoon, Blaine lingered, lost in his thoughts. He absentmindedly sat at the piano and began to play.

Kurt put his bag back down and leaned on the piano opposite him. For a moment he just stopped and took in the gorgeous curls that were falling over Blaine's forehead, but he tucked the thoughts of Blaine boxing away for another time. Blaine was clearly not in the mood for *that*.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Kurt asked cautiously.

"Talk about what?" Blaine murmured, staring at the piano keys as he played.

"Why Sam made you so upset? I know everything with Finn had you worked up, but saying what you did to Sam? Telling him that you're not for sale?" Kurt waited, but Blaine didn't look up or even acknowledge hearing him. Kurt came around to sit next to him and gently placed his hand over Blaine's, running his thumb over Blaine's knuckles. He stopped playing, but he didn't look up. "I've seen that look before Blaine," he said gently. "That wasn't Sam, that was your Father."

Blaine got up from the piano bench and walked across the room, rubbing the back of his neck. For a minute, Kurt thought Blaine wouldn't answer him, but then he heard him quietly respond. "When is this just going to get easier?" he asked sadly. Blaine was exhausted. Exhausted from keeping things in, and exhausted from letting them out. And he was just so tired of being tired all the time.

Kurt slipped away from the piano and took Blaine in his arms. "You said yourself it wouldn't happen overnight. Things are going to trigger you. It's easier if you talk about it."

Blaine pulled away with a quiet chuckle. "What are you, my therapist?"

Kurt smiled. "Well, if your therapist says the same thing, than she's a keeper." Blaine bowed his head and nodded. Kurt tried to keep the mood light while still getting Blaine to open up. "So, what horrible memory did Sam trigger?"

Blaine looked at him and shame clouded his eyes. "Let's just say that my father had every expectation I would be the one in the bar, or the street, selling my body for money. That's what good-looking gay boys do when they sing and dance after all, isn't it?" Blaine looked away as Kurt took in his biting words.

When Kurt thought his heart couldn't break for Blaine anymore, every new disclosure broke it more. "That's why you lost it with Karofsky last year. When he called you...what he did," he thought out loud.

Blaine didn't respond but walked back to the piano and began fingering the keys again. Kurt had a million things he could say to try and dispute his father's comments or just try to make Blaine feel better, but he was pretty sure that none of them would work. There was only one thing that might give Blaine some solace right now.

"Sing your number for me," Kurt called.

"What?" Blaine looked up at him uncertainly.

"Control," Kurt explained. "Sing it to me."

Blaine looked up at his boyfriend, confusion, but then understanding in his eyes. Kurt walked back over and leaned against the piano, as Blaine shuffled for the sheet music. He looked it over quickly, then closed his eyes, losing himself in the music he played, and healing himself with the words he sang.

*When I was 17, I did what people told me*

*Did what my father said, and let my mother mold me*

*but that was long ago*

As he sang, Kurt could see the connections form in Blaine's mind. For 17 years Blaine had done what he was told by his father, been the boy his mother wanted him to be. But now it was time for him to grow up, be a man, and take control of his own life. And it also meant taking control of his emotions.

*I'm in control, and now I've got a lot*

*Control, to get what I want*

*Control, I'm never gonna stop*

*Control, now I'm all grown up*

*Got my own mind*

*I wanna make my own decisions*

*When it has to do with my life, my life*

*I wanna be the one in control*

It was all new for Blaine. 17 years of being controlled by a man who used violence against him; it was hard to move past it. He desperately feared his own temper running away with him, was always afraid he'd turn into his father. But slowly he was learning that was his own choice. It was time to make his own decisions and to be in control of his own life. He had started with his father, and today with Finn. It was a long and tired journey, and it was taking longer than he wanted, but he would keep trying.

*So let me take you by the hand*

*And lead you on this dance*

*Cause what I've got is because I took a chance*

*I don't wanna rule the world*

*Just wanna run my life*

*So make your life a little easier*

*When you get the chance just take Control*

Almost a year ago he had decided that with Kurt by his side, he could confront anything. At times he forgot, but Kurt was always there to remind him when he needed it. He had Kurt because he took a chance at running his own life, and it led him down a rabbit hole that brought him to today. And the truth was, as hard as it was now, it was easier than before. Because he was free at least.

*Free at last,*

*Now control this*

*Cause I've got my own mind*

*I wanna make my own decisions*

*When it has to do with my life, my life*

*I wanna be the one in control*

*I'm in control*

Kurt smiled at him and Blaine smiled back, tiredly. He reached a hand out for Kurt to sit next to him, and when he did, Blaine placed a chaste kiss on Kurt's cheek. "I love you," he shared, his voice soft and deep.

"Does the song mean something to you?" Kurt asked placing Blaine's hand over his heart. "In here I mean?"

Blaine nodded. "You know it does."

"*That's* how New Directions wins." He paused, letting that sink in for Blaine. "Do you want me to come home with you?" Kurt asked.

"No, not today. I think I need a little time to myself."

"Are you ok?" Kurt frowned.

"It's just been a really hard day and I have a lot to think about. I'll call you later ok?" he said, grabbing his bag.

"Sure," Kurt said, grabbing his own bag, disappointed but understanding. "Of course."

Blaine unlocked the front door to his apartment, his school bag slung over his shoulder. His curls were completely free at this point. He felt a mess after everything he had been through that day and he just wanted to crash in his room and take a nap.

"Hey sweetheart," Mrs. Anderson greeted him casually from the living room, but the moment she saw him, she knew something was wrong. "Hey, you ok? What's the matter?" She walked over to him and placed a comforting hand on his arm.

"I'm fine Mom," he answered dismissively. "It's just been a long day, rehearsing for sectionals. I'm going to take a nap," he said, brushing her off, as he went into his room and closed the door.

Mrs. Anderson knew he was lying. She knew by the emotionally drained look in his eyes, the mess of his hair, and the tension in his body that there was more going on than just a few hours of rehearsal. But she also knew he was almost a grown man, and he clearly didn't want the comfort of his mother right now. And why should he, she thought. It had been years since he could go to her for comfort. She had never been there for him, had always abandoned him to defend himself alone against a man that repeatedly hurt him. She had been trying since they left him, and their relationship was improving, but she understood that it would take more than a few months of change to make up for years of neglect.

She was broken out of her revelry by a knock at the door. She opened it to find a handsome young man, brunette, Blaine's age, in a Dalton uniform. "Nick, right?" she asked trying to place a name with the face she vaguely recognized.

"Yes Ma'am, I used to go to school with Blaine. Well, clearly," he said, sheepishly glancing down at his uniform. "Um, is Blaine home?" he asked.

"Sure, of course, come in," she said as she opened the door wider to let Nick inside the apartment. He glanced around and was pleasantly surprised by the warm and comfortable feel to it. Blaine had always described home with his father to be cold and lonely. He was glad that he had this to come home to now.

"Blaine's in his room, which is right over there," she said pointing to the closed door. "He seems to have had a rough day, maybe you can cheer him up," she added hopefully.

"I'll certainly try," Nick said with a smile.

Blaine lay on his bed, staring at the ceiling. He had thought about doing homework, but couldn't wrap his brain around it. He had tried to sleep, but his mind raced. He had thought about playing the guitar, but he didn't think he could even manage that right then. He was startled when he heard a familiar knock at the door that didn't belong to his mother or to Kurt. He jumped off of his bed and opened the door to see his best friend standing in front of him. Blaine immediately took him in for a hug as if they hadn't seen each other in years, and ushered him inside, closing the door behind him.

"It's good to see you too Blaine," Nick laughed barely able to breath Blaine was squeezing him so hard. He patted Blaine on the back and the boy released him. "You know, you can always call and invite me over if you miss me," Nick said, taking a seat in the chair at Blaine's desk.

"I didn't realize you had gotten your driver's license," Blaine joked.

"Yes well, I finally completed my driving hours at Dalton, and passed the exam with flying colors."

"Good, now I don't have to make my way out to Westerville every time I want to see you," Blaine said with a wink. "So, what brings you here?"

Nick's smile faded slightly though he tried to remain nonchalant. "Kurt called me early today. Said you went a little fight club at school."

Blaine's face went tight. "Were those his words?"

"No, those are my words, after he told me what happened," he explained quickly, noting Blaine's immediate change in mood. "Care to talk about it?"

"No," Blaine said definitively, distancing himself from Nick by sitting across the room on his music stool. "Is that all you came for?"

"Actually, no," Nick assured him. "Jeff wanted me to personally thank you for those videos of *I Kissed a Girl* last week. He hasn't stopped watching them since you and Kurt posted them on YouTube." Nick was pleased to hear a laugh escape from Blaine's lips that also turned upward into a smile. "He really wanted to come here himself so that he could both, and I quote, *kiss you and get names and numbers*, but after hearing from Kurt I didn't think it was a good idea."

"Well, you can tell him that all those girls are taken, so he needs to continue to go out and find his own girl somewhere else," Blaine smirked.

"Oh, he *has* his own girl," Nick declared, "He just doesn't like to stop looking. Likes to keep his options open. Especially if one of those options is Quinn."

"Mr. Playboy," Blaine joked shaking his head at the tall blonde.

"He isn't the only one. Which leads to me to the real reason I'm here." Nick shifted apprehensively in his seat and Blaine's frown returned. "Sebastian."

Blaine immediately froze. "Nick, I really can't deal with this today on top of everything else."

Nick knew it would be hard, but it was something that he couldn't put off. "Blaine, Sebastian has half of Dalton believing that you are at his beck and call and doing goodness knows what with him behind Kurt's back."

Blaine shot up, "That's not true!"

Nick put his hand up, "Now, I know it's not, and the Warblers who know you have been trying to get him to stop, but it seems that when Sebastian Smythe wants something he doesn't stop until he gets it."

"Yeah, well, he's not going to get me." Blaine was furious. How dare this guy come into his life and try and ruin the only perfect thing he had. "He can't just rip apart what Kurt and I have. Kurt saved my life Nick," he yelled, "and Sebastian can't just swoop in and try to destroy that."

"Well then why don't you tell him that?" Nick pressed him.

Blaine's hands flew to his hair and he pulled at his curls as he rubbed his head, settling himself on the bed. How many times had he and Nick been in this position, Nick staring at a lost and broken Blaine from across the room. Nick waited patiently as Blaine's thoughts raced. He had been polite to Sebastian though he saw right through him. It hadn't mattered because he was devoted to Kurt and nothing could tear them apart. He had enjoyed their talks about art, and adventure and his life in Paris. Maybe he had hoped that Sebastian could get over this crush and move onto just being friends. Blaine could use a friend like him, someone with dreams as big as Kurt's who had already lived out there in the world. Maybe he liked the



attention. Or maybe it was just him running from another fight. "I don't know," Blaine finally admitted quietly.

"Well figure it out Blaine," Nick insisted. "Because every time you don't, Sebastian gets bolder and it's less and less fair to Kurt. He plans to go to your Sectionals competition, did you know that?"

Blaine looked at him and shook his head. "No. Are you guys coming too?" he asked hopefully.

"Wish we could, but most of us can't. It's midterms before winter break, and we all have exams or final papers. You remember. Getting out to Lima for a few hours is just too much."

"Yeah." Blaine was sad, but understood. The workload at Dalton was twice what it was at McKinley, that's why he shared so many classes with his fellow Glee Club members, despite most of them being seniors. Midterms at Dalton were killer and no one wanted to go home to their parents over winter break with bad grades.

"So, do you want to do something fun before I have to head back?" Nick asked to change the subject and try to get Blaine to relax.

"What did you have in mind," Blaine said, eyebrows arching up in amusement.

"Well," Nick said mischievously. "My guess is Kurt hasn't been too much of a match on that X-Box over there. Could you possibly be a bit rusty?"

"Oh, you would be surprised," Blaine retorted getting the controls out. "I've had plenty of practice since I left Dalton," he said throwing a controller to Nick. "Kurt is a master!"

Blaine looked out into the audience after Man in the Mirror. He had seen Sebastian out there cheering for him. And he had seen Mike's father next to him. He knew that both men should make him happy, but neither did. He had held out his own hope, despite knowing it wasn't to come to pass. He smiled at Mike, who stood in shock. Blaine knew how much it meant to him for his father to show, to stand and applaud. Blaine had his own dreams. But his never seemed to come true.

Those thoughts were in his head when Finn turned to him on stage and Blaine offered him a hearty handshake. They had come to terms with their feelings toward one another in the locker room, had danced and sung their hearts out at rehearsals and their performance was flawless. If they could stick together, they had a really good chance at Regionals and even Nationals.

He gave Rory a hug, then Kurt grabbed him as they all ran off the stage. Excitement filled the air as they ran back into the choir room that had been transformed into a dressing room.

"Your solos on ABC were incredible!" Blaine complimented him. "And that jump! Damn, Kurt, I am so proud of you!"

"All our hard work paid off," he winked to Blaine. "I'm going to freshen up before we go back out there," he said going over to the piano where his hair product sat waiting for him.

Blaine turned to Finn, and held out a hand, which Finn quickly clasped in a firm handshake. "We gave it our all," Blaine smiled.

"Yeah we did," Finn admitted, laughing and hugging Blaine. Sam quickly moved his way into the middle of the bromance, putting an arm around each of them.

"Top dogs, yes, this is what I was missing."

Suddenly, the room went quiet, and Blaine turned to see Mike's father walk in. Mr. Chang called Mike and Tina out of the room, and Blaine felt his skin turn warm with jealousy. He politely excused himself and went to go sit against the wall next to his bag to take some deep breaths. Kurt had turned to look for Blaine as soon as Mr. Chang walked in and spied him immediately. He walked over and knelt down in front of him, placing his hands gently on Blaine's pulled up knees.

"You ok?" he asked softly. Blaine nodded slightly. "Did you hear from him?"

Wordlessly, Blaine reached into his bag and pulled out his cell, fiddling with it for a second before tossing it to Kurt.

Kurt caught it and looked at a series of texts.

**Sorry I can't make it son, last minute drills on the base today. You understand. ~ Dad**

**Sure Dad, I understand perfectly. ~ Blaine**

Kurt couldn't say he was surprised in the slightest, but it didn't stop the sadness and anger he felt on Blaine's behalf. As he backed out of those texts another one caught his eye. He looked up slightly at Blaine, and his boyfriend's eyes were downcast, his mind elsewhere. Kurt quickly, against his better judgment, clicked on the conversation.

**Hey Hot Stuff, meet me after the competition in the lobby. I caught a glimpse of you in that white tuxedo and I can't stop thinking about you. ~ S.**

**It is pretty hot isn't it? Kurt looks damn fine in it too. ~ Blaine**

**You'd look better out of it. ~ S.**

**Don't you have exams or papers to write? ~ Blaine**

**More important things to do here. ~S.**

The conversation ended there. Kurt checked the time and it was right before they had headed out to the auditorium when the announcements started. He wanted to confront him. He wanted to know if Blaine had known he was coming. Kurt had been shocked to see Sebastian in the audience, but Blaine's texts had no surprise in them. He wanted to understand all these things, but now was not the time or the place.

He clicked out of it and handed the phone back to Blaine who took it and threw it back in his bag without looking.

"Come on everyone," Mr. Schuester called. "Judges are ready, everyone get back out there." Mr. Schuester noticed Kurt and Blaine against the wall and went over to them. "You guys ok?" he asked, hands on his hips looking down at them.

Kurt got up immediately. "Yeah, we're fine," he said but looked back at Blaine who hadn't moved.

"Go on out there," the teacher said to Kurt, patting him on the back. "We'll meet you in a second."

Kurt walked off with the rest of his friends, looking back behind him concerned. Mr. Schuester reached a hand out to Blaine, who looked up at him and took it, pulling himself up.

"Anytime you need to talk Blaine, I'm here," the teacher said.

"Thanks," Blaine answered. "Not sure if Kurt's told you, but I'm really not that much of a talker. Especially to teachers," he added.

"Ah, but Finn tells me you're quite the boxer," he laughed.

"Yeah," Blaine said, voice low. "About that, sorry. I didn't mean to lose it in there."

"Yeah well..." Mr. Schuester put his arm around Blaine's shoulders. "Now that you have, you are officially a member of New Directions," he joked. "Now go win your trophy."

Blaine smiled and left his teacher to join his team on the stage. It didn't matter who was in the audience, or who had stayed home. It didn't even truly matter who won. What mattered were the people next to him, New Directions and TroubleTones, his new brothers and sisters, his new family.

The third place winners were announced and they all applauded as Kurt stepped out to talk to the lead singer. Blaine grabbed him back. With Kurt by his side, he would get through anything.

Quinn walked out of the bathroom and the girls looked at each other.

"So, what do you girls think?" Sugar asked. She was never a part of New Directions and the TroubleTones was created for her, though the other girls kind of took it over. Still, with losing and all, she wouldn't mind going to the New Directions if the other girls agreed.

"Like I said before, I do not want to be stuck singing behind Blaine and Rachel," Mercedes said.

"No one wants to be stuck singing behind Blaine. Have you seen him shake his booty? Not pretty," Santana sniped.

"I think it's pretty," Sugar remarked quickly. Santana rolled her eyes at her.

"Come on Santana," Brittany said, pulling Santana in with the hand she held. "It would be fun to be back with all our friends. I miss Mike as a dance partner. Not that I don't love dancing with you, but did you see him out there tonight?"

Santana frowned.

"And Sam did look pretty cute doing those body rolls and magic sex dance," Mercedes said with a blush. "I wouldn't mind being able to spend more time with him, ya know, now that he's back."

"Sam better watch himself or Shane's gonna kick his white chocolate ass back to Kentucky," Santana warned.

"Only if I tell him to," Mercedes retorted, with a sly grin to herself. "Well, Santana, it's up to you."

Santana thought about it. She had left so that she felt she had a safe place to be with Brittany. But New Directions had made it pretty clear that she was safe with them, despite Puck's always obnoxious comments. They had all reached out to her last week and she felt loved and supported by all of them.

Her only problem was Blaine.

Brittany was right, he would be her best friend if she let him. And the truth was, she didn't know why she wouldn't let him in. Brittany had said that he scared her. She knew that sometimes she hated him. Maybe they were too similar. Maybe it was all too close to home. She had yelled at him for going back to his father, and yet all she could think about was getting her Abuela back in her life. He was her reflection in every way, yet everyone saw perfection in him while they saw ugliness in her. In her heart she knew it wasn't his fault, it was hers. But she couldn't help it.

She was about to tell her friends she couldn't go back when she looked in their eyes. They wanted to. Mercedes wanted to be with Sam and Kurt. Brittany wanted to be with Mike and Rory and Artie. And Sugar just wanted to be on a winning team. How could she say no to that?

"Fine. Let's go."

They found them in the auditorium, singing in a way that reminded her of the beginning. Santana was tense at first, but as she watched them she was reminded. These were her friends, there to welcome her with open arms.

*Tonight*

*We are young*

*So let's set the world on fire*

*We can burn brighter*

*Than the sun*

Mercedes joined in first and Santana smiled as they all turned to them. Quinn and Rachel smiled and Santana, Brittany and Sugar joined in. Santana looked at Brittany and grabbed her hand. The New Directions reached out to them and they laughed back singing.

*Tonight*

*We are young*

*So let's set the world on fire*

*We can burn brighter*

*Than the sun*

Quinn crossed the stage to get Mercedes and as Rory held his arms out for her Brittany jumped into his arms. Sugar jumped onto Artie's lap and Kurt wheeled them back, leaving Santana standing on her own.

*Carry me home tonight*

*Just carry me home tonight*

*The angels never arrived*

*But i can hear the choir*

*So will someone come and carry me home*

She looked at Blaine. And half of her wanted him to come for her. He glanced at her quickly. He thought about going to get her. But how many times had she left him standing there, insulted him, made him follow her. Kurt was right. He couldn't do play the game anymore. So he turned away. Rachel went to get Santana and brought her to Finn, who hugged her warmly.

*Tonight*

*We are young*

*So let's set the world on fire*

*We can burn brighter*

*Than the sun*

Santana, Finn, Rachel and Mercedes moved downstage and turned to the rest of the group, the two sets of leaders singing to the rest.

*So if by the time the bar closes*

*And you feel like falling down*

*I'll carry you home tonight*

Blaine found himself alone for a moment, watching Santana, not sure which way to turn with her. But he decided that tomorrow was another day. Tonight, he'd just reserve for celebration.

## ***Chapter Twelve: Xtraordinary Merry Christmas***

"Sweetheart, can you and Kurt go into the closet in the study and go through all the ornaments? I put everything in two totes back there. Just look through it and decide which ones you guys want for the house and the tree."

"Sure Mom," Blaine said and he grabbed Kurt's hand pulling him along. Blaine had never been so excited for Christmas before. Last year he spent the holiday singing *Baby It's Cold Outside* with the daughter of a Major at the annual Christmas Ball on the base. This year he would be home, safe and happy with Kurt and his mother. It was going to be the best year ever. He and his Mom decided to get and trim the tree two weeks before Christmas and he was thrilled when Kurt agreed to come over and help.

The two boys went into the study and pulled out two giant bins of Christmas ornaments and decorations. As they dug through, Kurt made a pile of decorations he thought were classy or endearing, and a pile of things he thought were gaudy. Occasionally, Blaine would pull something out of the gaudy pile and explain how he had it made it for his mother in Kindergarten, or his father had sent it to him from some faraway place when he was younger. Every time, Kurt would give into Blaine's puppy dog eyes, and move whatever it was to the keep pile.

"Oh look, what's this? A Dear Santa letter?" Kurt grinned widely, holding an old envelope in his hand. "Let's open it up and see what little Blaine wanted for Christmas!"

Blaine looked up suddenly with a horrified look, and went to grab it. "No, Kurt." Kurt had been teasing, but Blaine's tone made him stop and turn to him. "Please," Blaine begged, his voice cracking as he held his hand out for the letter. Blaine looked as though he was seeing a ghost.

"What is it, Baby?" Kurt went to him, touching his arm gently and handing him the letter. Blaine took it and stared, disappearing into it like a spaceship into a black hole. Kurt rubbed Blaine's arm to bring him out of the darkness. "Hey," he said quietly, "it's ok, you're here, you're safe." Blaine slowly looked up at him, tears in his eyes. Kurt was his light in dark places. Always.

Blaine's voice was quiet and reminiscent. "I wrote this when I was 8, the Christmas before my Dad left home for Iraq. I left it out on my desk the night I wrote it and in my sleep I had dreamed a melody to go along with my words. When I woke in the morning it was gone. I came to believe I had dreamt the whole thing." He opened it up and stared at it, getting lost in the memory. "How did it end up here?"



"Sing it to me?" Kurt asked quietly.

Blaine looked at Kurt, then back down to the letter. Kurt saw the tears forming in Blaine's eyes as he remembered, and he reached out to squeeze his free hand in support. Blaine handed the letter to Kurt, looking at the floor. Kurt read along as Blaine sang from memory.

*Dear Santa Claus I'm writing you this Christmas*

*With a wish that's different from the rest*

*I don't want toys or cars or games as maybe you have guessed*

*See Mom and Dad are fighting*

*But they won't tell my why*

*And it must be bad cause yesterday*

*I saw my Daddy cry*

Kurt looked up to see Mrs. Anderson standing in the doorway, watching Blaine. Blaine was so lost, he didn't notice. Amy already had tears running down her face. Kurt turned back Blaine. His eyes were distant and dark, full of painful memories.

*So Mister Claus what I'm asking for*

*Maybe only you can do*

*Please Santa Sir*

*Can you make things like they were?*

The tempo to the song increased with the desperation in Blaine's eyes. He looked up at Kurt, but through him, with a fierceness Kurt only ever saw when Blaine felt he was fighting for his life.

*Back when Daddy wasn't angry*

*And Mommy was around*

*And I wasn't yelled at all the time*

*Or scared to make a sound*

*And I know you must have better things*

*To do this Christmas Eve*

*But the only thing I really want*

*Is for Mommy not to leave*

*So Santa if you're out there*

*I will gladly take the blame*

*I would like to use my Christmas wish*

*To keep our lives the same*

Blaine's eyes softened as the song did again, and he reached for the letter, reading the last few words, though Kurt knew he didn't have to.

*So say hello to Missus Claus*

*And give the elves my best*

*But don't forget the things I've said*

*Please grant me this request.*

*Yours Truly,*

*Me*

Silence swept over the home as Kurt and Mrs. Anderson truly took in what they had just heard. In Blaine's mind he remained in the bedroom of his 8 year old self, listening to his parents fight downstairs, about him, as he wrote the letter. It wasn't until Kurt broke the silence, that Blaine returned to reality.

"That was beautiful," Kurt whispered.

"Thank you," Blaine said quietly, wiping away tears he hadn't realized he had shed. He looked up to Kurt, then around the room, and realized for the first time that his mother stood in the doorway. His eyes bore into his mother's and so many emotions flew to the surface. "Did you have the letter this whole time?" he asked desperately.

Mrs. Anderson nodded, tears in her own eyes. She couldn't believe that Blaine not only remembered the letter, but had turned it to song.

"Is that why you stayed?" Blaine asked, his voice breaking.

"You wished it for Christmas," she answered, taking a step toward her son. "How could I let Santa fail to give you the one thing you asked for?"

Blaine slowly stood up and took a step toward her. Then he ran and buried himself in his mother's arms. "I love you," he cried.

"I love you too son, I always have," she said, tears now streaming down.

Kurt turned to the ornaments, giving the two their moment of privacy, until Mrs. Anderson held her son away from her and looked between him and Kurt. "Now the two of you need to finish sorting through those ornaments, because that tree out there is looking awfully bare." She said as she returned to the living room, wiping her eyes.

Blaine looked after her as she left. Kurt walked up to Blaine, hands in his pockets, his heart still heavy. "Blaine," he started.

"Stop," Blaine said with a commanding look in his eye that quickly softened as he pulled Kurt close, wrapping arms around Kurt's waist. "It was a long time ago."

"So was my mother's death," Kurt said quietly. "You don't ever forget."

To comfort them both, Blaine leaned in and kissed Kurt, until he felt Kurt relax beneath him. "This is our first Christmas together," Blaine smiled at him. Today we start making new memories."

This time Kurt initiated the kiss, lingering to memorize the moment. He pulled away slowly and looked at Blaine, eyes sparkling. "So, can we start by putting that ugly green elf in the No pile?" he grinned.

Blaine frowned. "But I made that elf in the 2nd grade," he whined. "My mother told me it was beautiful."

"She lied Blaine," Kurt told him bluntly. "New memories, Baby, new memories," he said returning to the cartons of ornaments lying on the floor.

Blaine stood with his arms folded, staring after Kurt sulking. After a minute he came back to sit down next to Kurt. "Fine," he mumbled. "But only because I love you."

Kurt smiled and grabbed his face, kissing Blaine quickly. "I love you too," he said smiling.

It was going to be a wonderful Christmas.

Blaine rang the doorbell to the Hummel household and Finn answered the door. He immediately pulled Blaine into a tight squeeze that made it tough for Blaine to breathe. It also squeezed the present that Blaine had so carefully wrapped in blue and silver paper, covered in beautiful menorahs and Stars of David.

"Dude, I am so happy that you are here! It's great to have another Christian in the home," Finn said.

"Ummm," Blaine answered confused. "Isn't your whole family Christian?"

"Yeah," Finn explained, closing the door and ushering him inside. "But Rachel's been giving them Hanukkah lessons for a week now, and I just want to sip my eggnog and sing Christmas Carols by the tree."

"Dude," they both heard a voice from behind them, and Blaine and Finn both turned around to see Puck. "If you are going to date a Jewish Girl, then you seriously need to put your Christmas wishes aside and get into the spirit of Chanukah. Here," he said throwing an arm around his best friend and handing what looked like a top with funny letters on it to both Finn and Blaine. "Have a dreidle."

Blaine smiled a thank you, shaking his head at those two, and went off to find Kurt. He of course found him, as he often did, in the kitchen. But this time he was huddled over the stove with Rachel, both in aprons, making potato latkes.

Kurt smiled broadly as Blaine walked over to Rachel, gave her a kiss on the cheek, and held her present out for her. "Happy Chanukah, sweetie," he said.

Rachel smiled but pushed him aside. "Thank you, but watch out, the oil is going to splatter all over your handsome outfit."

Blaine left the present on the counter and took a step back grabbing Kurt's hand, to pull his boyfriend towards him. "Hello gorgeous," he grinned, kissing him lightly on the lips. He whispered in Kurt's ear, "I love seeing you in an apron, cooking for me."

Kurt swatted him gently with the spatula in his hand. "Chauvinist," he teased as Blaine jumped away and headed to the living room.

"I'm going to watch television in the other room, where it's safe," he called behind him.

Blaine went into the living room to find Finn and Puck on the couch and Burt in the recliner, all watching *Frosty the Snowman*. Carole was happily sitting on the arm of Burt's recliner with Burt's arm around her waist stringing popcorn. Blaine shook Burt's hand in greeting and gave Carole a kiss on the cheek before relaxing himself on the couch. It still amazed Blaine sometimes how comfortable he was in the house and how comfortable everyone was with him, but he guessed that's what happened when friends slowly became family.

Blaine peered over to Puck and looked at him questioningly, "Now, I love this movie, but are we really supposed to be watching Christmas movies on the first night of Chanukah?" he asked.

Puck looked over at him with a scowl. "Find me a Chanukah movie and I'll put it on in an instant."

They all watched quietly for a bit, until Rachel came bounding in with a big smile, clapping her hands together. "We're ready!" she announced.

They all went into the dining room and were in awe. Rachel and Kurt had set the table with a blue tablecloth, and there was a gorgeous gold menorah in the center of the table, matches perfectly placed next to it, with one candle in the center and one in the last holder on the right side. There were plates of regular potato latkes as well sweet potato latkes, and two bowls full of applesauce and sour cream. In addition, Kurt had prepared a huge salad, with some steamed chicken on the side for anybody who wanted it. On the buffet behind the table were a stack of presents wrapped in assorted Chanukah paper, as well as a basket full of chocolate coins. There was another basket full of yarmulkes, that Rachel took and passed around to all of the guys in the room. On her own head she placed a beautiful lace head covering.

Kurt sneaked over to Blaine's side and wrapped his arm around Blaine's waist as the two smiled at each other. This was going to be the happiest holiday season that all of them had the pleasure of celebrating in a long time. And if Kurt and Rachel had their way, it was going to be the first Chanukah they all spent together in a long line of future Decembers.

"So, Puck and I have been planning this for a while. We know that New Directions always neglects Chanukah, and that's fine, but we really wanted to sing a song for you tonight, in addition to doing the traditional prayers," she explained. "Puck?" she cued.

Puck walked around to the backside of the table and lit the middle candle, called the shamash, and addressed them all as if they were in Glee club. "So this is my favorite Chanukah song, it's by the BareNaked Ladies and it's called *Hannukah Blessings*. I hope you enjoy it."

*How lucky are we that we*

*Have lights so we can see*

*Although the day is done*

*What a miracle that a spark  
Lifts these candles out of the dark  
Every evening, one by one  
Until the end of Hanukkah, of Hanukkah.*

*With the jingle bells and the toys  
And the TV shows and noise  
It's easy to forget  
At the end of the day  
Our whole family will say  
These words for Hanukkah*

Rachel stood on the side of the table with everyone else, and joined in with Puck, singing the first Chanukah blessing with him as the song continued. She took the Shamash candle and she lit the single candle for the first night.

*Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu*

*B'mitz'votav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Hanukkah.*

*Light the candles for Hanukkah, for Hanukkah*

Rachel took hold of Finn's hand, and they snuggled together before the light of the menorah. Carole and Burt did the same off to the side. Blaine laid his head on Kurt's shoulder and smiled. Puck and Rachel continued singing, Puck taking the melody while Rachel took the harmony.

*We remember how Maccabees*

*Fought so all of us could be free*

*And so we celebrate*

*On this festival of the lights*

*There's a joyful time every night*

*But we illuminate*

*The candles of Hanukkah, of Hanukkah*

Rachel encouraged the Hummel family to join in, since she'd been working with them all week to learn the prayers, and Blaine smiled at his adopted family as they tried hard for Rachel's sake.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam she'asa niseem*

*La'avoteinu bayamim haheim baz'man hazeh.*

*Hanukkah...Hanukkah...*

Everyone applauded as Rachel and Puck finished the song and Puck took a deep bow, beaming. Rachel hushed everyone after an appropriate amount of applause had past. "Ok, before we start the festivities,



there is one more prayer that we say on the first night of Chanukah. *Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu Melech haolam shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higianu laz'man hazeh.*"

"What does it mean?" Kurt asked quietly.

Rachel smiled. "It means 'Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.' It's a prayer of thanks for letting us all be together to celebrate. And I really want to say, I am so thankful to be with family and friends today. I love you all," she said and turned to smile up at Finn. "Especially you," she said and Finn leaned down to kiss her gently. Her smile glowing, she turned to everyone. "Does anyone else want to say anything?"

Blaine stepped forward, letting go of Kurt. "Umm, if you don't mind, I have something I'd like to say." He looked to Rachel who smiled at him and Burt who nodded and he turned to the group. He spoke quietly and hesitantly at first. "It has been a really long time since I haven't had a sense of dread coming into December. But Kurt," he said reaching for his boyfriend's hand as Kurt clasped it. "you and your family have saved my life. Burt, you have showed me what it means to truly be a Dad and to be a man and I am so grateful to you for that. Finn, it took us some time, but we're putting our differences aside to support each other. Kurt," he paused, pulling him in for a hug, staring deeply into his eyes. "Whether you believe it or not, God brought you to me. Rachel was so very right when she said we were soulmates. And like the lights on that menorah, our light will burn so much longer and brighter than anyone expects." He watched as tears in Kurt's eyes sparkled with candlelight and he kissed his soft lips for all to see. "I love you."

"I love you too," Kurt responded with a shy smile. Then he turned to his family, only slightly embarrassed. "I think it's time to get this party started."

Everyone laughed and agreed as Finn yelled, "Thank goodness, I'm starving!"

The family and friends enjoyed their meal and played a rousing game of dreidel, which Puck won hands down, although Rachel was sure that he had somehow cheated by weighting down his dreidel. They exchanged Chanukah presents with one another, and sang songs into the night until Blaine and Rachel had to leave for home. It was a wonderful evening, and they all looked forward to it becoming a yearly ritual.

Kurt and Blaine left McKinley for the day, excited by Artie's plans for the Christmas special. But as Kurt drove back to Blaine's house, he could tell that something was wrong. He turned to Blaine while keeping his eyes on the road and grew concerned. "Ok, Blaine. Spill. What's going on in that mind of yours?" he asked with care.

Blaine looked to Kurt and took his hand, absentmindedly circling his thumb on Kurt's palm. "Sam was right. You and I both know that as much as he does. It is the sad things that make you remember what's really important." Blaine's voice was quiet, his tone contemplative.

Kurt considered Blaine. "Blaine, I really wish we could do the Christmas special and work at the homeless shelter, but we can't do both, and, well, we just can't give up the chance to be on television. This is an amazing opportunity for us, everyone's been working really hard. And I can send the videos to NYADA to help with my application."

"I know Kurt," Blaine said sadly. "It's just that...if my Mom had chosen to leave my Dad when I was younger, that could have been us. It *was* Sam. I'm sure some of the kids there have been through what I've been through. It just seems so wrong to skip out on them."

Kurt smiled warmly at Blaine. "I love you, for thinking all of that. I really do. And I promise that you and I can go back there another time, ok? Sam was right, but so was Artie. Christmas is about being merry, and damn Blaine, you deserve it this year." He squeezed Blaine's hand. "We both do."

Blaine turned to Kurt and sighed. He smiled at Kurt and brought Kurt's fingertips to his lips, kissing them gently. "You're right. The Christmas special is going to be fantastic, and we'll go back to the shelter another day. Yes?" he asked hopefully.

Kurt looked at him before turning back to the road. "Yes." he grinned.

Blaine watched Kurt read to the children at the shelter as he sat down with the families. He had been so grateful that they'd found a way to make it to the shelter after the taping. He knew what some of those kids had been through, and he understood that being there for them was the most important thing they could have done that Christmas. He saw children with vacant eyes begin to smile and laugh with Kurt, and

Blaine fell in love all over again. After playing Lucy and Desi in the television special, he began to see, perhaps for the first time, a future for himself full of love, acceptance and security.

As they left the shelter, hands linked, Blaine turned to Kurt and smiled. "Come to church with me Christmas morning. Mom and I are going to the Sunrise service."

Kurt stopped and looked at Blaine as if he'd grown three heads. "As much as I would love the excuse to stay over tomorrow night, one - my Dad would never believe me, and two - you don't want me at church with you."

"Yes I do," Blaine said with puppy dog eyes.

"Well fine, but the other people around you won't," Kurt argued.

"I don't care," Blaine assured him.

"Well I do. Rory's tale of God and Christ was far more than enough for me for one year thank you very much," he said, ending the discussion. "I will meet you at your apartment after."

"I can't believe your father is letting you have Christmas dinner with me."

"Well, he understands how important this year is to you," he explained. "First time you and your Mom are on your own, I mean."

Blaine smiled and pulled him outside and looked up to the clear night sky, stars gleaming. "Pick a star and make a wish," Blaine said.

"Come on, Blaine," Kurt protested.

"Just like at my Dad's house, pick a star Kurt," he urged.

Blaine closed his eyes, hoping Kurt would do the same, and wished with all his heart. He opened his eyes and saw Kurt's closed. He carefully leaned over and kissed each lid. He grinned as Kurt's eyes rolled back and then fluttered open. "What did you wish for?" Blaine whispered.

"I thought if we told it wouldn't come true," Kurt teased.

Blaine ignored him, giddy from the excitement of the television shoot and the satisfaction of working at the shelter. "I wished for the chic, swank chalet, the fireplace, the opulent decor, us greeting our friends, the perfect life." Kurt smiled adoringly at Blaine. "Maybe some kids."

"Woah," Kurt panicked. "Put the brakes on that runaway train, mister."

"What, you don't want kids?" Blaine asked with knitted brow.

"You just need to slow down a bit. Let's not talk about kids until we stop *being* kids." Kurt said.

"I don't need," he said slowly pulling Kurt into an embrace, "to slow down." And he began to sing...

*It's a very, very, merry, merry Christmas.*

*Gonna party on 'til Santa grants my wishes.*

*Got my halo on I know what I want*

*It's who I'm with.*

*It's an extraordinary Merry Christmas!*

Kurt laughed and pulled Blaine into the car to drive him back home. They had driven to the studio, then the shelter together from Blaine's apartment. "Blaine, I love you. But we don't even know what's happening next year yet. How about we take things one day at a time."

"One day, one week, one month, one year, one lifetime. Whatever I get with you I'm going to savor," Blaine said earnestly.

Kurt gazed into Blaine's hazel eyes and melted. "I do love you so, Blaine Anderson."

Blaine answered the door in his Sunday best, dressed quite similarly to his suit for the Special. Kurt was dressed in his best Marc Jacobs, and for a moment neither boy could stop themselves from staring at the other.

Mrs. Anderson came up behind them, laughing. "You two just going to stand in the doorway all night, or do you think you might invite him in Blaine."

Blaine shook his head, but never took his eyes off of Kurt. "You look absolutely stunning. Please come in," he said, extending an arm for Kurt to link.

"Thank you, Mr. Anderson. You look gorgeous yourself." Kurt linked arms with Blaine and nuzzled close.

Blaine leaned over and whispered. "Come with me, I have something to show you."

"Dinner will be ready in 20 minutes," Mrs. Anderson called with a smile, glad to see her son so happy.

Blaine took Kurt to his room and closed the door. He left the lights off, but Blaine had lit vanilla and pine scented candles all over the room, making the room both look and smell beautiful. Blaine seductively pulled Kurt inside to the center of his room, then looked up with a sexy smile and sang.

*Underneath, the mistletoe, hold me tight and kiss me slow.*

Kurt looked up to see mistletoe hanging from a grate in the ceiling. Blaine pulled Kurt into him so that their bodies pressed together fully and he kissed Kurt passionately. Kurt immediately took control of the kiss and slowed it down, taking pleasure in every single moment, until Blaine felt like Kurt was putting him through delicious torture. When Kurt took a breath, Blaine wasted no time. He kissed his way down Kurt's neck, and began to unbutton Kurt's shirt to mischievously nibble beneath Kurt's collarbone.

"Put that Halo away Blaine? Guess we know who's been naughty this year," Kurt's voice hitched.

"Oh, but it's oh so nice." Blaine's sultry tone nearly undoing Kurt instantly.

"Blaine, it's almost time for dinner," Kurt complained half-heartedly.

"Mmmm...." Blaine said, lips nuzzling where he marked Kurt, beginning to make his way down his chest.

"Can't we skip dinner and go straight to dessert?" he begged. "You look so sexy and you taste so good."

"As tempting as that is, somehow I think your mother would miss us," he said breathlessly, gasping as Blaine made his skin tingle with delight.

As if on cue, the boys heard the doorbell ring and a quick knock on the bedroom door. "If you two can pull yourself away from Blaine's mistletoe for a minute, can you please get the door?"

Blaine fell to the floor in over dramatic fashion and Kurt reached a hand down pulling him up. "You go get the door. I have to put my clothes back together, thank you very much."

"Your very welcome," Blaine grinned, pecking Kurt on the cheek, and he went out to answer the door.

He swung the door open without a thought, and for the second time that day stood motionless at the person on the other side.

"Santana?"

She looked at Blaine, almost shyly. "I didn't have anywhere else to go."

Blaine hesitated for only a moment before inviting her in and closing the door behind her. Kurt came out to join them, and hid his surprise, and possible disappointment, at Santana's unexpected arrival. Blaine took her coat, hat and gloves and hung them up in the closet. Then he turned to her, unable to completely hold back all he felt toward her, as his hands flew to his hips, considering her. "Are you ok," he asked, eyes scrunched.

Santana clearly saw Blaine's discomfort, and she knew she deserved it. She was reserved as she explained. "Brittany's gone and I didn't have anywhere else to go. My parents went to my Abuela's house with the rest of the family for Christmas dinner." Both Blaine and Kurt nodded, understanding that she was not welcome in the house. "They asked if I wanted them to stay home, but I told them to go. Then I got lonely," she finished.

Blaine studied her. He had so many things he wanted to say, and he knew that Kurt might get angry that he brushed it all aside, but it was Christmas and she was alone, and now wasn't the time to deal with other issues. "Of course you are welcome Santana." And he took her hand and brought her into the kitchen.

"We have one more for dinner Mom. This is Santana Lopez," he said introducing her. "Santana, this is my mom."

"Please, call me Amy, Santana. Just because Kurt won't, doesn't mean that Blaine's other friends shouldn't."

Santana smiled and offered to help Amy cook, which Blaine's mother readily accepted.

Kurt took Blaine's hand and led him into the living room, sitting underneath the Christmas tree and patting a spot next to him for Blaine. The two quietly sat, taking in the smell of the tree, until Blaine lay down against Kurt's chest and Kurt wrapped him up in his arms.

Blaine took Kurt's right hand in his and traced the gum wrapper ring on his boyfriend's ring finger. He smiled and clasped Kurt's hand. "Forever," Blaine whispered.

Behind him, Kurt smiled, his eyes twinkling. He remembered Blaine's fear and avoidance last Christmas, his complete refusal to admit he was falling in love, and he delighted in how far they'd come in a year's time. He held Blaine close, kissing him sweetly on his temple as he thought of all they'd been through and all they had overcome. Kurt looked up at the tree and the lights shining down on them, as Blaine had earlier in the week with the menorah. Blaine was right, their light would shine brighter and longer than anyone could dream.

It most definitely was an Extraordinary Merry Christmas.

### ***Chapter Thirteen: New Years Hiatus***

"Come on Dad, please?" Kurt begged his father.

"Come on yourself Kurt, you couldn't have possibly thought that I would say yes to this crazy scheme of yours," Burt answered.

It was the day after Christmas and Blaine hid in the Hummel living room, hanging on every word being spoken between Kurt and his Dad in the kitchen.

"Dad, if you're worried about the driving, we all plan on taking turns. And it's only ten hours. That's a little over two hours for each of us." Kurt was starting to whine. Blaine sent him silent thoughts to calm down before he blew it for all of them.

"It wasn't the driving I was worried about Kurt. What arrangements have you guys made for where to stay?" Burt asked, arms folded across his chest.

"Rachel's Dads booked two adjoining rooms when they gave her the tickets. Dad, please, you and Carole have to let us go," Kurt begged.

"I don't *have* to do anything, Kurt." Burt scolded. He was losing control of his son. When did that happen? He still remembered his little boy who came running home after school to spend time with him. Now he wanted to disappear for 3 days, and next year he would be off to college somewhere. He couldn't stop time. He couldn't even pause it for a few seconds. Burt sighed. "Finn is 18 years old, the rest of you are almost 18, and I'm not sure how good a job I would do at stopping any of you from going. Blaine's mom said yes?" Kurt nodded enthusiastically. "How did he get tickets for the two of you?" he asked suspiciously.

"After Rachel told him her dads had bought tickets for her and Finn, he called his father and asked for them for Christmas. So his father went online and got them." Kurt shrugged and added wryly, "Guess guilt is good for something."

"I don't want you boys using him for money and things, Kurt, got that?" Burt said sternly. Kurt rolled his eyes but nodded his head. "GOT THAT, Blaine?" Burt yelled in the direction of the living room.

"Yes, Sir," Blaine yelled back, contrite, then blushed, because clearly Burt knew he was listening to every word.



"So, *if* I let you go," Burt said, strongly emphasizing the *if*, "What exactly will be the sleeping arrangements at this hotel?"

Kurt leaned on the counter and jutted his hip out. "They are whatever you imagine them to be, Dad," he sassily answered his father.

"I *imagine* them to be you and Rachel in one room and Finn and Blaine in the other." He looked down on Kurt, eyebrows raised in expectation of respecting his wishes.

"Then that is how we will sleep," Kurt affirmed. "So we can go?" Kurt put his hands together in silent pleading, trying to make his face as puppy-dog like as Blaine was capable. "Please?"

Burt stared at Kurt for a long time, then took a deep breath. "It's fine with me if it's fine with Carole." Kurt jumped up and down in excitement and hugged his father. Burt hugged him back, then held him by the shoulders at arm's distance. "But you guys will come home before New Years. I do not want the four of you out there on New Year's Eve."

"That's no problem at all Dad, we already promised Brittany and Santana we'd go to their New Year's Eve party, so we were planning on driving back on the 30th."

Burt ruffled Kurt's hair then shook his head. "Crazy kids," he mumbled to himself as he walked out into the garage.

Blaine peaked his head in and Kurt turned to see him, beaming. "Is it safe to come in now?" Blaine asked with playful caution.

"Blaine," Kurt said. "We are going to New York City." He ran into Blaine's arms and Blaine picked him up and twirled him around.

Blaine gave Kurt a strong, quick kiss on the lips and grinned broadly at his boyfriend. "We are going to Broadway!"

"Finn, you *cannot* wear that to a Broadway show!" Rachel argued with her boyfriend as she looked through his packed bags. "Didn't Kurt and Blaine help you at all?" she asked incredulous.

"I don't want to wear bowties to New York, Rachel, I want to be comfortable," he argued.

Rachel rolled his eyes. "You can be comfortable and stylish too. Pretend you are dressing for Nationals. Come on, let's go back into your closet. We need to leave in 30 minutes."

Blaine sat on Kurt's bed as he watched Kurt finish packing up all his toiletries. Shampoo, Conditioner, moisturizer, hair gel and all the things that Kurt had finished using that morning went into the bag. Blaine stared expectantly at Kurt.

"What?" Kurt asked pertly.

"Forgetting something?" Blaine grinned and wagged his eyebrows.

Kurt pranced over to Blaine, kneeled on the bed and kissed him roughly. "No, I didn't forget anything, it's already packed. Eager much?" Kurt teased.

"I don't know what I'm more excited about. Broadway or being alone with you," Blaine mewled, his eyes narrowing as he pulled Kurt in to rest his curls on Kurt's chest.

Kurt looked down at him, in shock. "You can be alone with me anywhere, for a long, long time, Blaine. Broadway is an experience we won't get very often," Kurt said.

Blaine laughed and pushed Kurt off the bed. "You and Rachel are too much alike sometimes," he grinned.

Kurt and Finn brought their bags down and set them by the front door. They were driving most of the day today, sightseeing in Manhattan tomorrow before the evening show, and returning home the next day on Friday. Their excitement outweighed any concerns they may have had about the trip.

Finn and Blaine nearly ran to the plates piled high with pancakes, syrup, bacon and fruit cup that Carole had cooked them for their sending off.

"You guys have everything you need? Cell phone chargers? Toiletries? Clothes? Your tickets?" As Carole fussed, the kids nodded with every item on the list, Finn running upstairs once to grab his hairbrush that he had forgotten. Rachel and Kurt rolled their eyes at the same time and Blaine broke out in hysterics.

"Alright Kurt, you're all set," Burt came walking in from the garage, car keys in his hand. "You are gassed up, the oil is changed, fluids are topped off, I checked the tires, the brakes, the windshield wipers, the battery and did a full point inspection."

Kurt smiled. "Thanks Dad, you're the best."

"You guys are going to call every day, and I do mean call. I don't mind a text to let me know where you are but I want one phone call a day, understood?"

"Yes, Dad," Kurt answered.

"Blaine, you'll call your Mom every day even if Kurt checks in with me. Same for you Finn, and Rachel, you call your Dads. I want all four of you checking in."

Kurt got up and went to his father. "We're going to be fine, Dad," he said giving him a hug. Finn took the cue from Kurt and went to hug his mother as well. He noticed she had tears in her eyes.

"We're not leaving for college, Mom, the only day you won't see us at all is tomorrow," Finn assured her.

Carole nodded and wiped away her tears. "I know Finn. It's just that you guys are all grown up, and I don't know when that happened."

Blaine sat and watched, wistfully as he often did, at the relationship Kurt and Finn had with their parents. He looked at Rachel who was smiling at Finn, and suspected there was a similar scene when Rachel left her house. Blaine had left on his own that morning, his mother already at work, having wished him well the night before. She hadn't been weepy or concerned, just told him to have a good time. She had left him many times before, in situations far more dangerous than a trip to New York. His father had told him to be careful, but there was rarely true care behind anything his father said. Not like Burt and Carole. His parents would never be like Burt and Carole. It was something he resigned himself to a long time ago.

"Alright you guys, you better get on the road if you're going to make it before it gets too dark," Burt reasoned. He took hold of Kurt's bags as Finn grabbed his own, and they shoved them in the back of the

Navigator next to Blaine's and Rachel's suitcases. There were more hugs, including ones for Blaine, and the foursome climbed into the car, Kurt driving with Blaine next to him and Finn and Rachel in the back.

"Seatbelts on please, even in the back. You can cuddle from afar," Carole said.

Burt pulled out four envelopes and handed one to each of them. "A little extra cash," he said, "I don't want any of you to end up without money in an emergency."

Blaine looked at Burt. "You didn't have to do this, sir," he said sincerely.

"You're a part of this family Blaine, so take it and be quiet." Blaine smiled and leaned back in his chair. "And stop with the Sirs, you only do that now when your intentions toward my son are less than honorable," Burt ordered.

Blaine grimaced as his face turned crimson.

"On that note," Kurt squeaked, "We are leaving. See you in two days! We love you!" Kurt rolled up the window and pulled out of the driveway. They all waved as they made their way down the road.

Kurt sighed, Blaine futzed with the iPod, and Rachel moved over to the middle seat, refastening her seatbelt, and snuggled under Finn's arm. Suddenly, all four of them yelled. "Road Trip!"

They arrived at the hotel both exhausted and exhilarated. The moment they had entered Manhattan and had started to see the Broadway marquis, Rachel and Kurt squealed and Blaine looked out the window with a quiet reverence. Kurt grabbed his hand, and saw tears in Blaine's eyes. It struck Kurt. He had always thought of Broadway as his and Rachel's dream, not Blaine's. And yet, there was so clearly a silent passion Blaine held tightly to himself. Kurt wondered if Blaine had ever truly let himself feel it before now, or if he had just been too self absorbed to see it.

They were lucky that Finn was driving, because the other three would likely have crashed the car, distracted by the sights. Finn dodged the taxis and the pedestrians, nearly having a heart attack at one point as a bicyclist shot out in front of the Navigator, and breathed a sigh of relief as he finally arrived at the hotel. They praised the Broadway gods for valet parking and for the extra money they had been given.

They checked in and got the keys for their rooms. Rachel kept one for herself and Finn and handed the other to Kurt.

"Be good, boys!" she laughed.

Finn ducked his head and mumbled to himself as Kurt reddened and Blaine laughed. The four hoisted their luggage onto a baggage cart and located the elevator to take them up to the tenth floor. They found their rooms, and each couple looked at each other with sheepish grins as they slipped the cards into the readers. The doors flashed green, unlocking and they disappeared inside.

Kurt and Blaine opened the door to a gorgeous room with a king size bed covered in a red and brown down comforter, and a marble bathroom large enough for both of their bags of hair and facial products. They put their suitcases down on the luggage racks and turned to each other smiling.

"I don't think this is what your father imagined," Blaine said taking a step toward Kurt.

"Actually, I am pretty sure this is exactly what he imagined," Kurt said, taking his own step forward and wrapping his arms around Blaine's neck. "Welcome to New York," Kurt whispered.

"I love you," Blaine murmured as he lips met Kurt's neck, sending shivers down both their spines. Kurt's eyes rolled back in his head and he closed them, feeling the moist heat of Blaine's lips on his skin. His senses returned when Blaine started unbuttoning his vest and quickly discarded it on top of his coat.

"Blaine," Kurt whispered.

"Shhh..." Blaine hushed, catching his boyfriend's words in a kiss that Kurt took control of and deepened until he grabbed Blaine's shirt and tugged it over his head.

"Should we go check out the bed?" Kurt asked breathlessly.

Blaine didn't answer, instead leading Kurt to the bed and pushing him down, lying above him pressing his hips into Kurt's. "Is this what you want?" Blaine teased.

Kurt's head fell back and his heart raced wildly, thinking for a moment it was going to explode out of his chest. Blaine's heart skipped a beat seeing how wrecked Kurt already was. "Do you want me?" he whispered in Kurt's ear.

Kurt could barely speak, managing only a quick nod and a desperate, "Please."

Blaine reached down and deftly undid Kurt's skin tight jeans. He leaned over and kissed his soft lips deeply, separating only when absolutely necessary. Blaine smiled down at the most beautiful face in the world. "Welcome to New York."

The only thing missing the first time Kurt came to New York was Blaine, and now everything felt perfect. Kurt couldn't stop himself from showing Blaine all the places they'd gone last time. They strolled through Central Park, Blaine taking pictures the entire time. They had lunch at Sardi's and suffered Rachel telling again the story of how she met Patti LuPone. They went to Tiffany's, only this time they didn't stay outside. Kurt and Rachel grabbed their boyfriend's hands as they explored every last inch of the store. Rachel tried on necklace after necklace, and Kurt showed Blaine every ring and bracelet he could imagine on his delicate hands. He showed Blaine some gorgeous cufflinks he thought would look perfect on him. Rachel pulled Kurt aside for a moment, looking longingly at the engagement bands. *Someday*, Kurt thought. "Someday," Rachel said, blushing and looking over at Finn.

Blaine took Kurt's hand and the four headed out to Times Square, Blaine continuing to take pictures of everything they passed. When they arrived, Rachel bounded up the TKTS steps. Kurt started up after her, but watched as Blaine just kept walking, forgetting anything but the destination he had set. Kurt followed, nearly running to keep up, stopping only when Blaine stood before the humongous poster of Danielle Radcliffe in *How to Succeed in Business*. Kurt caught up and took his hand, breaking Blaine out of his spell and catching tears in Blaine's eyes.

"He means that much to you, doesn't he?" Kurt asked gazing up at the poster as he leaned his head on Blaine's shoulder.

Blaine's voice was quiet, and his eyes never left the billboard. "There were days when those books and movies were the only thing that kept me going. Sometimes it was my only hope that there would ever be a way out of my own cupboard under the stairs. And then I found Dalton and friends who cared about me, and it seemed like it was all coming true. I found a place where I belonged, someplace I could call home. And maybe, just maybe, like Harry, I'd find a family and someone who loved me. And I did."

"Does that make me Ginny or Ron?" Kurt asked with a scrunch of the nose.

"Cute," Blaine said teasingly, kissing him on the nose. He took Kurt in his arms, unafraid on the streets of New York. "And now, the man who played him follows my dream to Broadway. And I'm going to see him perform. Kurt, I can't believe this is happening."

"Well, believe it," Kurt smiled. Rachel and Finn came up behind them and Rachel went on and on reminiscing about their time on the Wicked stage. But Blaine didn't care. Tonight he was going to be in the audience of his first Broadway show.

"Why are you crying," Kurt asked gently as Blaine applauded wildly during the curtain call. The standing ovation let him rest his chin on Blaine's shoulder and pull him back tightly against his chest as Blaine continued to applaud loudly.

"The show was amazing. I want so badly to be a part of something like that. For that to be me up there," Blaine admitted.

"It will be Blaine," Kurt assured him, whispering in his ear. "That will be us up there. See that gay faced chorus kid up there? That's me. Forever singing back up to you and Rachel as you two take the final bows."

Blaine pulled away and grabbed Kurt's hand. "No way, Kurt," he said firmly, pride gleaming. "You are a star."

They smiled at each other and turned back just as Daniel Radcliffe came out for his curtain call. They both yelled and screamed like girls, and neither one of them cared. They watched a hero today, and someday it would be them.

Blaine arrived at the New Years Eve party first. Kurt, Finn and Rachel were coming together. They four of them had gone out to eat after the show, then tiredly stumbled into bed only to wake up the next morning to drive back home. The ride was quiet, and they all crashed last night once they got home and spent the day recovering. Kurt called Blaine to let him know it was easier if they just came separately and Kurt agreed. Blaine had packed an overnight bag and told his mom everyone was staying over at Brittany's house.

The door was answered before he could even ring the bell and Brittany gave him a huge hug and a kiss on the cheek. "Happy New Year!" she yelled, as she placed a plastic hat on his head and led him inside. Artie, Mike and Tina were already there, as was Santana.

"Hey boyfriend," Santana said, placing a chaste kiss on his lips, surprising Blaine. He could taste the alcohol already on them, but it was early and Santana still appeared sober. "Here, have a cup," she urged, handing him a cup of beer.

"Maybe later. I want to show you something first," he said.

Blaine took Santana's hand and led her to a quiet corner of the room. Santana was intrigued.

"So how was your trip to New York?" she asked.

"It was amazing. Sit down, I want to show you something."

The two sat together on the floor, legs stretched. In the privacy of Brittany's home, and with a little of her inhibitions gone, Santana could just be at ease with Blaine and not worry about all of the fears and feelings he typically brought out of her. It was like at the jazz club, and thinking about it, she realized how nice it felt. She glanced over as he fumbled with his phone, and she snuggled in with him.

Blaine was taken by surprise again, and smiled down at her. He hoped it wasn't just the alcohol, but that Santana was finally feeling comfortable with him. They had helped each other in so many ways, though neither ever wanted to admit it.

He turned his phone on and scrolled through to the pictures he had taken in New York. "Here, I wanted to show you these," he said handing the phone over to Santana.

He had noticed it as soon as they entered the city. Amongst the Broadway signs and the internationally known landmarks, were hundreds of thousands of people. People just like him and Kurt. People just like Santana and Brittany. He took picture after picture of couples holding hands, couples kissing. He took a picture of two women in the park feeding each other strawberries. He took pictures of an older gay couple, holding hands and dressed to the nines before the show. He took a picture of two teenage girls, arms linked, in Times Square that had reminded him so much of Santana and Brittany. He looked at her with anticipation and a hint of worry. But it was unnecessary.



Santana looked up at him, eyes shining with unshed tears. "These are beautiful Blaine," she said, resting her head on his shoulder. "Thank you for sharing them with me."

"There's a real way out, Santana," he said, voice deep and low. "It may not be here in Lima, but it's out there, just waiting for you. Just waiting for us," he said.

She kissed his cheek and hugged him gently. She stared into his eyes, seeing as always, herself in his reflection. "Thank you," she said.

Kurt grabbed the cup of beer out of Blaine's hands just before he could take a sip. "Oh hells no!" Kurt yelled.

"Kurt, you nearly spilled that!" Blaine admonished, grabbing for it. Kurt held it high above his head where Blaine couldn't reach. "Come on Kurt," he whined.

"Blaine, you hold your alcohol horribly, and I do not want a repeat of last year. Or Scandals."

"Sebastian isn't here and Rachel is hanging on Finn's every word," Blaine said. "As well as every part of his body," he added under his breath.

"Here you go, Boyfriend," Santana said, sweeping past him with a shot that Blaine grabbed and downed before Kurt could stop him.

Kurt took the glass out of Blaine's hand and slammed it on the table. "You want to get drunk, fine," he yelled. "You stay away from her," he ordered pointing to Santana, "and him," he said pointing to Rory.

"Kurt," Blaine slurred, grabbing his boyfriend by the waist and slumping just slightly, "Rory is straight."

"Yes, but you are not," Kurt responded forcefully.

"I only have eyes for you," Blaine said as he pulled Kurt toward him. "Eyes, hands, lips..." he whispered placing a wet, liquor tasting kiss sloppily on Kurt's lips.

"Oh Blaine," Kurt sighed, rolling his eyes at the boy.

"2 minutes!" Brittany yelled, "Ball's dropping! Grab your champagne!"

Blaine took a champagne flute for himself and one for Kurt and they stood with their arms around each other watching the ball drop. "This will be my first New Year's kiss," Kurt said softly to Blaine.

"Mine too," Blaine admitted smiling in wonder.

"10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5," they all yelled.

Blaine looked over to Santana, who had her arms around Brittany. Santana caught his eye and they smiled at one another.

"4, 3, 2, 1, Happy New Year!"

Blaine wrapped his free arm around Kurt, being careful not to spill his champagne. His eyelids fluttered, his eyes were dark yet sparkling as Kurt's face flushed with joy. "I love you Kurt Hummel," he said.

"I love you too, Blaine Anderson," Kurt answered, and Kurt took the initiative. He leaned in and kissed Blaine, softly at first then swiping his tongue over Blaine's lips until they parted. Kurt sighed contently as he reveled in his first kiss of the year, the only kiss he ever wanted to repeat for the rest of his life. Blaine pulled away, catching a glimpse over Kurt's shoulder of Santana and Brittany, lips still locked and he smiled. He turned back to Kurt, falling into the ocean depths of the eyes that made his dreams come true. "Happy New Year, Baby," he purred.

Kurt gazed into hazel eyes that gave him courage and strength, that made him fall in love over and over again. "Happy New Year, Blaine."

## ***Chapter Fourteen: Yes No***

"Come on, Kurt, make love to me," Blaine pouted with his best puppy dog face, as he held his arms out to Kurt.

Blaine was lying on Kurt's bed, staring up at him as Kurt sat with a book in his hand. They were supposed to be studying, but Blaine's mind was elsewhere. He was ready to show off his Jagger moves to his gorgeous boyfriend.

Kurt was hearing nothing of it. "Blaine," he protested, "Rachel and Finn are right downstairs and Dad and Carole could be home any minute. We are not having sex right now," he said definitively.

Blaine leaned up on his elbows. "Doesn't all this talk of marriage melt your adorable sarcastic cynicism at all? I thought you were the silly romantic?" Blaine said.

Kurt put his book down and leaned over Blaine, as Blaine rested his head back on the pillow smiling. "I *am* a silly romantic, and I love a wedding as much as the next person. But *you*," he emphasized with a quick kiss to Blaine's lips, "don't need to be getting any ideas. I swear, someone just mentions marriage and you're ready to propose."

"I love you, what can I say?" he grinned.

Kurt sat up and Blaine followed, pulling Kurt in for a cuddle. "Look," Kurt said seriously, stroking Blaine's curls softly. "I know what marriage means to you. A family that you can protect and will protect you. Kids you can adore and raise with love and affection."

"And I know what marriage means to you," Blaine said. "A gigantic theatrical production of pomp and circumstance that you get to write, design, direct and star in all by yourself," Blaine smirked.

"Which costs a fortune," Kurt reminded him. "And I have goals I want to achieve before we settle down with a family. Broadway," he dreamed. "Or a designer line. Marriage after that."

"Just promise I can have a co-starring role in the wedding. And that you won't wear the prom dress, okay?"

"Blaine!" Kurt reprimanded. "If you think that I am going to don a used ensemble that I've already worn to one of the most important events of my life, you do not know anything about me."

"Then what are you going to wear?" Blaine arched an eyebrow, amused.

Kurt glanced away mischievously, then straddled Blaine's lap, caressing him in the way only he knew how to drive Blaine wild. "I am going to wear the hottest and tightest, self-designed white tuxedo that you have ever seen," Kurt teased.

Blaine could feel the sweat on his brow start to bead and he had to clear away the lump in his throat, but he tried very hard to keep his wits about him. "I don't know, Kurt. I'm not sure you have the right to wear white anymore," he smirked.

Kurt tilted his head as he gazed at Blaine's blown pupils. He leaned in closer, his breath hot on Blaine's neck. Blaine stared in breathless anticipation as Kurt spoke into his ear. "Then maybe I need to begin earning it back," Kurt whispered.

Kurt climbed off of Blaine and sat on the bed opposite him, picking up his book with a satisfied smirk on his face. Blaine stared for a minute then collapsed back on the bed to catch his breath and settle the growing fire burning in his stomach. "You. Are. Evil," Blaine moaned. Kurt just snickered.

They were interrupted by a knock at the door and Blaine rolled over and groaned even louder. Kurt laughed, hopping off the bed and opening the door to find Finn.

"Hey," Finn said cautiously. "I...umm...hope I'm not interrupting anything. Rachel and I were going to go over to Breadstix. She's going insane waiting for the mail to come with the finalist letters and is obsessively refreshing the NYADA website. We were wondering if you two wanted to come."

"Yes, definitely," Kurt said with relief. "Other than the last half hour," he said glancing at Blaine, "I have not been able to get my mind off of those letters coming." Besides, he knew if he stayed he wasn't going to be able to keep his hands off of Blaine. He turned to his frustrated boyfriend. "You coming?" he said with a wiggle of his eyebrows.

Blaine sneered at Kurt, then sat up, suddenly solemn. "You guys go without me," he said, getting up and grabbing his bag. "I think I'll just head home."

Kurt frowned at Blaine then looked at Finn. "Give me a minute, okay?" he asked quietly.

Finn looked back and forth between the two. He could tell there was something going on between them and he definitely did not want to be in the middle of it. "Sure dude. We'll just wait downstairs," Finn said, closing the door behind him.

Kurt turned to look at Blaine. "Are you mad at me?" he asked his brow furrowed.

Blaine's eyes opened wide, then softened. "No, Kurt, I'm not mad." He walked over to him and took his hand. "Look, you know I fully support you going to NYADA and New York and everything else you want to do, and being there with you before New Years was amazing. But it also reminded me that you will be there and I will be here. You and Rachel will have this amazing life there and I will be a voice on a cell phone." Kurt's eyes turned to sadness and Blaine cupped his face. "Hey, don't be upset. It's everything you want and I want it for you too. I just don't feel like talking about it tonight. Is that okay?" he asked hesitantly.

Kurt smiled softly and kissed him gently before hugging him tightly. "Of course it's okay. Are you going to go home?"

"Yeah," Blaine answered. "I think I'll finish the homework you distracted me from all afternoon."

"I distracted..." Kurt stuttered and Blaine grinned impishly. Kurt rolled his eyes and opened the door, playfully hitting Blaine on the backside as he passed by. "Blaine, you are incorrigible!"

Blaine sat at his desk, computer shining in his face. He had been trying to write his History homework since he'd gotten home, but then his father called and a simple ten minute phone conversation about nothing threw him into a tailspin. He looked at the clock. 7pm. He wasn't sure if Kurt had gotten back from Breadstix with Finn and Rachel or not, and after this afternoon he didn't want to appear overly eager. Or overly dependent. Or overly anything really. Maybe he needed to take a step back.

"Oh who am I kidding?" Blaine mumbled to himself as he rubbed his neck. "I couldn't take a step back from Kurt if my life depended on it."

He was brought out of his thoughts by his mother's knock on the door. "Come in," he called.

His mother opened the door slightly. "Sweetheart, there's a friend here to see you," she said inquisitively.

She opened the door wider and Blaine saw Finn standing in the hallway, hands in his pockets looking uncomfortable. Blaine grew immediately confused and worried. He stood up and came to the doorway of his room. "Finn? Is Kurt okay?" he asked with a slight panic.

"What?" Finn asked puzzled. "Yeah, dude, Kurt's fine. He, um." Finn tried to stop stammering. "He suggested I come by to see you," Finn explained bashfully.

"Oh," Blaine answered, surprised. "Well, then come on in." Blaine stepped out of the way and let Finn come into the room. Blaine smiled his reassurance toward his Mom as he closed the door behind him. Finn looked around the room, taking in the sophisticated nature of Blaine's room and tried to decide where to sit. He looked at the bed and the desk chair and, thinking briefly about what Kurt and Blaine had probably done in that bed, he sat on the chair.

Blaine smiled and took a seat on his bed. "So, Finn, what can I do for you?"

"Um, well, you know how my mom always told me my dad died a war hero?" Blaine nodded. "Turns out that wasn't exactly true."

Finn explained to Blaine everything his mother had told him about his father turning to drugs after returning from Iraq. Blaine listened carefully, his heart breaking for his boyfriend's brother. Blaine knew better than anyone what it was like to love a father and then find out he wasn't the man you thought he was. Blaine just had gone through it at a much younger age than Finn.

"I just don't understand why she chose to tell me now," Finn was saying, more to himself than to Blaine. "Or at all really? Why not let me just go on thinking he was who she said he was?"

"Because she was scared," Blaine told him.

Finn looked up at his brother's boyfriend. "Scared of what?" he asked.

"You joining the Army, then coming back the same way," he answered. "Look, Finn, the military is a good career. I've met many good soldiers in my life who are also good men. But war," he emphasized, "it does

terrible things to people. And Carole has to be terrified that it would do the same thing to you that it did to your dad."

Finn thought about what Blaine said for a minute, and Blaine sat quietly letting him take it in. "But why would he turn to drugs?" Finn could feel the anger and the hurt return and he tried to push it away. He didn't want to cry in front of Blaine. "Weren't my mother and I important enough? I mean, why would he just abandon us like that? What kind of man does that?"

"A broken man. I don't know what your dad was feeling over there and when he came home, but the things that he saw, the things that he probably did, they take a toll. Post traumatic stress disorder can really destroy lives and the military unfortunately doesn't do enough to prevent it, diagnose it, or treat it. Soldiers come back and many are fine. But many are not. Some hurt their families," Blaine explained thinking of his own father, "and some turn to drugs to try and make themselves feel better. They get lost over there, and they can't find their way back."

"How do you know so much?" Finn asked. "I mean, I know about your dad and all, but..." Finn trailed off.

Blaine looked away from Finn, embarrassment striking him, though he wasn't sure why. "I've been going to counseling. Sometimes with my dad, sometimes on my own. And my therapist gave me some books on PTSD to read. Books written by adult children whose parents have come back from war." He went over to his bookcase and pulled one out. He walked over to Finn and offered the book to him. "It helps. To understand," he said.

Finn looked at Blaine, then at the book, and he took it hesitantly. "Thanks man," Finn said. He lowered his head glancing at the cover. "It's just, I've lived my whole life thinking my father was a hero and now it turns out he wasn't," Finn said.

Blaine placed his hand on Finn's shoulder and squeezed it in comfort. Finn looked up and met Blaine's gaze. "They may not have been heroes to us," Blaine said sadly. "But I am certain that in that uniform, half a world away, our fathers were heroes to someone."

"Mr. Schuester, I think this is a wonderful song to propose with but I'm singing it today for the someone in my life who is special. The someone who means something."

Rachel stood in front of her friends, but the only person she saw was Finn. Her heart broke for him, for what he had lost when he learned the truth about his father. She had to show him that there was still someone he could hold on to. Someone with whom he could find a way out.

*I can't win, I can't reign*

*I will never win this game*

*Without you, without you*

*I am lost, I am vain,*

*I will never be the same*

*Without you, without you*

Kurt's heart had broken for Finn and for himself. It felt like all of their dreams were falling apart around them, and whatever happened, whatever they chose something would be lost in the process. He and Rachel were so similar; so driven, and all too frequently so selfish. Sometimes they forgot the people who made the journey worthwhile. They had grown up with huge dreams of leaving Lima behind, but they knew in their hearts that it was also leaving Finn and Blaine behind. Was it worth it? Would it be worth it without them?

*I won't run, I won't fly*

*I will never make it by*

*Without you, without you*

If it weren't for the beauty of Rachel's voice, Blaine's tears would have started falling down his cheeks. He had stopped running because of Kurt. But would he continue to have the strength to make it without Kurt? Blaine leaned over to Kurt and gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "I love you," he whispered quickly.

*I can't rest, I can't fight*



*All I need is you and I,*

*Without you, without... You!*

Kurt looked over at Blaine and grinned at him. Tonight he would forget his threats to earn back his right for white. There was a time for teasing and a time for love. Blaine smiled back at him adoringly, their silent language, the one Kurt preferred in public, clear on both their faces. All they needed was each other.

*Oh oh oh*

*You you you*

*Without*

*You you you*

*Without you.*

*Can't erase, so I'll take blame*

*But I can't accept that we're*

*Estranged*

*Without you, without you*

Blaine glanced at Santana. She felt his gaze on him and looked back. They smiled softly at each other, knowing what was in the other's heart. So much between them, so unspoken. Mirrors of each other that they couldn't cover no matter how hard they tried. But it was easier together than apart, and for their friendship, in whatever form, they would always be grateful.

*I won't soar, I won't climb*

*If you're not here I'm paralyzed without you, without you*

*I can't look, I'm so blind*

*Lost my heart, I lost my mind without you without... You!*

*Oh oh oh*

*You you you*

*Without*

*You you you*

*Without you.*

Santana glanced back again to Blaine and he nodded to her. She turned to Brittany and took her hand. Brittany smiled over and cradled it with her other. Santana's face glowed, not for Rachel's song, but for the love and strength she felt flow between her and Brittany.

*I am lost, I am vain,*

*I will never be the same*

*Without you, without you, without you*

Brittany and Santana were slowly finishing their desert at the Jazz club. Brittany's favorite singer was featured and the girls cuddled in each other's arms as they listened to her final set. Santana sipped her espresso while Brittany finished up the triple chocolate cake they had shared. Santana kissed Britt on her head and she thought of the song they had sung for Mr. Scheuster.

"Do you remember the first time you fell in love with me?" Santana asked quietly.

"No," Brittany shook her head.

Santana's heart dropped as she pulled away slightly. "What do you mean, no?" Santana asked more harshly than she had intended.

Brittany looked at the girl with innocent eyes. "I've always loved you. I don't remember a moment when I didn't love you," Brittany said.

Santana face softened. That was what she loved about Brittany. Everything was always so easy with her, so simple. She never had to guess what Brittany was thinking or decipher the lies. "Do you ever think about getting married?" she asked, clasping fingers with her girlfriend.

Brittany shook her head. "I don't think I really believe in marriage," she answered.

"But you believe in leprechauns?" Santana quipped.

"I don't believe in those anymore either," Brittany said seriously. The conversation paused as the singer finished her song and both girls applauded, Brittany punching the air a bit in appreciation of the singer's talent. She looked over in the direction of the girls, knowing they were big fans, and gave them both a wink. Brittany smiled widely. The waiter brought them their check and Santana insisted on paying, as she always did at the jazz club. These were her dates. Brittany's dates were always far more whimsical.

Santana had tried to let it go, but there was too much talk of marriage these days, and the question wasn't leaving her thoughts. "Ok, what is it about marriage you don't believe in?" Santana asked.

Brittany ran her fingers through her hair, curling one lock around her finger as she explained. "People get up and make promises to each other that are forever, but unless they have a crystal ball or can tell the future, they don't even know if they will keep those promises. Who knows what tomorrow brings?" Brittany reasoned. "I don't want to make promises I might break someday. I'd rather just love someone and be with them until I'm not. And if it's forever, then it's forever."

Santana thought about what Brittany said. She didn't want it to make her sad, but she would be lying if she said all the talk of marriage hadn't gotten her imagining a life with Brittany.

Brittany saw the sorrow in Santana's eyes and tried to wipe it away with a gentle kiss. Santana smiled softly at the blonde. "I love you Brittany. I'm just so afraid I'm going to lose you," she admitted.

"Silly 'Tana," Brittany laughed and placed her hand in Santana's. "You could never lose me. I'm right here in your heart," she said.

Blaine lay in the dark of his room, his mind spinning with thoughts of Kurt; Kurt leaving, Kurt staying, Kurt and children and forever, Kurt walking away. He grew scared and reached out to the one person he knew would understand.

Santana sat on her bed in her negligee, finishing up some last minute homework when her cell played Man in the Mirror. She glanced at it quickly and smiled.

"Hey boyfriend," she answered, closing the book and tossing it on the floor. She reached over to the light on the nightstand next to her bed and turned it off, slipping under the covers and getting cozy.

"Hey 'Tana," Blaine said, easing into the conversation. "You and Britt have a nice date tonight?" Santana had told him after Glee club that the two girls were heading over to the jazz club.

"Yeah, it was nice." Santana hesitated. "Do you and Kurt ever talk about marriage?" she wondered aloud.

"Sort of," Blaine sighed. "Generally speaking, I talk and Kurt runs for the hills. That's kind of why I called you," he admitted. "You guys talk about it too?" he asked.

"Brittany doesn't believe in marriage," Santana said sadly in response.

"Oh," Blaine said glumly. "Seems like Kurt just wants to wait until his career takes off first. God, Santana, I'm just terrified he's going to make a life without me!" he blurted out before he could even think.

Santana rolled her eyes. "Ok, calm down Boyfriend," Santana ordered. "Look, Kurt and Brittany aren't like you and me. Despite the world being crap, they still believe that it is full of goodness and unicorns and lollipops and hopes and dreams that can come true. They believe in themselves. You and I? We believe in them."

"What do you mean?" Blaine asked.

"Our lives revolve around them. The ball is always in their court. Maybe it's time that you and I set the world on fire," Santana said.

"I'm not leaving Kurt," Blaine swore.

"I'm not saying you should, idiot," Santana snarled. Blaine heaved a sigh and Santana continued. "All I'm saying is, maybe it's time to start being Blaine Anderson and not just the boyfriend. Believe in yourself for a change," Santana urged.

"Well then I could say the same thing to you San." Blaine's phone vibrated with a text message. "Hang on a minute," he told her.

Blaine lowered his phone and flipped to the texts. He expected a goodnight from Kurt, or some news from Nick. He did not expect the text he received and he stared at it as his heart raced, nearly forgetting Santana was on the phone with him. "Shit," Blaine yelled.

Hearing Blaine on the other end, Santana called out, "What is it?"

Blaine returned the phone to his ear. "Hang on, Santana, you are not going to believe this!"

## ***Chapter Fifteen: Michael***

"Blaine Anderson, don't you dare answer that text!" Santana yelled into the phone.

"San, he is just asking a legitimate question," Blaine reasoned, rubbing his fingers through his hair.

"There is nothing legitimate about a guy who is shamelessly pursuing you, despite the fact that you are very taken, and starts every text he sends to you with the words 'Hey, Sexy!'"

"He's just trying to get something out of his blazer," Blaine said meekly.

"With your tongue!" she exclaimed, rolling her eyes at his stupidity. "He's trying to get into your pants Blaine. I absolutely forbid you to answer that text. And when he calls, which he will, I am ordering you NOT to answer the phone. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Blaine capitulated, as he snuggled down into bed. "Good night 'Tana," he said.

"Goodnight, Boyfriend."

Blaine shifted uncomfortably in his seat at the Lima Bean, watching in dismay as Sebastian approached their group. Blaine had broken his promise to both Santana and Kurt and he had no doubt that Sebastian would take immense pleasure in spilling his secret. This was how the world as he knew it ended, he thought dramatically to himself. He couldn't help but wish for one moment that he had on him Harry Potter's invisibility cloak, because all he wanted to do was disappear.

"Hey Blaine," Sebastian greeted. Blaine eyes shifted guiltily. "Hello, everyone else."

"Does he live here or something?" Kurt asked Blaine incredulously. Kurt turned back to Sebastian. "Seriously, you are always here."

Blaine avoided Kurt's gaze and kept his eyes trained on Sebastian, silently begging the Warbler not to cause trouble. When Artie questioned why it wasn't a good idea for New Directions to do Michael Jackson for Regionals, Blaine's stomach turned over. Sebastian grinned shamelessly.

"Because we're doing MJ for Regionals," Sebastian revealed. "You see Warblers drew first position, so as soon as I heard what your plan was, I changed our set list accordingly."

"I'm sorry, how did you hear?" Rachel wondered in confusion.

"Blaine told me this morning," Sebastian shared with gleeful feigned innocence. "I just called for a tip on how to get red wine out of my blazer piping, and he would *not* stop going on about it."

Blaine shrunk away from the assault of eye-daggers coming at him from both sides, not to mention the sickeningly sweet smug from Sebastian. "I may have mentioned it," he mumbled.

Kurt turned to him indignantly. "How often do you talk?" Kurt questioned as Blaine stared at Sebastian in a disgust that was in no way diminished by the string of insults he directed toward Kurt and Santana.

"Alright so here's what you guys should know," Sebastian's silky voice grated on all of them. "I am Captain of the Warblers now, and I'm tired of playing nice." He purred as he wiggled his fingers in farewell, pleased at the carnage he left in his path. "See ya, Blaine."

They watched Sebastian leave the coffee shop, then all eyes turned to the loveseat. Artie had every intention of laying into Blaine about losing Michael Jackson, but stopped when he saw the fire in Kurt's eyes. "I think I'm going to go get a muffin to go," he stammered, quickly wheeling himself away to the back of the line.

Santana and Rachel eyed one another, but neither thought it a good idea to leave their boys alone together. If looks could kill, and right then they both would have bet they could, Blaine Anderson would be one dead boyfriend.

Kurt's cheeks were flushed with anger and his glare made Blaine shudder. "Seriously Blaine, how often do you and Sebastian talk? Is he on your speed dial? Because I know you are on his!" Blaine and the girls cringed as Kurt's voice grew higher and higher with his temper. "I'm not even going to ask why you bother to answer the phone when he calls! Though I suppose it really shouldn't surprise me that you like the attention."

"It's not like that Kurt," Blaine grimaced as he unconsciously rubbed his neck nervously. "I'm sorry I spoke with him. But Kurt, we can't let him bother us. Sebastian is harmless. He's all talk and no bite," he tried to explain.

"You are too trusting for your own good, Blaine," Kurt snapped as he stood up and gathered his belongings. Rachel quickly followed suit. "I'm not going to tell you who you can and cannot talk to, but your conversations with him," Kurt pointed furiously out the door, "they are a problem, Blaine. They are a problem for *us*."

Blaine looked desperately after Kurt. He had known every time he talked to Sebastian that Kurt would hate it and yet he did it anyway. He couldn't even begin to explain why, he didn't understand it himself. But he would do whatever Kurt wanted. "Tell me what I should do, Kurt," he pleaded.

Kurt stared at him for a moment incredulously, then pulled his messenger bag over his shoulder. "Figure this out," Kurt said angrily to Blaine as he linked arms with Rachel. Kurt stormed off, nearly dragging Rachel out of the Lima Bean behind him.

"There's nothing to figure out," Blaine called sadly after Kurt as he left. He dropped his head into his hands.

"Well done, Boyfriend," Santana said sarcastically. "You managed to screw New Directions and completely piss off your boyfriend with one simple phone call that I believe I most explicitly ordered you not to answer."

"What am I going to do?" Blaine implored her as he peaked through his fingers at Santana.

"Your nicey-nice routine Blaine *Warbler*," Santana emphasized, "is getting real old real quick. You don't need everyone to love you. You don't need Sebastian's attention or approval. And if you do, then Kurt is right. There's something you seriously do need to figure out."

He didn't need Sebastian's attention or approval, but the Warblers meant the world to him. Turning his back on one who asked for his help went against everything he had come to believe during his time at Dalton. Still, if it hurt Kurt, he would do whatever was necessary. "So what do I do?" Blaine asked desperately.

"About MJ? We go back to Glee and we find a way to get back at Sebastian and win Regionals."

"And with Kurt?" he asked pitifully.



"God Blaine, do I really need to spell it out for you?" she asked in frustration. "With Kurt in the room, you block the arrogant weasel from your life. From Twitter, from Facebook, and from Skype. Erase him from your contacts. And for God's sake Blaine, you stop answering his texts and his phone calls." Santana took in his face, so sad and naïve, and for a second he reminded her more of Brittany than of herself. She felt sorry for him and moved to sit next to him, taking his hand in hers. He met her eyes and was calmed by their sudden softness as she continued. "Then you buy him flowers and chocolate and his favorite moisturizer or whatever it is that makes him happy, and you figure out the most romantic thing you could possibly do for him, and you do it."

The room went back and forth with ideas on how to fight back and crush the Warblers at Regionals. When Mr. Scheuster asked what Michael Jackson would do, Blaine figured out a plan, Warbler style.

"I know what Michael would do," Blaine said, glancing at Kurt who remained ice cold to him. He had created this mess, he would fix it. If this didn't prove to Kurt that he was serious, nothing would. "I think he would take it to the streets."

"And what?" Puck challenged him. "You're going to make the call to the Warblers? Hell to the No, I don't think so."

Santana stood up. "I'll do it. Blaine, give me your phone," she said, holding her hand out. Blaine pulled it out of his bag and handed it to her. Santana pointed two fingers out to Kurt and Blaine. "You two, with me," she ordered.

Kurt and Blaine glanced at each other as they followed Santana out of the choir room and into the girl's bathroom. She kicked out the freshman who were doing their makeup and locked the door.

She scrolled through Blaine's contacts and found Sebastian's number. She didn't miss Kurt's frown that the number remained in Blaine's phone but she would deal with their problems later. She pressed send and they listened on speaker as she waited for the rat to pick up.

"Blaine," came the silky voice of Sebastian on the other end. "I knew you'd call."

Blaine shied away from Kurt's death glare.

"This isn't Blaine, you needle-limbed demon, it's Santana Lopez, your worst nightmare. You may be Captain of the Warblers now, but the New Directions is your commanding officer and we are going to take your ship down. Tonight at midnight in the Westerville Center parking lot, we'll see who's Bad enough to do Michael Jackson. Oh, and if you can't make it because of curfew, we'll be more than happy to accept your white flag of surrender."

"Oh, you can bet that the Warblers will be there, every last one of us," Sebastian answered. "I can't wait to rumble you and your little public school friends into the ground."

"The pleasure will be all ours," Santana snarled.

"Oh, is Kurt there by chance?" Sebastian called through the phone. "You tell that little Barbie doll that if he wants Blaine he can have him. Those slicked back curls aren't worth my time anymore. But if he shows up on this little midnight rendezvous, he better watch his back."

Kurt crossed his arms nervously and turned away from the conversation.

"He hung up," Santana announced.

Blaine turned to Kurt and placed his hands on his boyfriend's shoulders, but Kurt shrugged them away. He had been threatened before and it sent shivers down his spine. "I would never let him hurt you," Blaine promised him.

Kurt turned on his heel. "No, you would just continue to engage him and lead him on until he hits his breaking point. Because that doesn't hurt me at all, does it Blaine?"

Blaine swiped his hand out and grabbed the phone from Santana. He scrolled through his contacts and came to Sebastian's name. He opened up the contact and deleted it from his phone, holding it up so Kurt could see. "I will make this right, Kurt. I promise."

The garage was dark and everything was moving so quickly, but he didn't miss a moment. Blaine saw Nick grab the paper bag, and watched as it got handed off to Beatbox, who passed it to Sebastian. As the Warbler's self-proclaimed Captain pulled the cup out of the bag, Blaine recognized the contents immediately and saw Sebastian's line of sight shift to Kurt. Blaine acted without thinking, pushing Kurt out

of the way of the frozen blast of red slushie. Momentum pushed him to the ground but pain kept him there as a fire erupted in his eyes. This wasn't the same as the first slushie he had endured at McKinley High School. He heard screaming and he couldn't tell if it was him, Kurt, or some horribly twisted duet they sang.

No one saw Nick look back at one of his two best friends with complete regret.

Blaine's screams were like a knife stabbing Kurt over and over again in the heart. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't think. They were in the middle of nowhere and a slushie shouldn't cause this much pain. He kept calling Blaine's name, but it was like Blaine didn't even hear him. He just kept shouting about his eyes. Suddenly he felt hands on his shoulders, and he saw Santana lean down next to him.

"I'll stay with him, Kurt. Go call your Dad and Carole. They will know what to do."

Kurt felt Finn's arms around him and he allowed himself to be led away by his brother. "What the hell did Sebastian do? I'm so angry and scared I can't even think straight."

"Do you want me to call?" Finn asked gently, distracting him from the very same thoughts he was having. Kurt shook his head.

Finn squeezed his brother's shoulder as Kurt's fingers shook as he dialed the phone. Kurt's anxiety shifted to his father. It had to be nearly one in the morning and he knew the phone call would terrify his dad. It was a lesson he apparently had neglected to consider when they planned this battle.

"Kurt?" Burt's frantic voice, woken up from a deep sleep, sent waves of guilt through Kurt's bones. "What is it? Where are you? Are you ok? Are you at Blaine's house?"

"We're in Westerville. Blaine's hurt, Dad!" Kurt's voice cracked and caught in his throat.

"Hurt how? Are you alone? Did someone jump you two?" Burt blurted out his questions, not knowing which were more important.

"It's nothing like that. New Directions came out to challenge the Warblers and Sebastian threw a slushie at me, but Blaine jumped in the way and it hit him instead, except he's on the ground screaming that his eye hurts, and Santana's with him right now, everyone is here, Dad what do we do?" Kurt tried to stop rambling, but his tears were flowing.

"First thing you do Kurt is calm down. Is Finn with you?" Burt questioned.

"Yes." He sniffled and wiped his face with the palm of his hand.

"Ok. If it's just his eye, you probably don't need an ambulance. Have Finn take you and Blaine to the hospital and we will meet you there. And tell everyone else to go home."

"Ok Dad," Kurt cried. "I'm sorry."

"Sorrays are for later Kurt. Take care of Blaine now."

By the time they returned to Blaine, Puck and Santana had led him off to her car and Santana was cleaning him off with a towel she had in her gym bag. Everyone else was gathered around in concern.

"You owe me a new towel, Blaine Anderson, this was one of my favorite ones and now it is entirely stained with red dye," Santana chided him. "It looks like it's covered in blood, which is ironic given the blood that's going to spill when I get a hold of Sebastian, for messing with my Boyfriend."

Puck looked up and saw Kurt and Finn return. Kurt immediately went to Blaine and wrapped him in his arms. "What did your dad say?" Puck asked.

Kurt couldn't answer, his whole heart focused on Blaine. "Burt said to take him to the hospital in Lima and they would meet us there. He told everyone else to go home," Finn answered for Kurt. "Come on you two, let's get going." He put his arm around his brother and Blaine and led them to the truck.

Kurt cradled Blaine in the backseat while Finn drove the thirty minutes to the hospital where his mother worked just inside of town. Blaine was quiet, but occasionally winced in pain, and Kurt knew that something was really wrong. He rubbed Blaine's temple and brushed his fingers through his hair, and whispered over and over again that he loved him and everything was going to be ok.

When they arrived at the emergency room, they were met by Burt, Carole and Mrs. Anderson. Blaine's mother took him in her arms, and Carole led them off to a room that she had managed to secure immediately for them. Finn and Kurt sat in the waiting room with Burt. Kurt curled his legs under him in

his chair, leaning his head on his father's shoulder. Finn was hunched over in his chair, hands clasped in front of him, his foot bouncing nervously.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, listening to the hustle and bustle of the emergency room waiting area. They all knew that more emergent cases waited while Blaine was cared for, but in that moment they could not care. Their only concern was Blaine.

"Do you want to tell me what happened?" Burt said quietly, breaking their silence. "Slushies have never caused any of you to need medical care and you have all been hit tons of times."

Kurt shook his head. "I don't know Dad. But there must have been something else in it, because he was screaming. I can't get that sound out of my head."

"Shh..." Burt soothed his son, holding his hand firmly.

Carole came into the waiting room and Kurt was the first to shoot up out of his chair. Burt and Finn followed closely behind. She called them inside the emergency room wing, away from the onlookers.

"Is he ok?" Kurt pleaded.

Carole took her step-son's hand. "He's going to be fine Kurt. I don't know what was thrown at him, but he has a deep abrasion on his right cornea. The doctor is concerned it won't heal on its own because he had similar injuries to the eye in the past when he was attacked at school. He can go home today, but they need to schedule laser surgery with an eye surgeon."

Kurt's hand flew to his mouth. "Oh my god! Can I see him?"

"We'll all go in and see him. The nurse is just putting an antibiotic and a numbing ointment into his eye and patching him up. Then his mom can take him home."

Kurt, Burt and Finn followed Carole to the room and Blaine looked up and smiled weakly at them. He held a hand out for Kurt and Kurt immediately took it.

The nurse finished her work and handed Mrs. Anderson the instructions. Carole eyed her, and she allowed the families the room for a minute.

"Nice eye patch, Pirate Blaine," Finn teased from the doorway.

Blaine chuckled. "Thanks, man. I always wanted to be pirate." Blaine turned to Kurt and tucked a stray hair behind Kurt's ear. "Don't squeeze so hard Kurt. I'm fine, you don't want to break my fingers."

Kurt suddenly realized he was clutching Blaine's hand hard enough to restrict the blood flow and loosened his grip. "I was just so worried about you," Kurt said softly.

"Well, I'm going to be ok. It's the Warblers and Sebastian we should worry about. I heard what Santana said," he said with a frown. He suddenly remembered Nick's role in all this, but he pushed it aside before the sense of betrayal overwhelmed him.

"Now boys," Burt stepped in. "I understand you are all angry and I can only imagine what Santana and Puck are planning behind closed doors. But we don't fight violence with violence, and I don't want to hear about any of you taking part in something like that."

"But Burt," Finn protested. "We can't just let him get away with what he did!"

Burt shook his head. "I'm not saying you should, Finn. I'm saying you choose a way other than violence. That's what I've taught Kurt all my life, and that's what I am telling you two. I'm sure your mother agrees with me Blaine," he said looking at Mrs. Anderson.

"One hundred percent," Mrs. Anderson agreed. "We've had enough violence in our life Blaine. I don't want you to think for even one second that it's the way to solve your problems. You know it's not."

Blaine nodded and realized how quiet Kurt had been. He looked at him in concern. Kurt's eyes were distant and he could only imagine what was going on behind them. "What are you thinking, baby?"

"I'm thinking I want to hurt him, like he tried to hurt me, like he hurt you," Kurt said quietly.

Burt walked up behind him and placed an arm around his shoulder. "You go out at midnight looking for trouble and trouble is going to come find you Kurt. Not everyone in this world plays fair. You've known for a long time Sebastian sure doesn't." Burt looked pointedly at Blaine.

"So, um, I don't want to point this out or anything," Finn said, shuffling his feet behind them. "But, um, are we in trouble? With you guys I mean?"

The adults in the room looked at each other as the boys held their breaths. Blaine thought he was pretty safe, since he'd be laid up in bed for the next week or so anyway, but Kurt suddenly feared that he would be grounded and not allowed to visit Blaine at all.

Burt turned to the boys sternly. "I don't think anything we could do to punish you would make you learn your lesson any better than what you've already been through tonight. You guys are almost adults. Don't do anything to make us regret that decision, understood?"

The boys all nodded.

"Alright, let's get Blaine's coat on and get out of here. We all need our rest. Most of us have school and work tomorrow."

Kurt took Blaine's hand as they walked out of the hospital ahead of the others. It was dark and chilly outside, and the night sky was cloudy, lit only by a hazy moon. "Thank you," Kurt spoke quietly. "No one's ever taken a slushie for me before."

Blaine pulled Kurt's hand to him and kissed his fingers lovingly. "I promised I wouldn't let him hurt you Kurt, and I meant it."

"Well," Kurt said blushing, "It's the most romantic thing anyone has ever done for me."

"I agree with Kurt, Santana. No violence," Blaine told her over the phone as he sat in the living room, the television flickering.

He hadn't been watching it. Anytime he was alone now, his mind drifted to how the Warblers had hurt him. He replayed over and over Nick picking up the paper bag and passing it off. He understood dueling with the Warblers, but he never imagined that even Sebastian's influence would drive them to real violence against Kurt or himself. He knew the eye would heal quickly. Remembering what Nick and his friends had done made him feel sick to his stomach. The Warblers had been his family when he had no one else. He couldn't help but feel in his heart now what he felt the day his father turned him away.

He was relieved when his phone rang and Santana's face shined on his phone in the darkness.

"Come on, one little tramp stamp?" Santana balked. "You two are absolutely no fun whatsoever. Neither of you would survive a day in Lima Heights Adjacent."

"Neither of us would spend a day in Lima Heights Adjacent," he answered with a smirk. "Look, violence isn't the answer, 'Tana."

"You know Blaine, Kurt and I are one step ahead of you. You better get your butt back to school or I'm going to steal him for my bestie and leave you with Rachel," she teased.

"Rachel and I have too much history," Blaine retorted. "So what is this plan you have?"

"Kurt told me all about how you Warblers settle your disputes. Since you can't defend your own honor, I fully intend to do it for you. No one messes with my friends. And if you guys won't let me beat him, I intend to join him."

"You're going to challenge him to a dual, Santana?" Blaine couldn't help but admit he was intrigued.

"You're damn right I am. I have every intention of getting him to admit just how smooth a criminal he is."

Blaine hated being alone in his room, hated not being in school with Kurt, so he was more than happy when his mother said that he had a visitor.

"Hey kid, how ya doing?" Burt asked as he took in the décor in Blaine's room and came to sit in the armchair next to Blaine's bed.

"Ok." Blaine tucked the covers around him tightly, feeling somewhat vulnerable in front of his boyfriend's father. "A bit nervous about the surgery, but I'll be ok."

Burt shifted slightly in his chair. "Your Dad come to visit?" he asked tentatively.

Blaine lowered his head and picked at the covers. "No, but he says he's coming for the surgery."

"Do you want him there?" Burt questioned.



Blaine looked at him, as best he could given his condition. He had been asking himself the same thing ever since his father called him. The first time bullying had sent him to the hospital his father didn't show up. It would mean something for his father to come this time. "Yeah. Yeah, I think it will be fine," Blaine answered slowly.

Burt smiled at him warmly. He marveled at Blaine's strength. He was glad for it. Blaine would need it in the coming months.

"I just left Kurt at school," Burt shared, changing the subject.

Blaine immediately sat up straighter with concern. "Everything okay? He's taking this pretty hard."

"Well, I brought him some news that I am pretty sure cheered him up." Burt smiled and held out an envelope. Blaine eyed it warily for a moment, seeing the NYADA return address, then slowly took it. With a deep breath, he pulled out the letter inside the already opened envelope. He read the words, and his face lit up.

"Oh my gosh, this is incredible!" Blaine shrieked. "I wish I could have been there to see him open it."

"Yeah, he was pretty excited. I'm sure he wishes you had been there too." Burt watched as a cloud fell over Blaine. He reached over and took Blaine's hand. "It's ok if it kills you a little inside."

Blaine blinked as his boyfriend's father watched him knowingly. "I want him to go. I am so proud of him. But," Blaine hesitated. "he's amazing. Some gorgeous college freshman is going to snap him up in a New York minute."

"You're amazing too Blaine." Burt squeezed his hand. Blaine looked down at Burt's hand laying on his own and remembered the first time he had felt that fatherly grasp. So many memories flooded back. Memories that included Nick and he quickly pushed them away. "I know you haven't been told that often enough by the right people Blaine, but it's the truth. And if you and Kurt are meant to be together, than some time and distance won't change that."

Blaine forced his lungs to breath and his eyes not to cry. "I will miss him so much."

Burt nodded. "So will I."

They sat in comfortable silence for a moment, both reminiscing perfect moments with the one they loved. Blaine looked over at the letter and put it back in the envelope.

"Why did you come to tell me instead of Kurt?" he asked curiously.

Burt let go of Blaine's hand and sat back in the chair, crossing his arms on his chest. "Because I thought you would need a Dad to process this all with before you saw him. I don't want your feelings holding him back in any way."

"I don't want that either, Sir," Blaine assured him.

"And that's why I love you, Son." Blaine startled, and his breath caught in his throat. Burt noticed and laughed softly. "You and Rachel are every bit a part of the family as Kurt and Finn. That's the way the Hummel-Hudson home rolls. So don't think you can get rid of me just because Kurt goes off to New York. Got it?"

Blaine's voice was stuck in his throat, but he nodded vigorously and whispered. "Yes, Sir."

"Good." Burt leaned over and patted Blaine's hand, getting up out of his chair. "I have to head back to the shop. Tell Kurt he can stay for dinner if he likes. I know you two need to celebrate."

Blaine smiled, his voice returning. "Thanks, Burt."

"I trust the pain in your eye will serve as an appropriate distraction from any, um, overly enthusiastic celebrations," Burt said with a hint of a blush on his cheeks.

"Of course, Sir," Blaine responded quickly.

"Good." Burt nodded as he left the room to say goodbye to Mrs. Anderson.

Blaine smiled as he lay down for a nap before Kurt arrived, but his thoughts raced. Burt loved him. Kurt was leaving. But Blaine couldn't wait to hold Kurt in his arms and tell him how very proud he was to be with him.

Having Kurt nurse him back to health may have been the best thing about his eye injury. When he arrived after school that day, Blaine kissed him and long and hard in congratulations on his being a NYADA finalist. Kurt blushed and squealed for a few minutes, then swept it under the rug, choosing instead to focus his attention on Blaine. Kurt had completely forgiven him the instant Blaine took the slushie for him, and now he just felt guilty that Blaine was the one hurt and not himself.

Kurt had noticed how much Nick's involvement in the attack was bothering him. When things grew quiet, he would see the distant look in Blaine's face, as he felt the loss of a place he called home. He knew that it made Blaine feel abandoned and alone and he never wanted him to feel that way. He had the perfect Michael Jackson song to sing and he invited Finn and Rachel over to help him. He needed Blaine to understand that no matter what happened with the Warblers, he was loved and cared for by his friends now.

Kurt sat in the red leather armchair and took Blaine's hand as Rachel blew the note into the pitch pipe. Kurt sang, and all the feelings Blaine had revealed to Burt about Kurt leaving came flooding back. His love filled his heart, his pride filled his soul, and his sorrow filled his mind.

*Ben, the two of us need look no more*

*We both found what we were looking for*

*With my friend to call my own I'll never be alone*

*And you my friend will see, you've got a friend in me*

*You've got a friend in me.*

He had Kurt, he would always have Kurt, and no matter who else turned him away, Blaine would never be alone. But as Rachel and Finn joined in, Burt's words returned fresh in his mind. He had more than just Kurt. The four of them were family, and though things with Rachel and Finn hadn't always gone so smoothly, he wouldn't trade them for the world.

*Ben, you're always running here and there*

*You feel you're not wanted anywhere*

*If you ever look behind and don't like what you find*

*There's something you should know, you've got a place to go*

He had run his whole life, never wanted, always searching. He thought he had found a home at Dalton, the place where he was safe and belonged, and that it always would be, even after he left. Sebastian destroyed that for him, taking his friends in the process. It broke his heart to lose them, but he would be alright. He had Rachel, Finn, Santana and of course Kurt, loving him and fighting for him. He had a family again.

*You've got a place to go.*

He glanced at Kurt, but tears threatened to flow and he had to look away. He focused on Finn as he sang.

*Ben, most people would turn you away*

*I don't listen to a word they say*

*They don't see you as I do I wish they would try to*

*I'm sure they'd think again if they had a friend like Ben*

*Like Ben, like Ben*

Blaine choked back his tears, forcing from his mind the thoughts of the three of them leaving him behind. He had them now, and until they walked away, he wasn't letting go.

Kurt had rushed over to Blaine's immediately after their performance of "Black Or White." He was excited to tell him that the Warblers had turned on Sebastian, but was taken aback when Blaine had little to say about it. The faraway look returned and Blaine only asked to watch a movie. Kurt quietly agreed, picking from the few that Finn had brought over.

The two were sitting on Blaine's bed watching "Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow" on the DVD player his mother had allowed him to bring into his room "just this once." His surgery had been done the day before and Burt had agreed to let Kurt stay the night tonight. Blaine's eye was painful when he woke this morning, but drooling over Jude Law while snuggling with his boyfriend was helping.

Blaine had been having a steady stream of visitors since the slushie attack, and it warmed his heart to know how much the members of New Directions, and of course Burt, cared about him. None of the Warblers had called or come to visit. Kurt tried to make him see it was out of guilt, especially after they slushied Santana, but Blaine didn't believe him.

His face lit up with anticipation as there was a knock on the door and Kurt paused the movie as Blaine yelled, "Come in!" But his face immediately dropped and tension flew into the room like a hurricane as Nick walked in and closed the door quietly behind him. Nick immediately recognized Blaine's hostility and while he hated it, he understood he deserved it. "Your mom let me in," Nick said apprehensively.

Kurt swung his legs off the bed and stood up. "I'll give you guys a few minutes alone," he said trying to leave, but Blaine grabbed his hand.

"No," Blaine said sharply, not taking his eyes off of the boy in the Dalton uniform that until a week ago he called his best friend. Nick had given him the strength to stop running away from Kurt, to tell the truth, and to face his father. Sebastian meant nothing to him, it was Nick's betrayal that broke his heart. His hand shook in Kurt's and he let go to try to steady it. "This is as much about you as it is me, Kurt. Their plan was for you to be in this bed, not me." Kurt nodded softly and took a seat in the armchair next to Blaine's bed.

Nick shook his head. "That wasn't the plan Blaine, no one was supposed to get hurt. We didn't know about the rock salt, that was all Sebastian. None of us would ever have agreed to this."

"But you agreed to that?" Blaine's agitation only grew as his heart constricted and unshed tears burned his injured eye, making him wince in pain. Kurt gripped the sides of the chair. Blaine's anger at Nick had been building, especially after he heard about Santana's slushie. As much as he wanted to calm him down so he didn't hurt himself further, Kurt knew he had to let Blaine get this out.

"Then tell me something, Nick," Blaine continued furiously. "What exactly was the plan? And why the hell were you, of all people, the one to hand the slushie off to Sebastian?"

Nick's gaze fell to the floor, as shame sent flames to his cheeks and his eyes watered with remorse. "It was just supposed to be a joke. Sebastian told us to expect you guys to fight dirty, McKinley style. We'd spent enough time with Kurt to know what that meant. Some of us didn't want to do it. But..." he rubbed his hands together in worry.

"But what Nick?" Blaine demanded not even caring at this point if Nick was one of those guys.

Nick thought twice about telling Blaine. Seeing Blaine in bed, with the patch over his eye, made all his reasons seem insignificant. He knew he had been weak and wrong, but at the time it was why he did what he was told, and he felt Blaine deserved an explanation, even a feeble one. "Sebastian's father has a lot of pull at Dalton and with the Warblers now. Sebastian pulled us aside; Trent, Beatbox, Jeff and me, and told us that he'd make sure we never sang again if we didn't show that we were more loyal to him than to you." Nick looked at Blaine, teeming with guilt, but trying to make him understand. "You did anything to stay with the Warblers Blaine..." he said quietly.

Blaine's face instantly flushed with anger. "The things I did to stay with the Warblers hurt no one but me, Nick. I would never have done anything to hurt you or Jeff or someone any of you cared about. You may not have thrown the slushie Nick, but you may as well have."

"If I had known that you were going to get hurt, I never..."

"But humiliating Kurt and Santana would be ok?" Blaine was incredulous. "My boyfriend and my best friend!"

"Since when is Santana your best friend?" Nick snapped, his eyes shooting up fiercely to meet Blaine's.

"I need friends in New Directions Nick, since apparently Sebastian's new motto is *Leave the Warblers, Never a Warbler!*" Blaine shouted back.

"Blaine," hummed a soothing voice next to him, taking him out of the red haze that was forming in front of his face. Kurt took his hand to calm him and Blaine finally looked away from Nick and took a deep breath.

The room was silent for a few minutes, as no one knew what to say. Blaine's anger came from love, not hate and he and Nick were both heartbroken at the turn of events. Kurt ached that Blaine had to suffer another betrayal of trust and wondered how many times and how many people he could forgive before he

gave up. He hoped desperately that he had patience for one more. Nick had been too important to him to lose.

As if reading his mind, Blaine turned to Nick. "Kurt told me you all stood up to him."

Nick stood with his hands in the pockets of his uniform. "Trent did yes. He had the courage. We all just followed his lead. We should have done it sooner," Nick answered.

"Yes, you should have," Blaine agreed.

"I am so sorry, Blaine. I'd take it all back if I could. We all would." Nick did not know what else he could say. He regretted his actions, his childish decisions, more than anything in his life, but he knew that words couldn't make it better.

"I better be going," Nick said, motioning toward the door. "Can we come see you in a few days? Beatz, Jeff, Trent and I? I know they feel awful and want to apologize too."

Blaine studied his blanket. They had all been through too much together. Nick had been too important to him to let one mistake come between their friendship. It wasn't that long ago that he had gone to Nick to talk about forgiveness. He had done it once, he could do it again. After all, he had fallen victim to Sebastian's manipulations too. And Kurt had forgiven him.

"Yeah," Blaine answered. "I think I would like that."

## ***Chapter Sixteen: Spanish Heart***

"So what am I missing in Glee this week?" Blaine said with a frown. He was miserable sitting at home all day. Miserable and antsy. Sitting still was never his strongest ability, but the doctor told him he couldn't be bouncing around for at least two weeks after the surgery. It was promising to be the longest two weeks of his life.

The steady stream of visitors helped. Kurt had been there day and night nursing him back to health until both of their parents put a stop to it. Kurt pouted but Blaine sent him off to Rachel and Mercedes for the night for some good, quality girl talk. And now here he was, in the living room of his apartment curled up on the couch, with his own quality girl team; Santana, Brittany and Quinn.

"What you are missing, Boyfriend," Santana said in her usual bitchy tone, "is that while you are sitting in your house watching soap operas and drowning your sorrows in popcorn and chips," Blaine grabbed his popcorn protectively as she reached in, "Your boy toy is at school showering his affections on another man. A very hot, very manly, man."

"I don't think Kurt is a toy," Brittany piped up, before Blaine could drill Santana for answers. "I think he's more of a doll. Like one of those little fragile baby dolls you put up on a shelf."

"That's why he's called Porcelain," Quinn explained patiently to Brittany. She turned to Santana. "And you, stop torturing the poor guy, he's recovering from surgery for goodness sake." Quinn took Blaine's hand and patted it. "Mr. Scheuster brought in a friend of his, a Spanish teacher from night school. And he, umm," she paused trying to find the right words to keep Blaine's heartbeat steady. "He sang for us in Spanish."

"No, blondie, he had *sex* for us," Santana recounted. "Hot dance floor sex in the middle of the choir room, complete with full body gyrations, bumping, grinding, and chair dancing. And I am sure you can imagine," she baited Blaine, "the look of pure lust on Hummel's face as his cheeks flushed and his eyes latched on to the man's amazingly fine body, never straying for one single solitary second."

"Yes they did, Santana," Britt chimed. "I'm pretty sure Kurt couldn't see him when he flung himself upside down on the chair with his legs straight up in the air." Blaine startled at the image, his own cheeks blushing. Santana took her hand lovingly and kissed her on the cheek. Quinn just laughed.



"Ok, enough guys," Blaine huffed. He took a deep breath. "Look, I know that Kurt can very much appreciate another man and that's totally fine. " He thought back to Taylor Lautner in the field of lilacs and smiled. He had no issues with Kurt flirting or allowing himself to feel sexy every once in a while, in fact he rather enjoyed it. The only problem this time was that he wasn't around to see it. "All it means is that I need to figure out some amazing way to spend Valentine's Day with him even though I'm stuck in this godforsaken apartment."

"Maybe the doctors will let you out early," Quinn offered. "If not, we'll definitely help you figure out something. Right girls?"

Brittany smiled, hugging him. "Definitely Blaine. I want to see my dolphins happy on Valentine's Day."

A knock on the front door interrupted their planning. Blaine glanced at Quinn. "Would you mind getting that for me?"

Quinn walked to the front door, swiping a bag of chips from the kitchen table on the way over and opened the door with a smile that quickly faded. Though the boys had thought things through enough to change from their Dalton Blazers to their street clothes, Quinn had met them often enough to recognize them out of uniform. "What do you guys want?" Quinn asked, her voice deep with concern.

It didn't help that Jeff and Nick were positively speechless that Quinn Fabray had opened the door, nor that Santana and Brittany were quickly approaching when they heard Quinn's icy tone. Trent took a quick look at his friends, who were stood either enthralled with Quinn or fascinated with the cheerleaders drawing near to them and rolled his eyes. "We're here to see Blaine," he explained sassily. "We were invited."

Blaine came up slowly behind his bodyguards. "It's ok ladies, Trent is right. I did invite them over. Why don't you three go do your Spanish homework or something," Blaine said winking.

"Oh don't you worry Boyfriend, I have a killer of a presentation planned!" Santana kissed him on the cheek then laced her fingers with Brittany's.

"Bye Blaine," Brittany called after her as Santana pushed through the Warblers in warning, into the hall.

"Be well, Blaine," Quinn said quietly as she returned the chips to the table, stepping aside to allow the boys to enter the room. She stared them down a second before stepping out of the apartment and closing the door behind her.

Blaine crossed his arms across his chest and chuckled as he watched Jeff and Nick stare after her. "You know that neither one of you stand a chance with her. You're too young. She's headed off to Yale in the fall. And you two will still be at Dalton trying to figure out how to ask out a girl."

"Wait a second, we're the same age difference as you and Kurt," Jeff protested.

"Yes, but I know how to ask out a boy," Blaine said haughtily. "And keep him," he winked at Trent, who blushed only slightly. "Come on in guys," he said bringing them into the living room that he and the girls just vacated.

"I'm sorry, the girls ate most of the food. I thought it was bad at Dalton, but get a bunch of girls together and they scarf down everything too."

"I still can't believe Quinn Fabray was in your damn house," Jeff was muttering, shaking his head.

"Down boy," Blaine said. "Any slim chance you may have had with her probably went out the window when you slushied two of her best friends."

The room suddenly became uncomfortably quiet, as they all remembered why they were here.

"Look, Blaine," Beatz spoke up for the first time. "I for one am really sorry. And I know the other guys are too." Nick, Jeff and Trent all nodded. "We let Sebastian talk us into something we knew was wrong. And the worst part is we did it to two of our brothers. Which was quite intentional on Sebastian's part, and while he didn't tell us that specifically, we knew."

"You really shouldn't be mad at Jeff or Trent, Blaine," Nick said. "Jeff never did anything with the slushie, even told us not to do it. And Trent, well, he was amazing going up on that stage with New Directions."

"Kurt did tell me about that. Thank you Trent. And Jeff." Blaine looked away for a minute. He'd done a lot of thinking in the last few days. He was angry and hurt, but did not in any way want to allow Sebastian the satisfaction of driving a wedge between him and his boyfriend, or him and his brothers. He was done with Sebastian and his drama. New Directions would beat the Warblers at Regionals, then they could all go

back to being friends without the competition and Sebastian would have no more power over any of them. Blaine looked at Nick primarily, the one friend that he had trusted with his deepest, darkest secrets. "I'm not going to let Sebastian steal any of you from me," he promised. "You mean too much to me."

Trent was the first to run into Blaine's arms, but Nick, Jeff and Beatz followed, with perhaps a little more decorum. "Once a Warbler, Always a Warbler," Nick said, putting his hand into the center of a circle. The others joined in. "Brothers Forever!" they laughed.

"Hey," Blaine said smoothly into the phone. "I love hearing your voice but when are you coming by next. I miss you."

"If you're finally missing me, then as soon as our parents say it's ok. Seems to me that you were the one that kicked me to curb," Kurt frowned into the phone.

"I kicked you to Rachel's house for the weekend, Kurt, there's a big difference. I can't keep you trapped in this apartment with me all the time. How was it by the way?" Blaine heard nothing but silence on the other end of the phone. "Kurt? Everything ok?"

"How do I know when a secret is too important not to tell?" Kurt asked quietly.

"Oh Kurt," Blaine sighed.

"I mean, I know we've talked about this before. Everything with you over the summer, then Santana this year, I promised I wouldn't do it again, but now," he took a deep breath. He didn't think Blaine would like what he was planning. "I think that I have to."

Blaine thought before responding. Kurt had grown, a lot, in the last year. Maybe this time his instincts were right. "How did you find out about this secret?" Blaine pondered.

"Rachel told me," Kurt said before clapping his hand over his mouth. "Damnit. People shouldn't tell me secrets Blaine!" he shrilled. "Then I went to Finn to talk to him, but he wasn't listening to reason either and so I think I need to talk to Dad. What do you think Blaine?"

"I think," he paused. "I think I can't make this decision for you. I think your Dad is the smartest man I know, so you have to do what you think is right."

"Yeah. Well, I better do it now while Finn is out. Talk to you later?" Kurt asked hopefully.

"Of course," Blaine exhaled. "I love you."

"Love you too," Kurt sighed and hung up the phone.

Kurt inhaled deeply and went downstairs. He found his Dad watching some old war movie on television in the living room. Carole was nowhere to be seen. He shoved his hands in the back pocket of his jeans and rocked back and forth on his heels awkwardly. When his father didn't say anything, he cleared his throat quietly.

"If you want to talk about something, Kurt, all you need to do is say so. No need to tiptoe." Burt said, glancing at his son out of the corner of his eye.

"Can we, um, maybe go somewhere else?" Kurt asked. "Like, for a drive?"

That caught Burt's ear and he shut off the television and turned to Kurt. "Is this something serious, Kurt?" he asked concerned.

"Yes," he said tilting his head with anxiety, "But not for me. Or Blaine," he added when his father's brow furrowed even tighter. "I just want to make sure no one else is listening, okay?"

"Sure. Of course, son. Let me just get my keys."

The two packed up for a ride around Lima, something they hadn't done since Kurt was very little and used to try to hide his feelings everywhere but in the car. Burt put the radio on softly, giving control to Kurt so he could talk whenever he was ready. But it didn't take long. Kurt had been keeping this secret for a couple of days now and he was about ready to burst.

"Dad, do you think that if someone feels they need to keep something they've done from everyone they love, that maybe they shouldn't have done it in the first place?" Kurt asked.

Burt shot him a quick look before returning his eyes to the road. "I think that when someone is proud of what they've done they want to share it. And when they think there's probably something wrong with what they've done, they hide it." He hesitated for a minute then asked for reassurance, "You said this wasn't about you or Blaine?"

"No," Kurt responded quickly. "No, it's not. It's something Rachel told me. And then I talked to Finn about it, but neither of them listened to reason and I think they're making a huge mistake..."

"Is Rachel pregnant?" Burt asked suddenly, trying not to race off the road.

"No! God no, Dad, I wouldn't tell you that while you're driving, please." Kurt grabbed his father's hand. "Is your heart ok? I didn't mean to scare you like that."

Burt shook his head. "Sometimes you have no idea how glad I am I don't have to worry about that with you and Blaine," Kurt's father admitted.

"Yeah, you just worry about other stuff with us, I know." Kurt shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Can we get back to Finn and Rachel?" he pleaded.

Burt chuckled. "Sure. So what did those two knuckleheads do?"

"Finn proposed," Kurt said, staring out the window. He felt a bit like he was betraying his brother and his best friend, but on the other hand, someone needed the adults to talk some sense into them. "And Rachel said yes."

"Proposed like what, marriage?" Burt asked a bit dumbfounded.

"No, he proposed they go climb trees together in Central Park," he answered sarcastically. "Yes Dad, he proposed marriage and she, for some reason I will never understand, said yes."

"Really Kurt? You don't understand? And what if Blaine asked you to marry him?" Burt's eyebrows arched, but he was surprisingly composed.

"Why does everyone keep asking me that?" Kurt screeched. He turned to his father, who continued to wait for an answer. "Fine," he said slowly. "I would tell him, and I *have* told him I would like to point out, that

someday, when we have both graduated college and we both seem to be well on our way to fulfilling our career dreams, that I would love to marry him."

"And until then, you're going to live in sin," Burt said with a chuckle.

"Day in and day out with Blaine is living in sin," he muttered under his breath, before realizing what he said and buried his bright red face in his hands. "Oh my god I cannot believe I just said that to you. That's not what I meant. I just meant, people think, I mean..." he stuttered.

"I know what you meant Kurt," Burt laughed, patting his son on the knee. "And don't worry about Finn and Rachel. Lots of kids in Lima make that mistake, I'm not going to let them do it too. And neither are Rachel's parents. We'll handle it, ok?"

"Ok, Dad. Thank you," Kurt breathed a sigh of relief.

"Anytime, Kurt," Burt answered honestly. "Anytime."

He heard only his mother's shout of "Blaine, Santana's..." before the firecracker of his best friend came bursting through his door, slamming it shut behind her.

Pointing at him with one hand, the other firmly on her hip, she yelled. "If you were not already laid up in that bed with a patch over your eye, I swear to god I would punch you myself."

"What the hell did I do?" Blaine's confusion fought for dominance over his fear of the girl making good on her promise, eyepatch or not. "I haven't been out of my house for more than a week!"

"It's not what you *did*, Boyfriend, it's what you *didn't* do. Britt and I just got reamed out today by Figgins for giving each other a freakin' peck in the hallway. A *peck*, Blaine Anderson. And do you know why that is?"

Both of her hands were on her hips now and she was coming dangerously close to him with nowhere for him to escape, yet he found himself backing up on his pillows as much as possible. He couldn't begin to imagine how this was his fault, but before he could even ask, she continued her rant.

"I'll tell you why that is. It's because you and Hummel have been too terrified or prudish to set the precedent for us. That's right, boyfriend, this is entirely your fault. If you and Kurt would have just gotten it on in the hallways like you two do everywhere else we all get to see, than you two would have already dealt with this crap, and Brittany and I would be able to give each other a peck on the lips in our own damn school. That's what you wanted, wasn't it? To be our little gay mentors? You guys pave the way so Britt and I just get to follow happily behind? Well it's not working, Blaine. And it's not like we're sticking our tongues down each other's throats like Rachel and Finn."

"Santana," Blaine said quietly, and she finally stopped talking long enough to cross her arms and tap her foot in anticipation of his reply. "You're not being fair. Kurt may be, flamboyant at times..."

"Understatement!" interrupted Santana.

" But unlike you and Brittany," Blaine continued calmly, "he's very private about his affections. And I'm ok with that. Kurt and I have both been hurt for being who we are. And maybe it's cowardly on our part, I don't know." He shook his head with a frown. "But that's why we don't do it. We know we love each other, we don't need to prove it to anyone and risk getting hurt more. Though it seems now," he said sarcastically, looking at her fists, "I'm damned if I do, damned if I don't."

Santana paced back and forth for a minute more until her anger slowly winded down. She sat gently on his bed.

"Well, I'm not going down without a fight, Blaine. You and Kurt can make your own decisions..."

"Gee, thanks 'Tana," he acquiesced.

"But I'm not going to let ignorant religious fanatics get in my way of loving my girlfriend, whether that be in public or private," she vowed.

Blaine's eyes filled with pride. "Good for you, Santana," Blaine said holding a hand out as a peace offering. She looked at it for a moment, then took it with a smile. He pulled her in and she cuddled up with him on the bed. "Now, tell me your plan for this revolution. Maybe I can convince Kurt to join in," he said with a mischievous grin.

"Are you sure you can't go to Sugar's party?" Kurt asked Blaine the night before as they got ready for bed.

"Yes, I'm sure Kurt. I wish I could, but I have my follow-up appointment tomorrow and last I saw him he was pretty insistent I wouldn't be able to 'resume normal activities' until the weekend." Blaine answered.

Kurt turned around at his vanity. He stared at the valentines that he just *knew* Blaine had sent him. He didn't believe Blaine for one minute. This was all some crazy ploy his boyfriend had to surprise him on Valentine's Day, he was certain. After all, it was their first Valentine's Day together as a couple and there was no way that Blaine was going to let him spend it alone. Right? The week in Glee had been bad enough.

"I'm so sorry Kurt," Blaine said earnestly at Kurt's silence. "You know I'd be there if I could. And I don't want you staying home for me, okay? I want you to go and have fun and know that I am here thinking about you."

If Kurt thought that Blaine was being honest, he would say no in a heartbeat. He would be at Blaine's bedside with roses and gourmet takeout and chocolate covered strawberries to nibble off of his chest. But Kurt didn't believe him, not for one minute. Those Valentines were from Blaine and he had no doubt that he would be spending his Valentine's Day at the Sugar Shack with his boyfriend.

"Fine Blaine, have it your way, but you had better be thinking about me," he cautioned, "Because I'm going to be at the party with Sugar's rich society friends, and if you're not careful, someone else might just snatch me up."

"Jeff and Nick are planning a special Warbler Valentines dinner tonight. I think we all know why!" Trent said, winking.

"Trent, we talked about this, no more announcing the dreams you have at night," Jeff retorted.

"Gentlemen, we're here to make Blaine feel better and not so alone on Valentine's Day, not to fight about Trent's delusions of our sexuality." Nick admonished, searching through the movies Blaine had in the shelves by the television.

"He just wants a gay club of four," Blaine teased. "Without Sebastian being a part of it," he added under his breath.



"No talk of the puppetmaster," Nick warned. "Remember?"

"Well, I'm sorry guys," Blaine announced, standing up. "I know you came all this way, but I'm going to have to bail on you tonight. I have had a change of plans and a much better offer." Blaine's twinkle in his eyes gave him away.

"The only better offer that comes with that look, Blaine Anderson, is one from your hottie boyfriend, Kurt, and I thought he was at a party shaking it up with high society tonight?" Trent eyed him knowingly.

"Mmm...well, it's not precisely from him, it's more for him." Blaine spoke secretively. "Since I got the all clear from the doctor just this afternoon, I decided to pay him a little surprise visit. But I need you guys to help me!"

"What do you need?" Nick asked.

"Mainly? I need a heart eye-patch and a ride."

Kurt entered Breadstix holding his extra special valentine, and searched around for Blaine. He was positive his boyfriend was there, there was no other explanation for his insistence that Kurt go to the party. He grew concerned when he didn't see Blaine right away, but when the gorilla approached, he nearly jumped out of his skin with happiness.

"I knew it!" he said and reached for the candies as the gorilla shrugged.

"Dear Kurt, Happy Valentine's Day. I think I love you." Kurt frowned with confusion. That wasn't like Blaine at all. "Wait, you think you love me?"

And his beating heart that thumped wildly in anticipation of a mess of curls and puppy dog eyes, nearly stopped as the mask was pulled off and the face of his biggest tormentor was revealed instead.

"Karofsky."

He fiddled with the box of chocolates, his fingers playing with the paper, because what else was he supposed to do? His fingertips should be brushing against the skin of the boy he loved right now, not occupying themselves so he didn't show just how much they were shaking with emotions he couldn't even describe.

"So you tormented me, shoved me into lockers, called me horrible names, and," he could barely even say it, "hate-kissed me, now after one conversation in a bar you want us to be together?" Kurt tried desperately to understand, because that is what he did, that is what the Hummel men did.

And David's words, he understood. He understood hating himself. He understood acting out because of it. He had done it. Blaine had done it. But as David said, Kurt and the man he loved had always done it proudly. David had been a coward. While Kurt fought back with words and dress, David fought back with violence. While Blaine ran away from those he loved, David exploded, without care for who he brought down in the process.

People changed. They all had changed. Kurt had matured, Blaine had stopped running, and David was learning to accept himself. But one thing would never change. Kurt loved Blaine and the torture he had suffered at David's hands could be forgiven, but not forgotten. David took his hand, and Kurt just stared at it. For a moment time stopped. And for a moment he truly understood what Blaine must feel like during every encounter with his father. He pulled it away, his mind returning to what David was saying.

"David you just think that you love me, you don't really love me." He couldn't really love him. Kurt knew what true love was. "David, look, I am so proud of you for coming so far. And I want you to be happy, and you will be happy, but I'm with Blaine." He *loved* Blaine. And the things he felt about David weren't things he would get over in a year or with two quick conversations, even with a profession of love. But he did his best to be the man that Blaine was, the man that his own father would want him to be, and as he did at the club, he worked toward reconciliation. "And I like you." It was harder than he thought it would be to say, but it was true that he could like the person Karofsky was becoming. "But just as friends."

The look on David's face as he got up was heartbreaking though, and Kurt knew how much pain he had caused. He also knew what someone could do with that sort of pain. "No, you don't have to go," Kurt called with concern. And on the way out when someone who must go to David's new school confronted them, Kurt worried even more as David stormed out of the restaurant.

Kurt found a rounded booth, close to the stage, and waited for Sugar and his friends to show up. He pulled out his cell phone and called Blaine, but there was no answer. He called the house phone and Mrs. Anderson told him that Blaine had a tough day at the doctors and was sleeping. Kurt's heart sunk even further. He had been wrong. Blaine wasn't planning anything and now he would definitely be celebrating Valentine's Day alone. Rachel and Finn were at her house, their parents carrying out some plan that Kurt could only hope was an effort to call off the wedding. Mercedes was depressed and confused about her breakup with Shane and her undeniable feelings for Sam. Despite the fact that he was madly in love with an amazing boyfriend, he would once again be lonely and depressed on Valentine's Day.

He was mildly brought out of his depression when the so-called "God Squad" declared that love is love and sang to Brittany and Santana. Santana hadn't stopped ranting and raving the whole afternoon after Figgins had spoken to her about their kiss, and while Kurt didn't blame the girl, it was something he could have told Santana years ago. The double standard at McKinley High School was not going to go away because of one song from a Christian student group, at a private party. It was pervasive and lasting, and would take years beyond their reign at McKinley. But maybe at least, he thought for a moment, the four of them could make some progress for the future. He watched Brittany and Santana dance, then kiss, openly and without fear, and he smiled, proud that Blaine had helped them come so far. He looked back at David's box on his table and wondered if maybe he could have done more.

He stared at his empty table full of heart cookies, lollipops and valentines, and he missed Blaine horribly. He considered getting up and leaving when Finn and Rachel walked through the door and joined him at his table. Then Sugar climbed back on stage.

"Okay everyone, it's time for my extra special guest," Sugar announced, glancing at Kurt. "Back from the dead and cute and compact as ever!"

"Happy Valentine's Day everybody," Kurt heard a familiar voice from across the room, and for a moment he thought his eyes were deceiving him. And then suddenly a million emotions crashed into him at once, as he realized that Blaine was in fact here and he wasn't alone, and damn he was wearing the sexiest jeans and jacket and hat.

"This is for all the lovers in the room!" Blaine crooned.

"Love Shack" started playing and nothing but pure bliss crossed Kurt's mind as he watched Blaine sing. When Blaine's face lit up, truly seeing him with both eyes for the first time in a long time, Kurt's heart

skipped a beat. As Blaine looked at him so longingly and grabbed his tie, pulling him on stage, he fought to keep the blood flow where it belonged so he could still sing, though with Blaine's arm around him it was difficult. He dropped his head on Blaine's shoulder briefly with unspoken promises of later, but there was plenty of time for those other thoughts. For now, Blaine had a congo line to run and he had a song to sing about love.

"Blaine Anderson, I cannot believe you had your mother lie to me," Kurt rebuked him playfully. "How long have you known you were coming tonight?" They sat in the booth together as Finn and Rachel sang another classic love song to the crowd.

"The girls told me about the party when Sugar announced it and they helped me arrange it. Of course, we didn't know until today for sure that I would definitely be able to come, but I begged and begged the doctor and after he checked my eye, he said because I was so young that I'd healed faster than usual." Blaine reached his arm around Kurt's waist and pulled him close. "Then he cleared me to spend Valentine's day with my ridiculously," he kissed Kurt's neck. "sexy," he kissed Kurt's lips, "boyfriend."

"Mmmm...." He moaned, kissing Blaine back. "And I am so glad that he did, because I was just about to get up to go drown myself in a tub of ice cream in my pajamas at home. This is much better," he smiled, snuggling closely. "How did you get here? I'm certain you're still not supposed to be driving at night."

"The Warblers," he answered nonchalantly, and Kurt was pleased that they had made up. Blaine plucked a chocolate heart lollipop from the center of the table and held it out to Kurt. "I know it's a little bit late, but will you be my Valentine?" Blaine asked with a grin.

Kurt let out a sigh of relief that he had not recognized he had been holding in. "You have no idea how long I've waited for you to ask," he breathed, as he took one seductive bite from the lollipop.

"We're staying at Sugar's tonight," Blaine announced quickly, unable to take his lust-blown eyes off of Kurt. Kurt laughed as he watched Blaine nearly melt to the floor.

Blaine looked around the rest of the table for more of Sugar's goodies to tempt Kurt with. His eyes fell on a heart-shaped box of candies and before Kurt could realize, Blaine was picking it up.

"Dear Kurt, Happy Valentine's Day. I think I love you," Blaine read, bewildered. He held it up for Kurt to see. "What's this?" he demanded.

Kurt's shoulders fell. "Don't be mad, Blaine."

Blaine took Kurt's hand and held it tightly. "I'm not mad, Kurt, just confused. I know it's only been two weeks but I feel like I've been gone forever, and now you have chocolates from someone else declaring their love for you. What's going on?"

Kurt had planned on telling him, he had always planned on telling him, but not here and now. Still, there was no time like the present. Kurt looked at him and Blaine saw soft and loving eyes. There was no guilt or shame and that eased Blaine's fears, but he knew that there was still something serious behind those gifts.

Kurt took a deep breath and started. "Blaine, there's something I need to tell you."

## ***Chapter Seventeen: On My Way***

*"Dear Kurt, Happy Valentine's Day. I think I love you," Blaine read, bewildered. He held it up for Kurt to see. "What's this?" he demanded.*

*Kurt's shoulders fell. "Don't be mad, Blaine."*

*Blaine took Kurt's hand and held it tightly. "I'm not mad, Kurt, just confused. I know it's only been two weeks but I feel like I've been gone forever, and now you have chocolates from someone else declaring their love for you. What's going on?"*

*Kurt took a deep breath and started. "Blaine, there's something I need to tell you."*

"Wait, stop," Blaine said. Kurt looked at him surprised. Blaine looked down and shook his head. The music continued to play around them at the Sugar Shack and he smiled at Santana and Brittany dancing together lovingly. He looked back at Kurt. "I don't want to know. I mean, I do want to know, but not right now. You and I haven't been alone together for two weeks, and I haven't seen you, really seen you, in all that time, and you look," he sucked in a breath and took in the full sight of Kurt. He had been scared for a while that he might never be able to see him like that again. "You look absolutely stunning. And tonight I have arranged a room to ourselves at Sugar's mansion, and I highly suspect that whatever you have to say is going to throw a big damper into all the plans I have." He lifted their hands and intertwined their fingers, brushing his thumb against Kurt's hand, just the way it he knew it drove his boyfriend wild. Blaine smiled slyly. "And I promise you, Kurt, I do have plans. So unless this is something that I really need to know now, I'd be just as happy waiting until tomorrow."

Kurt glanced at the chocolate hearts from Karofsky, then back at Blaine. Blaine was right. Telling him would ruin the evening. He did need to tell him, but it didn't need to be tonight. And the way Blaine's fingertip were teasing his own, he wasn't sure he could speak anyway. Instead, Kurt leaned in and kissed him softly, smiling against Blaine's lips and sucking the bottom one in to taste. When he pulled away, Blaine was smiling as well. Kurt traced Blaine's lips with his finger. "I don't want to do anything to ruin that smile tonight," Kurt whispered.

"Then shut up and kiss me again," Blaine grinned.

They put off the inevitable as long as they could. They had spent the night and most of the morning in bed making up for lost time. Then they played the day away in Sugar's bowling alley, movie theater, and indoor Jacuzzi, Kurt constantly concerned that Blaine was overdoing it. The sun was going down, Kurt needed to drive Blaine back to his apartment and get back home himself. They couldn't put it off forever. Packing to leave, Blaine picked up the box of chocolates Kurt had left out, and raised an eyebrow.

Kurt sighed, and took it from him. His smile erased from his face, he sat down in a pink flowered armchair and fiddled with it as he looked up at Blaine.

"Karofsky," Kurt said quietly as if it explained everything. "He was sending me Valentine's all week. I didn't say anything because I thought they were surprises from you. It's the only reason I agreed to go to the party, but he met me before it started. And he gave me these," he finished, looking at the candies.

Blaine stared at him, unbelieving. "Let me get this straight. He torments you, steals your first kiss; which belonged to me by the way, threatens your life, leaves you on the dance floor at your prom, chats you up at Scandals, and then takes advantage of your boyfriend being injured and out of school for two weeks to hit on you and ask you out on Valentine's Day?" His rage slowly grew.

"Please don't be angry," Kurt said throwing the chocolates behind him onto the armchair as he gripped Blaine's arms. He felt Blaine's biceps flex under his grasp as Blaine balled his hands into fists. "I told him no. I told him I was with you. That he and I could only be friends."

"I'm not angry with you, Kurt. I missed you and I love you and last night was wonderful," Blaine said, but Kurt didn't miss that his eyes were getting shifty. "But you were right. People like Sebastian and Karofsky and my father, they have no place in our lives. I'm sick of being the victim and you should be too. You asked me to figure things out with Sebastian. You couldn't deal with us being friends and I didn't get that then Kurt, and I'm so sorry, because I get it now. So I'm asking you the same thing. Figure this thing out with Karofsky."

"There is no *thing* with Karofsky," Kurt insisted. Blaine remembered Kurt walking out on him at the Lima Bean as he said the same thing.

Blaine tore himself away from Kurt's grip and grabbed his phone from his overnight bag. "I'll get my Mom to pick me up," he muttered.

Kurt turned sharply on his heel. "Don't you dare run away from me because of this Blaine Anderson!" Kurt yelled.

Blaine stopped and closed his eyes. Kurt was right. He was being unfair. He sighed and turned around, reaching out a hand. Kurt stepped forward and clasped his hand reassuringly.

Blaine was silent the whole ride home, eyes staring out the window, thinking. Kurt let him be, allowing only the music of his iPod to fill the air. He pulled into Blaine's apartment complex and parked in the visitor's spot. Blaine didn't move.

"Will you meet Rachel and me at the Lima Bean tomorrow afternoon?" Kurt asked carefully. "She wants to go through wedding magazines and I don't know if I can keep my comments to myself without you."

"I don't think so Kurt." Blaine answered. He was distant, his thoughts elsewhere. "I have counseling with my father tomorrow."

Kurt squeezed his hand. "Call me after if you need me ok?" he offered, concerned.

Blaine finally turned to him. "I love you, Kurt," he said, his eyes sad and tired.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow night?" Kurt asked for reassurance. Blaine nodded and kissed him lightly. "I love you too, Blaine."

*Life's too short to even care at all*

*I'm losing my mind, losing my mind, losing control.*

*These fishes in the sea they're staring at me.*

*A wet world aches for a beat of a drum.*

*If I could find a way to see this straight*

*I'd run away*



*To some fortune that I should have found by now*

*I'm waiting for this cough syrup to come down, come down.*

Blaine sat on the couch of the counselor's office, more agitated than usual. His hair was messed up from the number of times he had run his fingers through it. His legs were growing tired from the tap, tap, tap of his foot.

"How did your Dad's visit at the hospital go?" the counselor asked.

"You mean for the five minutes he wasn't implying how Sebastian attacking Kurt and me was entirely my fault?" he sneered, staring at his hands as he picked at his cuticles. "Telling me that I deserved it?"

"That's not what I meant Blaine, and you know it!" his father yelled as he stood pacing the floor. Blaine had been snapping at him for a half hour now, and he was growing increasingly tired of the attitude.

"That's what you always think! But you know what?" Blaine yelled back, standing up. His pupils dilated with anger and the veins in his neck popped out. "I'm done with this. I didn't deserve any of it! I didn't deserve almost losing an eye, I don't deserve my boyfriend's tormentor sending him Valentines while I'm lying half-blind in my room, and I don't deserve my boyfriend's brother and best friend rushing to get married when Kurt and I don't even have the damn right to even consider the idea. I didn't deserve being beaten by bullies after the Sadie Hawkins dance, and I certainly didn't deserve what you did to me when I finally came home. For that matter, I didn't deserve it any time you hit me." Colonel Anderson began to protest but Blaine stopped him cold. "Keep your comments to yourself Dad, because more than anything else, I didn't deserve having a father like you!"

Blaine grabbed his coat and stormed out of the office, slamming the door behind him.

*Life's too short to even care at all.*

*I'm coming up now, coming up now out of the blue*

*These zombies in the park they're looking for my heart.*

*A dark world aches for a splash in the sun.*

*If I could find a way to see this straight*

*I'd run away*

*To some fortune that I should have found by now*

Kurt told Blaine about Sebastian's latest attempts at blackmail during their phone call the night before and Blaine had been furious. Mike, who shared many classes with Blaine, could sense his tension all day. His usually laid back and fun friend was clearly on edge, tapping his pencil incessantly on the desk, snapping at teachers, and attacking the punching bag in the locker room during weight training. Blaine met Kurt in the chorus room before Glee and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Did you and Rachel at least have fun looking at wedding magazines?" he asked. Kurt scowled and rolled his eyes.

Mike waltzed into the choir room with Sugar and grabbed Blaine immediately before class had officially started. He steered him by the shoulders and guided him to the piano. Blaine couldn't help but laugh. "Sit. Play. Cheer up." Mike ordered. Kurt, Sugar and Mike gathered around the piano, jamming to Katy Perry, Pink and everything else Blaine decided to play as the rest of their classmates started filing in.

*And so I run now to the things they said could restore me*

*Restore life the way it should be*

*I'm waiting for this cough syrup to come down.*

Blaine heard Kurt's phone ring as he played, and Kurt turned away for a minute, but didn't answer it. Kurt turned back and looked cautiously at Blaine. Blaine glanced back and knew. Karofsky again.

*Life's too short to even care at all.*

*I'm losing my mind, losing my mind, losing control.*

Any semblance of calm that had come over him disappeared when they all finally saw the picture in Glee that day. Blaine was more than ready and willing to back up Finn as he kicked Sebastian's ass.

Mr. Scheuster stopped them. "Guys, I contacted the headmaster at Dalton."

Blaine had had enough. "Like you did when Sebastian almost blinded me?" he yelled. "What did they do then? Same thing as they're gonna do now. Nothing. "

It killed him. Not only had the Warblers turned their back on him. *Dalton* turned its back on him. His one safe place. The only place he felt *home*. Abandoned him just like his father.

*If I could find a way to see this straight*

*I'd run away*

*To some fortune that I should have found by now*

He left Glee as soon as the bell rang. He couldn't go to class. The walls were caving in around him. So he ran away, to the auditorium, his one safe place at McKinley. He paced the stage, hands clenched, trying to remember the dreams that had come true here. The picnic in the spot tower, West Side Story, Kurt asking to make love to him for the first time. But the rest threatened to invade his thoughts no matter how hard he tried to push them away. And the song that started in his head days ago continued to run through his mind. Thoughts of running away plagued him.

Kurt came walking out onto the stage from the wings. "You okay?" Kurt asked gently. Blaine waved him off. "You seemed upset." Blaine shook his head almost imperceptibly. "You know Sebastian just needs to...?"

"Forget about Sebastian!" Blaine exploded, then softened. "I'm not mad at you; I just don't want to waste any more time on him. I want to focus on winning." He needed to focus on winning. Performing. Music. Music and Kurt. Those were the things that restored him.

*And so I run now to the things they said could restore me*

*Restore life the way it should be*

*I'm waiting for this cough syrup to come down.*

*One more spoon of cough syrup now.*

*One more spoon of cough syrup now.*

Blaine's eyes fell on Kurt's; Kurt's bright eyes, with a hint of tears. Blaine lost himself in them as he slowly walked toward the man sitting on the stool. He placed his hands on Kurt's thighs.

"That was beautiful," Kurt whispered.

Blaine kissed him in reply, letting himself soak up the love and comfort and feelings of safety that he always felt with Kurt. Kurt wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck and held him tightly, their two hearts beating as one. Kurt tried to ease all of Blaine's pain, whatever was haunting him, and he felt Blaine finally relax beneath him. Blaine pulled away first.

"I don't know what I would do without you," Blaine whispered, his eyes shining.

Kurt brushed a curl back where it belonged as he smiled at the love of his life. "Well luckily, you don't have to find out."

Principal Figgins, Coach Sylvester, Coach Bieste, Mr. Scheuster and Ms. Pillsbury made the rounds to each of the classes during second period. Blaine was in junior history with Tina when Ms. Pillsbury told them. It was as if he'd been punched in the stomach and the room started to sway. The room faded out of view and he felt a hand on his. As if in slow motion he turned to see Tina's fingers on his skin, but when he looked up, only one face flashed before his eyes. Kurt.

He jumped up stumbling, and knocked his chair over but he didn't care. He heard Tina yell his name as he left the classroom, and he thought he heard Ms. Pillsbury tell her to let him go, but it all sounded miles away as his ears rang. As the door slammed behind him, he slowed down to think. *Where was Kurt? Second period, where was Kurt? French.*

Without thinking he raced down the hallway and barely glanced in the door to the classroom before flinging it open. Mr. Scheuster stood in the front of the classroom and immediately turned to Blaine in the doorway. Everyone froze, including Blaine, his eyes searching only for Kurt. He found him in the middle of the room with his eyes on the desk. Kurt had been the only one not to budge when the door opened.

"Kurt?" His voice was shaking and hushed, but the room was quiet enough to hear a pin drop and Blaine's voice would wake Kurt out of the deepest of slumbers. He turned to Blaine, surprised and yet not to see the boy standing there. He glanced to Mr. Scheuster and his French teacher and they both nodded. As if in a trance, Kurt eased out of his chair and gathered his books. Blaine watched Kurt pay no attention to the whispers and glances of his classmates as he made his way to the door, closing it softly behind him. Blaine expected Kurt to fall into his arms, but he didn't. He walked right past Blaine, in a daze, toward the choir room, and collapsed onto the floor of the risers, not even bothering to take a chair. Kurt never looked at him. Blaine didn't know what to do, so he just sat next to him.

Santana and Brittany were together in phys ed, when Coach Bieste and Coach Sylvester entered the gymnasium. They sent the boys and girls to the locker rooms to change early, then Coach Sylvester met with the girls and shared with them what had happened. Santana choked on her breath and Brittany grabbed her hand. Santana had spent so much time with him the end of last year, as they struggled to hide themselves in the safety of the closet, but she hadn't really spoken to him since, only occasionally checking in with him online. She heard little Coach Sylvester had to say as she reached for her phone and pulled up his Facebook account. She understood immediately. When Finn had outed her, she had the love and support of her friends. He had clearly been outed and received only hate.

"Are you ok?" Brittany whispered. "You guys were close last year."

"Yeah, I'm ok," Santana answered.

"What do you think happened?" her girlfriend asked.

If it was anyone else, she would have just handed over the phone. But she couldn't let Brittany see the hate in the world, the awful words that people called the boy whom Santana had taken to her junior prom.

"People didn't like who he was," she told her. "And he didn't have amazing friends to help him through it." Her friends. Blaine. She grabbed her things and pulled on Brittany's arm. "Come on. We have to find Blaine."

"Oh my god, do you think Kurt's okay?" Brittany asked.

"Wherever we find Blaine, we'll find Kurt," Santana promised.

Sebastian walked into Warblers practice, late and looking terrible. His eyes were sunken with dark circles underneath and his skin was pale. He looked like he'd barely slept at all that night. He tried to hide himself away in the corner, but little goes unnoticed by the boys of Dalton.

"What's the matter, Smythe? Long night at Scandals?" Trent teased. Everyone laughed. They knew Sebastian's evening activities, and he typically enjoyed regaling them with tales of his rendezvous at the local gay bar.

"Short night at Scandals, actually," he said with a strained voice. His eyes shifted downwards and any of Sebastian's usual spark in them was gone. The boys stopped laughing and looked nervously at one another. Nick stepped forward.

"We're here, Sebastian," Nick told him. "If you need to talk."

Sebastian shifted in his chair, fidgeting with his fingers, before running them through his hair. "There's this guy, at the bar. This kid really. He um..." Sebastian took a breath before continuing. "Word got around pretty fast. Not sure how. But, he was outed at school. Tried to kill himself."

"Oh my god," Trent blurted out, his hand flying to cover his mouth.

Nick knelt down to Sebastian and placed a hand on his knee. "Did you know him? What's his name?"

"Um...yeah, I knew him. A bit. Talked to him a couple of times." Sebastian shook the memory away. It was too much right now. "Name is David. David Karofsky."

Nick instantly snapped to Jeff and Trent's gaze. As the realization hit, horror and concern passed over their faces. Trent said it first. "We need to call Kurt and Blaine."

Brittany and Santana walked into the choir room to find Kurt and Blaine sitting on the bottom step of the risers. Blaine was despondent, rubbing Kurt's back while Kurt stared off into the distance. Santana had expected both of them to be crying, but neither looked as if they had shed a single tear. The boys looked up as the girls walked in and Brittany immediately sat next to Kurt and took the boy in her arms. Safe in the

arms of the only person in the world who wouldn't judge him for what he was feeling, he finally let the tears flow.

Hurt and confused, Blaine stood up and walked into the open arms of Santana. She guided him to the corner of the room, away from their significant others, where they spoke in hushed tones.

"He hasn't talked to me at all," Blaine told her. "Just stares."

"Give him time," Santana said, glancing over to Kurt and Brittany. "He's talking to her. Maybe he thinks you won't like what he has to say."

"There's nothing he can say that's wrong right now," Blaine said dismissively.

"Really?" She looked at him squarely. "You said that David asked him out on Valentine's Day and Kurt of course said no. What if he feels guilty?"

"That's crazy," Blaine said, watching Kurt and Brittany whisper together. "He has to know this isn't his fault."

"Doesn't change the way he feels, Boyfriend. This is Kurt we're talking about. He feels everything. And everything revolves around him," Santana said.

"Don't talk badly about him Santana," Blaine warned. "Not now."

Santana took his hand. "I'm not," she said firmly. "That is who Kurt is, good or bad, and it's going to affect how he feels. And he probably knows that you'll tell him he's not responsible, and it's not what he wants to hear right now."

Brittany and Kurt came over, hand in hand. Kurt wiped away some tears as Brittany smiled sadly at them. "We're going to take a walk," she told them. Kurt finally looked at Blaine and touched his fingertips to Blaine's cheek. "I love you," he mouthed without sound and Blaine captured Kurt's fingers in his hand and brought them to his lips to kiss.

"Take care of him, Britt," Blaine said, and the girl nodded as she led him out of the choir room.

Santana turned to Blaine and looked him over. "Come on," she said. "I think there's some jazz in my car with our name on it."

Brittany and Kurt walked hand in hand down the hallway to the gymnasium. The teachers had decided to continue to hold classes, while offering the gym as a safe place for students who needed a place to talk. Ms. Pillsbury and Principal Figgins were there, as was Coach Bieste who had coached David last year. It was a mix of students in the gym. Some just didn't want to go to class, but a lot of the jocks and cheerleaders were there as well. David had had some friends at McKinley.

Brittany and Kurt went outside to walk around the track. The fresh air helped Kurt clear his mind, a bit. Brittany's hand helped too. He didn't talk. He didn't want to burden Brittany with his thoughts of guilt. Sometimes they couldn't shield Brittany from the world like they all wanted to, but he could certainly not add to her distress.

"I hope you never thought about it Kurt," she said after a few minutes of walking. "It would make me sad if you hurt yourself."

"After you and I..." he trailed off and stopped. He turned to her. "Before I met Blaine, sometimes when things got really bad, I would try and look at the world through your eyes. It always made things seem just enough brighter to get through the day."

"Is that true?" she asked, her face bright and shining.

"I would never lie to you Brittany," he promised.

"Hey Brittany." They turned to see Joe, the guy who sang to her on Valentine's Day. "Kurt, right?" he asked. Kurt nodded. "Mercedes told me about you and David. I know it might be kind of weird, but we're going to be holding a meeting of the God Squad after school today to pray for David and everyone affected. You're welcome to come, if you want. You too Brittany," he said, turning to the girl.

"Thanks Joe." Kurt appreciated the invitation. "I'll think about it."



Blaine and Santana were stopped at the door to the parking lot. They couldn't leave the building without parental permission. They were steered back to the two options of class or the gym.

They went up to the spot tower in the Auditorium.

Blaine pulled his iPod and headphones out and nestled into Santana's arms as they shared the ear buds. Blaine's thoughts continued to race though and he removed the headphones.

"Did you care about him?" he asked Santana curiously. He sat up and spun around to face her. She stopped the music and set the iPod to the side. "When you were dating him last year, did you care about him?"

Santana studied him for a moment, then answered honestly. "I understood him. We were both just scared, trying to hide who we were. I never knew that he might do this when people found out though. I thought he was stronger than that." She looked at the boy in front of her. Sometimes he looked like a sad little puppy, but she knew the truth. "I thought he was strong like you."

"I'm not so strong, 'Tana," Blaine said, looking away.

She grabbed his hand and forced him to look at her. "You are still here. After everything you've been through. You helped Kurt, you helped me. You are one of the strongest people I know."

Blaine scoffed. "You know what they say. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

She started to answer, but they were interrupted by the buzz of Blaine's cell phone. "Hey Nick," he answered and he stood up and against the railing to talk to his friends.

She put the headphones back on and sat back to listen but was soon interrupted by her own phone buzzing. She glanced at it and swore underneath her breath, but opened the text anyway.

*Lima Bean. 4pm. Bring Blaine and Kurt. ~ Sebastian*

When Blaine got off the phone with Nick, Jeff and Trent, Santana showed him the text from Sebastian.

"Do you think we should go?" she asked. "I'm up to my ears with his bullshit. Couldn't believe Mr. Schue stopped Finn from going out to beat his ass. I would have paid good money to see that."

"Well he knows," Blaine said. "About Karofsky, I mean. That was Nick and the guys on the phone. Said Sebastian told them and was pretty shaken up about it."

Santana thought that was curious but filed the information away for later. "Yeah well, that doesn't mean he's going to stop keeping his eye on the prize. I say we go and put an end to all this once and for all."

"I agree," he said, checking the time. "Let's go find Kurt and Brittany. It's going to be lunchtime soon."

The four met back up in the courtyard. Though they still didn't discuss it, Kurt and Blaine naturally fell into one another's arms.

"Are you ok?" Kurt whispered to him.

"For now, yes," Blaine answered. He pulled away and looked deeply into the oceans of Kurt's eyes. "Are you ok?"

"Yes," Kurt nodded, then shook his head with an ironic chuckle. "And no."

Blaine pressed his forehead into Kurt's and put his hand on the small of Kurt's back. "Come on, let's get some food."

None of them were very hungry, but it was nice to sit together in the fresh air, as if everything was normal. They discussed Sebastian's demand, and agreed that they'd all go together and insist that the violence and harassment stop. There had been too many casualties, enough was enough.

"I'm going to stop by the God Squad meeting after school first," Kurt informed them.

Santana raised an eyebrow, but decided against stating the obvious.

Blaine, on the other hand, grew even more concerned and took Kurt's hand. "Kurt, talk to me. You know this isn't your fault. We tried, last year to help him. You went above and beyond. You did everything you could. His choices were his own."

Kurt looked away and took a deep breath, then turned back. "This is why I can't talk to you about this. Not yet." Kurt linked his fingers with Blaine, but his voice was strained. "I love you. This doesn't change that. But you're still angry with him. You don't feel how I feel, and frankly I don't want you to, not until I can sort it out myself. Adding this on top of everything else you're dealing with right now, I just can't do that to you." Kurt kissed him hastily, then stood up. "I need to go to class. I'll meet you guys at the Lima Bean." He took his tray and walked off.

Blaine sat frozen. Brittany took his hand. "He's ok, Blaine. He's just hurting and he thinks you'll feel threatened by how he feels."

"He loves you Blaine," Santana told him. "Sometimes you need space. This time he needs it."

He looked at their earnest expressions and relaxed a bit. He shook his head and smiled. "What would I do without you girls?"

Sebastian sat at the Lima Bean doing his history homework, but his mind wasn't on it. His thoughts dashed back and forth between Karofsky and his guests who were late. He could feel his heart racing nervously, something he hadn't felt in a long time. He respected Santana and Blaine. Unexpectedly he had truly grown to care for Blaine, and everything had just gone way too far. And now he shared a burden with Kurt as well. It was time to end this rivalry and he knew it was entirely in his hands. He took a sip of his coffee and tried to concentrate on his schoolwork while he waited.

"Let me break it down for you," Santana said, not even bothering with a greeting as she sat down in front of him, Brittany by her side. He glanced to the others, to Blaine, then looked back at her. "From one bitch to another. All this vicious, underhanded crap has got to stop."

"Exactly," Sebastian says. "That's why I called you here. First of all," he turned to Blaine. "Blaine, I am sorry about your eye."

"That means nothing to me," Blaine hissed.

"Just give me a chance," he appealed as he raced to get out his apology. "I have no excuses other than a lame prank got completely out of control. Second," he turned his attention briefly to Kurt, "the Finn photos have all been destroyed." He looked back and forth between Santana and Blaine. "I want the Warblers to

win fair and square. And we're going to take donations for Lady Gaga's Born This Way foundation. Win, lose, or draw, we're going to dedicate our performance to Dave Karofsky." He peered into Blaine's eyes, hoping to see a shift but didn't. He turned to Kurt. "I thought you might want to join us."

"Wait for the punch," Kurt sniped to Blaine, never taking his eyes off Sebastian. "You know it's coming."

Sebastian shook his head and lowered his eyes. He knew it would take more to earn their trust back, especially from Kurt. He had done an amazing job of taking advantage of Blaine's trust and good-nature, stomping all over it and throwing it in the trash. He knew Kurt was unlikely to ever forgive him for that. But he needed to put this to rest. "No, not this time," he tried to assure them. "For too long, I have treated everything like a big joke." Sebastian took a breath, considering Kurt for only a minute before avoiding his judging gaze. "Karofsky came up to me, at Scandals. Asked me how to get a guy to like him. And in my usual way, I insulted him, basically told him he would never get a guy, told him to stay in the closet and blew him off." Sebastian glanced at Blaine, who regarded him with a mix of disgust and pity, and Sebastian looked away in shame. He turned to Santana, addressing her, one bitch to another. "It's all fun and games. Until it's not."

They sat silently for a minute, the five of them. It had been a long hard day for them all and emotions were running extremely high. Santana looked to Brittany, Kurt and Blaine who seemed unconvinced by Sebastian's words, but maybe because they were, in some way, kindred spirits, she believed him.

"Then I think we're all done here," she said getting up. "Here's one thing I've learned Sebastian. The New Directions are a pretty forgiving bunch. I hope you mean this. If you do, then chances are most of us will be behind you." She peered at Kurt who still looked unimpressed. "But if you screw up again, then you better watch out, because we fight back, hard."

The four started out past him, but Sebastian reached out to grab Blaine's wrist. Blaine stopped and looked down at him. Sebastian caught Blaine's eyes. "Do you have a minute?" he asked.

Blaine looked up at Kurt, who didn't hide his disdain but nodded his head. "We'll be right outside," Kurt told him.

As the others left, Blaine sat awkwardly at the table, keeping his distance physically and emotionally.

Sebastian kept his eyes trained on Blaine as he tried, with little hope, to make things right. "I am truly sorry, Blaine. For everything, not just your eye, though that was the worst. I got caught up in the competition. Not only Warblers against New Directions, but me against Kurt, and I went way too far. I wish....I wish it hadn't taken a suicide attempt for me to realize that, but," his eyes shifted, "sometimes when something shoves you so much in one direction, it takes it happening again to move you back to center."

Blaine considered Sebastian's admission for a minute before trying to respond. "Sebastian," he started.

"No," Sebastian interrupted. "I don't want your pity. I want your trust and your respect. And I know it will take time to earn it back. I just wanted you to know that earning it back matters to me."

Blaine stood up slowly, his hands still on the table, watching Sebastian. He looked outside at his friends waiting for him, then turned back. "Thank you for the apology," he said sincerely, then headed outside.

Kurt was leaning sullenly with his back to the driver's side door, arms folded as Blaine walked up. Santana and Brittany were crowded around him.

"Sebastian feels guilty too," Brittany was saying.

"Well, he should," Kurt declared. "He hurts people deliberately. What he said to David was horrible."

"And what David did to you was horrible," Blaine snapped as he joined the conversation. "But you have had no problem forgiving him."

Kurt side-eyed Blaine angrily. Santana hastily linked arms with Brittany. "I think this is our cue to leave," Santana decided. "Let's let Kurt take Blaine home, Britt."

Brittany waved behind her at the boys, frowning that they were angry and arguing with each other. The boys paused their argument to say goodbye to the girls, but Kurt was never one for leaving an argument unfinished. As soon as the girls got in their car, he whirled around back to Blaine, arms folded across his chest as if holding himself together.

"Why can't you just let it go, Blaine," Kurt pleaded with frustration so deep the tears started flowing against his will. "David's trying and he's changed and he's clearly hurting, I mean, that wasn't a cry for help

Blaine, that was a real attempt. You and I of all people should be understanding toward him, and yet you're still acting like you hate him."

Blaine listened to what Kurt had to say, and turned away, walking a few steps to clear his head. He couldn't explain his feelings toward Karofsky. David reminded him so much of his father. Bullies attacked and abused and in Blaine's experience, they rarely changed. David had made Kurt feel the way he felt his whole life and he couldn't bear the thought of them being friends. He folded his hands together and pressed them to his lips, almost in prayer as he closed his eyes.

Blaine felt Kurt's hands on his back rubbing up and down his spine, then wrapping around his waist. Kurt silently pressed his cheek to Blaine's back.

"He hurt you," Blaine whispered roughly. "No one's allowed to hurt you. And because of him, it could have been you in the hospital. Or worse. And I may never have met you. "

"But instead it's because of me that he's in the hospital," Kurt said brokenly.

"No," Blaine insisted, turning around in Kurt's arms. "Don't ever say that. You only ever tried to help him. And after everything he did to you, you were still your kind, amazing self to him every time you were with him. It's what I love about you." He lowered his head and glanced back in the window of the coffee shop. Sebastian was still there, nursing his coffee trying to finish his work. He turned back to Kurt. "It's what I'm going to try to do with Sebastian."

Kurt met Blaine's eyes, then chuckled sadly as he looked down to the street. "That may be asking a little much of me, Blaine. You struggle with the people who hurt me. Well, I don't know if I can forgive the people that hurt you."

Blaine nodded. "I'm not asking you to. Maybe we could just start by not judging each other."

Kurt fell into Blaine's arms and they both were comforted by the warmth of the other. "That seems like a good start."

Mr. Scheuster called them all to the auditorium the next day for Glee. Kurt and Blaine held hands as they walked onto the stage. The tension between them wasn't gone, but it was eased since their conversation at

the Lima Bean. Their teacher sat on the stage and most of the choir members were sitting in a circle around him. Rachel curled into Finn's side tugged at both of their hearts. The ease at which they could just be with each other, love one another, and decide to spend their whole lives together was something that Kurt and Blaine sometimes worried they would never have if they didn't make it out of Ohio.

"Sit with me?" Kurt asked soberly.

"No," Blaine answered, still concerned for Kurt's emotional state. Kurt's guilt hadn't abated and Blaine was honestly terrified of it. "I want to sit where I can see you." He kissed Kurt softly on the cheek and sat down in the circle across from Kurt, next to Mr. Scheuster.

Blaine could only imagine that the choir director was going to talk to them about the suicide, and he watched Kurt carefully, aching for the pain that was so evident in his demeanor. The stunt with Rory pulled at Kurt's patience, which he knew quite well was thin enough these past few days.

"Mr. Scheuster, while that's incredibly moving," Kurt said sarcastically, "It's kind of been an emotional week for some of us."

Blaine fought the urge to wrap him in his arms as Mr. Scheuster acknowledged Kurt.

Focusing solely on Kurt and Karofsky, he'd been able, until now, to keep his own memories at bay. But now they rushed to the surface, triggered by Mr. Scheuster's story. His attention involuntarily drifted away from Kurt and drew inward. His circle of friends and even Kurt faded out as pictures floated back into his mind. Laying in the hospital bed after the Sadie Hawkins dance, he had closed his eyes and wished that the bullies had just put him out of his misery. Not just because of the hate at school, though that might have been enough. No, what he didn't want to face was his father when he got home. But not because of his disappointment. Blaine had to hold back his feelings about his teacher's story because disappointment was the least of his concerns. Disappointment would have meant that his father had cared about him. No, with Colonel Anderson, Blaine had only ever felt disgust and hatred.

He had been right, in the hospital. Within minutes of arriving home, his mother was out the door, escaping what Blaine never could. And as he lay in his room, pain wracking his body from nearly head to toe, he thought about his ways out. And in that moment he could only think of one.

Kurt's eyes had shifted to Blaine when their teacher started his story. He fought the urge to tell Mr. Scheuster to stop or to run over to Blaine and remove him from the auditorium. Blaine's eyes had gone dark and distant, as he shifted uncomfortably, unconsciously rubbing the scar on his wrist. Kurt had kissed that scar away over and over, but he knew it was burning in Blaine's memory right now. Blaine had told him it had been more an act of relieving the pain than trying to hurt himself, but as he watched the boy he loved, his face nearly wracked with anxiety, Kurt wondered. And he worried. He had been so caught up in his own guilt and pain this week. Had he missed that Blaine needed him?

"That day," Mr. Scheuster was saying, "I promise you, I thought it was the end of the world. But you know what? It wasn't."

Blaine thought about what he said. He had survived it. Santana was right, he had reached his edge years ago, and had survived. If he hadn't, he would have missed his years at Dalton, singing with the Warblers, and of course, meeting the love of his life. Mr. Scheuster asked them to think of something they were looking forward to. He had already come so far, but there was still one thing out of his reach.

"I am looking forward to marriage equality in all fifty states." And though there was sadness still in his eyes, Kurt could see a hint of his sparkle return and smiled faintly back at him. Truth be told, when it all came down to it, he wanted the same thing.

"I'm looking forward to watching my Dad make a difference in congress," Kurt said.

Because Kurt knew that as those changes were made, when the gay community enjoyed the love and respect and freedom that others took for granted, then there would be fewer kids like himself and Blaine and David contemplating a permanent way out.

Choir ended, and both boys stood up, still reeling. Blaine fiddled with his fingers and shuffled his feet. Kurt hooked his thumbs in the back pockets of his pants and drew near to his boyfriend. He reached over and took Blaine's hand in his, running his thumb over the scar on Blaine's wrist. "I think it's time for us to talk," Kurt breathed.

Blaine looked up at him and linked their fingers, bringing their hands to his heart. "I would like that very much."



Everyone arrived at Regionals on Saturday, their hearts a little lighter. The New Directions had worked hard the last few days of the week to ace their performances, especially the girls who were in all three numbers, while Kurt and Blaine were only in one. Mr. Scheuster had insisted that they take a break from everything, and while both would have strongly preferred to lose themselves in performing, they instead filled the hours with planning the New Directions costumes. It allowed them some time to reconnect and just have fun.

They sat next to one another in the audience as the judges were announced and Blaine just could not containing how excited he was that the damn vampire he forced Kurt and Finn to watch way too many nights was a judge. Kurt was almost relieved when the Warblers took the stage to perform. Almost. Despite Finn rallying them to cheer on their competition, despite Blaine's gradual enthusiasm, Kurt just couldn't bring himself to put any passion into his applause. He didn't trust Sebastian and he didn't like him. By the end though, he was reminded that he had other friends on the stage, and for them he applauded supportively.

After the Golden Goblets performed they went to the choir room to prepare for their set. Blaine ran into Nick and Jeff on his way in and congratulated them.

"You guys were great, really," he smiled, hugging them both. He noticed David chatting up a member of the Golden Goblets and nudged Jeff. "What's up with that? Thought he had a girlfriend?"

"He just broke up with her," Jeff smirked. "Tell your girls to watch out, he's on the prowl."

Quinn passed by and both Warblers' heads turned. "Apparently he's not the only one on the prowl. Just don't stare at Quinn for too long boys." Blaine chuckled at them before heading into the choir room, straight to the piano to warm up.

"But she's so beautiful," Nick pouted and Jeff cuffed him playfully on the head.

"You couldn't ask out a girl if she walked right up to you," Jeff teased as they headed back to the audience to watch the New Directions.

"I'm gonna get up the courage very soon to just go up to a girl and ask her out," Nick said confidently. "I'm just preparing exactly what to say."

Trent jogged by and turned to them both. "Maybe you can't because you've already found the love of your life?" he winked and ran off.

"Oh, we are so going to kick your sass, Trent Warbler!" they yelled running after him.

Sebastian followed behind them all slowly and smiled. He peered into the window of the choir room. Blaine sat at the piano, looking absolutely adorable. He knew that Kurt didn't believe him. He knew that Blaine wouldn't trust him for a while. But he meant every word he had sang that day. Blaine hit him like the sky fell on him. And whatever way it worked out, he was going to stand and run again.

Kurt took his place on the stage. He saw his father in the audience and felt the familiar confidence his presence brought. He may have had hard times. He may have had times when he just wanted it all to go away. But he was a fighter, a survivor and he would not let anyone or anything stand in his way of winning.

*I came to win, to fight*

*To conquer, to thrive*

*I came to win, to survive*

*To prosper, to rise*

*To fly, To fly*

As Santana performed, she thought about the days when it all became too much. She missed her grandmother. In those days she cried in Brittany's arms or reached out to Blaine. Everything else she could bite back at, aiming her own guns of sarcasm. But it was only her friends that got her through the days that got became too painful.

*I wish today it will rain all day*

*Maybe that will kinda make the pain go away*

*And life was nothing but an awful song*

*They got their guns out aiming at me*

*But I become Neo when they aiming at me*

Blaine looked out into the audience as he sang. He could pick out the Dalton uniforms and looked at the boys he called friends. He felt like the fight would never be over. His father, Sebastian, Karofsky, even his best friends had hurt him and the ones he loved over and over. But his days of being a victim were over. Together with Kurt, he could do anything. He would thrive and soar beyond what any of them ever imagined.

*Me, me, me against them*

*Me against enemies, me against friends*

*Somehow they both seem to become one*

*A sea full of sharks and they all smell blood*

*They start coming and I start rising*

*Must be surprising, I'm just surmising*

*I win, thrive, soar*

*Higher, higher, higher*

*More fire*

Sebastian watched Blaine from across the stage. He was mesmerized. His confidence, his power, his brutal honesty on that stage. He knew Blaine's words were a message to Sebastian and the Warblers. He wondered to whom else. He recognized Blaine's pain and loneliness. He had seen it the first time they had sat over coffee at Dalton. Sebastian felt alone with the Warblers. Of course he had done it to himself. They embraced everyone, and yet he managed to alienate them all by going after two they considered their own. But, he had felt that way before. That's why he'd come to Dalton in the first place. He had thought if

he could d shut himself off emotionally that he'd protect himself this time. But that silence was so very loud.

*See I was on the verge of breakin' down*

*Paint they own pictures, then they crop me in*

*But I will remain where the top begins*

*Sometimes silence can seem so loud*

After the wedding, Blaine would visit his father. He hadn't seen or talked to him since the last counseling session and Blaine had done a lot of thinking this past week. So many tears his father had caused, so much pain. And yet, watching Kurt forgive Dave, he thought maybe there was still hope for him and his Dad if he put the effort in. It terrified him, trying to let his father in. But life was short and his father was still there. He would do his best and come what may, he'd see what his father would do with it.

*I hear the criticism loud and clear*

*That is how I know that the time is near*

*See we become alive in a time of fear*

*And I ain't got no motherfickle time to spare*

*Cry my eyes out for days upon days*

*Such a heavy burden placed upon me*

*But when you go hard your nay's become yea's*

*Yankee Stadium with Jay's and Kanye's*

Burt watched his kids. Four of his kids up on that stage and their best friends. He had a parent's fear for the future for all of them, but today, they were amazing and he believed in them wholeheartedly.

*I believe I can soar*

*Get ready for it*

*I see me runnin' through that open door*

*Get ready for it I believe I can fly*

"You ready for Rachel Berry to get married?" Blaine sidled up to Kurt, massaging his shoulders. He whispered in the darkness of backstage, as the girls sang and the other boys climbed to the auditorium towers.

*We stuck it out this far together*

*Put our dreams through the shredder*

*Let's toast cause things*

*Got Better*

"I'm less worried about Rachel, than Finn. He can't even take care of himself," Kurt said frankly. "But if the plan is for Finn to move in with Rachel, maybe it's worth it. No more having to worry about him walking in us," he smirked.

"And if Rachel moves in with you guys?" Blaine laughed.

"Then I'm moving in with the Rachel's Dads," Kurt declared quickly.

*And everything could change like that*

*And all these years go by so fast*

*But nothing lasts*

*Forever.*

"Are you going to the wedding?" Blaine asked hesitantly.

Kurt shrugged reluctantly. "Of course, how I could I miss it? Though, I planned to go to the hospital to see David as soon as we were done here."

"Do that," Blaine said, enveloping Kurt in his arms and kissing him. "I think you need to do that."

"I'd invite you to come with me, but," he trailed off.

"It's something you need to do yourself," Blaine finished in agreement. "I have to run back to our houses and get our tuxes."

"Don't bring my prom kilt," Kurt teased. He breathed easy in Blaine's arms. "I'm sorry. For how distant I've been this week. I'm sorry it took me so long to be there for you. Everything just, really hit me hard. I've missed you."

"Don't ever be sorry, Kurt. I love you so much. If I was eighteen, and if we were legally allowed to marry, and if I thought you might say yes, I'd ask you in a heartbeat, faults and all." Blaine promised.

"That's a lot of ifs," Kurt joked.

Blaine shook his head. "Shut up and kiss me," Blaine grinned as he leaned in to Kurt, nearly alone backstage, and kissed him passionately.

*Here's to us*

*Here's to love*

*All the times that we messed up*

*Here's to you*

*Fill the glass*

*Cause the last few nights have gone too fast.*

*If they give you hell*

*Tell 'em to forget themselves*

*Here's to us.*

*Here's to us.*

"Here's to us," they whispered together.

As Blaine walked over to Sebastian and shook his hand, congratulating his rival on the second place win, Kurt fought back his jealousy. He had to. In less than an hour, he'd be sitting with David Karofsky in the hospital. He wouldn't shake the Warbler Captain's hand himself though, any more than Blaine would come sit by Dave's bedside. When you love someone, it's easy to hate the people who hurt them. It was still too early for both of them.

Blaine looked for Kurt and caught him in the midst of screaming New Directions, a glow of envious green in Kurt's ocean colored eyes. He smiled warmly at his gorgeous boyfriend and returned to his side, grabbing his hand.

"Come on," he said, leading him from the crowd of celebrating teammates, "I know just where to go."

Blaine pulled Kurt's arm to follow him backstage and up the spiral staircase to the spot tower; their special place.

"I do recall you saying you wanted to make love to me here," Blaine said with a mischievous glint.

"Blaine, there are still a hundred people filing out of the auditorium," Kurt said motioning to the people still making their way out of the seats. People including Rachel's Dads and his own Dad. "You are such an exhibitionist."

"And *you* are too private. Maybe I just want to show off how much I love you," he teased, though as always he pulled Kurt to a shadowed corner just outside the view of the crowd below them. Blaine cupped Kurt's chin, asking permission, and Kurt leaned in to kiss him in response. Blaine wrapped his arms around Kurt's waist, pulling him closer so that their bodies were flush. As they kissed lovingly, their eyes closed, they both imagined the possibilities of an empty and dark auditorium. Kurt pulled away first, breathless as always, his face flush with his thoughts.

Blaine pressed his forehead against Kurt's. "This is a little better than last year, isn't it?" Blaine whispered. "It feels amazing to win with you."

"I'm just happy not to be at a funeral this year," Kurt quipped with sadness. Pavarotti's death had been bad enough. Imagining what could have happened with Dave was too much.

Blaine sobered and drew back to meet Kurt's eyes. "I am too, baby," he said pulling Kurt in for an embrace. "I love you more than anything."

"I love you too," Kurt sighed, letting the sadness go. David was ok, he and Blaine were ok, and they had just won a trip to Nationals together. "And we have a wedding to go to," he said rolling his eyes.

"And you have a friend to visit," Blaine sighed.

Kurt smiled softly. It meant the world to him that Blaine could even call David a friend. Kurt kissed him quickly, then straightened Blaine's bow tie.

"Come on. Let's go get changed."

Kurt grabbed Blaine's hand and they left the auditorium, walking hand in hand in the relative emptiness of the McKinley hallways. They passed Quinn in her Cheerios outfit and Blaine broke into a grin. "Hey Fabray, looking good!" he called. As he and Kurt rounded the corner, Blaine broke out in laughter. "Do you think we should tell Nick and Jeff?" he teased.

"Tell Nick and Jeff what?" the Warblers called in unison as they passed by on their way to the Dalton dressing room.

"Your crush is back in her Cheerios uniform. Looking hot!" Blaine grinned.



Nick and Jeff turned and stared each other down. Blaine and Kurt watched silently as the boys stood frozen, then suddenly broke out into a run, trying to sneak the first glimpse at Quinn.

Blaine and Kurt broke out in laughter as they continued back to the choir room. "Straight boys," Kurt said as he rolled his eyes in amusement.

"Dalton boys!" Blaine clarified and he and Kurt ran back to the dressing room to quickly change.

Kurt and Blaine changed into their tuxedos in an empty room at City Hall and fixed each other's ties.

"I can't believe they are going to go through with this," Kurt rolled his eyes.

"I can't believe your father is going to let them," Blaine quipped. "Did you see the vein nearly popping out of his head?"

"If they cared at all for his heart, they would call this off," Kurt grumbled.

"Come here," Blaine said and pulled him. He met Kurt's lips, swiping his tongue across them teasingly. Kurt responded by dipping his own between Blaine's lips, allowing his annoyance to slip away. As his eyes closed, his mind was brought back to his conversation with David in the hospital. He allowed himself to forget all the things that were wrong, and instead lose himself in the perfection of the moment, so grateful for all that he had; his loving family, friends, and of course, Blaine. He pulled away only when he had to, breathless and joyful.

"What do you want to do when you graduate college?" Kurt asked Blaine casually.

Blaine looked at him askance. "What?" he asked curiously.

"Do you want a boy or a girl? When we have kids." Kurt's smile was teasing but Blaine could see a touch of dreaming in his eyes.

"I want whatever you want," Blaine answered thoughtfully. "Where did this come from?"

"Just trying to imagine our future together," Kurt said with a glimmer in his eye.

"Oh don't you worry, babe," Blaine hummed as he reached over for Kurt's hand and led him out to the lobby with the girls. "I've got our future all planned out."

## ***Chapter Eighteen: Big Brother***

Blaine sat at the long dining room table across from his father. It was only the two of them. Kurt still had trouble around Colonel Anderson, but Blaine had promised himself after everything with Sebastian and Karofsky and then Quinn that he'd give his father a second chance. He'd spent a fair amount of time with him over the last few weeks and things were getting better. They were far from perfect, but Blaine was trying and his father was trying and they could at least breathe at the same table together without it feeling like the air was so heavy they were drowning in it.

"So you guys are getting ready for Nationals I assume?" Col. Anderson had in the past been nothing but derisive in regards to Blaine's involvement in show choir. Blaine was learning to appreciate the little things, the attempts at connecting, instead of focusing on the past.

"You'd think so," Blaine answered, careful to keep the sarcasm out of his voice. "But New Directions doesn't really do all that well at preparing. Especially with Quinn's accident, no one's mind has exactly been in the game. I'm really getting kind of worried about our chances. The Warblers..." he trailed off. Dalton and the Warblers still held too many bad memories for them.

"Well, I hope you can keep your head on tight no matter what your teammates are doing. Casualties aren't an excuse for losing your way. That just causes more casualties."

Blaine grimaced. Only his father could equate a show choir championship with war. "Yes, Sir."

They ate in silence for a moment. Breathing had improved. Conversation was still a struggle.

"I heard your brother's coming to town," Blaine's father said slowly.

Blaine dropped his fork and coughed as he choked on his potato. "What?" he squealed, his eyes watering as he took a drink to calm himself.

"Your mother told me," Col. Anderson said watching his son closely. "I thought you knew."

Blaine shook his head as his hands balled into fists. "No. No, she managed to keep that one a secret from me."

"Maybe she was worried that you wouldn't handle it well," he suggested with a quirked eyebrow.

"Maybe he told her not to tell me," Blaine mumbled dejectedly under his breath.

"Your brother loves you," Col. Anderson told his son, and Blaine thought it seemed an ironic thing to come out of his father's mouth.

"Yeah well, you and he have funny ways of showing your love," Blaine grumbled dryly. His father slowly put his utensils down and the air quickly thickened. It was the sign for Blaine to leave. He folded his napkin neatly on the table and stood up. "Suddenly I'm not very hungry. I have to go."

"Blaine Anderson," his father warned, rising from the table himself.

"Please, Dad," Blaine's eyes begged. "Please, just let it go for once." He didn't wait for an answer though. He grabbed his coat and slammed the front door behind him.

He immediately turned the car on, backed quickly out of the driveway and headed toward the highway back home to Lima. He changed his mind though and pulled over, pulling out his cell phone.

*Can you meet me in 15 minutes? ~ Blaine*

When he got a reply in the affirmative, he turned the car around and headed back into Westerville.

Parking the car in a visitor's spot at Dalton, he strolled to the chapel, in no hurry. He'd made it there in record time. He took in the school that had been his escape when he had needed it most. It wasn't there for him anymore, it had turned its back on him just like everyone and everything else. But each time, he had found something stronger to cling to, as he continued to claw his way up and out.

"To what do I owe the honor of your visit?" Nick asked with a grin when Blaine finally met him at the gardens. The two had been in contact by email and text over the last few weeks, but they hadn't met again since Nick's visits after the accident. Blaine thought he'd heard that Nick and Jeff had gone to visit Quinn, but he didn't know for sure.

Blaine huffed as he settled heavily onto one of the benches. "Dinner at my father's." Blaine picked a sunflower out of the ground and began tearing the petals off, one by one.

Nick peered over apprehensively. "Went that well, huh?" Nick was the one person beside Kurt who knew most everything about Blaine and his father. He hadn't been there for the worst of it. No one had been there for Blaine; he had been completely alone then. But Nick had helped pick up the pieces and Blaine recognized one advantage he had on Kurt. Nick had met Cooper Anderson.

"Apparently my brother is coming back to town," Blaine remarked. Hands fisted on his chin, elbows on his knees, he glanced up nervously at Nick, who was still standing over him.

Nick exhaled and took in the pain in Blaine's eyes. He missed the happiness, the sparkle that he'd had at Dalton, where he could hide away from all that hurt him. He knew things were harder for Blaine living at home, going to McKinley, and dealing with Sebastian. Cooper would only make it even more difficult.

"I remember when he came for the Christmas concert our freshman year," Nick recalled. "We had finally gotten you out of your shell. And he seemed to stuff you right back inside."

"Yeah, well, Cooper has an amazing way of doing that," Blaine grouched as he fisted his hand into his hair. Cooper belittled him, constantly put him down. No matter how hard Blaine tried, he could never do anything right enough for Cooper.

"When was the last time you saw him?" Nick asked, sitting next to him.

"After the spring concert that year I stopped inviting him to things. You guys always built me up. I didn't need him bringing me down," Blaine answered.

"So Kurt hasn't met him yet?" Nick asked surprised.

Blaine scoffed. "Kurt's already in love with him, he just doesn't know it. Do you know he won't let me fast forward through those awful commercials? He has Coop's damn jingle as the ringtone on his cell phone. Makes me cringe every time I hear the darn thing go off."

"Why haven't you told him?" Nick wondered.

"And have him find out that he's my brother? I was hoping to keep that information from him as long as possible!"

"Well, looks like your times up," Nick smirked.

"Yeah. Yeah time's up," Blaine frowned.

"Maybe he's changed," Nick suggested hesitantly. "And even if he hasn't, you're not the same guy you were a year ago Blaine. You can handle him now." Blaine nodded slightly, but without conviction.

Nick and Blaine sat quietly for a moment. "Was it ever good between you?" Nick wondered.

Blaine remembered and smiled. "Yeah. When my dad was gone when I was nine, ten, eleven, we used to spend hours singing and dancing in the living room, our bedrooms, at neighborhood parties, anywhere we could whenever he was home. I'd jump on the bed or the couch, he'd play air guitar on the floor. For a while there, he stopped being critical like Dad and we'd just play. He was only starting out in Hollywood. Wasn't a *big star*" Blaine emphasized with air quotes and an eye roll, "back then."

"Then maybe you can remember that," Nick suggested. "Focus on the good times you had with him and give him a second chance." Nick shrugged. "It's your choice."

Blaine wasn't sure. He hated the way Cooper treated him, but that was only half the story. The rest he tucked away in the privacy of his heart, sharing with no one, barely even allowing himself to feel what was truly inside.

Nick glanced at his watch. "We're coming up on curfew, and I still have homework. Shall I walk you to your car?" Nick asked politely.

"No," Blaine dismissed him. "I'm going to stay here for a bit." He hugged his friend, grateful that he could still call Nick that and continue to count on him like he had before. "Thank you," he said warmly.

Nick smiled at him and headed back to his dorm.

Blaine remained in the gardens, the reset lighting in the pebbled paths offering a soothing glow to think on all that Nick had said. He found himself following the path to the doors of the chapel and with little consideration he walked inside. The vast elegant hall was where the Dalton formality began every semester, forcing the boys to leave their undisciplined selves behind and adopt the deportment and dignity demanded of each and every Dalton student. After the first invocation a student's first year, the transformation happened nearly instinctively, and Blaine stood in the pews, his fingers running along the smooth wood of the seat in front of him allowing it to wash over him one more time.

The Dalton Mask. The smile that never reached his eyes. The enthusiasm so visible in his step but absent from his heart. The whitewashing of the past until all the ugliness is hidden and only the pristine surface coat is visible to the world. The transformation wasn't as easy without the uniform, but he was practiced and it wasn't difficult. He closed his eyes and lifted his chin. He had survived the bullies at school, his father, Sebastian. He damn well would not allow Cooper Anderson to break him.

He started to panic the minute that he got the text.

*Hey little bro! I'm coming to town for a couple days! Pick you up at school tomorrow and I'll take you out to lunch. You'll be my first stop! You can introduce me to the boyfriend. ~ Cooper*

Blaine texted him back that it would be great, but it wouldn't be great at all. He didn't want Cooper at McKinley and he didn't want his friends meeting him. He wanted Coop in the controlled atmosphere of their mother's apartment where he didn't have to try so hard to be that person that he wasn't anymore. Last time Cooper had gone to his school he had berated and humiliated him in front of the Warblers. The Warblers pieced him back together but New Directions was different. Once Cooper arrived on the scene, if Blaine couldn't keep it together himself all the progress he had made with his new friends would go out the window.

In school the next morning, Blaine kept staring at his phone, waiting for the moment that Cooper announced his arrival. Kurt picked up on his worry right away, but Blaine quickly wiped it off his face and replaced it with a smile to Kurt.

Cooper arrived and Blaine introduced them. Kurt acted exactly as he had expected and it tore at Blaine's heart, but he refused to let it show. He knew there was no rational reason to worry about competing with his straight brother for his own boyfriend's affections, but Cooper brought out all of Blaine's insecurities and magnified them tenfold.

He was both mortified and terrified when Coach Sylvester brought Cooper into Glee. Rachel and Kurt begged the brothers to sing. He tried to protest, but Blaine Warbler never passed up the opportunity to perform so he slapped the mask on and tried to remember those happy years when he and Cooper wowed the neighborhood with their song and dance and they came home to love and not fear. He tried so hard to

be the little brother that everyone expected him to be. But Cooper pushed his every button with his critical self-absorbed attention seeking self and Blaine was horribly out of practice.

The Dalton mask lasted less than a day.

"You're unbelievable," Blaine said throwing down his fork at the table at BreadStix.

"What do you mean?" Cooper asked confused.

"What are you doing?" Blaine asked exasperated. "All you ever do is tell me what I'm doing wrong. You waste no opportunity, to remind me how much I suck. At like, everything."

He was only five years old. He couldn't even dance well enough to the Hanson Brothers. He could never do anything right for Cooper. Just like their father. The Colonel had treated Cooper the same way. Coop just gave back what he learned. Was he doomed to do the same?

"If that happened, I am so sorry," Cooper apologized. "But I don't remember it."

"Course you don't," Blaine muttered staring at the table.

"Hey," Cooper stopped him, sitting up. "Hey little brother, I know there's an age difference between us, but I really want to be closer to you. I want to get to know you a little better."

Cooper was sincere. Blaine knew he was. And it terrified him. He wanted the same thing, but Cooper always hurt him and Blaine had hidden so much from him for so long. Blaine feared the floodgates.

"All right? That's why I'm here," Cooper tried to connect with him.

In the end it was all Blaine ever wanted. Remember the good times.

"Yeah, I know, I would love that, I, I'd like that," Blaine stuttered.

"Great, so you're going to come to my Master Class tomorrow, right?" Cooper checked.



It was the last thing he wanted to do. He wanted his brother, not the actor. "Yeah, sure," he said, unable to say no, as the waitress came to put their cokes down.

"Cheers," Cooper smiled at the waitress.

Blaine shook his head, not believing he was about to encourage his nonsense. "Accent," he reminded Cooper quietly, hating himself more every second.

He had Cooper drop him off at Kurt's house for no other reason than Cooper was at Blaine's apartment and Blaine didn't want to be around him. Or around Kurt with him. He'd seen the way Kurt had stared during their Duran Duran duet. Cooper had no problem strutting his stuff right in front of his boyfriend and Kurt had lapped it up. Even climbing on the piano, a request that Kurt made at least twice a week, didn't distract him from drooling over the elder Anderson.

"Oh my god, Blaine, stop, go back!" Kurt screeched next to him as he nearly bounced out of the bed. They were watching Tabatha's Salon Takeover on DVR, a show that Kurt adored and Blaine tolerated, when Cooper's stupid commercial came on and Kurt went insane. Blaine rolled his eyes and pressed play, rewinding to the beginning of the horrible thing so Kurt didn't miss a single moment of the jingle. He scowled as Kurt stared googly-eyed at Cooper on the screen. "I still cannot believe that that is your brother," he said breathlessly.

Blaine knew that look all too well. "Kurt, imagining you with Taylor Lautner in a field of lilacs is hot. Imagining you with my brother in a field of lilacs is not," he complained.

"No," Kurt said quickly turning away to hide the blush that rose on his cheeks, especially when he started imagining those two things put together with a good dose of Blaine in the mix as well. He shook the thoughts out of his head. "No of course it's not." He turned the television off and shifted to give Blaine his full attention and change the subject entirely. "I wish you'd come to senior skip day," Kurt told him taking his hand.

"I'm a junior Kurt. I don't think I'm invited to senior skip day," Blaine said sullenly.

"That's nonsense," Kurt brushed his concerns away. "Tina and Rory and Sugar are all going. And Artie's doing something special with Quinn."

"I don't want to get in trouble," Blaine said, but he was just making excuses and Kurt knew it. "I really just am not feeling up for an amusement park Kurt, I'm sorry. We'll go another time together, just you and me, ok?"

Kurt frowned, but linked their fingers and snuggled into the crook of Blaine's arm. "Fine." Blaine pulled him closer and Kurt breathed in the warm and musky scent he couldn't resist. He pressed his lips to Blaine's neck and wrapped his arms around him, letting his mind drift as he nipped and savored the feel and taste of Blaine. Kurt made his way up Blaine's neck to nibble on his ear, then kissed his way over to Blaine's lips as his hand slid past Blaine's knee up his thigh with increasing ferocity as his imagination spun out of control.

Blaine closed his eyes and relished in the feel of Kurt's soft lips on his skin but though he enjoyed the aggression in Kurt's attention he pulled away knowingly. "Kurt," he whispered.

"Hmmm?" Kurt hummed against his lips, begging for entrance.

"Stop thinking about my brother," Blaine said bluntly.

"What?" Kurt shrilled pulling away and blushing. "I wasn't....I mean I didn't..." Kurt stumbled over his words, too caught to even try to deny it any longer. He looked for anger in Blaine's eyes, but he saw only a twinkle of amusement. Kurt sighed with relief. "How did you know?"

"Because I know you better than you know yourself," Blaine smiled and returned his lips to Kurt's.

"Mmm..." Kurt purred against him as he nuzzled into Blaine. "Good song. Can I think about Adam Lambert?"

Blaine smiled and nodded into Kurt's lips. "Mmmhmmm," he agreed without hesitation and deepened the kiss. Blaine pulled Kurt down on top of him and Kurt laughed as they lost themselves in one another's arms.

He'd tried. Blaine tried so hard to keep his cool during the master class, but Kurt and Rachel were hanging on his every word, even Santana was smiling along and just like at Dalton, Cooper humiliated Blaine by calling him out in front of everyone.

"Why don't you just take the note man," Cooper urged, his frustration with Blaine's constant fighting of him reaching the edge. All he was trying to do was help.

"Coop, you're my brother! Can't you just support me?" Blaine was near tears in the midst of all of his friends in the master class and no one noticed. Just like home. Just like always. He couldn't do this anymore. But he would not walk out. He would never give Cooper the satisfaction of walking out.

So he waited as his nerves twisted in his chest and it became harder and harder to breathe, but everyone else seemed too caught up in his brother's ridiculous lessons that Blaine knew from his drama classes at Dalton were full of terrible advice. When it was finally over, he couldn't get out of there fast enough.

"Hey, boyfriend, wait up!" Santana called as he finally allowed his temper to flare, racing outside to get some air.

Blaine avoided her gaze as he stormed down the front steps of the school. "Thought you'd be inside with Kurt and the rest of them getting Cooper's autograph and worshipping the ground he walks on," he growled at her.

"Well, I'm not taken victim by the charm of the Anderson men," Santana said firmly. When he didn't look at her she grabbed his arm and forced him to turn around.

He crossed his arms, angry and embarrassed. "Everyone is taken in by Mr. Perfect," he said gesturing in the direction of the choir room. "Kurt adores him. I saw you in there, hanging on his every word. So what are you doing following me?"

"Let me tell you something that you may not have figured out yet Blaine Anderson, but I sure as hell have. Cooper may be charming and maybe what he says about acting is right, I don't know. But what I do know is that *you* are the smartest, strongest, most talented and most warm-hearted Anderson in your family."

"You're wrong, Santana," he said staring shamefully at his feet. He sat down on the cold concrete step, dropping his head onto his hands. "Cooper's the strong one. He's the one that runs after his dreams. I just run from everything."

Santana rolled her eyes and stood in front of him, irritated. "What would Cooper have done with those bullies at your school, Blaine? Pointed and talked REALLY LOUDLY to them?" she said sarcastically. "Listen, you think you're a runner, but you're not," she said adamantly. "You're a fighter."

Blaine shook his head. "San," he started.

"Shut up, boyfriend," she ordered and he snapped his eyes up to hers. "A great fighter doesn't engage in every conflict and go after every person that attacks him. A great fighter chooses his battles wisely and leaves behind the ones that aren't worth fighting for." He tried to look away but she continued and held his attention firmly. "Those guys at your old school, they weren't worth your effort. You didn't run away from them, you ran toward something better. Love, safety, freedom; those are the things worth doing battle. Kurt, your father, your friends, those are the people worth fighting for. Dumb bullies who don't know how amazing you are? They aren't worth your time of day." Santana knelt down to him and took his hands in hers. "Now you just have to decide which list your brother is on."

Shameless self promotion in the middle of the McKinley hallway. Cooper was unbelievable.

"Ask me why I'm so happy, squirt," Cooper smiled.

"Don't call me that." Blaine hated that nickname more than anything.

"My life just completely changed. I just got an audition for a Michael Bay movie."

"Oh that's great," Blaine responded bitterly and stopped really listening. Blaine had thought about it all night after his conversation with Santana. He had planned to tell Cooper everything. He needed him to know about the dance and the bullies and their father. He'd gotten up early this morning to talk to Coop before school, but when he'd looked on the couch for him, his brother was gone. Cooper had left a note on the kitchen table that he'd catch up with him at school. Blaine could barely stomach his breakfast.

"Come on man, we'll have our own ditch day," Cooper said excitedly grabbing his arm to turn him. Blaine stared at the hand on his wrist, his heart leaping into his throat involuntarily. "You can help me run lines."

Blaine just stared at him. His brother had no idea what he had just done. "It's all about you, isn't it. But you know what big brother? I'm sick of it. And I'm not going to take it anymore."

*After all that you put me through,*

*You think I'd despise you,*

*But in the end I wanna thank you,*

*'Cause you've made me that much stronger*

*Well I thought I knew you, thinkin' that you were true*

*Guess I, I couldn't trust called your bluff time is up*

*'Cause I've had enough*

Cooper watched Blaine walk away from him.

He didn't understand. He loved Blaine more than anyone else. His little brother meant the world to him. But his parents had always loved Blaine more than him. Blaine could get away with murder with barely a talking to by his father while he was held accountable for everything. Not only that, Blaine was always adorable, always so talented, while he was "wasting his life away with that acting business." His father was impossible to satisfy:

*"Your grades are terrible and I am not working this hard to raise losers."*

*"Get your head out of the clouds, stop dreaming and find a real future for yourself."*

*"Stop acting like you're the little brother and be responsible for a change."*

He hated his father, he felt worthless, and he took it out on Blaine. He wasn't proud of that. He could have been nicer, but it wasn't as if he had the best role model. His father was literally a drill sergeant. And Cooper wanted Blaine to reach his potential. Blaine was more talented than him and he knew it. Blaine was a better singer, a better dancer and maybe even a better actor than him, but he made childish mistakes and if he wanted to make it past his father's biting criticism, Cooper had to prepare him. Someday, Cooper would leave and Blaine needed to be able to take it from his Dad without his big brother there to protect him. He was only helping Blaine develop a thicker skin. Otherwise, his father would destroy him.

*Makes me that much stronger*

*Makes me work a little bit harder*

*It makes me that much wiser*

*So thanks for making me a fighter*

He searched the school for him, wanting to explain it to him, and found him in the last place he'd expect, the gym. Blaine was wailing away on a punching bag, no doubt imagining his face as the target, and he stepped back so he could watch without Blaine seeing him. He had no idea that Blaine had taken up boxing. He had no idea that he was so good.

*Made me learn a little bit faster*

*Made my skin a little bit thicker*

*Makes me that much smarter*

*So thanks for making me a fighter*

"He's pretty amazing," a voice came behind him.

Cooper turned to see a girl in a cheerleading uniform, tying her long dark hair in a ponytail. It took him a moment, then he recognized her from Blaine's class. "Santana, right?" She nodded. "When did he learn how to box?" he indicated toward his brother.

"He started at Dalton after the attack, thought it would be a good idea to learn how to defend himself next time." Cooper looked from Santana to Blaine and back again, confusion written all over his face. "At his old school?" Santana prompted, but the look did not change. "After the Sadie Hawkins dance?" Cooper shook his head. He had no idea what she was talking about. "I can't believe that no one told you. Blaine had a dance at his old school and he went with another boy. It was right after he came out. None of us know exactly what happened, he doesn't talk about it. Well, Kurt probably does. But Blaine said there were some guys at school that beat the shit out of him. We know they hurt his eye. I think he had some broken bones. He was in the hospital a few days at least. It's why he transferred to Dalton."

Cooper froze in shock. "They just told me that he wasn't getting along with the other kids at school and needed to be challenged more," Cooper said quietly, staring after Blaine. "I always thought they were spoiling him by sending him there."

"It's probably what they wanted everyone to think," she said disgusted. Her brow furrowed in amazement. "You really don't know your brother at all, do you?" She walked off to cheerleading practice as Blaine finished up on the bag and disappeared into the showers.

No, he really didn't know his little brother at all.

The amusement park had been fun, but Kurt didn't enjoy it like he would have if Blaine had come along. Every fabulous moment he had wanted to share, but he didn't want to make Blaine feel worse by texting him a play-by-play. When he'd seen the little golden retriever stuffed puppy, with the sad eyes just like Blaine's, he immediately had to snag it for him. Rachel had enough stuffed animals.

Kurt's first stop was the auditorium. Given Blaine's mood, Cooper's imminent departure and leaving himself out of senior skip day, Blaine's refuge was the obvious place to find him. Kurt entered the house of the auditorium, expecting to see Blaine pacing the stage or brooding in the seats. But the Anderson brother he anticipated wasn't there. Instead he found Cooper, oblivious to his entrance.

"Blaine always comes here to think too," Kurt said from the top of the stairs, gently making his presence known.

Cooper startled and turned, gazing upwards to see Kurt standing at the doors. "Yeah, well, the stage has always been where he and I are most at home," Cooper said dispirited. But at least he knew that much about his brother hadn't changed.

Kurt stepped down the aisle slowly and took the seat behind Cooper, toying with the puppy in his lap lightly as he sat back in the seat. Cooper didn't turn to him, keeping his eyes trained on the stage.

"He loves you, you know," Kurt told him. Cooper head bowed. "That's why it hurts so much. If he didn't care about you so much he wouldn't care what you said or did. He looked up to you. *Looks* up to you," Kurt corrected.

"I've never meant to hurt Blaine," Cooper assured him.

Kurt looked over to Cooper. He didn't see the television star or even the hottest man in the world. He saw only a man who was missing out on a relationship with the one person that Kurt loved more than anyone. And unlike Blaine's father, Kurt knew that Blaine and Cooper needed one another. "Here's one thing I've learned about being bullied. The bruises and the scars of the physical abuse fade. Skin heals quickly. But the words that shatter your soul, they take a hell of a lot longer."

Cooper nodded silently, rubbing his neck the same way that Blaine did when he was anxious. "I shouldn't have treated him like that. I shouldn't have just left, I should have tried to stay involved with him more, taken him out, known what he was doing," Cooper whispered shamefully. If he'd stayed maybe he could have protected him at that dance. Or at least been there for him in the hospital.

"Maybe," Kurt admitted but it wasn't a judgment he was going to make. He stood to resume his search for Blaine. "But the fact is, you're here now. And all Blaine wants is a chance for it to be different between you and him than it is with your father." Kurt walked down the aisle and stepped up to the stage. He turned back to Cooper though with a question that had been plaguing him. "There's only one thing I'm curious about. After Blaine came out to your dad or came home from the hospital after the dance; do you have any idea the way your father treated him? What your father did to him?"

Cooper's heart dropped in his stomach and his face distorted in a panic and it was all the answer that Kurt needed. He hadn't known, but he did now. Kurt left Cooper to his thoughts in the quiet auditorium. Cooper's vision grew fuzzy. Kurt couldn't be saying what he thought. In the back of his mind, he had always feared the possibility but refused to believe that his father would go too far without someone telling him. *Blaine* would have told him if things had gotten worse. Wouldn't he? He frantically picked up the phone and called his mother.

"Mom?" he breathed quickly into the phone. "Mom, Kurt just asked me if I knew what Dad did to Blaine after he came out...Mom...and after the hospital...Mom stop crying...Mom, what the hell did Dad do?"

Blaine flinched at the unfamiliar voice at his locker, momentarily flashing back and shrinking in on himself. Then he saw the puppy, realized it was Kurt and breathed a sigh of relief. His nerves were



frazzled. First Cooper grabbing him, now this. It was feeling like the days before he met Kurt and he hated it. He couldn't do this much longer.

"Look, I get it, family stuff is hard," Kurt told him with a pout as he pet the puppy. "Especially between brothers. I mean, Finn and I aren't even real brothers and we pretty much disagree on everything. But, I love the big lug," Kurt's puppy told him and Blaine couldn't help but laugh. "And at the end of the day, we're in each other's corners." That was the problem though. Cooper hadn't been in Blaine's corner in a very long time. "You only get one brother Blaine, don't give up on that," Kurt encouraged.

"He's the one that's leaving," Blaine argued. "Huge audition, you didn't hear about it?"

"Actually," Kurt told him, "he hasn't left yet. He's in the auditorium hoping that you come and talk to him."

Blaine felt his temper flaring again. He was always expected to do all the work. Forgive his father, forgive his mother, forgive Finn and Karofsky, now Cooper. How many times could he put himself out there? How many chances did everyone deserve? "I've tried talking to him. Doesn't really work with him."

Kurt considered that. "Maybe talking's not the answer." Kurt knew Blaine better than he knew himself too. Blaine talked best in song. And there'd been a song he'd heard Blaine humming all week. "Maybe you need to show him how you really feel in the best most honest way you know how."

Blaine rolled his eyes and looked away. And then realized that Kurt was absolutely right. This was his way to tell Cooper everything. He took off for the stage, determined.

*Now and then I think of when we were together*

*Like when you said you felt so happy you could die*

Blaine had held it all inside for years. Cooper didn't know anything. His father was uncaring when Cooper was around and Blaine wasn't naïve enough to believe that Cooper had escaped his father's harsh discipline, but it wasn't the same. His father didn't *abuse* Cooper like he had Blaine. No, Cooper had escaped with harsh words and a trip to the study every now and again, but he was never struck like Blaine, never thrown against the furniture, never...

But there were times when he and Cooper had been together, especially with just their Mom, performing like they had the other day in the choir room, that it had been good.

*So when we found that we could not make sense*

*Well you said that we would still be friends*

*But I'll admit that I was glad that it was over*

Cooper was devastated that even Kurt and Santana seemed to know his brother better than he did. There was a time that he knew Blaine inside and out, but when he left it was like he was cut off from the whole family. Even trying to get answers from his mother a few minutes before, she had only cried and told her to talk to Blaine. It had been Cooper's choice to leave. He needed to break free of his father's constant criticism and he thought that leaving would make things better for Blaine. Cooper believed his baby brother had always been their favorite. He'd left precisely to keep Blaine as safe as possible. But he had a terrible feeling that he had failed miserably.

*But you didn't have to cut me off*

*Make out like it never happened and that we were nothing*

*And I don't even need your love*

*But you treat me like a stranger and that feels so rough*

Cooper had gone to LA and left him to fend for himself with a father still reeling from the effects of war. Blaine knew he wasn't being fair blaming Cooper entirely. Blaine had kept their secrets and he knew that neither Mom nor Dad had ever told him. Cooper didn't know how his father had assaulted him when he came out. Cooper didn't know he'd been attacked at school after the Sadie Hawkins dance or that his father had added to the bruises only moments after he'd arrived home from the hospital. Cooper didn't know about the deals he agreed to with his father just to stay with the Warblers. Blaine may have kept the secrets, but in his mind Cooper didn't know because Cooper had never made an effort to know him.

*No you didn't have to stoop so low*

*Have your friends collect your records and then change your number*

*I guess that I don't need that though*

*Now you're just somebody that I used to know*

But Cooper had tried. He went to Blaine's Warbler concerts after he transferred to Dalton, and tried to talk to him but Blaine was so angry he would storm away and then Cooper stopped being invited. Cooper tried to call and Blaine wouldn't answer or he'd have his friends tell him he was busy. Blaine had cut him out and he had never understood why. He came back this time to try again to make it better, to be friends, but he grew frightened that it was too late.

*Now and then I think of all the times you screwed me over*

*But had me believing it was always something that I'd done*

Cooper was always starting in on him. It was like Cooper just couldn't give up the chance to taunt his little brother, no matter the consequences. And there were consequences. When their mother caught them she merely separated them, sending Cooper to his room and taking Blaine to help her with whatever she was doing. But their father was a different story. He would take them to the study. It would start with a lecture to Cooper about having better things to do than rile up his little brother and a lecture to Blaine about how he needed to stop whining and stand up for himself because he wasn't raising any sissy boys. It ended with Blaine sore and crying alone in his room, and Cooper... Well, Blaine knew that Cooper always blamed him. He'd always been so angry when it was all done.

*But I don't wanna live that way*

*Reading into every word you say*

*You said that you could let it go*

*And I wouldn't catch you hung up on somebody that you used to know*

There was no excuse for the way Cooper treated him. Blaine had needed someone in his corner. Someone to just love him unconditionally, all his imperfections and all his foibles. He shouldn't have had to wait until he was sixteen years old to find someone who could just love him no matter what. With all his heart, Blaine wanted it to be better. He wanted to be closer. He needed Cooper to know what he'd been through, what he had left him to deal with. He needed Cooper to change and be the big brother that he had always wanted, but he feared that Cooper would never change.

*But you didn't have to cut me off*

*Make out like it never happened and that we were nothing*

*And I don't even need your love*

*But you treat me like a stranger and that feels so rough*

Cooper needed to make this better again. He always remembered the little brother that he played with and danced with but it seemed like when Blaine went to Dalton he had thrown their whole childhood away. He wasn't the same little boy he had left when their father came back.

*And you didn't have to stoop so low*

*Have your friends collect your records and then change your number*

*I guess that I don't need that though*

*Now you're just somebody that I used to know*

Cooper should have been there for him all along. He never should have left Blaine alone with their father. If he had been around than Cooper would have known him well enough and been around enough to **know** what was going on. To protect him or save him. But instead he'd just caused Blaine to push him even further away. And now they were strangers.

*Somebody*

Part of Blaine hated him. For leaving. For not protecting him.

*Now you're just somebody that I used to know*

Cooper saw the hate and it came at him like daggers. And his heart broke. He walked to his brother wanting nothing more than to understand. To be given another chance to love him and protect him like a big brother should.

*I used to know, Somebody*

They stepped toward each other, scared, but wanting desperately to try. To tell the truth, to know the truth. To fix this. To be brothers and to be friends.

"Was it ever real for you?" Blaine asked, his eyes squinted with years of pain. "Did you ever care for me, or was I just a nuisance to put up with until you could leave?"

"Blaine," Cooper's brow furrowed in confusion. How could Blaine not know how much he cared for him? "Things were bad for me here Blaine. I didn't want to leave you but I had to," Cooper justified. His father was strict and demanding and impossible to please. "As tiny as you were, you were always caught in the middle. I was always getting you in trouble." Cooper had run from that guilt his entire adult life. He should have protected Blaine better. When their Dad came home from the war, Cooper believed it would be better if he left for good. He wouldn't instigate trouble then. "You don't remember how it was. I needed to get out. I thought it was better for you without me around."

"I don't remember?" Blaine spat incredulously, his pulse pounding in his ears. "You think things were better for me? Get a fucking clue, Cooper. You left me and cut me off to run off to your world of parties and land of make believe where you could just be perfect all the time and forget all about me! You never even asked me how I was doing! And now you just come waltzing back in like a hero? Well I found my own way out, Cooper, I don't need you here! "

"Don't act like the helpless little boy still. You cut me off too, Blaine!" Cooper yelled. "I tried to stay in touch with you. I would call home, you wouldn't talk to me. I understand that you were mad at me, but what the hell was I supposed to do when I'd sit on one end of the phone and all you'd ever say was *'I'm fine'?*"

"Come back for me!" Blaine shouted. "You knew what was happening, you knew when he came back from overseas what you had left me with and you didn't come back for me!"

"No, Blaine, I didn't!" Cooper looked back at his brother, eyes filled with shock. "You think I know? I don't know anything Blaine. I learned from Santana about the attack at your school and then Kurt asks me if I know what Dad did to you. I tried to ask Mom, but she just cried. Jesus Christ Blaine, how am I supposed to know anything when all you do hide from me?"

They turned from each other, the intensity too much. Blaine knew he was right. He had wanted Cooper to rescue him but it was just as much his fault as Cooper's that he was kept in the dark. Cooper shook his

head in shame. The fact was, he had chosen to turn a blind eye to what might be happening. Just looking at Blaine, he recognized that he'd been horribly wrong. And though he couldn't go back, he could pretend like they used to. He turned back. Blaine was closed in on himself, his back to Cooper. Blaine couldn't even look at him.

"Can we go back a year?" Cooper asked guardedly.

Blaine dropped his head quietly. It was a game they used to play. As kids, when everything would go wrong, they would "go back" and do it over again. While they couldn't undo what they had done, they could at least pretend to fix it. And somehow it had the power to make things right again. That was a long time ago though, and nothing could really make this right. Too much had happened. A year ago had been Regionals. Blaine's fear of admitting his love for Kurt and losing everything. His grades dropping. His father threatening to take him out of the Warblers. Nothing Cooper could do now could change any of that. But Blaine needed him to know what he'd failed to protect him from and he just couldn't get the words out of his mouth any other way. Like with Kurt months ago, they'd been imprisoned too long. "Sure," he sighed.

Cooper took a chair from the band and turned it around backwards, straddling it and leaning his elbows on the back of the chair. "Hi Blaine, how are you?" he asked with the casual nature that hid his nerves with every phone call.

"Fine," Blaine lied instinctively. That was how it had always gone. Cooper was right. If that's how he answered, how was his brother ever to know the truth? But not this time. They were going back. He grabbed another chair and sat across from him.

Cooper had never pushed him before, not really wanting to know the truth. Instead he had ignored the pain in his brother's voice and chalked it up to teenage angst. But those days were done, he needed to hear the truth. "No really," Cooper pushed. "How *are* you?"

Blaine stared into Cooper's blue eyes, his own amber darkening with memories. "Not fine," he answered crestfallen.

Cooper's heart raced as he asked the question he couldn't stand the answer to. "How has Dad been treating you since he's been back?"

Blaine's eyes flashed to a long walk up the stairs of his father's house as he chose the Warblers over his own safety. Tears began to wet his cheeks. "Not good," he admitted brokenly.

Cooper's heart raced in anticipation of the answer he knew was coming. "Is he hurting you?"

Blaine lowered his eyes, studying a loose thread on his pants. "Yes," he confessed barely above a whisper.

Cooper's breath caught in his throat. He looked away for a moment, blinking back the tears he felt no right to shed. Shame filled his heart, knowing that it was his fault. He hadn't wanted it to be true. The guilt suddenly overwhelmed him, guessing what things must have been like for Blaine once their Dad returned, wondering just how badly things had gotten. As the years went by, he had prayed that the person who had never protected him was finally able to protect his little brother. "What is Mom doing for you?" Cooper asked.

"Nothing," Blaine said harshly and his eyes snapped back to Cooper's as he jumped out of his chair. "She walks out the door. Just like you. And neither of you think to take me with you!"

Cooper felt Blaine's words like a punch in the gut and he rose out of his chair. "Dammit Blaine, you never asked! And it's not like he would have let me just take you out to California! What the hell was I suppose to do?"

"I don't know," Blaine yelled turning back to him. "Maybe tell me how you got the hell out?"

Cooper took a breath and swallowed hard. He hadn't found a way out until he'd been eighteen. He didn't have an answer for sixteen year old Blaine. He sat back down and returned to a year ago. "Do you have somewhere you can go? Someone you can talk to? Maybe at Dalton?" It should have been him. He should have done something. But that he couldn't change.

Blaine turned away. A year ago. Nick had figured it out after that visit home, but Blaine made him promise not to tell. He should have gone to Kurt then, but he'd been terrified. If he had only known then what he knew now....he sat back down. "Yes, but I'm scared."

"Scared of what?" Cooper begged, instinctively taking his brother's hand. He sighed with relief when Blaine did not pull away.

"Losing everything." It had been Blaine's biggest fear.

"Look at me Blaine," Cooper urged, and Blaine met his gaze. He spoke from his own experience the words he should have said a year ago, maybe even five years ago. "You may lose some things. Important things," he emphasized as he squeezed Blaine's hand. The most important thing he had lost was Blaine. "But there's a bigger and better world out there. And this special someone...Kurt is his name?" he asked with a knowing smile.

Blaine blushed slightly and nodded. "Yes."

"Kurt will help you find it." Cooper willed Blaine to listen to him and believe him. "You can *do* this Blaine."

Cooper let go of Blaine's hand and leaned back grasping the back of the chair, suddenly shying out of the game. Blaine still watched him. Cooper looked down embarrassed. "Would that have helped?" he asked uneasily.

"Yeah," Blaine responded sadly.

Cooper arched his brow and caught Blaine's eye. "Does it still help?" he asked hopefully. He couldn't go back, but he would do what he needed to do for Blaine now.

Blaine reached over and settled his hands on top of Cooper's. He didn't want things to still be that way between them anymore. He wanted things to change. His eyes shined and he smiled slightly. "Yes."

Cooper lit up at the first genuine smile Blaine had given him in years. "Even though we don't live in the same town and don't see each other all the time, we're not just brothers, right?" he asked and Blaine could see the desperate hope in Cooper's eyes. "We're friends too."

"That's exactly what I've always wanted us to be Coop," Blaine said softly.

Cooper's eyes filled with tears as he wrapped his little brother safely in his arms, knowing that this time he would protect him from whatever else may come his way. Blaine smiled, feeling home again with his brother, something that he had not felt in a very long time.

"Blaine," Cooper asked softly. Blaine pulled away, wiping away tears slightly, almost relieved to see Cooper do the same. Their eyes met and Cooper's blue bore into Blaine's. "What did Dad do?"



Blaine looked away, fear and shame filling him. But it was time. Blaine led him to the edge of the stage and they sat. Slowly but surely, Blaine told him everything.

Santana and Kurt had been right. This was very much worth the fight.

## ***Chapter Nineteen: Saturday Night Gleever***

Blaine jumped off the stage excitedly as Kurt grabbed his bag and raced up the auditorium stairs without a glance to Blaine. Eyeing Kurt oddly, Blaine quickly grabbed his things from the seat just abandoned by his boyfriend and hurried behind him.

"Kurt," he called, but Kurt's eyes stayed forward as he reached the top and flung the door open. Blaine caught the door before it closed and jogged up next to the seemingly irate young man. "Kurt, Kurt, what are you doing?"

"Ignoring you," Kurt snarked.

Blaine laughed nervously. "Why? Did I do something wrong?" Blaine couldn't take Kurt's silent treatment any longer and grabbed his arm, bringing them to a stop in the middle of the hallway. "Kurt talk to me."

Kurt stared at him annoyed. "Disco, Blaine? Really?" Blaine stared back in disbelief, then closed his eyes and chuckled. Sometimes Kurt was a bigger drama queen than Rachel. Blaine pursed his lips in amusement allowing Kurt to finish his rant. "It's one thing to 'boogie on down' in the privacy of your own bedroom," Kurt mocked Blaine's 70's dancing while he talked, "but it is entirely something else to force the rest of the glee club to endure you and Mr. Schuester's love of disco."

Blaine took Kurt's hand softly and swung it between them. "I thought you loved our disco nights?" Blaine flirted lowly.

Kurt blushed but held his ground. "I love those nights because of you. Doesn't make the disco suck any less."

"Casper is right, Boyfriend, this time you've gone too far." Santana suddenly snuck up between the boys and placed her hands on her hips staring Blaine down. "There is no place in this glee club for disco. And I don't appreciate you manipulating my girlfriend into swinging her pretty little hips to those beats. Those were three minutes of her life that she will never get back and she should have been using them to dance to something awesome."

Blaine just stared back and forth from his boyfriend to his best friend. "You two are unbelievable. I will have you know that 70's music had some of the most innovative sounds and production techniques that have led to..."

"Shut him up please," Santana begged Kurt. "Put those cherry red lips on his and shut him up before he starts talking about how disco saved the world." She turned back to Blaine and stuck a finger in his face. "You want to serenade your boy and shake your booty to disco in the bedroom? I'm ok with that. If that's what it takes to spice up your no doubt pitifully boring sex life I say do what you need to do." Blaine and Kurt shot her an annoyed glances, but she continued. "But leave the disco out of glee club."

Santana walked off and caught up to Brittany, putting her arm immediately around the girl's waist. Blaine and Kurt stared at each other, nearly a foot between them, and frowned. "We're not boring, are we?" Kurt asked nervously.

Blaine wanted nothing more than to wrap his arm around Kurt, slip his hand in Kurt's back pocket and reassure him, but Kurt remained hesitant with memories of dumpsters and slushies fixed firmly in his mind. Instead he gingerly rubbed Kurt's arms. "We're not boring at all. Come on, don't let Santana get to you. My house or yours?" Blaine asked.

Kurt thought about Finn and Rachel at his house versus a likely empty apartment at Blaine's. "Definitely yours," he smiled as they walked out. "But no disco playlist!" he insisted.

Blaine smiled. "Katy Perry and Pink it is," he said and Kurt rolled his eyes. They definitely needed to spice things up a bit.

They sat sprawled in the living room after school at Kurt's empty house doing homework. Burt and Carole were both and Finn and Sam were spending the afternoon in the weight room working off their women problems.

"I think he should do it," Blaine said definitively. Kurt looked at him like he was crazy and he threw innocent eyes back. "What? I think if Wade wants to go on that stage as Unique, he should."

"Blaine Anderson, have you gone out of your mind?" Kurt screeched. "Have you already forgotten your Sadie Hawkins dance, dumpsters, slushies, Prom, Karofsky for heaven's sake? Wade's just asking to get himself booed, beaten up or worse!"

"So he should pretend to be someone he's not just to keep himself safe?" Blaine had done it for years, but he was done. Talking to Cooper about everything that had happened made him realize that despite the tremendous pain and suffering it had caused him, going to the Sadie Hawkins dance with a boy had been one of the proudest moments of his life. "It sucks living in the closet Kurt, believe me. And it may be safer denying who you are, but it feels horrible."

"I know that Blaine. I may have had it better than most, but I still know that." Kurt felt like his closet never really had a door that shut. Though he tried to deny it to himself for years, the world around him knew even before he did. Kurt blinked then buried his face in his hands. "It's horrible that we live in a time and a place where he can't just wear what he wants and not have any repercussions, but we do and he seems like a nice kid and I just don't want to see anyone else get hurt. I think we've all had enough of that."

Blaine wrapped Kurt in his arms and kissed the top of his head. "I love that you want to protect him, even though Coach Sylvester wants him eaten by the sharks. But sometimes we have to take chances. And sometimes we have to do what's right, no matter what might come our way. Be a fighter." Blaine smiled and kissed his lips softly as his eyes darkened and his lids grew heavy. "That's what you taught me. No matter who has ever tried to beat me down, you've encouraged me to rise above it."

Kurt bit his lip and nodded.

"Dance with me," Blaine said.

"What?" Kurt startled. "Now?"

"No, in class. Dance with me. For disco. And not like we normally do in the choir room. Like we do here, where no one is watching."

"Blaine!" Kurt protested, his face growing red.

"I don't mean *that*, Mr. dirty mind," he laughed as he tickled Kurt's sides. Kurt laughed and fell back on the floor begging for a truce. Blaine straddled Kurt's sprawled out body and stopped, kissing him a little more strongly on the lips before settling on his heels on top of Kurt's hips. "Seriously Kurt. Cooper made me

realize that I'm too strong to be hiding all the time. Dance with me in the choir room. Close. Like we do here."

Kurt looked up at Blaine and nervously nodded his head. It was becoming more and more difficult to say no to those sparkling eyes.

"Ok everyone," Mr. Schuester grinned at the top of the class. He circled around so he could see everyone, the chairs set up around the dance floor. "Our second finalist will be singing for you all today. Everyone please give a warm welcome to Ms. Santana Lopez!"

Santana smiled as she stepped onto the stage, stealing a glance to Blaine. He winked at her and she smiled back before turning to Brittany. They'd discussed the song last night. Blaine thought it was perfect and today he thought she looked beautiful.

*Don't know why*

*I'm surviving every lonely day*

*When there's got to be no chance for me*

*My life would end*

Brittany thought she looked stunning. It always amazed her that someone as smart and witty and sexy as Santana would love her as much as she did and Brittany was forever pledging that she would do anything for her girlfriend. She loved Santana more than anyone in the world, except maybe Lord Tubbington, but he could be just as frustrating as Santana at times and Santana forgave her more easily. That was why she would do anything within her power for the girl that loved her.

*And it doesn't matter how I try*

*I gave it all so easily*

*to you my love*

*To dreams that never*

*will come true*

*Am I strong enough to*

*see it through?*

*Go crazy is what I will do*

Santana wanted it all, fame and fortune, and most of all she wanted Brittany by her side. Brittany was her biggest cheerleader, an amazing lover and the perfect friend. It had always been so difficult to give her love to anyone; Puck, Finn, Sam, they was always a war inside her heart with them. With Brittany, everything was easy. She knew that as long as Brittany was with her, she could do anything she could ever dream of.

*If I can't have you*

*I don't want nobody, baby*

*If I can't have you*

*If I can't have you*

*I don't want nobody, baby*

*If I can't have you*

Kurt smiled at Brittany, so amazingly in love with Santana. He would never understand it, but then again he did, because despite everything he would stay by Blaine's side as long as he let him. He glanced over and for a moment his heart sunk as he remembered how far apart they might be next year, but he knew that they would deal with things as they came. Blaine had reassured him in the past that he'd be okay, and though Kurt certainly worried about him, he knew, as his father said, that if their relationship was meant to be than they would survive whatever was thrown their way.

*If I can't have you*

*I don't want nobody, baby*

*If I can't have you*

*If I can't have you*

*I don't want nobody, baby*

*If I can't have you*

Blaine was so proud of Santana, singing to Brittany. She had grown so much this year and though he knew that Brittany was the biggest factor, he was glad he could be a part of it. He kept his eyes trained on her, because looking at Kurt right then would hurt too much. He tried to keep positive about New York and NYADA and he tried to be the supportive boyfriend that he knew he should be, but he couldn't help the worries that Kurt would break his heart as so many others had. It helped, having Cooper back in his life, trying with his Dad, knowing that broken could be mended. But he also knew that broken hurt and he'd been hurt enough. They'd barely talked about it, but the final decisions were soon to be made. They'd have to talk about it eventually.

*If I can't have you*

Blaine slipped into the booth at the jazz club next to Santana and ordered his regular drink. It was their weekly "girl's night out". Kurt and Mercedes went to the Vocal Adrenaline Regionals performance to watch Wade. Blaine hoped that Kurt would support Unique.

The singer tonight at the club was one of their favorites, a soulful woman who reminded Blaine of the girl sitting next to him, with ten years of experience and wisdom added in. Because times like now, he just did not understand anything that went on in the gorgeous, intelligent, and constantly defensive mind of hers.

"Could you stop staring at me like that Anderson? What the hell?" Santana yelled. Since the moment he walked in, Blaine had been watching her, examining her, doing very little to hide the deep disappointment that radiated from his honey colored eyes that usually either hated or adored her. This was new and she didn't like it.

"A sex tape Santana?" he asked incredulously. "Seriously?"

"Hey, don't knock it 'till you've tried it, Boyfriend," Santana quipped. "Ain't nothing better than watching my girl making love. You and Kurt might want to try it. You're going to be spending some long, lonely nights together when Porcelain's in the city that never sleeps. A visual may do you both some good."

Blaine looked embarrassingly at his fingers. "That would be illegal, Santana," he muttered just loud enough for her to hear.

"Yeah well, disco should be too, but you like that," she answered smartly, taking a sip of her drink.

Blaine ignored her. "Look, I don't care that you did it, that's between you and Britt. But what the hell are you doing putting it out there for everyone to see?" he asked earnestly.

Santana looked away. "Yeah well, not everyone's as prudish as you and Kurt."

Their food arrived and Blaine put a quick halt to the conversation, thanking the server until he left. He turned back to Santana.

"We're not prudish Santana," he argued, "we're careful. Some things are private." He looked at her, and her cheeks were reddened. There was something here he was missing. He took her hand and she glanced over at him. "Why would you want fame that badly?"

Santana exhaled and shook her head slightly. "Brittany put it out. I didn't. I wouldn't," she admitted. "It's my fault. I shouldn't have said I would do anything in front of Brittany. I just meant that fame was my dream."

"But why?" Blaine asked, and squeezed her hand so she would meet his eyes. "Mr. Scheuster's right, fame isn't something you aspire to. Santana, you can do anything you put your mind to. And whatever that is can bring you fame, because the key to fame is being the best at what you do. I could see you a hot shot attorney prosecuting the most heinous and notorious criminals." Santana chuckled that as always, Blaine and Mr. Scheuster were on the same page. He continued. "You have people who love you because they know who you are. And as you go through life there are going to be so many more. You don't need the love of strangers to feel good about yourself. That's the old Santana."

"The old Santana," she mimicked with an eye roll, then laid her head on his shoulders. "Where did the old Blaine and Santana go?" she mused aloud.



Blaine shrugged. "We grew up I guess." He kissed her on the head and snuggled her close as their food arrived. Santana picked up a pea from her plate, placed it on her fork and flung it at Blaine catching him on the nose. She couldn't help but laugh hysterically as he picked up a French Fry and threw it at her.

"Grown up as we are, apparently we still have a long way to go," she chortled as they comfortably settled in for their evening of jazz.

"Oh my god, I look fantastic," Kurt said to himself, as he watched himself twirl in the mirror of the choir room. Polyester aside, the white Saturday Night Fever outfit hugged him in every perfect place.

Blaine couldn't agree more, and he strolled over to his boyfriend with eyes quickly darkening. Kurt was his angel and he looked simply heavenly in the suit. He took Kurt's hand and his heart skipped a beat. "You are the most gorgeous man alive," Blaine whispered lowly in his ear.

Kurt's face flushed with desire as Mr. Schuester called them. "Alright, everyone on stage, let's get the fever!"

Kurt rolled his eyes as he and Blaine followed the rest of the glee club out onto the stage.

Throughout the performance, Kurt and Blaine snuck furtive glances in the other's directions, their desires growing instead of waning. Kurt still hated disco, but he had to admit that Blaine in chains and bellbottoms could have been one of the sexiest things he'd ever seen.

Kurt could barely stand still during the mountainous praise Mr. Schuester heaped on them when it was over. He had only one thing on his mind. Blaine reveled in the performance, thinking it would be perfect for Regionals, then wondered if that was really the best idea. He'd scolded Finn last year for his unprofessionalism and knew it would take all his own willpower to keep his hands off Kurt if he ever saw him in that outfit again. He eyed Kurt who appeared flush, but he dismissed it as exertion. After all, Kurt couldn't possibly be thinking what he was.

Returning to the choir room, Kurt whispered in Blaine's ear, "Keep the suit on." His cyan eyes were mischievous and a fire sparked in Blaine's stomach. Blaine gathered his things slowly, waiting for Kurt and trying to look nonchalant while his heart beat strongly in his ears.

Kurt sent quick text to Finn and his father: *Going out with Blaine. Don't wait for us. Be home late. ~Kurt*

He ignored Finn's side-eye as he got the text, but sent daggers in his brother's direction when Finn started to come over to argue. It was Friday night dinner. They would miss it. It would be worth it.

Kurt slung his satchel over his shoulder and grabbed Blaine's hand. "Come with me," he flirted.

Blaine followed with anticipation so fierce it was burning a hole in his gut. Kurt took him left instead of right and Blaine's brow furrowed. "The parking lot is that way, Love," he laughed.

"We're not going to the parking lot," Kurt seduced and Blaine's knees barely held out. Kurt led him back to the auditorium, and glanced around quickly before silently opening the door and closing it ever so gently behind them. It was pitch dark backstage and on, and Kurt led him through the wings to the other side, pulling out his cell phone to light the way. He squeezed Blaine's hand tightly, smiling with both satisfaction and pure lust as he nearly dragged Blaine up the rickety stairs to the alcove above the stage.

"Oh my god, Kurt," Blaine said breathlessly but he barely got the words out because Kurt dropped his satchel and cell phone to the floor and swiftly pressed Blaine between himself and the wall, pushing his lips ferociously against Blaine's.

Blaine moaned into the kiss, as his blood ran hot through his body, heading to all the right places. He happily gave Kurt the lead, but wrapped his arms around his boyfriend's waist to pull his hips in even tighter. When he paused for breath he opened his eyes to see Kurt's cell phone skittering across the floor as it vibrated.

"Should you get that?" he whimpered between mind-blowing kisses as Kurt's mouth went to work on his neck and his fingers went to work on his buttons.

"It's just my Dad calling to yell," Kurt said dismissively.

"Shit, Kurt, it's Friday. You're going to get in so much trouble for missing dinner," Blaine said with shaky breath.

"Correction my love," Kurt hummed as he nibbled his way further down. "*We* are going to get in trouble for missing dinner. But I promise it will be completely worth it." He glanced up teasingly. "Unless you want me to stop."

Blaine threw his head back. "Oh god, don't you dare," he groaned. "You've been promising this night for months now, even the wrath of Burt Hummel can't make me give it up."

Kurt laughed and resumed his ministrations where he had left off. Blaine closed his eyes and gave into every sensation. Blaine knew he was in no need of a video. This moment would be etched into his memory for a lifetime.

Blaine was still on cloud nine when he dug his keys out of his satchel, and unlocked the front door, letting himself in to the dark apartment. He'd decided not to go back to the house with Kurt, choosing to face Burt's wrath another day and let Kurt be reprimanded in peace. He flung the keys on the kitchen counter and switched the light on with a sigh. He grabbed the note on the kitchen table.

*Blaine,*

*Working late tonight. I left a casserole in the fridge for you. Heat it up in the microwave for 2 minutes. Please do your homework and go to bed at a reasonable time. I love you and will see you in the morning.*

*Love, Mom*

Blaine went to the fridge and pulled out the casserole dish, humming to himself as he scooped some into a bowl and setting it in the microwave. He kicked off his shoes and headed to his room to change into sweats and a t-shirt while his dinner cooked. He took his math homework out and completed the twenty pre-calculus equations while he ate, then grabbed Hamlet, his assigned reading for English. He'd read it before, but he didn't mind reading it again. Better preparation for the day he knew he'd be performing the role, whether it was a college class or on stage. College. The day couldn't come quickly enough.

His cell rang in his pocket and he reached in to answer it.

"Hey, Santana! What's up?"

"Blaine, you are never going to believe what happened! Coach Sylvester and Brittany applied to the University of Louisville for me and I got in with a full ride scholarship! I would have called you earlier, but Britt and I have been," she cleared her throat, "celebrating for the last few hours."

Blaine closed his eyes, pressing the phone to his ear, as his heart sunk to the floor. One more person, gone. "That's great, Santana." He tried to be happy, but his heart wasn't in it.

"Now don't go getting teary-eyed on me Boyfriend. It's only four hours away and I'm always on the other end of the phone," she said firmly but with sympathy.

"Yeah," he attempted to brush away the hurt to be happy for her. "Yeah of course. No, Tana, really, that's amazing. I'm really, really proud of you."

She heard the hurt in his voice and understood. Blaine had been abandoned and betrayed more often than was fair for anyone and she'd just be one more person on his list. But she had to do this. "It's my way out Blaine. I'm actually getting out of Lima," she said quietly, and Blaine could hear her own amazement. She feigned all the confidence in the world to the outside, but he knew that she had never truly thought she'd actually do it.

"I know. I love you, Tana," he whispered as he blinked back the tears.

Santana paused for a moment with surprise, before responding with a smile. "Back atcha, Boyfriend," she said warmly.

Blaine ended the call and put the phone down. The silence of his empty apartment was deafening.

He called Cooper, but his brother was sitting in a sea of actors waiting to be called in for an audition and couldn't talk, but promised to call back tomorrow. Blaine put his dirty dishes away then went to his bedroom, throwing the phone on the bed.

Kurt was going to New York. Santana was going to Kentucky. Cooper was in LA. Mike and Mercedes and Rachel and Puck and Finn were going off to follow their dreams and he was stuck another year here in Lima, Ohio with two parents who barely ever had time for him. There had been other times in his life when he had felt utterly alone, but this was the worst. Now there were people out there who loved him and who he loved, and they were all about to be just out of reach. He tried to lie down to sleep, but he tossed and turned with racing thoughts.

Giving up, he went to the living room, grabbing a movie off the shelf and putting it in the DVD player. Saturday Night Fever. He settled into the couch, curling up with a blanket, and imagined.

One more year, and it would be his turn for his dreams to come true.

## ***Chapter Twenty: Dance With Somebody***

Blaine always went over to Kurt's house when they had something scheduled, but he kept his heart tucked away, especially when the constant discussions of NYADA and New York inevitably arose. He didn't reach out. He stopped texting, he stopped flirting. He loved Kurt, more than anything in the world. And that was the problem. It all hurt too much.

The list of people he loved that had betrayed and left him was growing too long for Blaine to bear. His harsh but loving father went off to war and returned with hatred in his heart. Cooper left for the bright lights and cameras of LA, abandoning Blaine when he needed him most. His mother did her best, but she never protected him then and was never there for him now. His friends at school turned their back on him when he came out, then his friends at Dalton turned on him the minute he left.

But Kurt was truly his angel. He only ever had love in his heart, he was there for him, protected him, held him when he cried, calmed the rage, loved him when he thought himself unlovable. Kurt had never betrayed him. And the thought of losing him, of being alone in a world that seemed to constantly turn its back on Blaine Anderson, was too much. It was so much that he knew he needed to start preparing.

So he hung out with the guys more. Sure, they were leaving too but it didn't matter as much, not like Kurt and Santana. The jazz club chat sessions were hard enough. He was growing to really love the place, not to mention Santana's biting honesty and sense of humor, and there would be no one next year to go with. But being close to Kurt was killing him. He wanted to remember the night in the auditorium forever. It was the most exhilarating and yet tender experience they'd had together, and Blaine couldn't help but feel that it was the perfect note to end on if it was going to end. And in his heart, he couldn't help but believe it truly would end and next year he would be alone.

No, pizza and video games at Puck's house with Finn and Sam were a hell of a lot easier to say goodbye to.

"I am so going to kick your ass in Mario Kart today, Anderson," Puck challenged as he grabbed a slice of pepperoni and onion and shoved it in his mouth unceremoniously.

"You think so?" Blaine answered, but there was no energy in it. His mind kept drifting to Kurt.

A month ago he would have gone to the music store with him. They would have spent hours searching the racks, arguing between Barbara Streisand and Pink and Roxy, laughing and joking, finally settling on something they'd sing together the whole way home.

His Kart drove off the path of Rainbow Road over and over as tears shimmered in his eyes. He quickly blinked them away, focusing his mind on the task at hand, beating Puck and Finn and Sam. The guys were fun, but they weren't Kurt, his best friend, the love of his life.

The day went into night and the boys went their own ways. Blaine headed home. He had waited and waited for Kurt's text that he was done at the store. But it never came.

Kurt and Blaine went through the next two days pretending everything was okay, but they could not help but feel the other inexplicably slipping through their fingers. When Kurt invited him over for a movie, Blaine accepted with mixed feelings.

"Hey Blaine," Sam said warily as he let Blaine inside the Hummel home. "Kurt's up in his room waiting for you."

Sam's apprehension certainly didn't ease the concerns that plagued Blaine on the drive over. He hadn't missed Sam and Kurt during Glee today, huddled over Kurt's phone. Blaine had walked in late to the choir room, his math teacher keeping him after class, to see Kurt and Sam sitting together. The seat next to Kurt had been empty but it was apart from Kurt. Blaine took it, but didn't pull it closer. It seemed fitting. Together but apart.

Kurt had paid no attention to Blaine as he sat glued to his phone. It had been like that for two days now. His own phone was virtually silent. Blaine had hoped when he'd seen Kurt giggling over his phone earlier in the hallway that it was Brittany or Mercedes or even Rachel, but all of their friends were in the choir room and no one else had their phone out. The only other person he could think of was Karofsky. He knew that David still often talked to Kurt and Blaine had accepted that. Kurt had shown him their conversations, with David's permission, and they were always supportive and friendly. He was proud that Kurt could be that kind of person and if the texts were David needing him, he could respect it. Still though, it wasn't at all like Kurt to not pay attention in glee club, especially to Santana and Rachel performing together. And Blaine had to admit that as strange a pairing as it was, their performance was incredible.

He had tried to lean over to whisper to Kurt, but Kurt paid him no attention, sharing the texts with Sam instead. It was killing Blaine. Kurt wasn't even gone yet and it was already like Blaine wasn't even there. Blaine had thought that was what he wanted, to get used to being alone, but there was one thing he hadn't realized. The only thing harder than thinking about living without Kurt was watching Kurt live happily without him. He pushed his feelings away and smiled at Sam.

"Thanks Sam," Blaine said as he walked into the living room to say hi to Finn. He rubbed his hands together mischievously and grabbed a chip from the bowl that no doubt Sam and Finn had left out. It looked like they were having a movie afternoon as well, probably something with cars blowing up or the world ending. Finn sat on the couch and automatically smacked his hand away from the bowl. "Go get your own food Anderson, I am sure Kurt has a feast planned for you. This bowl's for those of us without dates this evening."

Blaine grabbed a chip anyway, munching on it before starting to make his way toward the stairs. "Rachel busy tonight?"

"NYADA rehearsal with her Dads," Finn grumbled and Blaine understood the sentiment. Neither Kurt nor Rachel could go five minutes without talking about their audition.

"Hey, um, that reminds me Blaine," Sam said tentatively and Blaine could see the discomfort in his face. "Can we talk for a minute?"

Blaine looked at him nervously. "Yeah, sure Sam, what's up?"

Sam walked off to the kitchen for some privacy and to grab a soda from the fridge and Blaine followed. "So, I don't really want to get in the middle of things, but..." he hedged, before continuing. "Have things been okay between you and Kurt lately?"

Blaine's heart sunk in his chest. He knew. He knew during Glee when Kurt giggled and his cheeks blushed in a way that had always been reserved for Blaine. He felt like he was watching his whole world crumble before his eyes and there was absolutely nothing he could do about it. He had already prepared for it but he needed to be told what he already knew and Kurt was telling him nothing. "The texts aren't from Karofsky, are they?"



Sam looked at him sadly, Blaine's eyes full of fear and pain. Sam didn't think he should be the one to tell him what Kurt was up to, though he was shocked at the messages he'd seen and he thought Blaine should definitely be told. But it wasn't his place. "Talk to Kurt, Blaine," Sam said, and he returned to the living room without another word.

Blaine made his way slowly up the stairs, almost wanting to turn and run, when he caught Kurt's excited face and his heart melted.

"Hey handsome," Kurt flitted toward him and gave him a quick kiss on the lips. "I'm going to go get the cheese platter, I'll be right back, set the movie up."

Blaine glanced at the phone on Kurt's nightstand but went to his shelf to grab the disc. The phone buzzed once while he put the movie in the blue-ray. He turned to stare at it when it buzzed again. He slowly made his way to the bed as it buzzed a third time and he sat down and closed his eyes. He kept his hands folded on his lap. He wasn't that type of boyfriend, he'd drilled the importance of privacy into Kurt's head for over a year now. And besides, Kurt didn't keep secrets from him, they trusted one another. But when it buzzed again the phone was in his hand and he stared at his worst fears realized.

"Ok, I've got the cheese plate," Kurt bounced into the room. "Our Being Bobby Brown marathon can officially begin."

"Who's Chandler?" Blaine could barely breathe, barely put the words together, his heart broken into pieces. He looked up at Kurt, completely lost.

Kurt stopped. Panic and guilt ripped through him and he deflects defensively. "Why are you going through my phone?"

Blaine sat in shock, not even sure in what universe this was all happening. "I'm not going through your phone, it's just that it keeps buzzing because," he was unable to say the name without his heart leaping into his throat. "Chandler won't stop texting you."

He read the texts out loud, looking for Kurt to say something that would make it all make sense and not have it be what it obviously is. Kurt reached for his phone and Blaine stepped away from Kurt's touch, needing to say what he had to say.

"Why are you getting so upset, this is all innocent," Kurt tried to calm Blaine before his anger built.

"This is cheating, Kurt." The words alone nearly killed him.

Kurt could try to deny it all he wanted but the proof was in his hand. His jaw clenched and his eyes blazed as anger threatened to overwhelm him and then he suddenly realized: Kurt liked this guy.

He wondered what he had done, but he knew exactly what he had done. He had pushed Kurt away in order to keep himself safe and he had pushed him straight into the arms of another man. It didn't matter what he had done in the past, all the things he had done for Kurt and because of Kurt. It didn't matter how many times he had called Kurt his angel, was there more he still could have done?

He tried to get Kurt to talk to him but no matter what he said, Kurt continued to deny what he had done. Blaine hadn't realized his heart could break anymore, but all the pieces of his heart shattered even more as Kurt tried to convince him that it was all ok.

"It's not right," Blaine said firmly, as he gaped at the boy he loved and suddenly wondered if he had ever really known him. "But it's ok?" he asked, incredulous. He stared, trying to restart this conversation, trying to erase it all. He wanted to turn back time and go to the music shop with him and erase this guy Chandler from the plane of existence. But he couldn't do any of those things. "I have to go."

"Wait!" Kurt jumped up and grabbed Blaine's hand. "Blaine, don't leave," he nearly begged.

Blaine ripped his hand away, his face twisted with anger and hurt. "You were the one person. The ONE person, Kurt, who never betrayed me. I honestly don't know what to do right now, but I know I can't stay."

Blaine didn't hear Kurt's breath hitch behind him as he slammed Kurt's door and raced down the stairs and out the front door. He ignored Sam's knowing look and Finn's worried one. He got into his car and peeled out of the driveway, hitting the highway without any thought to his destination. The signs were blurry through his tears, his foot was heavy on the gas pedal and his car raced with the strength of his anger. He had nowhere to go, no place that belonged just to him. Lima, Westerville, Dalton, the jazz club, even Scandals was filled with memories of people who had betrayed him. He was trapped in a prison of loneliness.

So he just drove for hours. The sun went down and the moon lit his way. When his tank was near empty he filled it and headed back to Lima, but still he did not go home. He pulled into an empty parking lot and blasted his iPod well past curfew. One song on repeat and he killed it every time. Whitney would be proud.

He closed his eyes, but all he saw were Chandler's texts: *We'll go for a carriage ride in New York. We'll take Broadway by storm. When we go to New York, let's go to the front of the Plaza and reenact the end of The Way We Were.* His phone kept chiming with the tones of Kurt texting. Even Sam and Rachel tried to reach him but he disregarded every one. He poured himself into his music and ignored the texts and calls from his mother telling him to come home. He knew she was worried and angry but how dare she choose today to have the evening off and remember him. His head swam as the time ticked by without notice. It wasn't until the sound of his father's ring tone that he snapped back to reality and he knew he couldn't ignore the phone anymore.

*Two Choices, Blaine: Get yourself home to your mother in ten minutes or I will call the police and have them deliver you here.*

He read it over twice before throwing it quickly on the seat next to him, managing to scramble out of the car and to the bushes before sickness overcame him. He couldn't do this. Not alone. Not again. When he could finally breathe again he went back to the car and grabbed his water bottle to rinse his mouth. He looked at the clock. He had 7 minutes left.

He rested his forehead on the steering wheel before pulling himself together enough to drive home. Nothing was ever right. But he'd survived before. And he would this time too.

His night was wracked with dreams and nightmares: Kurt and a faceless Chandler exploring New York together, hugging, kissing; his father sending the police after him; and images of himself in slick black with New Directions singing his fury. He tossed and turned and woke up resolved, his heart somehow pieced back together with the fire in his soul. He thought he had known Kurt, but guessed that he'd never really known the boy at all. He decided that maybe it was easier this way. They'd break up now and he could get over the heartache before Kurt even left.

*Friday night you and your boys went out to eat*

*Then they hung out, but you came home around three*

*Now if six of ya'll went out*

*Then four of you were really cheap*

*'Cause only two of you had dinner*

*I found your credit card receipt*

Santana stared at Kurt, her hackles raised at even the idea of Kurt cheating on Blaine. Kurt felt her eyes , and the eyes of every other member of New Directions, on him and glared back quickly, nearly challenging them to get into it with him. He could not believe that Blaine was going to air their dirty laundry for the entire Glee club to judge him.

*It's not right but it's okay*

*I'm gonna make it anyway*

*Pack your bags up and leave*

*And don't you dare come Running back to me*

*It's not right but it's okay*

*I'm gonna make it anyway*

*Close the door behind you*

*Leave your key*

*I'd rather be alone than unhappy*

Blaine didn't need anyone. He didn't need his father, he didn't need Cooper and he didn't need Kurt or Santana or Sebastian and the Warblers. He would make it just fine on his own. Kurt could pack his bags and leave for New York and fill his days with Chandler or whatever other guy cast his net on him, because there was no doubt in Blaine's mind that a million guys would be all over Kurt Hummel the instant he arrived in the city that never sleeps.

*I've been through all this before*

*So how could you think*

*So don't turn around to see my face*

*There's no more tears*

*Left here for you to see*

Santana didn't know what Kurt had done, but her heart broke for Blaine and she was determined to find what the hell Kurt had done and kick his ass. Blaine had been through enough, he had cried enough tears and Santana could see on Blaine's face that there were none left to shed.

*Was it really worth you going out like that*

*Tell Me*

Blaine stared at Kurt, seeing in the boy's eyes that he still didn't think he'd done anything wrong. Well screw him. Blaine had been wrong last night. He *could* do this alone and he would. He wasn't going to be a fool. He was a fighter and he wasn't going to let anyone, not even Kurt, play with his heart anymore.

*It's not right, it's okay baby*

*I can pay my own rent*

*Pave my life now*

*Take care of my business*

*Oh, Oh, oh oh.*

The fire in Blaine's eyes made Santana proud. "Oh, Snap!" Santana said with a smirk to Kurt as Blaine stormed out of the room.

Kurt waited only a moment, letting his pride and indignation win out over his guilt before he ran after Blaine, catching him just outside the choir room door. "Blaine, don't walk away..."

Blaine spun back to him. "Not right now, Kurt," and Kurt knew that look in his eye well enough to back off immediately. Blaine stormed in the direction of the gym, no doubt to the punching bag.

Kurt looked off after him, but did not follow. He felt a gently placed hand on his back and turned, cheeks red with anger, hurt and embarrassment, to see Mike. "I'll talk to him," the boy said and Kurt just nodded and stepped back inside the room to gather his things, nearly running into an irate Santana.

"Do you mind telling me what you did to my boyfriend?" she challenged him, her hands on her hips and head swinging.

Kurt was in no mood to deal with Santana though and he walked past her. "He's my boyfriend Santana, not yours, so why don't you just mind your own business?"

"Oh hell's no, Hummel. Blaine IS my business and it looks like the way you're going, he's not going to be your boyfriend for very long," she snapped.

"Then go ask him Santana," Kurt said irritated, slinging his bag over his shoulder. "I'm actually surprised you don't know everything about it already. Doesn't he call you about everything now?"

Kurt didn't wait for an answer. He stomped out of the choir room and to his car to race home.

Santana stood frozen as Brittany brought her things over to her. "You ok?" Brittany asked.

"What? Oh, sure," she said quietly as she took her bag and Brittany's hand. Brittany chatted on their way to cheerleading, but Santana heard little of what her girlfriend said. She suddenly realized that she and Blaine hadn't really talked since the night she told him about Louisville.

Mike followed Blaine exactly where he expected, into the locker room already changed and heading out to the bag. Blaine glanced up and caught his friend's eye but ignored him, his anger too explosive to contain. He grabbed his gloves from beside the heavy punching bag and went to work on it immediately.

"Let me hold the bag for you?" Mike offered, taking it before Blaine could say no.

"Sure, whatever," Blaine said punching even harder. It was even easier then to get his anger out. Mike was another one leaving.

"Kurt's hurting too you know," Mike said casually, gripping the bag against Blaine's blows.

"Yeah?" Blaine growled through gritted teeth as he assaulted the bag. "What do you know about it? You guys aren't even really friends."

"I know how it feels to be leaving someone behind," Mike said. The admission caused Blaine to pause. He lowered his hands from the bag and bowed his head. He took the gloves off and threw them to the floor, wiping the sweat from his brow. He sat on the bench and Mike joined him.

"How is Tina dealing with it?" Blaine asked softly.

"She's sad, of course. But we try to spend as much time together as we can. And we talk about it. A lot. I try to reassure her. She knows I'm as scared as she is," he admitted.

"Kurt's not scared, he's been dying to get out of here since he was five years old," Blaine said wryly.

"Really Blaine? I thought you were smarter than that." Blaine turned to him and Mike continued. "You are staying here, at McKinley, with your friends and your family..."

"Screw my family," Blaine said angrily. "My parents didn't just turn things around like yours. They've never been there for me before and they won't be now."

Mike let the comment go, knowing that Blaine's pain was deeper than he could imagine. "Then you have Kurt's Dad and Carole," Mike gently reminded him. "They are there for you whenever you need them, I know they are."

Blaine shook his head. "Not if Kurt and I broke up," he said sadly.

"Listen Blaine, I don't know him nearly as well as you do. But I know Finn and Sam so I'm pretty sure I can say this honestly. Mr. Hummel doesn't give up on any of his kids or their friends. You are a part of their family for life. So any time you need him, he will be right there for you."

Blaine sat with his elbows on his knees, staring at the wall. He hoped that Mike was right. Burt Hummel was really the only father he had.

Blaine took a long hot shower after Mike changed and left for practice with Coach Beiste. He didn't know how long it was, but he let the water flow over him, washing away the tension in his joints until it ran cold. Only then did he finally get out and dress to go home.

He'd hoped to avoid everyone as he headed out to the parking lot, but Santana eyed him from across the football field and jogged over immediately and fell into step beside him.

"What the hell, Blaine. Why do I have to find out about all this in the choir room? And from Sam, no less?"

"Santana, I don't want to talk about this with you right now," he said without even a glance in her direction.

"Don't shut me out, Blaine!" she stopped and yelled after him but he ignored her and kept walking to his car.

Her shoulders slumped as he drove away. Brittany came up behind her and wrapped her arms around Santana's neck, dropping her chin on the girl's shoulder with a frown.

"He's scared," Brittany explained, brushing her fingers gently through the silky black hair. "Kurt and you, you are all he has and you're both leaving him."

"Are you scared?" Santana asked her thoughtfully.

Brittany turned Santana toward her and kissed her softly on the lips. "As long as I know you are safe and happy, Santana, I'll never be scared."

Santana smiled and kissed her back. Brittany linked their fingers and hand in hand they returned to cheerleading practice.



Kurt watched his father leave and sighed, looking over the sticky notes in his room. So many memories of his life in Lima. He was ready to move on, to start a new chapter of his life in a world that was accepting of who he was and what he could do. But his father's words played over in his head:

*"Yes, you and I will always love each other, and you and I will always be there for each other, but...you know as soon as you walk out our door toward New York, everything's gonna change, and it won't change back, not to the way it is now."*

He grew scared. Not just of living on his own in the big city with no one he knew except maybe Rachel. He had kept the truth safely tucked away, not letting it worry him because he had already promised that nothing would touch them or what they had. He had promised never to say goodbye to him. Yet for the first time, he allowed himself to truly realize that goodbye was right around the corner and there was every possibility of losing Blaine. And Blaine had known it all along, had been carrying that around with him for months. The thought stopped his breath and tears welled in his eyes.

He walked over to the picture of him and Blaine at prom and brought it to his bed as he sat down. He took the pink sticker off and crumpled it, throwing it in the trash. He wrapped his arms around the frame, holding it to his heart. He had messed up. And he needed to make it right before it was too late.

Burt quietly closed Kurt's bedroom door behind him and took a deep breath. He hadn't missed what Kurt had said about he and Blaine being on the rocks and though he didn't know the details he had a pretty good idea of what was going on. He went to his room and changed his clothes, then picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hey, Blaine," he said cheerfully when the boy answered the call. "I have a 57 Chevy down at the shop I could use some help with. Finn's at practice and Kurt's busy with...something in his room, so I thought maybe you'd like to come down?"

Blaine found himself driving around again after school, trying to settle himself enough to go home but nothing was taking his mind off of Kurt and this Chandler kid. Maybe getting his hands dirty was just what he needed. "Yeah, sure," he said and Burt could hear the sadness in his voice. "I'll be right down."

Blaine arrived at the shop twenty minutes later and was immediately put to work. He didn't like working on cars as much as Finn, or even Kurt, but he liked working with Burt. He hoped that Mike was right because he guessed that he could really use a father right about then. If nothing else, it would be a distraction.

They worked in relative silence for a while, broken only by Burt's requests for tools or Blaine's questions about what he should do next or where certain parts went. Burt kept glancing over at the kid. Usually he had to tell Blaine to stop humming or singing so that he could concentrate. Today his brow was furrowed, his eyes were dark and it seemed as though the weight of the world was on his shoulders. "I'm sorry I haven't been around as much kid," Burt told him. "I know our Friday night dinners are important to you."

"That's alright Sir," Blaine said dismissively. "I understand."

They were back to Sir, Burt noted. He knew immediately that Blaine must have either believed that things were over between him and Kurt, or he thought that he had been the one in the wrong. And he knew very well that Blaine was the one wrong this time, he could see it in Kurt's eyes. Kurt only hid things from him when he thought that his father would not be pleased with his behavior. Either way, it wouldn't make telling Blaine what he'd called him here for any easier, but he wouldn't put it off.

"I told Kurt today that I didn't want him to go," Burt confessed. Blaine froze on the spot, his hands still inside the guts of the car. Then he slowly stood and looked at Burt. Betrayal flashed in Blaine's eyes and it hit Burt as hard as if it had come from one of his own sons. He tried to explain. "I was wrong, son. I was wrong to encourage you to keep your feelings about New York from him. I thought it would be better, for all of us, but I was wrong."

Blaine's eyes slowly tempered as tears filled them. "What did he say?" he asked, his voice dispirited.

"That doesn't matter," Burt answered grabbing a clean rag to wipe his hands. "What matters is what he says to you." Burt walked over to the boy and took him by the shoulders. "Talk to him. Tell him how you feel. Don't distance yourself like I did. Sure it seems easier to push him away, but in the end, it just makes everything so much worse. You know as well as I do, Kurt is stubborn and selfish and he needs attention or he's going to do something stupid to seek it." Burt raised a brow at Blaine. "Am I right?" Blaine looked self-consciously to the floor but nodded.

"I just," Blaine started but the tears started to fall. It wasn't about the texts. Kurt was right, he'd done the same thing with Sebastian even after Kurt had asked him to stop. But the difference was that Kurt was right by his side the whole time. Kurt and this Chandler kid that he didn't even know were making secret plans in New York, plans that should have been for him and Kurt alone. Kurt wasn't only his boyfriend, Kurt was his best friend and it was as if every single fear Blaine had about him going to New York was being confirmed right before his very eyes and Kurt hadn't even waited until he was gone. Kurt was already replacing him with Chandler. Blaine didn't even realize that he was shaking in Burt's arms as he cried and that Burt gently soothed him with whispers of "I know."

Blaine pulled away when he realized, wiping his nose on his sleeve. "I'm sorry, Sir, I shouldn't have done that."

Burt dismissed the comment. It wasn't the first time and every part of him hoped it wouldn't be the last. "Here's what I know Blaine. It wouldn't hurt so much if you didn't love him. And I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he loves you. So hear him out. Tell him what you need to tell him and hear him out. The last thing in the world he wants to do is hurt you."

"I really hope you're right, Sir. I just don't know what I would do without him in my life," Blaine said.

Burt wrapped the boy in his arms again. "You and me both, Kid," he admitted. "You and me both."

They kept their distance from each other throughout the morning, their eyes catching at their usual meeting times and places before turning away. For Blaine it was practice, imagining the halls of McKinley without Kurt. Every hallway, every classroom, every turn held a memory and the pieces of his broken heart shattered all over again.

He considered skipping Glee, something he'd never done, but as he stood still outside the choir room Mike draped an arm around his neck and brought him inside. Blaine sat in the back, huddled in on himself, when Kurt came in. He tried not to watch the boy he loved whisper to Mr. Scheuster and take center stage. His nerves twisted as he waited for Kurt to say goodbye.

*Share my life,*

*Take me for what I am.*

*'Cause I'll never change*

*All my colors for you.*

Blaine always thought he had loved Kurt exactly as he was. Feisty and confident, beautiful and talented as hell. Blaine loved his delicious mix of innocence and spice. He thought he had accepted Kurt's faults; his selfishness and ambition that sometimes left Blaine shaking his head. But now those same faults left him the cold and as much as he wanted to take Kurt for who he was in every way, he didn't know if he still could.

*Take my love,*

*I'll never ask for too much,*

*Just all that you are*

*And everything that you do.*

Mike looked at Blaine. His friend couldn't possibly deny Kurt's love or hope or fears after this performance. But Blaine kept his walls up and sneered at him. Mike turned back to Tina and watched her throughout the song. She was feeling every bit was Blaine was and he knew it. He wanted to reach out to assure her, but he didn't.

*I don't really need to look*

*Very much further,*

*I don't want to have to go*

*Where you don't follow.*

*I will hold it back again,*

*This passion inside.*

*Can't run from myself,*

*There's nowhere to hide.*

Kurt's eyes never left Blaine's, beautiful hazel eyes filled with tears of love and sorrow that he had put there. Blaine kept himself closed off, wanting more than anything to believe everything Kurt sung but it was impossible. Kurt was going where he couldn't follow and nothing they sang or said would change that fact.

*Don't make me close one more door,*

*I don't want to hurt anymore.*

*Stay in my arms if you dare,*

*Or must I imagine you there.*

Blaine would have done absolutely anything to stay safe in Kurt's arms, pressed forever against his beating heart, but Kurt was the one leaving, not him. It wasn't fair, nothing about this or anything that had ever happened to him was fair. So much pain, too much pain for one person to bear. So many doors closed, so many goodbyes, too many people that Blaine imagined were there for him but then walked away. If he was wise, he would walk away with the memories and let them both move on. Except he didn't know if he could ever walk away from the look in Kurt's eyes that had hypnotized him from the moment they met.

*Don't walk away from me.*

*I have nothing, nothing, nothing*

*Don't make me close one more door,*

*I don't want to hurt anymore.*

Kurt was giving him the choice and he didn't know what to do. There was no one more important to him in the world. No one he would fight for more. And yet he had stopped fighting for him and had started fighting against him, even before Kurt cheated. He thought the pain of not being with Kurt every day was too great, but not having him at all was unbearable. Without Kurt he didn't feel whole, he wasn't as strong. Without Kurt he was Blaine Warbler and he had come too far to turn back now.

*Stay in my arms if you dare,*

*Or must I imagine you there.*

*Don't walk away from me.*

*No, don't walk away from me.*

He loved him. He loved Kurt more than anything in the world and the last thing he ever truly wanted to do was walk away from him. Every time he did it hurt more than staying, more than hoping, more than waiting. He grew lost in Kurt's loving and hopeful eyes, seeing in them the one place, the one person with whom he truly belonged, and he knew he had nothing without him.

*Don't you dare walk away from me.*

*I have nothing, nothing, nothing*

*If I don't have you, you*

Blaine clapped hesitantly through his tears, pressing his hands together in silent prayer. The song was beautiful. Kurt was beautiful. But every day seemed to be the same question. How much more forgiveness did he have in him?

The Glee members passed Kurt as they filed out. Santana glared at him while Brittany wrapped him lightly in her arms. Rachel and Mike gave him sad but encouraging looks. Pretty soon the room was empty, save for Blaine, too emotionally spent to move from his chair.

Kurt walked slowly toward him, waiting for the anger to flare again but he only saw sadness.

"That was beautiful," Blaine whispered, his eyes looking past Kurt.

"I meant every word," Kurt promised. He wrung his fingers nervously, hopefully. "Can we talk?"

Blaine shook his head and stared at the ground. "I need more time, Kurt."

But that was it. They didn't have more time. Time was slipping away. Every minute, every second, was one less that they could have together before New York. The irony was lost on neither of them and their sadness simply grew. Kurt looked up, and saw rain coming down. It matched the tears he felt inside.

"Okay," Kurt said quietly with a quick nod. "I understand."

They went another night without talking, Blaine watching the rain fall out his window for hours. He had a lot to think about and work out in his mind. He arrived at school late, just as the first bell rang and he didn't see Kurt before heading off to calculus with Mike. He had his head buried in his books when a call came for the teacher.

"Blaine, Ms. Pillsbury would like to see you in her office," she said handing him a pass.

Blaine looked worriedly at Mike, who shrugged, then gathered his books and made his way nervously to the guidance counselor's office. His brow furrowed even deeper when he saw Kurt waiting in the office for him. He paused outside the door and, noticing him, Kurt rushed out to meet him.

"What are you doing, Kurt?" Blaine immediately accused him.

Kurt pursed his lips. He had gone to Ms. Pillsbury after Glee yesterday to find out how to get Blaine to open up to him. She talked to him about active listening and the art of compromise and suggested that he and Blaine come in for couple's counseling. Kurt thought it was a good idea, though he didn't think Blaine would agree. Still he had to give it a try.

"I was actually hoping we could talk with Ms. Pillsbury," Kurt started slowly and hesitantly, but as Blaine's eyes darkened and his face grew stiff he began to ramble. "She's helped me with David and Rachel in the past and I thought maybe it would be a good idea to have someone else there to kind of mediate."

"I'm not going to counseling with you, Kurt." Blaine said firmly.

Kurt's shoulders slumped. "But why? You go with your father..." the words were out of his mouth before he could stop himself.

"And that is precisely why, Kurt," he snapped. "I hate therapy. I hate being locked in a room with him and having to tell things to a stranger and have him brush it off and ignore me and I never ever wanted to be in that kind of situation with you. I never wanted **us** to be something that needed counseling."

Kurt wanted more than anything to wrap Blaine in his arms, but he knew now wasn't the time. "I absolutely understand that Blaine. But Ms. Pillsbury isn't a stranger and I would never ignore you. Don't think of it as counseling; just think of it like we're talking to Mr. Scheuster or my dad."

"Then let's do that," Blaine urged him, his eyes pleading. He wanted to talk just not this way. "Let's just talk to them."

Kurt glanced into the office and looked at Ms. Pillsbury who nodded her encouragement. He turned back to Blaine. "Blaine, we're here now and I don't want to go another second without working this out. Please," he begged.

Blaine sighed, but he could not resist Kurt. He walked into the room, sitting in the chair with resignation. Kurt smiled at Ms. Pillsbury who smiled back and took a seat next to Blaine.

Blaine fought it. He challenged her credentials, he nitpicked and deflected, but it was like waves crashing against a dam until it burst. Perhaps it was his hatred of therapy, where his feelings poured out no matter how hard he tried to keep them contained, or perhaps it was just his depth of love for Kurt and his unwillingness to let everything go without a fight, but his anger built and he couldn't hold back his feelings anymore despite himself.

"And while we're being perfectly honest," Blaine yelled before he could stop himself, "I don't like that with every conversation, we end up always talking about NYADA. What song you're gonna sing, what outfit you're going to wear to your callback, how amazing New York is." He knew he was whining like a child, but the words were ones he had kept hidden from Kurt for months and once he started he couldn't stop. "And it's like New York is the only thing we talk about now Kurt, and it's like," he paused, needing to tell him how he had been feeling but terrified that putting the words out there would only confirm his fears. "it's like you can't even wait to get out of here." And away from him. Those words remained unspoken but they were thick in the air. "How's that supposed to make me feel?" he asked broken-hearted.

Blaine took a deep breath as Kurt took in what he said. It was so hard to just say the words, but he knew he had to make Kurt understand what he'd been feeling. "In a few months, you're going to be gone. With



this brand-new life, these brand-new friends, brand-new everything, and I'm going to be right here. By myself."

One empty house. One loveless house. No boyfriend to wrap in his arms and hold him tight and tell him he was safe and wanted and loved. He'd make friends, he was good at that. But his family – his parents, Cooper and now Kurt – would be gone. All he was trying to do was come to terms with that.

"You're right," Blaine went on, filling in the words that Kurt didn't even need to say. "I have been distant. And I'm sorry. But I'm just trying to practice what life is going to be like without you." He looked at Kurt, who was finally listening to him, seeing him and understanding. He'd been so angry but looking in his eyes right now all he felt was love that he never wanted to live without." You are the love of my life, Kurt. And I'm pissed off that I have to learn, for the next year, what being alone is going to be like."

As Kurt listened to Blaine, his heart broke at the grief and anger Blaine had been bottling up and he inwardly screamed at himself for ignoring it this whole time. He reached out, not wanting Blaine to be without his touch for one more minute.

"But you're not going to be alone," Kurt said vehemently. "I'm going to Skype you every day, and you're going to come visit me in New York every weekend as far as I'm concerned. But I promise, you aren't going to lose me."

Blaine's tears began to flow, knowing it was unrealistic and it wouldn't be the same, but the fact that Kurt had imagined them together next year melted any anger and warmed his heart.

Blaine smiled softly and took Kurt's hand. "I love you so much."

"I love you too," Kurt said, his own eyes misting with tears.

Kurt smiled at him and opened his arms. Blaine fell into his embrace, needing to feel Kurt's warmth and his heart beating against his own. He needed to breathe in Kurt's scent of vanilla and sandalwood that he had missed so much the last few days. He clung to Kurt as Kurt clung to him, gripping each other with the desire to never let go. More would have to wait until later, but they didn't care. They just needed to stay in each other's arms for as long as possible.

Blaine winked up to Kurt on top of the piano as the Glee Club finished their impromptu rehearsal and he turned on the piano bench to Santana. She glared up to Kurt, who shrugged and smirked back at her, then brought her gaze to hazel puppy dog eyes that stared up at her. He smiled softly and held out a hand.

She grabbed it and pulled him up roughly and smiled.

"Forgive me?" Blaine asked sheepishly.

"Boyfriend, I am the Queen of shutting people out. No one does it better than me," she quipped in understanding.

"I just..." Blaine started sadly, but Santana stopped him with a finger to his lips.

"I know," she said with a soft smile.

Blaine kissed her on the cheek and she wrapped an arm around him laughing.

"So you're back with Selfish McTexty Pants?" she jibed.

"He's my everything, 'Tana," Blaine said with soft eyes. "Love is worth forgiving for."

Blaine's phone vibrated and he pulled it out. He glanced at the screen and Santana immediately noticed the bedroom eyes and the blush of his cheeks. Blaine looked across the stage. Next to a laughing Brittany stood Kurt, gazing at him seductively. Blaine put his phone away. "I have to go," he said quickly with a grin and raced across the stage to grab Kurt's hand.

"Make him earn it," Santana called after him as the boys nearly ran out of the auditorium. She turned to Brittany who walked to her girlfriend and gathered Santana in her arms. Brittany kissed her softly. "Is your boyfriend back?" the blonde asked.

"The boyfriend is definitely back," Santana replied before kissing Brittany with a smile.

They drove in a comfortable silence out of Lima, the only sound their two hearts beating with their love for one another. Kurt's fingers were laced with Blaine's, the soft caress of his thumb sending waves of

warmth from him to Blaine. Blaine wouldn't tell him where they were going and Kurt had never been this way before. They drove over an hour, through the cities and residential neighborhoods, into the farmlands and beyond. As the sights grew more rural and beautiful, Kurt was mesmerized by the peacefulness of the land and he wondered where Blaine was taking him. It was nearing dusk when Blaine pulled up beside the most breathtaking field of lilacs that Kurt had ever seen. Blaine smiled and Kurt opened the door, without a backwards glance, and walked out onto the field, his arms wrapped tightly around himself.

He felt Blaine draw near to him, but Kurt could not take his eyes off the acres of lilac that seemed to go on forever. "Blaine, it's beautiful, how did you ever find it?"

"The other night after I left your place, I didn't have anywhere to go so I just drove and drove for hours," Blaine said.

Kurt turned to Blaine, his bright blue eyes tearing thinking of that night. He noticed Blaine carrying a blanket and a small cooler and his head tilted. "You planned this," he accused playfully, his eyes twinkling.

Blaine took Kurt's hand with his free one. "Kurt, I know I am no Taylor Lautner," he started, his insecurity transparent in his eyes.

Kurt smiled with love overflowing. "No, you're not Blaine. You are better. You are real, and here and mine, and you are in my heart forever."

Blaine's eyes misted. "I was wrong, Kurt, to keep myself from you. I want to make a million memories between now and September that will last us through every day that we are apart. I don't want to waste another minute."

"Neither do I," Kurt whispered and cupped his face, kissing him tenderly.

Blaine took his hand and they walked through the field until their car was out of sight. Blaine spread the blanket and Kurt laid out the food. They ate and talked about Kurt's fears and hopes and they made plans for the future, their future together. They talked until the darkness came upon them and they were lit only by the light of the moon and stars. Only then did they replace talk with kisses and settled into the soft bed of lilacs, making love soft and slow, filling their night with memories that would last a lifetime.

**Chapter Twenty-One: Choke**

"God, Kurt, you are so tense, you need to calm down." Kurt sat on Blaine's bed, one leg curled up underneath him, the other bouncing out of control on the floor as he stared at the sheet music in front of him. *Music of the Night* and *The Boy Next Door* stared back at him, yelling reasons in his mind why each was the better choice and Kurt thought he was losing it. Phantom was practiced and rehearsed over and over, they had the set all ready to go, and yet there was something gnawing at him to go the other way. They'd been going back and forth for hours. Blaine was right. He needed to calm down.

Kurt took a deep breath and Blaine rose from his armchair to climb on the bed behind Kurt. Sitting on his knees he massaged Kurt's shoulders deeply and Kurt closed his eyes, the tension slipping away. Kurt purred beneath him. "Mmm...you, sir, are a keeper."

Blaine smiled. "You just remember that on your long, lonely nights in New York City," Blaine teased and just to emphasize his point, he began nibbling on Kurt's neck.

Kurt shivered beneath Blaine's lips and leaned into them to savor the feeling. He could stay like this forever. And he would if he didn't get back to work on his song choice and get himself into NYADA. "You are ridiculously distracting Blaine," he forced himself to argue and lean away from the lips on his neck but not the hands still massaging his shoulders. "You keep this up and New York won't even be an issue because I will royally blow my audition," he grumbled.

Blaine pulled Kurt's collar back in reply and began kissing his way down Kurt's shoulders. "That's..." Kiss. "A very tempting..." Kiss. "Proposition." He kissed.

"Blaine!" Kurt yelled, pulling away to face him angrily. Blaine smirked and grabbed his face, pulling him in for a quick kiss, and Kurt softened.

"Then get back to work Hummel," Blaine said playfully as he picked up a packet of sheet music and swatted it against Kurt's stomach. Kurt grabbed it and pulled it away as Blaine walked across the room and leaned casually against the wall. "Besides, my mother is actually home tonight and she always walks in at the most inopportune moments."

As if on cue, a knock on the door interrupted them and Mrs. Anderson walked in. Kurt glanced at Blaine in amazement and Blaine just chuckled. "Hey boys," she said with a smile, ruffling Blaine's hair but otherwise

ignoring him. Instead her eyes fell on Kurt and the sheet music strewn on the bed. "What are you two up to tonight?" she asked curiously.

Kurt knew that she and Blaine obviously had their issues, but Mrs. Anderson had always been sweet to Kurt and he liked her. "Just preparing for my audition for NYADA tomorrow." Kurt sighed with ceremonious uncertainty. "I have two possibilities and I am just completely torn as to which way to go. One way feels safe, but the other one feels right."

She walked over to Kurt and gave him a kiss on the head. "Go with your heart," she told him. "You're correct, safe isn't always what's right." She glanced at Blaine, who was studying her intensely, but she looked away quickly. "I'm heading out. I've got a double shift tonight Blaine, so I won't be home until morning," she announced nonchalantly as she quickly straightened some of his things.

"Of course," Blaine replied flatly, and Kurt didn't miss Blaine's eyes narrow or his cheeks grow heated as he watched his mother flit around the room.

"I'm sure your father is expecting you home though, Kurt?" she said, either ignoring or oblivious to her son's reply.

"Curfew's at ten, Mrs. A.," Kurt responded, while keeping one eye trained on a cross-armed Blaine. She smiled once more at no one in particular before walking out and closing the door behind her. As they both implicitly waited for the sound of the front door closing, Blaine's eyes were growing more and more distant and Kurt could see he was losing him. At the click of the latch, he tried to head it off before it grew worse. "She loves you Blaine," he said gently. "Don't blame her for having to work."

"She's not going to work," he said coolly, staring at an empty space on the door.

Kurt looked at him confused. "Then where is she going?"

Blaine swallowed, the anger building to hide the overwhelming sense of betrayal and fear that lay beneath the surface. "To spend the night with my father."

It took Kurt a moment for Blaine's statement to register, because it made no sense to him. "How do you know?" he wondered.

Blaine turned to him, his arms still crossed and closed off. "She couldn't even look me in the eye," he sneered.

Kurt still struggled to even be in the same room with the man who had hurt Blaine so deeply. He couldn't even imagine how hard it must be for Blaine to have his mother go back. "Blaine, sweetheart, I'm sorry," Kurt comforted though it didn't seem like enough. Yet, the warmth and understanding in Kurt's words and eyes brought Blaine back from the dark place he was headed.

"Come on," Blaine said. Kurt didn't know how he worried about his mother; it was a secret he continued to keep. He let it go for now, as he had been for weeks. He needed to focus his energy on Kurt and his friends who were leaving, not the constant turmoil of his family. There would be plenty of time for that when everyone was gone. He pulled himself from the wall and sat back down with Kurt. "You need to get back to work on your audition piece. We need to get you to New York."

Kurt looked at him regretfully, knowing how hard it was for Blaine to help him leave. Kurt took his hand as he kissed him sweetly on the lips. "You're amazing."

"Yes," Blaine smirked. "Yes, I am. But I'm selfish too," he added wryly. "I am pretty sure that I am going to need a place to escape to every weekend next year."

Kurt and Blaine gripped each other's hands tightly as they watched the dreams of one of their best friend's fall away before their very eyes.

Finn and Mr. Scheuster raced out after Rachel, leaving Kurt and Blaine alone in the darkened theater.

"I hope she'll be okay," Kurt worried.

But Blaine didn't want to talk about Rachel. "I am so amazingly proud of you." Blaine pulled Kurt to him, kissing him adoringly as he slowly slid one hand up from Kurt's knee to his thigh. "And these pants," he grinned against Kurt's lips. "I'm proud of these pants as well."

Kurt laughed that adorable laugh that made Blaine's heart leap with joy. "I had hoped you might like them," he flirted. "Is your Mom home tonight?" he asked suggestively.

"No," he frowned. "She says she's working again, though her schedule says differently," he added under his breath. "But I promised the guys I would help Noah study tonight. I suspect it involves breaking into the school, pizza, and a lot of guy insanity." Blaine raised an eyebrow. "You're welcome to join, of course."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "As tempting as that all sounds, I think I'll just start packing for New York. The sooner I get rid of those sticky notes the better, right?"

Blaine hated the sticky notes. He'd refused to go in Kurt's room until the sticky notes were gone. He hated every reminder of Kurt leaving. "New York has no idea how lucky it is, having Kurt Hummel begin his life there," Blaine said.

"Our life, Blaine," he said with a loving smile. "Our life."

Blaine eyed him mischievously. "Can the gold pants go too?"

Kurt laughed, kissing him quickly and nodding. "Yes, the pants can come too."

"I honestly can't even imagine letting someone do that to me," Santana said as she popped a cherry tomato into her mouth. The girls had gathered together at lunch outside in the courtyard, the beautiful day contrasting the mood amongst them. Everything with Coach Beiste was hitting them hard, which they supposed was exactly what the teachers had intended.

"No man, or woman, is ever gonna get the upper hand on my girl," Brittany said smiling proudly at her girlfriend.

"I'm not so sure it's that easy," Mercedes argued. "She didn't let it happen, Santana. He's the one responsible, not her." They'd all seen it in the music industry. Domestic violence wasn't something new to them, but to know someone directly affected by it made it all that much more real to them.

"I just feel really bad for her, that's all," Tina said quietly. "I can't believe he would even do that to her."

Blaine walked over, his lunch tray in hand, and sat down with the girls, overhearing the last bit of the conversation. "Hello, ladies," he said cheerfully as he unwrapped his sandwich and took a bite of his apple. "You can't believe what happened."

"Coach Beiste's shiner," Santana told him bluntly. "Seems Cooter decided to show her what boxing is all about." Blaine's eyes snapped to Santana's and blazed a dark amber, before becoming dull and distant.

"I'm really glad she went to her sister's house," Brittany said with a frown.

"Guys," Mercedes hushed them. "I don't know if she wanted us to be telling anyone."

"That's ok," Santana said a little more carefully, keeping a close eye on Blaine. "Boyfriend can keep a secret, can't you?"

His eyes refocused on her. Whether she meant to or not, he saw the demand in her eyes, the expectation to be complicit in one more secret, and he hated the fact that she was right. "Yeah," he nearly whispered. "Yeah I can." He'd kept these secrets for years, but he didn't want to do it anymore. "Excuse me," he said as he picked up his bag and walked off, leaving his tray behind.

His vision was blurry and his chest was tight. He hated that it got like that when the triggers overwhelmed him but he knew it would pass and he just kept walking. He found himself in a small courtyard with benches and trees, but not used much by students during the day. He sat on the bench and dropped his face in his hands, pressing the heels of his hands to his eyes in an effort to right them again. He felt someone take a seat next to him and he startled until he realized it was just Santana. He took some deep breaths to calm his now racing heart.

She sat in silence. Yelling at him for running would do no good at this point. Like Kurt she was becoming very well aware of both his triggers and his reactions to them and though she was at a loss this time around, she knew now was the time for silence not questions. He would talk to her as soon as his nerves regulated, so she waited.

"She'll never leave him," Blaine finally said to her as if sharing a secret.

"How do you know?" she asked calmly.

"They never do."

His voice was filled with resignation and suddenly she realized and her heart broke. "You weren't your father's only target," she said to herself, but he heard the words. There were some secrets that Blaine



Anderson didn't share, but he didn't need to tell her. The quickening of his breath, the aversion of his eyes and the wringing of his hands were all she needed to see.

"Why?" she asked quietly. "Why do they go back?"

"Love, I guess" he answered mournfully. "People forgive almost anything for love, right or wrong."

"I'm sorry, Blaine," Santana said, but Blaine didn't want her pity.

"I'm just so tired, 'Tana. I'm tired of the lies and the secrets and the constant pain and fear no matter where I go or what I do. I'm tired of putting on a happy face with the guys because I know that they can't handle the rage that boils inside me all the time. And I'm tired of being that angry and afraid of what I might do." His cheeks grew rosy with shame and she saw so much sadness in his eyes. She pressed her hands to his cheeks and traced her thumbs over each eyelid just to block it out for a moment. Blaine felt her soothing touch and he leaned into her hands, closing his eyes to immerse himself in her touch. When she took her hands away, his eyes fluttered open. "I can't do this anymore," he said sorrowfully. "I just can't keep waiting for the next blow to fall."

"Then don't," Santana said firmly. "Walk away. I know you think you need Kurt and me, but you don't. You are stronger than both of us combined. Every day I learn exactly how strong you have been and I couldn't be prouder to call you my best friend." The words unexpectedly fell from her lips before she thought and she blushed at her own admission. "Ya know, other than Brittany of course," she added defensively.

Blaine nodded with a sly grin. "Oh, of course." The bell rang and the both gathered their belongings and headed off to class. "Thank you, 'Tana."

"Meet me outside the choir room at 2:30. Don't be late," she said quickly before kissing him lightly on the cheek and running off in the opposite direction.

Blaine smiled after her. He was Santana Lopez' best friend.

Blaine finished his workout on the bag and showered and dressed to meet Santana. He was sitting on the bench getting his shoes on when Coach Beiste walked into the weight room. He glanced up and she caught his eye, but he turned away as feelings that had no place here at McKinley quickly rushed over him.

Coach Beiste had worked with Blaine both in gym class and the weight room before, and the tension was thick between them where it had never been before. She immediately worried that he knew her secret and deflected. "I heard Kurt did an amazing job on his NYADA audition yesterday," she said making uneasy conversation.

"Yeah, he did" Blaine answered, trying to avoid the conversation as he got up to grab his shoulder bag. He struggled to look her in the eye. He couldn't help the anger and disappointment he felt toward her, even though he knew he had no right.

"Tell him I said, Congratulations," she said, awkwardly. "I heard he switched songs at the last minute."

"Yeah, well my Mom told him that the safe choice isn't always the right one." Blaine risked a look at her and saw in her eyes the same agony and doubt that he saw daily in his mother's eyes. "Sometimes I think it is though," he finished quietly.

His words hit home and she willed the tears that had threatened her all day not to fall in front of Blaine. "How do you know the difference?" she asked brokenly.

Blaine considered her for a minute before answering. "I think you have to block out all the voices around you, and the ones inside your head. Just listen to your heart. It's usually right, in the moment."

Coach Beiste nodded, knowing that it wasn't as easy as all that. The moments could change so quickly and drastically. And it was the hardest thing in the world to let the old ones go as the new ones drew near.

*Regrets collect like old friends*

*Here to relive your darkest moments*

*I can see no way, I can see no way*

*And all of the ghouls come out to play*

Blaine heard Santana's voice as he walked up to the choir room. The hallways were quiet this time of day, only those going to afterschool activities roamed from one room to another. He caught sight of the girls

singing to Coach Beiste and he stayed outside, pressing his suddenly hot cheek against the cold tile wall as he listened to words that penetrated to the core. Santana had brought him here to listen. Though the girls sang to their Coach, Santana sang to him.

*And every demon wants his pound of flesh*

*But I like to keep some things to myself*

*I like to keep my issues drawn*

*It's always darkest before the dawn*

Santana and Kurt knew about his father. They knew the stories of his coming out, the Sadie Hawkins dance, some of his most painful and humiliating moments. But there were other secrets he kept, his mother's secret, always. He didn't even tell Cooper. He had thought it was all over, but he knew now that it would never be over and he was scared. Scared that she would be hurt again. Scared that he would have to go back too.

*And I've been a fool and I've been blind*

*I can never leave the past behind*

*I can see no way, I can see no way*

*I'm always dragging that horse around*

*And our love is pastured such a mournful sound*

*Tonight I'm gonna bury that horse in the ground*

*So I like to keep my issues drawn*

*It's always darkest before the dawn*

He had tried to so hard to let it go and move on but there seemed no way. Filling his days with Kurt and Santana and the guys only made him forget for a time. It was impossible to move on from something that

you came home to every night. The secrets and the lies, they never stopped in his family. He'd been naïve to think that it could all just change overnight and suddenly she'd learn to protect him. He'd been blind to not see that she had never truly left his father. But he was done. Santana was right. It was time to walk away and tonight was the night.

*Shake it out, shake it out, shake it out, shake it out*

*Shake it out, shake it out, shake it out, shake it out*

*And it's hard to dance with a devil on your back*

*So shake him off*

Blaine felt a hand on his back and he turned to see Kurt with a gentle smile on his face. Blaine stared at Kurt's bright blue eyes, sparkling with love. He wanted to be free for him, at peace, with no more demons or devils. Everything Blaine had been through had made him stronger, strong enough to survive what he would go through over the next year. He wouldn't take it back but he was more than ready to let it go.

*And it's hard to dance with a devil on your back*

*And given half the chance would I take any of it back*

*It's a fine romance but it's left me so undone*

*It's always darkest before the dawn*

Kurt was his heaven and Blaine's biggest fear was that someday the rage he inherited from his father might lead him to lash out at Kurt. Blaine reached a hand to Kurt's face, tracing from his eyebrow around to his cheekbone with his fingertips, imagining Coach Beiste's black eye marring Kurt's beautifully perfect skin. His eyes welled up as he remembered how close he had come a few times before.

*Looking for heaven, found the devil in me*

*Looking for heaven, found the devil in me*

*But what the hell I'm gonna let it happen to me*

Kurt took Blaine's hand from his face, pressing his palm gently to his lips, and Blaine's eyes squeezed shut, teardrops falling from them. Whatever demons had possessed Blaine today, Kurt knew that he would shake them out. He wiped Blaine's eyes with his fingertips and they locked eyes as the girls sang, Kurt willing Blaine to hear their words.

*Shake it out, shake it out, shake it out, shake it out*

*Shake it out, shake it out, shake it out, shake it out*

*And it's hard to dance with a devil on your back*

*So shake him off*

*Shake it out, shake it out, shake it out, shake it out*

*Shake it out, shake it out, shake it out, shake it out*

"I never want to hurt you," Blaine whispered, anguish in his eyes.

Kurt took him in his arms and held him tightly. "I know."

Blaine walked in the door and without a word placed his bag gently on the kitchen chair closest to the door. His mother fussed with the crock pot, adding the last pinch of bay leaves and peppercorn. "I made you Adobo Chicken. One of your favorites." He said nothing as he watched her, waiting for the words he dreaded. "I'm working late tonight so I'll see you in the morning," she said with a small smile as she turned to him, but looked past him.

"Please stop lying to me," he begged in a hushed tone.

She blinked in dismay and finally met his eyes. "What do you mean?" she hedged, knowing she was caught.

"You know exactly what I mean Mom," Blaine whined with frustration. "I know you're going over there."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Blaine" she lied, and the lies just frightened Blaine more.

"I go to counseling with him every week Mom, I'm not stupid. I can see it in his face, in the things he says. I can see it in yours."

She stepped toward him, a hand reached out, but he stepped back putting up a wall between them and she dropped her hand. "Blaine," she tried to explain but he cut her off.

Blaine held back the sobs that threatened their escape, refusing to give in to them as dread overtook him and he asked the question that had been plaguing him. "Are we going back to him?"

Her shoulders squared and her face hardened. "I would never make you go back," she promised him firmly.

"But you would." Blaine said bitterly.

"I'm okay," she assured him.

"But I'm not," he yelled, his blood racing through his veins as his anger exploded. "This isn't all about you! You always choose him over me and I can't do this anymore, Mom. I can't worry that you're going to come home with a black eye or a broken arm or not at all. I'm not going to New York like Kurt, Mom. I'm still here another year and I can't live with even the possibility that you would make me go back there!"

She tried again to approach him but he retreated another step. "He's changing, Blaine. And a year isn't a very long time. When you go, I don't want to be alone. Maybe you're strong enough for that but I'm not."

His eyes narrowed and in that moment he hated her. He hated her for having to be strong enough to be alone when she couldn't do the same for him. "Do you know what I did when he threatened to call the police on me Mom? I threw up! I threw up because the thought of going back to him scared the shit out of me, and I knew you wouldn't be there for me. But you expect me to just be okay with you leaving me alone to spend the nights with him?" he asked sarcastically and shook his head. "Well I won't do it." He grabbed his bag and he opened the door before turning back for only a moment. "I'm going to Kurt's. Don't you dare tell Dad that I've left," he ordered as he slammed the door behind him.

Blaine drove around for a bit before heading to the Hudmel house. He knocked on the door and Burt answered jovially. "You're a little bit late for Friday night dinner," Burt joked, but stopped as soon as he saw the anguish in Blaine's face. "What's the matter, son?"

"Is Kurt here?" Blaine asked pitifully and he saw Kurt come out of the kitchen and into the living room.

Blaine looked broken and exhausted and Kurt rushed to him. "What happened baby?" he implored. Blaine immediately fell into Kurt's arms and while a small ache in his gut remained, the worst of his thoughts and feelings washed away in the arms of the boy he loved. Burt returned to the kitchen to give them space.

"Do you think I will fit in your suitcase?" Blaine wisecracked cheerlessly.

"I think even you're too big," Kurt retorted, concern still evident in his face.

Their eyes locked and Blaine let the ocean blue quench his fire-blazed amber. "Can I stay the weekend then?"

Kurt reached his arm around Blaine's waist. "That I think we can do," he smiled tenderly as he led Blaine into the kitchen for their family dinner. Rachel was missing, but Finn, Sam and Burt quickly made room for him at the table while Carole got up to fix him a quick plate. His eyes frowned, but he smiled at the love and acceptance he knew he would always have in Kurt's family. Whatever happened, he always had a safe place to go and a family to call his own.

## ***Chapter Twenty-Two: Prom 2012***

*I hereby declare this to be the Best. Prom. Ever.*

"Are you ok?" Kurt leaned over and whispered to Blaine.

"What?" he asked his mind elsewhere. He'd missed basically the entire conversation about the prom song set, which was good because he didn't even want to go now, much less be on stage performing. "Oh sure, I'm fine," he lied as he distractedly got his books together. "You go ahead."

Kurt looked at him sympathetically but slung his bag over his shoulder and walked out of the choir room with Sam and Mercedes.

Blaine got up and rushed over to Santana, who stood by the piano with Brittany whispering to each other. Blaine placed a hand on Santana's arm. "Tana, can I talk to you for a minute?" he said quietly, avoiding Brittany's gaze.

Santana glanced knowingly at Brittany who gathered her things. "Sure, Blaine," she agreed and led him back to the chairs, taking two seats facing each other as Brittany headed out of the room, leaving them alone.

Santana watched him with amusement as he wriggled uncomfortably in his seat. "Tana, do you think you can get Brittany to lay off about the hair gel?"

Santana smiled. "No," she said firmly. "I can't. Nor do I want to."

"What?" He looked grief-stricken.

"Look at me, Blaine," she ordered and she took his hands in her own, squeezing tightly. He looked her in the eye with more pain and fear than should have anything to do with hair gel and she knew she was right. "Why does it frighten you so much?"

"It doesn't frighten me, Santana," he argued defensively, though she didn't believe him. "I just look terrible without the gel."

"And so you look terrible, what then?" she asked, her eyes quirked.



He averted his eyes and pulled his hands from hers, wringing them together and tapping his leg nervously.

She placed a hand on his knee to still it, and his eyes turned to her manicured nails. "When was the last time you went without gel Blaine?" she asked gently.

"In public?" he asked painfully, his eyes trained on her hand. "The Sadie Hawkins dance." Blaine sighed and raised his eyes. Shame was clear on his face as he remembered the taunts about his hair, the ease at which it allowed the bullies to take hold of him in the most humiliating fashion. "I started slicking it back as soon as I went to Dalton." Unconsciously, it was one of many layers of protection he built for himself at Dalton and Santana could see right through him.

She continued for him. "And as your life fell apart more and more, you gelled it more and more, making sure there was never a stray out of place." Santana analyzed and Blaine's face told her she was right. "I knew when your brother was here. Your hair was like shellac. Look, I get it. You think the more you can keep your hair perfectly in place the more power you have over things. It's the only mess in your life you can control, right?"

Blaine had never thought of it that way, but he couldn't deny it might be true. He shrugged noncommittally.

She had to get through to him somehow. She and Brittany were doing this for his own good. He needed to let it go, at least for one night. Just to prove to himself he could and the world would not collapse around him. She stood up and walked around the room as she thought, then an idea hit and she returned to her chair, leaning her hands on the back facing him. "Do you remember the night you gave me your cell number?" she asked, a challenge in her eyes.

"Of course I do," he responded crossing his arms in front of him.

"Do you remember what we sang to you?" she asked with her hands on her hips.

He looked at her with a smirk, then rose to go sit at the piano. He played the melody they had sung to him that summer night, only a week or so before his first day at McKinley. Santana crossed over to the piano and leaned against it. When it hit Santana's message, she sang strongly.

*Maybe sometimes, we've got it wrong, but it's alright*

*The more things seem to change, the more they stay the same*

*Oh, don't you hesitate.*

*Girl, put your records on, tell me your favorite song*

*You go ahead, let your hair down*

*Sapphire and faded jeans, I hope you get your dreams,*

*Just go ahead, let your hair down.*

*You're gonna find yourself somewhere, somehow.*

Blaine smiled at his best friend, remembering that very day when he had seen her across the room, staring at Brittany, longing to be with her but too scared to admit the truth about herself. Santana had come so far.

*Maybe sometimes, we feel afraid, but it's alright*

*The more you stay the same, the more they seem to change.*

*Don't you think it's strange?*

Was it time for him to let it all go? Just stop trying, stop worrying. Go with the flow of his father's harshness, his mother's insecurity, Cooper's selfishness and Kurt's self-determination. Would he really be happier if he just stopped trying to control everything so much? Stopped trying to be in control so much? Was it time to let his hair down again?

*'Twas more than I could take, pity for pity's sake*

*Some nights kept me awake, I thought that I was stronger*

*When you gonna realise, that you don't even have to try any longer?*

*Do what you want to.*

*Girl, put your records on, tell me your favorite song*

*You go ahead, let your hair down*

*Sapphire and faded jeans, I hope you get your dreams,*

*Just go ahead, let your hair down.*

*You're gonna find yourself somewhere, somehow.*

But it was silly, thinking that his desire to look good and keep his hair under control had so much emotional baggage behind it. His boxing he knew was both a reaction and coping method, but his hair wasn't a sign of his trauma. He just learned how to take care of himself better, he learned that he liked himself better when his hair was under control and Kurt certainly liked it that way, so why change it for Brittany or Santana. He'd do his hair his way and it didn't matter what anyone else thought.

"Sorry, Tana. My hair's staying the way it is," Blaine said.

Santana frowned at him. "That's too bad, Boyfriend. I'll miss you at prom," she said and she grabbed her books and walked out.

He sighed as she left, angry that Santana would let Brittany take this from him. Why couldn't he just go to one school dance happy and safe like a normal kid?

Blaine stood with his head in his locker, trading his English books for physics and mixing just a small amount of gel to reinvigorate the shine of his hair.

"Hey," Kurt called happily behind him and Blaine nearly hit his head on the locker as he whipped around, thoroughly startled. "Sorry," Kurt apologized with an adorable pout.

As his racing heart settled, Blaine closed his locker door and leaned against it. "Don't be sorry, I just wasn't expecting you. Isn't this your daily Rachel Berry locker bonding time?"

"Yes, but she's not there and she's not answering her phone. Have you seen her?" he asked with a frown. "She's been so depressed lately, I'm really getting worried."

Blaine shook his head. "Me too. Come on, we'll split up. I'll check the girl's rooms, you check the choir room and the auditorium. Whoever finds her first texts."

She wasn't in the choir room and he headed to the auditorium, hearing her before seeing her. He sent a quick text to Blaine, then entered through the side door pushing aside the curtain. His heart had been breaking for her for days. Her dream of New York and Broadway was bigger than his ever was. He wanted to be in the theater. He wanted to work, sing, dance, design costumes. All she ever wanted was to be a star. And though it wasn't his fault, he couldn't help but feel that he was stealing her dream. She lost everything by staying in Ohio. Though Kurt wanted to go, get out and move on, it wasn't the same for him. Half his heart was already staying behind.

*I hope you know, I hope you know*

*That this has nothing to do with you*

*It's personal, myself and I*

*We've got some straightenin' out to do*

As Blaine walked in from backstage, Kurt smiled at him lovingly. He still hadn't truly come to terms with how much it would hurt to be without Blaine. If he was honest, he wouldn't let himself think about it. He knew it tortured Blaine and that he thought about it all the time. But how was he even supposed to leave if he only ever thought about the love he could possibly lose.

*And I'm gonna miss you like a child misses their blanket*

*But I've got to get a move on with my life*

*It's time to be a big girl now*

*And big girls don't cry*

Blaine's gaze shifted to the band, then he felt Kurt's eyes on him. He turned back and for only a moment they met, but he saw it. He knew the avoidance. He'd been learning, the last few days and weeks since Blaine had opened up to him, that it was what Kurt needed. He should have always known. Kurt kept his pain hidden as much as Blaine did at times. Denying it was sometimes the only way to keep going.

*But it's time for me to go home*

*It's getting late, dark outside*

*I need to be with myself, and center*

*Clarity, peace, serenity*

*I hope you know, I hope you know*

*That this has nothing to do with you*

*It's personal, myself and I*

*We've got some straightenin' out to do*

And Blaine couldn't deny that a tiny part of him was secretly delighted at the thought that Rachel might be staying behind. Rachel wasn't a replacement for Kurt, but she was a very good friend and could ease his own pain a little. He made sure she knew that if she couldn't be in New York with Kurt, at least she would be in Ohio with him and her smile made his day. Whatever went down in the next few weeks, they had to keep putting one foot in front of the other, one step at a time as they moved on.

*And I'm gonna miss you like a child misses their blanket*

*But I've got to get a move on with my life*

*It's time to be a big girl now*

*And big girls don't cry*

And the first step, like it or not, was Prom. ""Rehearsing for prom?" Blaine asked gently, keeping an eye on Kurt. "Because I love that song, but it's sort of a downer, don't you think?" Not that he didn't think Prom would be a downer anyway. Just the thought of Brittany's decree made him sick to his stomach.

"It's just how I'm feeling right now, okay." Rachel got up off the stool and Kurt felt a Rachel rant coming on. "I don't want to watch Finn and Quinn get prom King and Queen at my prom and I don't want to watch him dance with her." Kurt looked at her uncomfortably, given Quinn's current condition. "I know she can't really dance anymore..." Blaine raised an eyebrow at Rachel's insensitivity, "I'm sorry, you know what I mean."

Kurt turned to Blaine, the memories of last year all too much at the forefront of his mind. "She's right. Prom sucks. I don't want to go either."

"Well, you have to go," Blaine told him, with a mischievous glint in his eye. "You're the reigning prom queen. You have to crown the next one."

Rachel agreed, but Kurt wasn't hearing it. "As much as I love a good coronation, I can't risk it," he says. "With this school's strong and insane tradition of write-in ballots, I could get elected prom queen again, all right? And I know I put on a brave face last year, but it was humiliating. And, had I known, I would have worn a full kilt, so..."

They went on, Blaine voicing his fears about Brittany's' "insane ban on hair gel." He chalked it up to balloons and taffeta and baby-fine strands, keeping Santana's opinion to himself, not to mention the fact that his supposed best friend stood firmly behind the ban.

In the end, they decided that they would find their own solution. An anti-prom at Lima's best hotel that Rachel would secure.

Kurt and Blaine snuggled together on the couch as they watched the evening news before bed. Blaine was once again staying the night at Kurt's, having practically moved into the guest room with Sam. Of course

he spent little of the night in the room when Burt was in Washington, and while Carole was aware, she turned a blind eye. She knew the boys needed each other now more than ever and she tried to give them their privacy.

Their hands wandered and excited each other, hidden under a blanket from any wandering eyes that might enter the room, but Blaine's mood was low and it didn't get past Kurt.

"Are you upset about the hair gel or the vote?" Kurt asked.

"It's just North Carolina," Blaine answered dismissively but his voice was mournful and Kurt knew the truth. Every vote against marriage equality hit Blaine like a knife.

"Someday, Blaine," Kurt said, folding him tightly in his arms. "Someday we won't worry about prom or school hallways or where we can and can't choose to raise a family."

"And until then?" Blaine asked turning to him, his eyes misty with unshed tears of lost hope.

"Until then we have each other and we have New York. Or Massachusetts. Though I personally don't see our children being raised in Patriots' Nation. For some reason, Tom Brady's godliness does not override his Michigan history in my father's eyes." Kurt shook his head in disbelief.

Blaine bit his lip at Kurt's adorableness. "No I can't imagine it would," he smiled and his eyes twinkled at his boyfriend, who gazed back curiously. Blaine's hand reached up to Kurt's chest and his eyes went dark and sultry as he undid a button. "Look at you, talking about children and football." He leaned over to Kurt's ear while his other hand journeyed seductively up Kurt's thigh. "I want you so much right now," Blaine whispered before nibbling on Kurt's ear and neck.

"Well if I had realized it was that easy, maybe I would have turned the conversation a month ago," Kurt teased.

Blaine pulled away in mock offense. "Well, maybe you shouldn't have started texting other..."

Blaine was cut off by Kurt's lips attacking his own, and he smiled and moaned into the kiss, tangling his fingers in Kurt's hair while Kurt took control and pushed Blaine backwards on the couch. Blaine groaned as Kurt pressed his hips into Blaine's and Blaine responded in kind.

"Let's go to bed," Kurt hissed seductively in Blaine's ear. "Screw North Carolina."

"Mmm..." Blaine purred as Kurt's lips hit his sweet spot. "I think that is precisely my intention."

Blaine, Kurt, Finn and Rachel walked through the door of the Hudmel household after Glee practice. Blaine and Finn went immediately to the kitchen and raided the refrigerator while Kurt rolled his eyes at Rachel and hung up the coats and bags the boys had dropped in the entranceway. Rachel followed the boys into the kitchen to help them. Kurt was just about to sit down at the kitchen table and open his homework when his father called.

"Hey Dad!" Kurt beamed. "Everything ok?"

"Turn on the news, Kurt, now," Burt said urgently.

"What's going on Dad?" Kurt panicked a hearing Burt out of breath and got up and went to the living room to turn the television on.

"Is Blaine there with you? Make sure he watches too," Burt told him.

His father's cryptic nature was making him nervous as he switched the channel to the news. The ticker on the bottom was running but President Obama's face graced the screen. Kurt had turned it on the just in time.

*"At a certain point, I've just concluded that – for me personally, it is important for me to go ahead and affirm that –I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."*

"Blaine!" Kurt called frantically.

Kurt's tone frightened Blaine and he rushed into the living room to find his boyfriend on the couch, eyes wide open in shock, his face covering his hands. Tears shined in his eyes and Blaine immediately sat next to him and grabbed Kurt's hands in his own. "Baby, what is it?" he asked terrified, but he didn't need Kurt's answer as he turned to the screen.



*"When I meet same-sex couples, and I see how caring they are, how much love they have in their hearts- how they're taking care of their kids. When I hear from them the pain they feel that somehow they are still considered less than full citizens when it comes to their legal rights, then, for me, I think it – it just has tipped the scales in that direction."*

Unlike Kurt's, Blaine's tears ran freely as he continued listening to the President. Neither boy noticed that Finn and Rachel had come up behind them, leaning on the couch watching and Rachel also broke down in tears.

"Dad?" Kurt whispered into the phone. "Did you have something to do with this?"

"It's not a lot, Kurt," Burt said, his political hat on his head. "But it's a start son," he said proudly. "It's a start."

"Blaine," Mrs. Anderson called, "It's time for you to go honey."

Blaine glanced one last time into the mirror, checking his flawlessly coifed hair and fixing his bow tie so that it was perfectly straight. He took a deep breath and smiled. He was determined to not only get through Prom night, but to have an amazing evening.

The minute she saw him she teared up. "You are so handsome," she said as she rushed over to brush any remaining lint off his tuxedo.

"Mom," he whined rolling his eyes, but he also secretly relished the motherly attention. They had been growing apart these last few weeks because of everything with his father. It was nice for her to dote on him again.

"You guys should have rented a limousine," she reprimanded as she fussed.

"You don't take a limo to an anti-prom Mom," he said as he went to the closet to grab his coat and umbrella just in case.

She smiled and grabbed the camera, snapping candid shots of him while she could. "Did you leave me the number of the hotel you guys will be at?" she asked.

"Yes mom, it's on the table. I have to go now," he answered by rote. Maybe he preferred the lack of attention, he thought to himself.

She put the camera down and gathered him in her arms for a hug and a kiss on the cheek. "I love you, have fun, and be safe," she said with a smile.

He smiled in return. Her warm brown eyes were back and for a moment she was there for him again as she had been when it was just the two of them. "Safe is the plan Mom," he said gently. "I love you too. But if I'm late, Kurt will kill me."

She laughed. "Go then," she said, playfully pushing him out the door.

Blaine's mood was on top of the world as he bounced down the stairs of the apartment complex and out to his car. This year nothing was going to go wrong because they weren't going to the dance. This year was going to be him and Kurt and his friends, safe and secure and perfectly styled. The only thing more he could ask for was that Santana would drop by after prom to join them.

He hummed and tossed his keys in his hand when his eyes landed on a figure in the parking lot and he froze in fear. After reminding his legs to start moving again he slowly made his way to his car, which now had a black Ford Expedition by its side. Leaning casually on the car was his father, clearly waiting for him.

Blaine's legs managed to walk to his father's side, but the spring was gone from his step, replaced by a heavy weight now lying squarely across his shoulders as his skin bristled. "What are you doing here?" he asked vigilantly, trying desperately to hold back his conflicting emotions.

"It's prom night," Colonel Anderson said matter-of-factly. "I wanted to see you. I knew you didn't want me up in the apartment, so I waited down here."

"Thanks," Blaine managed softly. He squinted at his father, wondering what his angle was. He was being too kind. Well, he wasn't going to hide it, not anymore. And he refused to allow his father to forbid him to go either. "I'm going with Kurt," he announced flatly.

"I assumed that," Colonel Anderson chuckled softly. His levity left Blaine completely confused. The Colonel noticed and took a step toward Blaine, but Blaine stepped backwards. "Look, Blaine, a dad only gets to see his son dressed for prom once or twice. Aside from this when will I ever see you in a tuxedo?"

"My wedding," Blaine answered wryly.

Blaine's father looked away, staring into the distance. He didn't have to say the words, Blaine heard them loud and clear. *Don't push your luck kid.* Blaine's eyes fell to the gravelly pavement of the parking lot and he resisted the urge to scuff his perfectly shined shoes. "I should be going," Blaine said meekly.

"Your mother told me I scared you. When I texted you that night you didn't come home." Blaine's head snapped up and he caught his father's eye. "I wouldn't have...you know," he finished lamely.

"No," Blaine said shaking his head bitterly. "I don't know. I don't know that at all."

Colonel Anderson sighed and rubbed his hand in his hair with frustration. "Well, have a good time tonight, son. Behave yourself."

"Yes sir," Blaine answered automatically. He waited and watched until his father got in the Expedition and drove away, only then letting go of the breath and tension he'd been holding the entire conversation. He got into his car and pulled down the visor. His fingers subconsciously flew to his hair tucking in one stray curl that had made its way out of his gelled prison before starting the engine.

As he stared in the mirror, he considered that maybe it was possible that Santana had a point.

At Kurt's house, the mood was decidedly different. Like last year, it was just Kurt and Blaine. Finn and Sam had gone ahead to pick up Mercedes, Finn grumbling about Rachel the whole evening, at one point even getting angry at Kurt for the anti-prom party. Kurt assured Blaine though that he shut that down quickly by suggesting that maybe Finn put Rachel's prom wishes ahead of Quinn this year. Burt and Carole took no shortage of pictures, posed and candid, of their boys. Kurt smiled broadly, tipping his top hat and taking photo after photo with Blaine and his father. He knew it was their last special night together for a long time but he didn't let it get him down. He was determined to have a fabulous night free of the stress of the immature classmates he could not wait to say goodbye to at McKinley. But more than that, he was determined to give Blaine the perfect night. Two school dances had been ruined for him so far by bullies and homophobia and he refused to let him have a third one. Tonight they were in control and Kurt would not let anything bad happen to either of them.

The anti-prom was lame enough that even Blaine was willing to risk going to prom. But the moment Brittany stopped him, panic set in. He wanted more than anything to go back to the safety of that hotel room, but how could he deny Kurt his senior prom just because of his own insecurity.

"You can do this," Kurt encouraged, and Blaine mustered every ounce of courage and headed alone to the bathroom.

He stopped at his locker to grab his gym bag, then went to the boys' room furthest from the dance on the other side of school, praying for privacy and thanking god when he got it. He went to the sink and stared at himself in the mirror. His first instinct was to fix a hair that had strayed since his last check, and then laughed nervously at himself. It was just his hair, and yet he was sweating and his heart was palpitating as he turned the water in the sink on. It took only five minutes before he realized that Santana was right. Her words to Rachel rang through his head. *"Stop pretending like you're fine and start dealing with your crap."* He knew the words had been aimed at him as much as Rachel and had been taken aback because he dealt with his crap all the time. How much more crap did he have to deal with? Wasn't he allowed one vice, one method of controlling the universe?

He turned the water off and paced the floor, allowing himself to run his fingers through his hair to break up the gel some. It was as close as he ever let himself get to going without when Kurt was around. Kurt had seen it messy when they fooled around or in the morning. But he never left the bathroom after a shower without product. No one had seen him like that since he'd left his father's home at 14 years old for Dalton Academy.

There was only one person he could possibly turn to. Only one person who knew his curls, knew his life and knew how to hold it all together. "Please let him answer, please let him answer," he muttered as he dialed the number.

"Hey little brother!" Cooper answered excitedly. "What's happening?"

"Cooper, I need your help, please tell me you're not busy," Blaine begged.

"Blaine, slow down," Cooper said, his tone instantly changing to worry. "What's the matter?"

Blaine colored in embarrassment as he explained the situation and he could feel his brother holding back laughter in the phone, but he just kept talking, knowing how ridiculous he sounded being as panicked as he was over a bit of hair gel.

"Ok, Blaine, stop for a minute and take a deep breath," Cooper told him and Blaine obeyed, squeezing his eyes shut. "Now, you said that Santana told you that it's your way of controlling everything. Is that true?"

Blaine bit his lip and stared at himself in the mirror. His curls were loose, and beginning to fly away, but they were still under some control. "Yeah. It's true."

"Ok, put me on speaker and turn the water on and rinse your hair." Blaine froze, willing himself to do what Cooper said, but unable to move. "You can do this."

Blaine heard Kurt's voice in his head as Cooper echoed his boyfriend's words. It gave him the strength and courage he needed. He put the phone on speaker and laid it down on the mantel above the sink. Then he turned the water on. As he took the small container of shampoo and rinsed his hair out in the sink, images flashed behind his closed eyes. Three jocks at his old school on the Sadie Hawkins night, grabbing his hair to hold him in place. His father, coming at him. He shook them from his mind. His curls didn't cause those things and his gel certainly wasn't a glue to keep his life together. The abuse from his father went on long after he had started to gel his hair, but Santana was right. After the summer and the move to McKinley he gelled it more and more and things had been getting better and better for him. What if washing it out washed away all that progress. What if he went back out to that prom and the jocks were ready to jump him, or he went home and his father was waiting.

"What's going on there, Blaine?" Cooper asked, pulling him out of his reverie. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Blaine said, breathing heavily but coming back to reality. "Coop, how do you hold it all together."

"You mean when it all becomes overwhelming?" he asked.

"Yeah," Blaine said as he dried his now clean hair off with a towel. He brushed it through to unsnarl any knots, than scrunched it completely, hoping that it would maintain some semblance of order after it dried.

"I pretend to be someone else," Cooper admitted. "But you shouldn't do that Blaine, not at Kurt's senior prom. This is for him, not you. It's his night. You just have to be there for him. Like you were last year."

Blaine sighed and leaned against the wall, still not ready to go out there. "When does it get to be my night, Cooper?"

"You do this for him little brother, and I think it's entirely fair to ask that the rest of the night gets to be your night," Cooper said suggestively.

Blaine grinned and grabbed the phone back from the ledge. "Well, that is my cue to tell you good night then Cooper."

"Love you little brother. Have a good time and stay safe," Cooper said.

"Love you too. And thank you," Blaine smiled.

*"Don't you dare," Kurt told him lovingly when Brittany gave him permission to gel again. "I love finally getting to see the real you. The man without the product, and I want everyone here to know just how proud I am of my brave, handsome, bushy-haired boyfriend."*

Blaine didn't know how many times it was possible to fall in love with someone, but he fell in love all over again with Kurt in that moment and tears of happiness welled in his eyes.

Santana and Quinn sang Take My Breath Away and they danced hand in hand, less afraid than the year before. Couples kissed around them but they could wait. So far even with the lame anti-prom party, the hair gel crisis and the surprise prom queen, their night was still uneventful and they wanted to keep it that way. When Blaine pulled close to kiss Kurt's neck, Kurt gently pushed him back and gave him a look. They silently agreed, eyes sparkling, that their kisses and more were better left for them and them alone. They left before Finn and Rachel, agreeing to meet them in the hotel restaurant for breakfast the next morning.

Leaving first meant that they could take the bigger bedroom in the suite. They slipped out of their jackets and ties and loosened their shirts. Kurt instantly ran his fingers through the curls and Blaine blushed.

"Another milestone, I guess," Blaine said sheepishly. "Congratulations, you have now seen me completely au natural."

"Oh no, Blaine," Kurt said eyeing the layers of clothing covering his gorgeous boyfriend's body. "This is far from au natural." Kurt grinned naughtily as he straddled Blaine and leaned over, pressing his lips and hips together with Blaine's at the same time. Kurt kissed deeply, begging Blaine for entrance and Blaine teased until finally he parted his lips and let Kurt taste him. Blaine sucked in Kurt's lower lip as Kurt grabbed hold of Blaine's hair, twirling the curls around his fingers. "Is this okay?" he whispered cautiously against Blaine's lips. The last thing he wanted to do was trigger anything, but Blaine nodded emphatically, his eyes opening momentarily blazing so hot Kurt almost felt it on his skin.

Kurt slowly unbuttoned Blaine's shirt, pulling it apart as he reached beneath his undershirt, running his fingers up and down his perfectly toned chest.

"I love you," Blaine purred as Kurt moved his lips to Blaine's neck, mirroring the hickey he had tried to give Kurt on the dance floor.

"I love you too," Kurt said, sitting above him, still for a moment. "Thank you, for coming with me to prom. And for putting up with Brittany. I don't know what got into her."

"Santana," Blaine answered heavily . "But she was right."

Kurt wanted to ask more, but Blaine didn't offer and he wouldn't pry. Blaine's silence told him there was far more to the story than balloons and taffeta and his boyfriend had been through far more that evening than he'd been aware.

"Did you have a good night, Gorgeous, at your senior prom?" Blaine asked, hoping it had all been worth it.

"Yes I did," Kurt smiled, kissing him an appreciation. But Kurt understood now how stressful it had been for Blaine and he had plans to change that. "Let me make the night just as good for you?" he asked coyly.

Blaine's eyes darkened and closed as he nodded. "Please," he whispered, begging for Kurt to take away all the fear and tension of the evening. Kurt was slow and sure, gentle and passionate, and he made sure that Blaine's memories of this night were as filled with love as the love that overflowed from both of their hearts.

### ***Chapter Twenty-Three: Props Nationals***

Blaine took his and Kurt's coffee from the counter and returned to the couches, handing over Kurt's cup as he joined him on the loveseat. The conversation between Kurt, Mike, Santana and Brittany was starting to get heated.

"Look Kurt, I appreciate that she's your hag and all, but Rachel needs to get her head out of New York and into Nationals, or we are going to leave McKinley losers," Santana barked as she got more and more riled up. "And frankly since I started my high school career on top, I have absolutely no desire or intention to leave at the bottom. I know it's different for the two of you..."

"Tana," Blaine warned and Brittany also put a hand on her girlfriend's knee to calm her. Santana sat back in her chair and folded her arms with a huff.

"Santana's right though," Brittany said delicately. "If we don't do something, we're going to lose."

"I think we need to up the choreography," Mike said, agreeing with Brittany. "Vocal Adrenaline's moves are amazing. We can't even begin to compete with that."

"That's not the problem," Blaine said quietly.

Everyone but Kurt turned to him expectantly. Kurt didn't have to, he already knew what Blaine was going to say and he agreed one hundred percent. Blaine checked in with Kurt who encouraged him to share what he'd been thinking the entire year.

"Look guys, New Directions is amazing. Obviously. I mean, you beat the Warblers two years in a row. And we performed incredibly for Sectionals and Regionals, especially with the Troubletones," he said, glancing at Santana and Brittany. The girls smiled at him, Santana smug and Britt appreciative. "Kurt told me before Sectionals that the reason New Directions wins is because we sing from our hearts. And he's completely right. But that's not enough to beat Vocal Adrenaline."

"Then what is?" Mike asked.

"Teamwork. We can't bring each other down," he said pointedly to Santana, "and we can't create choreography that half our guys can't do," he said to Brittany and Mike. "We have to feature our best



vocalists and support them and play as a true team. No more petty crap. We win together or we lose together."

Kurt smiled proudly. So did Santana. "Boy's right," she said with a smirk.

Blaine looked at each and every one of them. He loved them all and he would miss them all so much, each in their own way. Santana's spunk, Brittany's innocence, Mike's determination and Kurt's...well, he would miss everything there was about Kurt. His eyes rested on the oceans of blue that shined back at him and he wanted nothing more than to kiss his lips. But he didn't. He turned back to his friends, all moving on, moving forward, while he was left behind. "We have one last chance. Let's make it count."

"So what do you think was up with Tina today?" Blaine asked as he and Kurt walked hand in hand into the mall.

Kurt looked at him as if he'd lost his mind, then shook his head. "You and Rachel are exactly the same," he rolled his eyes. "It's not easy being in your shadows. Have you already forgotten that conversation we had about me sitting on a stool watching you sing?"

"Actually I've tried to block that whole conversation from my mind," Blaine said under his breath.

Kurt side-eyed his boyfriend and laughed, linking his arm in Blaine's. "Come on, poor baby. I'll take you to Brooks Brothers."

Blaine's face lit up as he walked in the store and he worked his way methodically through the racks. He'd pull out a shirt or pair of pants he would like and would hand it to Kurt, who either smiled and draped it over his arm or quickly put it back with a crinkle of his nose. When he had a good collection, Blaine went into the dressing room to try on his wares. Kurt sat outside on a large comfortable armchair, like a judge on Project Runway, looking Blaine up and down every time he came out. Blaine kept waiting for Kurt to tell him he was "out," but in the end he came out with three Hummel approved outfits. Kurt gave him carte blanche on the bowties and he picked two one Madras Patch and one Social Primer reversible. He paid with his father's credit card; the man owed him anyway.

"So what am I hearing about you going to spy on Vocal Adrenaline tomorrow?" Blaine asked with a twinkle in his eye as they walked toward the Department stores for Kurt. "Didn't you learn your lesson when you came to Dalton?"

"I think the lesson I learned at Dalton was that spying has its benefits," Kurt smirked.

"Well you best focus on the performance this time around and not on any benefits," Blaine said with a frown.

Kurt grabbed Blaine's hand and nudged him with his hip. "I only go for lead singers and Unique is just not my type," he promised. "My turn," Kurt called nearly skipping to the Marc Jacobs collection at the Department store.

Kurt was a determined and focused shopper and he systematically explored the shelves until he found the perfect shirt, holding it up to Blaine for approval.

"As long as you don't wear that to Vocal Adrenaline tomorrow, I think it's the sexiest shirt you've ever bought," Blaine teased him. Kurt took the shirt to counter and paid with cash from his under the table wages from the tire shop. "You know Kurt, if this whole NYADA thing doesn't pan out, I seriously think you should consider getting a job with the CIA."

"I am kind of a super spy at this point," Kurt agreed and thanked the cashier. "I'm going to shoot the film in true vintage style too since we loved *The Artist* so much."

"Fancy," Blaine said in mocked awe. "If they won't accept you at the CIA, then a career in cinematography is a definite third choice."

"How about we just assume that NYADA will work out," Kurt glared at him.

Blaine quickly changed the subject. "Frozen Yogurt or pretzels," he asked.

"Frozen Yogurt, definitely," Kurt responded, Blaine's teasing forgotten in exchange for a delicious treat. "The stress of Nationals requires it," Kurt responded.

"Fine," Blaine acquiesced. "But we'll get pretzels later." He reached for Kurt's bag, who happily handed it over. "Why don't you go get the yogurt and I'll take the bags back to the car. Meet you in the massage chairs?" he asked with a grin.

"Of course," Kurt said with a wink and he spun around to head back to the food court.

Blaine had gotten a parking spot close to the main mall entrance, right outside the movie theater. He threw the bags gently into the back seat, Kurt would kill him if he got everything wrinkled before they even got the garments home, and clicked the button to lock the doors. Glancing over to the movie theater to see what was playing, his eyes were instantly drawn to Coach Beiste and Cooter going into the theater hand in hand and whispering to one another. Blaine pursed his lips, considering whether or not to go up to her, but he knew it didn't matter. If he couldn't get his own mother away from a man who hurt her, hurt them, what made him think he could help anyone else.

He breathed out deeply and cleared his head. It wasn't his problem. Right now his focus had to be Kurt and Nationals. They were the only two things that mattered. He flung open the mall door, nearly knocking into a little boy who was coming out, and once again took a moment to center himself. Time in the massage chair would certainly help.

He grinned when he saw Kurt licking his vanilla cone and felt his body stir when Kurt caught his eye and seductively licked a strip of yogurt from the scoop. Kurt knew it drove Blaine crazy when he got a cone and had done it purposefully. Kurt smirked even more as Blaine sat down and he slipped the dollar into the massage chair. Blaine took a long sip of the coffee milkshake Kurt had gotten him, eyes twinkling at his beautiful boyfriend.

"I don't know about you, but I'm very much looking forward to the welding routine," Blaine said laying back in the chair with his eyes closed. "Watching you work on a piece of metal, sparks flying..." His cheeks flushed at the thought. "It'll be like watching you in the shop, your hands deep in the guts of an engine. So sexy,"

"I can't believe Coach Sylvester won't stop talking about that damn dress," Kurt grumbled next to him.

Blaine opened his eyes and turned to Kurt. "I mean, I'm behind you 100%, being gay doesn't mean you're a crossdresser, that's just silly."

Kurt was about to answer when his attention was drawn to the escalators. "Is that Tina?"

Blaine turned and his face brightened. "Hey Tina, what are you doing here?"

She rambled about costumes and Rachel, her arms full of bolts of fabric that caught Kurt's discerning eye. She seemed still as upset as she was when she left the choir room that afternoon, then scrambled as her phone went off. Completely distracted, she walked away from the boys and directly into the fountain.

"Oh, my goodness, Tina," Kurt said, jumping up from the chair and running to the fountain.

Blaine followed close behind, still holding his coffee milk shake. "Tina, are you okay?" he asked worried.

"Did she have to take the bolt of fabric with her?" Kurt grimaced. "The silk charmeuse is worth like 25 bucks a yard."

Blaine glared at Kurt's selfishness but Tina just smiled at them. They looked back curiously.

"Are you sure you're okay Tina? Why don't we get you back to your car," Blaine suggested. He handed the bolts of fabric to Kurt who shrunk back from the water dripping off of them, holding them as far from his clothing as he possibly could. Blaine checked Tina's eyes to make sure they weren't dilated, but she assured them she was fine. They walked her out to her car, Blaine careful to make sure she was walking well on her own. Blaine got her in the car and Kurt laid the delicate and soaked fabric carefully on the backseat.

"Call me tonight and I'll walk you through how to salvage that charmeuse," Kurt told her.

"Thanks Kurt," Tina smiled.

They watched her drive away and Blaine sighed. "I'm willing to forego that pretzel if you want to just go home and change your clothes."

Kurt's clothing was only damp, not as wet as Blaine's had gotten holding on to Tina, but he didn't feel like going back into the mall at this point. "I'll text Carole to let her know we'll be home for dinner."

Blaine walked with Kurt from the car to the Hudmel house hand in hand. Their clothes were nearly dry from the drive alone, but Kurt had been unusually quiet on the ride home so Blaine left their bags on the front porch then led him around back to Carole's garden. "You want to tell me what's bothering you?" Blaine asked, worried. "Tina will be fine. So will the charmeuse," Blaine said knowingly. "I don't think you have to worry."

Kurt swung Blaine's hand lightly, but kept his eyes trained ahead of him. "It's not Tina or the charmeuse. All your talk about being a team player," Kurt started hesitantly. He never wanted to let Blaine down, but he also didn't want to do anything that made him uncomfortable. "You..." Kurt bit his lip nervously.

Blaine tugged Kurt down onto a bench and lifted Kurt's chin to meet his eyes. "What is it babe?"

Kurt grimaced uneasily. "I know you said you were behind me 100%, but I can't help but wonder if you'd feel the same way if I wasn't your boyfriend. I mean, Coach Sylvester thinks it will help us win against Unique but we know she's absolutely crazy and I just can't bear the thought..." Kurt ranted rapidly, but Blaine stopped him with a kiss that at once was deepened by them both. The wind whistled around them and the sweet scent of flowers filled their senses as their love filled their hearts and calmed Kurt.

"I would never want you to do anything that made you feel unsafe," Blaine assured him.

"But do you think we would win? If I did it?" Kurt asked unsure.

"Honestly? No," Blaine answered firmly. "I don't think having the same gimmick as the other team is going to help us at all. It works for Unique because that's who she is and from what you've told me, she's just pure joy up there on that stage. And while I'm sure you would fill that dress amazingly, your heart wouldn't be in it and it would fall completely flat."

Kurt's eyebrows raised at Blaine's last comment. "But, would *you* want me to wear it?" he smirked, tickling Blaine's chest temptingly.

Blaine's forehead creased and his nose wrinkled. "Honestly Kurt," he said gently taking Kurt's hand in his. "It's not really my thing."

"Oh thank god," Kurt sighed with relief and the tension released from his body. Blaine laughed and kissed him again, grinning broadly above Kurt's lips.

"I love you, Kurt Hummel." Blaine kissed a third time, immediately filling Kurt up with the taste of him. Kurt wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck and hummed into the kiss before pulling away gently. "I've been wanting to do that all day you know," Blaine told him.

"I know," Kurt chuckled. "I can see you eying me from across the room Blaine, it doesn't take much to notice it when I'm right next to you."

"Well, I can't help myself," Blaine frowned. "You're too delicious. And I hate missing any moment I have with you. I just want you all the time."

Kurt smiled softly and placed a hand on Blaine's cheek. "I love you too, Blaine Anderson," he whispered. "And you have me now. My lips are all yours."

Blaine took advantage of the invitation and Kurt melted into him, seizing every moment until Carole called them in for dinner.

Santana jogged up to Blaine at his locker, hugging her books to her chest. "Hey, Boyfriend, can I talk to you for a minute?" she asked.

His curiosity was apparent and he grabbed his books, checked his hair and closed the locker door. "Sure," he said cautiously. They hadn't talked much since the whole hair gel situation at Prom. He thought she felt guilty. She thought he was angry.

They walked down the hall together toward the auditorium where Blaine was anxiously awaiting the chance to watch Kurt grinding metal. "So, are we okay?" Santana asked apprehensively.

Try as he might, Blaine could never hold a grudge. "Yeah, of course 'Tana. We're good." He looked at her as she bit her lip nervously. "Something else on your mind?"

Santana stopped him outside the auditorium door and they smiled at Sam, Rory and Artie as they went inside. Blaine peaked in and Kurt and their teachers were already inside. "Look, I know this is hard for you to talk about," Santana started hesitantly, and Blaine turned his attention back to her. "Mercedes saw Beiste and Cooter at the movies last night. Together."

"Yeah," Blaine sighed immediately, eyes downcast. "Yeah, I saw them too. Don't want to say I told you so, but..."

"So what do we do?" Santana asked.

"Tana, if I knew the answer to that then my own mother wouldn't be going back night after night to the man that abused her. Her visits aren't court ordered," he said wryly. He took a breath and shrugged. "I'd say just talk to her. If she's ready then maybe it will help. But if she's not, then it won't. Don't expect too much."

Brittany and Mercedes came up behind them and other glee clubbers filed their way into the auditorium as well. Brittany grabbed Santana's hand and Santana grabbed Blaine's and they made their way up on to the stage, each grabbing a helmet and finding their places. Kurt was up front fiddling with the grinder and Blaine smiled. He couldn't wait for the sparks to fly.

The doorbell rang just as Santana's lips had met Brittany's and their tongues had begun to dance. Brittany lay underneath the brunette, her cheerleading uniform in disarray from where the wandering hands of her girlfriend had slipped underneath her skirt. Sweat beaded on their silky skin.

"You gonna get that?" Brittany asked breathlessly but Santana shook her head vehemently. She had other plans.

When it rang again, Brittany giggled and pulled away and Santana collapsed onto her back. "I'm going to kill whoever is at that door."

She straightened her own uniform and stormed out of her room to the front door. Flinging it open she yelled before she even looked. "Whatever you want, go away, I am in the middle of f..." Her voice trailed off as she took in the sight of an injured Noah Puckerman staring at her forlornly. "Puck, what the hell?" she asked as she grabbed his arm and pulled him inside. He had a bruise above and below his left eye and it looked like he'd been crying.

"My mom would kill me if I went home like this," he said with a little boy pout and Santana rolled her eyes. Of course they would end their school career exactly the way they had begun.

"Come on," Santana said over her shoulder as she headed to the bathroom.

Brittany came out to see what the commotion was and she frowned at Puck, wrinkling her nose. "Why do you smell like a dumpster? Did the trash punch you in the eye?"

Santana grabbed him roughly and plopped him down on the closed toilet. "Sit," she ordered. "Shirt off." As he complied, she pulled antiseptic and gauze out from under the sink and began to clean up the wounds Puck had hidden beneath his clothes. While she dabbed at the cuts, Brittany went into Santana's parent's room and grabbed some clothing from Mr. Lopez.

"You're an idiot, Puckerman," Santana snapped. "What the hell are you doing getting into a fight? Looking to spend next year in prison instead of college? You're eighteen years old, there's no more juvie for you."

"Rick started it. Somehow got wind of that stupid dress I put on for Glee and came at me. What am I supposed to do, turn away from a fight? You know I can't do that," Puck answered.

Santana softened as she threw out the bandages. "Yes," she smiled gently, as memories of her and Puck twinkled in her eye. She touched his cheek affectionately. "I do know that very well."

Brittany bounced back into the bathroom. "I got you some clean clothes." She folded them neatly on the counter.

"Take a shower," Santana told him, pulling out a towel from the linen closet and throwing it at him. "No coming into my room until the smell of dumpster is completely gone."

Puck agreed and closed the door after the girls left. He ran the water and took a short but hot shower, washing away the grime of the dumpster and the shame of the afternoon. As he washed his hair with Santana's shampoo he smiled to himself that she still used the same products she had six years ago.

He dried off and got dressed in Santana's father's clothing then met the girls in Santana's bedroom. Brittany smiled up at him as he walked in. "That's much better."

Puck sat on the edge of the bed next to Santana, drawing his knee in. "Thanks babe," he said sincerely. "Brings back old times, doesn't it."



Santana laughed. "Sure does. Best year of our relationship when you were in 8th grade and I was in 7th. We ruled that school," she remembered.

"We were such badasses," he reminisced. "That fight with Monroe was legendary."

"I remember you punching him with everything you had after he said those things about me," Santana said fondly.

"I remember you mirroring every punch, blow for blow. You laid into him better than any guy ever could. I'd never met a girl like you before, Santana Lopez."

"I learned so much about you after that," she said placing a hand on his knee and he smirked. She sneered at him and poked his chest. "I don't mean in the bedroom you egotist."

"That's a story I want to hear." Brittany wiggled her eyebrows, suggestively.

Santana winked at her but Puck's focus was entirely on Santana. "That was my first trip to Juvie," Puck sighed softly.

"You went to court and you took the entire blame. Monroe didn't want anyone to know that a girl beat him up. You could have sold me out, but you didn't. You did the time for both of us." She looked at him thoughtfully. His eyes were sad and she hated to see him like that. "That's the kind of person you are Puck. Whether it's a dress and a wig, or juvenile hall, you'll do anything for the people you love. Don't change that."

They were quiet for a moment. Brittany moved over and patted a space in between her and Santana. Puck crawled in between the girls and closed his eyes as they both snuggled into him. He knew better than to try to cop a feel with Santana, but his hand instinctively traced slowly up Brittany's leg from her knee to her thigh and underneath her skirt until he felt a sharp sting on his hand.

"Hands off my girlfriend, Puckerman," Santana snarled and he held his hand up in surrender and put it chastely back around Brittany's waist. Brittany reached over to get the remote and started the movie the girls had put in earlier. Santana reached her hand over Puck and caressed Britt's leg. They had just settled in when Santana's phone rang.

She sighed and snuck away from Puck's embrace and answered her phone. "This better be good Blaine, I had just gotten comfortable."

"Tana, I need...nevermind. If it's not a good time." Santana could hear the distress in his voice but she could also see Puck's hand starting to reach back down to Brittany's skirt and slip underneath.

"I'm sorry Blaine, it's really not a good time. Can I meet you tomorrow before school?" she asked hastily.

"Yeah, sure, of course," he said and she closed her eyes at the tone of his voice. She knew she was being selfish but over on the bed Puck was gearing up for something that simply was not going to happen.

"I'll text you in the morning," she promised and said a quick goodbye. Turning to the bed she placed her hands on her hips and her eyes blazed. "Get your hands off my girlfriend now, Noah Puckerman before I cut them off!"

Dinner with his father was the last thing that Blaine had wanted to do that evening, but Kurt already had plans with Mercedes while Mike and Tina and Santana and Brittany were spending their evenings alone.

"So how are things going for Nationals, Blaine. You guys going to make McKinley proud?"

"It's pretty good, I guess. Coach Sylvester has been trying to dump a bunch of gimmicks on us, but I think in the end it will all turn out okay."

Blaine's cell phone buzzed and though he knew better, he reached for it anyway to read the text. He took in a breath at the message, but hastily returned it to his pocket and glanced back up to his father as if nothing had happened. He hadn't been discrete enough though.

His father stared harshly at him and Blaine's heart dropped. "You know the rules, Blaine, no cell phones at the table." Colonel Anderson reached a hand out and beckoned Blaine when he didn't move. "Hand it over."

Blaine thought about fighting but he simply sighed and pulled his phone out of his pocket and put it in his father's hand. The Colonel instantly turned it on and began scrolling through.

"Dad," Blaine protested, but he knew there was no point.

"Your cell phone becomes public when you use it at the dinner table Blaine." He read the last message that was sent, his eyes flashing angrily to Blaine then returning to the phone as he clicked the link to the video. He watched the ten second clip that Blaine had ignored and stared up at Blaine. Blaine blanched. "Do you want to explain to me what this is?"

Blaine looked away, unable to meet his father's eyes as his heart raced. "It's not a big deal," he said meekly, but it only served to fuel his father's explosion.

**"This is what happens when you gay glee clubbers dress up in your pretty dresses."** Colonel Anderson read from the phone. **"You or your boyfriend Hummel try this Anderson and it's lights out."** Blaine didn't need to look up, he felt the heat, he knew what was coming as he heard his father stand and lean toward him with his hands on the table. "You and your boyfriend crossdressing now Blaine?"

"No," he snapped as he jumped out of his seat, meeting his father's eye. "God, why does everyone think that just because we're gay we're going to happily dress in skirts," he yelled angrily, sick of having this discussion. "Puck is about as straight as can be and he did it because he thought it might help us win. And because Kurt's been saying no for days now, but Coach Sylvester refuses to listen."

"This is about Nationals?" his father asked incredulously. "Because if it is, you are not going."

"Like hell I'm not," Blaine snarled and firmly held his ground as his father came around the table and advanced on him. "What are you going to do, hit me?" he yelled. "Go back to trying to beat the gay out of me?" He stood posturing. "Go ahead, have at me!"

Blaine saw his father's hands twitch, the tell-tale sign and they stared each other in the eye for over a minute. Finally, Colonel Anderson stepped back. "Go home Blaine. Let's take a break."

Blaine's face twisted with fury and surprise, but he finally nodded, backing away himself as he grabbed his bag off the couch. "Why don't I just stay away for good," Blaine spat as he opened the front door and slammed it behind him.

He made it to the car before his entire body began to shake. Provoking his father was probably the stupidest thing he'd ever done, but he had no idea what to make out of the fact that it hadn't worked. He thought of calling Kurt, but he knew that he'd be angry at Blaine for trying to provoke his father, not to

mention his father or the bullies and Coach Sylvester for the text and for hurting Puck and the whole crossdressing idea in the first place. He'd decided to call Santana, as his breathing slowly returned to normal.

"This better be good Blaine, I had just gotten comfortable," she answered roughly and he remembered too late that she was spending the evening with Brittany.

"Tana, I need..." He needed to talk. He needed someone who would drop everything to listen to him. He needed a damn mother who would be there for him no matter what. But Santana wasn't those things and he couldn't expect her to be. "Nevermind. If it's not a good time."

"I'm sorry Blaine, it's really not a good time. Can I meet you tomorrow before school?" she asked hastily.

"Yeah, sure, of course," he said, closing his eyes. He felt lost and alone. He thought he should be used to it by now, but he wasn't.

"I'll text you in the morning," she promised and said a quick goodbye.

Blaine sighed as he started the car and drove home. His mother asked how dinner went when he arrived home and he shrugged her off. He didn't think she really cared anyway. She would no doubt take his father's side. He got ready for bed and climbed in, sleeping fitfully until exhaustion finally overtook him.

Blaine got Santana's text in the morning and he made his way from the car to the auditorium, still reeling from the previous night. He'd been quiet with his mother that morning and he wouldn't be surprised if his father had called her to tell her what happened, but she didn't mention it. He hadn't mentioned it to Kurt either. The entire conversation would have greatly angered Kurt. And the text itself would have thrown him and Burt into a rage.

He entered the auditorium through the side door and was about to push aside the curtain when he heard Puck sing. His brain told him to turn around and leave but his feet were frozen in the blackness, transfixed by the Taylor Swift song.

*You, with your words like knives and swords and weapons that you use against me*

*You have knocked me off my feet again got me feeling like I'm nothing*

*You, with your voice like nails on a chalkboard, calling me out when I'm wounded*

*You, pickin' on the weaker man*

After Prom, Blaine had allowed himself hope again that things would change, that his father might finally be accepting him. But it was a pipe dream that would never come true. Every time he found himself standing tall, his father would knock him down again.

*Well, you can take me down with just one single blow*

*But you don't know what you don't know*

*Someday I'll be living in a big old city*

*And all you're ever gonna be is mean*

*Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me*

*And all you're ever gonna be is mean*

*Why you gotta be so mean?*

The tears came fast and unexpected as the tension he'd been holding since the night before poured out. He hated it. He didn't want to feel this anymore. He wanted to be fine. He squeezed his eyes shut tight, willing his sobs to be silent as the words tore him apart. *Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me.* He felt his knees grow weak and he nearly sunk to the ground when he felt a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"Shh...it's going to be okay," she whispered and he turned to Santana's warm gaze, falling into her arms. "I'm here."

*You, with your switching sides and your walk-by lies and your humiliation*

*You, have pointed out my flaws again as if I don't already see them*

*I'll walk with my head down trying to block you out 'cause I'll never impress you*

*I just wanna feel okay again*

Together they sat against the wall, Santana cradling his head as he listened to words he needed to hear. She wanted more than anything for him to feel okay again, to not have to deal with this day in and day out. How she attracted boys in pain, she didn't know, but as she listened to Puck's voice sing the words that were so true for both of them, her heart ached and she regretted hanging up on Blaine the night before.

*I'll bet you got pushed around, somebody made you cold*

*But the cycle ends right now 'cause you can't lead me down that road*

*And you don't know what you don't know*

This had been the final straw. He refused to let this go on any longer. He wouldn't risk his friendships and his relationships. Though it was his greatest fear, he would never ever be the man his father was, not to Kurt and not to his own children.

"Sing it," Santana told him and Blaine quietly sang in the darkness with Puck, letting the words give him the strength and resolve he needed.

*Someday I'll be living in a big old city*

*And all you're ever gonna be is mean*

*Someday I'll be big enough so you can't hit me*

*And all you're ever gonna be is mean*

*Why you gotta be so mean?*

"I hate that song," Blaine said dryly. It was everything he felt.

Santana chuckled and took Blaine's hand. "Come on," she whispered and led Blaine out of the dark auditorium into the bright hallways. Blaine squinted and hid his tear stained eyes as she led him to the empty Cheerios lounge. Santana sat him on the couch and sidled up next to him. "I'm sorry. I should have talked to you last night."

Blaine shyed away. "That's ok, you were busy."

They were quiet, lost in their own thoughts. Blaine was tired of talking about his father, Santana feared she had abandoned him when he needed her most. "Did he hit you again?" she finally asked.

"No. I told him to, but he didn't." His voice was small and ashamed.

"Why?" she asked more harshly than she intended. "Why would you do that?"

Blaine didn't say anything. He simply fished his phone out of his pocket and scrolled to the text, handing it over. Santana read and it sprung out of her seat. "I'm going to kick their asses," she yelled.

"No," Blaine said softly, holding her arm. "No more violence, Santana. What they did to Puck was enough. Delete the text, I don't want Kurt to see it."

She paced back and forth a few times before doing as he said and sitting back down. "Puck came over last night. That's why I couldn't talk."

"You to used to be good friends, weren't you," he asked.

"The best," she told him, her eyes trained distantly on the wall as she remembered. "We took care of each other. His dad was never around and his mom didn't care. He always felt so alone and unloved. And I was so badass, pretending to be the girl I wanted to be instead of the girl I was. We were perfect for a while."

Blaine nodded, those words reverberating in his head. *We were perfect for a while*. "What happens when a *while* isn't forever?" he asked, heavy-hearted.

She looked at him, his eyes so sad and scared of the past and the future. "Oh Boyfriend," she soothed, wrapping her arms around him and rocking him slightly. "Just live in the present. Forget all that other stuff. You're safe and you're loved and you're headed to Nationals. With me," she grinned and she managed a smile out of him as well. "And with Kurt. With all the people who love you. Let the rest of it go

for a few days. There will be time enough for pain. We've got moments of joy coming up, so let's just take these moments in. Deal?"

Blaine looked at her. She was right. He took a deep breath in and let as much of the tension as he could go as he breathed out. It wasn't like at Dalton, where he held it all on putting a mask of happiness on top of it. This was real. "Deal," he smiled.

As the Troubletones got into position behind the curtain and the judges were announced, Kurt fidgeted nervously backstage. Blaine looked over and smiled, massaging his shoulders as he had almost a year ago. So much had changed, and yet so much stayed the same. He tried to do what Santana said and not think about what the next year would bring.

"I'm so happy to be here at Nationals with you," Blaine said lovingly. "It's much better than waiting at home."

Kurt sparkled as he smiled up at Blaine. "Definitely. I can't wait to dance Paradise with you. I couldn't ask for a better performance to be our last together." Blaine's hands stopped as his eyes filled with tears. Kurt quickly turned around and hugged him. "Don't cry, baby, I meant our last competition together, that's all." Kurt wiped the tears from Blaine's cheeks.

"I know what you meant," Blaine sniffled, though it didn't change the fact that it could be their last. "I'm just going to miss this so much. New Directions won't be the same without you," he said looking out on the stage. "And her."

*There ain't no reason you and me should be alone*

*Tonight, yeah, baby! Tonight!*

*And I got a reason that you're who should take me home tonight*

"She is incredible," Kurt agreed watching Santana. "They all are. Mercedes, Quinn. And Tina. You two are going to rule the show choir circuit next year."

"Blaine," Mike whispered. "It's almost time, come on."



"Love you," Blaine said as he quickly kissed Kurt on the lips.

"Break a leg, handsome," Kurt smiled and he went to wait with Finn and Rachel.

*I'm on the edge of glory*

*And I'm hanging on a moment of truth*

*Out on the edge of glory*

*And I'm hanging on a moment with you*

*With you, with you, with you, with you*

*I'm on the edge with you*

"She didn't come," Rachel said stepping forward and checking the seat one more time. Carmen's seat remained empty. Kurt wondered if he should say something, but what could he say? He was very likely going. She was very likely not. It broke his heart, but nothing he could say would make it better.

Finn though could make it better. "Stop it. Look at me." Kurt watched his stepbrother closely. Finn had a way of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time to many people. But Rachel he knew inside and out and if anyone could get her back to focusing on the competition, it was him. "This is your moment. Three years in the making, forget about everything else," Finn urged. "Take it."

Rachel looked at him and turned to the stage, resolved and focused. Kurt smiled. No matter what, Rachel would win this for them.

Some of them slept on the five hour bus ride home, but most were far too excited to rest. They sang most of the drive home, passing around the trophy, laughing and reminiscing about the craziness in the hotels. But by the last hour, an uneasiness began to settle over them. They'd be coming straight back to school and they had no idea how they would be received. Last year they had been a laughing stock with a 12th place finish. Would anyone at McKinley care if they won first place?

They slowly made their way into the school, Artie holding the trophy on his lap as Finn wheeled him. Rachel stood front and center in her white dress, having lamented for the past half hour at how destroyed it would be with a slushie thrown at it. The crowd frightened them and they stared apprehensively as two hockey players came toward them, slushie cups in their hands.

Kurt and Blaine both instantly started to panic. Blaine's mind went immediately to the text he'd received earlier in the week as well as the last slushie that had been thrown at him. His stomach flip-flopped and his first instinct was to take Kurt's hand and run. But Kurt's head was high as he kept moving forward and along with everyone else, Blaine nervously held his ground.

When the confetti came flying down on them it took both Kurt and Blaine a moment to realize what was happening. They were both in shock, unable to believe it when the entire school cheered for them. A hockey player came up to hug Kurt, and Blaine's goofy grin could not escape his face. The entire thing was surreal.

Blaine grabbed Kurt's hand and pulled him into the choir room before everyone else could make their way inside. Kurt was smiling and breathless. "Are you okay?" Blaine asked him, his own heart still beating twice its usual rate.

"What the hell was that Blaine?" Kurt asked, unable to take his eyes off the mayhem outside.

Blaine shrugged and grinned. "The New Directions are like Rockstars."

Kurt stared at him in disbelief then wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck, pulling him in for a kiss. Blaine hesitated only slightly before intensify it as the thoughts of slushies and threats disappeared from his mind. The only things that mattered were Kurt and Nationals. And he'd won them both.

As Rachel brought the trophy in and he stood by Santana's side, he was so proud of the work they had all done that year. So much was about to change, but in this moment, Blaine Anderson had everything he could possibly want. He looked over at Kurt, who stood so proud as the trophy was placed in its case. Kurt had three years of blood, sweat and tears behind that trophy and Blaine was so glad to have been able to help bring it home for him. After all, Kurt was his one and only Rockstar.

## ***Chapter Twenty-Four: Graduation***

Kurt was mid facial, applying the firming cream to the underneath of his eyes, his brow and his no doubt soon to be deepening frown lines with graduation looming, when Finn barged into his room.

"Finn Hudson," Kurt yelled with a deadly glare and Finn recoiled.

"Oh, sorry, Dude, forgot." He turned around and knocked on the door loudly. Kurt simply rolled his eyes.

"What do you want Finn," he asked impatiently as he poured the moisturizer into his hand and rubbed it onto his porcelain skin. It was almost time to call Blaine, so Finn needed to hurry this up.

Finn shuffled in, his hands in his pockets timidly. "Is Blaine here?" he asked nervously looking around.

Kurt froze midstream and stared at Finn in amazement. "Does it *look* like he's here Finn?" he screeched.

Finn looked around dumbly, then caught the sarcastic look on Kurt's face. "Ok, you don't have to be mean about it. I was just checking. "

Kurt took a deep breath. "I'm sorry," he apologized, remembering the hundreds of times his father had told him to be nice to his brother. "Do you need to talk to Blaine? I'm going to call him in a minute."

"No," Finn said quickly. "I...I don't want to upset him." That garnered Kurt's full attention. "I was wondering if you would tell me his father's address."

Kurt stared at him with his mouth slightly agape. The request itself took him by shock and his mind raced, wondering what Finn could possibly want with Blaine's father. Whatever it was though, it didn't matter, there wasn't a chance he was giving that information to Finn. "No."

"Kurt, please, this has nothing to do with Blaine, I just," he couldn't explain it. He didn't want to explain it to Kurt because Kurt would never understand. And he knew how much Kurt hated Colonel Anderson. But Finn just had some questions and needed someone who could give him answers. "I just need to talk to him, that's all. It's really important to me."

Finn looked at his brother pathetically and Kurt couldn't help but feel bad for the big lug. He wouldn't give him Blaine's address, that wasn't for him to tell. He knew he was likely to regret it, that Blaine would be

upset if he found out, but he couldn't stare into Finn's pleading face for one more second. "I'm not giving you his address Finn. But you can find him sometimes at the Army recruiting office in Westerville," he said with a sigh.

Finn's face lit up like a Christmas tree. "Thanks man!" he said, slapping Kurt on the back before bounding out of the room.

Kurt rolled his eyes again and closed the door behind Finn. Kurt hoped he never found out what that was all about. But moreso, he hoped that Blaine never did.

During his drive up to Westerville, Finn recalled all the stories he'd recently learned about his father's bravery and heroism in Kuwait. He remembered the parties he and his mother used to have every Memorial Day when he was young with his Dad's old army buddies. He understood now that his Mom had hosted those parties for him, to keep the good memories of his father alive while she buried the truth of his life after. It had been a years since they'd come over, but in the last couple of weeks, Finn was able to look them up and really talk to them about the things his father did over there. He knew that the bad did not outweigh the good and that his father's memory shouldn't have been tarnished by the Army's inability to give his father the help he needed to deal with the trauma that they caused. His father had been honorable in every way. It was the Army that had treated him with dishonor.

And he knew that no one would know that better than Colonel Anderson. Blaine had told him that his father was being treated for PTSD. Finn's own research on the computer had come up pretty bare. He hoped that the Colonel would be able to tell him what to do to make things right for his father.

He began to wonder how Kurt and Blaine had made this trip so frequently when he finally pulled up to the Army recruiting office in Westerville. He had called ahead of time to ensure that Colonel Anderson would be there, posing as a student looking to do a paper on an Army Colonel. He parked across the street in the lot and walked across into the storefront sandwiched between Worley Law office and Minuteman Press. Stepping inside he immediately picked out the man who could only be Blaine's father. He was taller than Blaine, maybe the same height as Cooper, and imposing in his Army uniform with strong hazel eyes that lacked the warmth of his two sons. But there was no denying he looked very much like them.

Finn waited his turn as two other young men spoke with him about enlisting, and he listened with fascination as the Colonel went through the intricacies of expectations, occupational specialties, benefits and basic training. Finn couldn't help but think that it didn't sound too bad, especially the free college education he would receive after he had served his time. Plus, he'd have the chance to do it right and make good of the Hudson name. When he was younger he couldn't wait to follow in his father's footsteps and be the hero that he was. Until football and Glee, it was all he had ever dreamed about. He suddenly wondered how that dream had escaped him so easily. His thoughts turned to Rachel and shook the past from his mind. He had a future to think about. Make things right for his father, marry Rachel, move to New York and be a star. That's what he wanted. Wasn't it?

"May I help you young man?" the Colonel asked, shaking Finn out of his thoughts.

"Yes," he answered quickly stepping up the counter, then added a quick "Sir," remembering how proper Blaine was and rightly assuming it came from his father. "I...umm...I wanted to ask you about dishonorable discharges," he stuttered nervously. He couldn't say why he was nervous, except that he knew Kurt hated him and Blaine didn't want to love him, and he wasn't entirely certain that he should be there. Still, he came for a reason and he wasn't turning back. "I need to know how to request that a dishonorable discharge be changed to an honorable one."

Colonel Anderson raised his eyebrows. "Is this for a school project?" he asked curiously.

Finn's eyes dropped to the counter that stood between them. "No, Sir," he said quietly. "It's for my father."

Colonel Anderson was quiet for a moment, nodding slowly. "I see. Why did you come here, you don't go to Dalton. One of the High Schools?"

Finn shook his head nervously. "No. I'm friends with Blaine. I go to McKinley High School with him."

The Army Colonel eyed him up and down, noticing his Leatherman jacket. "Football?" he guessed. Finn nodded and the Colonel's brow wrinkled. "How does Blaine know you then?"

"I'm also in Glee Club. And I'm Kurt's step-brother," he added, immediately wondering if he shouldn't have, and quickly returned to the reason for his visit. "Please, my father made some mistakes toward the end of the war and once he got home from Kuwait. He really changed over there but," he hesitated, wondering if he should say what he was thinking, then decided he had nothing to lose. "But you

understand that Sir, don't you? That's why I came to you, even though I wasn't sure I should. Blaine once told me that even though our fathers weren't heroes to us, he was sure you were heroes to someone."

"Blaine said that?" Colonel Anderson asked, taken aback.

Finn nodded. "And after he said that, I did some research on my father. Turns out he was right."

Finn felt like he was under the microscope as Blaine's father looked him up and down and considered him. He wondered if he had made a huge mistake coming here, but he must have said something right. The Colonel came around the counter and put an arm across Finn's shoulders. "Come on, son," he said, guiding him into the backroom. "Let's talk."

As soon as they returned home from dinner at Breadstix, Santana pulled her girlfriend by the arm up the stairs to her bedroom, ignoring her mother's calls to go say hello to her father. The moment they entered her room, Santana slammed the door behind her.

"Brittany S. Pearce, why didn't you tell me you weren't graduating?" she accused, her eyes narrow and her hands on her hips.

Brittany shrugged, hating that Santana seemed angry at her. "Because I didn't want anyone getting in trouble for me. I didn't want you barging into Figgins office, or Blaine and Artie hacking into the computer systems, or Puck trying to seduce the teachers because honestly, I've already done that and he doesn't have anything to offer them that I haven't bested."

As Brittany spoke, Santana's anger melted from her face and sadness slowly replaced it. Brittany closed the distance between them and took Santana's hands in her own, lifting them up and linking their fingers before swinging them back down again. "Look, it's okay," Brittany said with a smile. "I'm happy here. I'm safe and I'm loved and I'm popular and on top. It won't be like that for me out there."

Santana frowned. "You're safe and loved and popular and often on top," she winked, wrapping her arms around Brittany's waist, pulling her close, "with me. And I am with you. So I should stay."

"No," Brittany shook her head. "I don't want you to change anything Santana. I want you to be a star, whether it's at the top of the pyramid in Kentucky or at the most famous jazz club in New York. I don't want you to stay here for me. Holding you back from your dreams isn't love."

Santana gazed into Brittany's eyes, never loving her more than she did right then. "I love you so much," Santana purred as she grasped Brittany's blond hair and pulled her girlfriends lips to her own. Brittany smiled beneath Santana's kiss and she quickly deepened it. Santana finally pulled away, drawing Brittany to her bed.

"You're my best friend forever," Brittany promised as Santana laid back and she leaned over Santana and placed tiny butterfly kisses all over her smooth skin.

"Make love to me," Santana begged and Brittany was happy to oblige.

"Brittany, we can go in the pool *after* we rehearse, but we have to get this song just right," Tina argued.

"Maybe we just sing in the pool like we did for Mr. Schuester?" Brittany suggested.

"Guys, come on," Blaine said, needing this song to be just perfect. "We'll rehearse for an hour and then we can do whatever."

They were gathered around the grand piano in Sugar's living room which, Blaine thought to himself, could fit his entire apartment inside it. He had played the song through a few times with the parts and harmonies until everyone was familiar with it. It was kind of fun for him to get back to musical directing like he had at Dalton, and he hoped he had more opportunity next year at McKinley. Now he turned around on the bench, Artie next to him in his chair and the others standing, as they sang it through acapella.

*There are places I remember*

*All my life though some have changed*

*Some forever not for better*

*Some have gone and some remain*

The song itself had been his idea. He'd always loved it, but he'd been singing it a lot lately. This last year had brought so many changes. This time last year he was preparing for the Warbler's end of year performance for graduation, a smile perpetually on his lips, despite the fact that he was returning home for the summer, because Kurt loved him. His secret was safe, though he was far from it. Now it had all changed. Except for Kurt's love. That remained.

*All these places have their moments*

*With lovers and friends I still can recall*

*Some are dead and some are living*

*In my life I've loved them all*

Some of his friendships were gone or diminished, but he remembered them and loved them. They served their purpose at the time and he'd had some wonderful new ones to help him move forward even more. Now, looking at the underclassman in the room, he suddenly started to panic. He wasn't close to any of them really. How was he going to get through the next year?

*But of all these friends and lovers*

*There is no one compares with you*

*And these memories lose their meaning*

*When I think of love as something new*

The tears escaped despite himself and though he tried to keep them to himself, the pounding in his heart and head made them flow even more freely. Embarrassed in front of the guys, he quickly excused himself and vanished into the next room away from everyone.

He chastised himself for being so stupid, so emotional. He'd sung countless songs to Kurt, even said goodbye before, but this one felt entirely different though he sang with six other people. It was truly feeling like goodbye, not see you later. With Kurt in New York, there would be no after school and on the



weekends, despite Kurt's unrealistic plans. There would be no Warblers to keep him busy and distracted and having fun without Kurt. There would be no best friend to share his secrets with because she was leaving too. No matter how he thought about it, he was being left with no one.

"Can we come in?" a small voice asked and Blaine wiped his eyes quickly on his sleeve, then turned to see Tina and Brittany looking at him compassionately.

He merely nodded and sat down on the beige leather sofa. The girls sat on either side of him and both placed arms around him.

"We know how hard this is for you," Tina tried to comfort him.

"I know how much Santana means to you," Brittany said.

"And Mike too," Tina added. "And we know that we haven't been as close to you as them, but we hope that will change."

"Mike's one of my best friends too, Blaine," Brittany said and Blaine looked up to see her pure smile beaming out at her. "I'm going to need a new dance partner you know," she said to him knowingly.

"And I need a singing partner," Tina encouraged him. "You and I are going to lead New Directions next year, and we can't take the team to another championship with our hearts broken. It's not going to be easy, but the three of us have to stick together if we're going to do our senior year right."

"I know I'm not like Santana," Brittany said. "But I'm a unicorn like Kurt, so when you miss him you can always come find me."

"And when you might have gone off looking for Mike, I'm pretty good at knowing what he would say in most situations," Tina smiled.

"And if you need someone to tell it how it is..." Blaine looked up to see Sam standing in the doorway as well.

"Or you need a little Santana sass..." Artie rolled in.

"We're here as well," Sam finished.

"Are we rehearsing here or what?" Sugar yelled. "Because if not it's time to go swimming!"

Blaine smiled gratefully at every single one of them, squeezing Brittany and Tina tightly to him. He kissed both of them on their cheeks. "Thank you," he whispered to them alone. Then more loudly he added, "To all of you. My family is so much larger than I sometimes think it is."

They returned to the piano to run through the song again, and this time Blaine could get through it without tears flowing, hands held tightly by Tina and Brittany.

*Though I know I'll never lose affection*

*For people and things that went before*

*I know I'll often stop and think about them*

*In my life I love you more*

*In my life I love you more*

"Well, this is it."

Kurt held the letter in his hand, as he leaned against the locker next to Blaine's. His head was back, his eyes nearly closed as his heart raced wildly.

Blaine looked over at the love of his life, so nervously excited about the possibilities of the future. The possibilities of a year without Blaine. He wanted desperately to be excited too, but he struggled to plaster the smile on his face. Luckily, Kurt was too much in his own world to notice.

"Are you going to come with me?" Kurt asked, lifting his head to look at Blaine.

Blaine kept his eyes in his locker. He knew what Kurt meant, joining him and Rachel and Finn in the choir room, but the words struck him hard. How he wished he could go with him, start their life together in New York this year instead of next. "No, I think I'll just go to the weight room."

Kurt frowned. "But why. This is a big moment, I want you by my side."

Blaine closed his locker and leaned against it, hoping it would keep his knees from buckling underneath him. "Kurt, I can't. When you open that letter and it says 'Welcome to NYADA', your face is going to light up with pure joy. And I don't think I can..." He stopped, his face betraying his sense of dread. How he could he tell Kurt that letting him go was killing him? That he didn't have Kurt's faith that they would be okay with distance between them. Everybody turned on him. Everybody left him. How could he tell Kurt that his joy made him want to just curl up and cry?

He didn't have to, because Kurt knew. Kurt knew everything about Blaine and he understood. "I really wish you were coming with me Blaine. But I can't give up my dreams."

"And I would never ask you to. I want you to go after your dreams Kurt, with all the pieces of my broken heart." Kurt reached over and squeezed Blaine's hand, giving him a sad, tight-lipped smile. "Go," Blaine told him, his voice nearly breaking. "They're waiting for you."

"I'll come find you as soon as we all open them. Okay?"

Blaine nodded and watched as Kurt walked off to the choir room. His heart leapt into his throat, nerves skittering through his body. He didn't know if he wanted the letter to say yes or no. They were in a no win situation. Whatever happened now, one of them would lose their dream.

The possibilities were roaring in his head, as he attempted to knock each one away with a punch on the bag. Kurt being left behind in Lima. Blaine being left behind in Lima. Kurt going. Them breaking up. Should he set Kurt free? Should he try and fight the inevitable? Kurt had been in denial all year but Blaine had not. With every blow he felt more and more as if his life was just a cruel joke, in the hands of a creator who wanted anything but for Kurt and Blaine to live happily ever after.

The sweat flowed from every pore, soaking his gym clothes to the point where he looked as though he'd taken a shower fully clothed. He fought breathlessly, wailing away on the punching bag, knowing that at

this very moment his future was being decided in a classroom he was too scared to enter. And then he realized he didn't have to because Kurt was standing before him, the weight room door slamming shut behind him and Blaine just grabbed the bag and froze.

"I didn't get in," Kurt shrugged. He stood for a moment, trying to hold it together, before the tears started to fall down his face, the letter still firmly in his grasp. Blaine stepped to him and Kurt fell into his arms, sobbing. The pain of rejection, the fear of the future all hit him at once and try as he might to be happy that it meant he didn't have to leave Blaine, the loss of all of the dreams of his past year was too much to endure.

Blaine didn't know what to say. His heart leapt with hope while it broke for Kurt and he hated himself for feeling the way that he did. So all he did was hold Kurt tightly and stroke his hair until he calmed down. To Blaine it didn't seem like much, but to Kurt it was enough.

His crying slowed and he sniffled, wiping his nose with his hand. Blaine reached over to his gym bag and pulled out a handkerchief, handing it to Kurt who laughed and blew his nose. Blaine reached up and dried Kurt's tears with his thumbs. "I'm sorry," Kurt apologized, face red and sad.

"Don't be sorry, Kurt. I'm sorry. I'm sorry you didn't get in." As Blaine said it, he realized exactly how true it was. Tina and Brittany's words came to him and in that moment the only thing he wanted was to make everything in Kurt's world right again.

Kurt sniffled, eyes avoiding Blaine's because when he looked into those glowing amber eyes everything became so much more confusing. "It wasn't NYADA Blaine," he cried, shaking his head. "It was New York. I needed it. Ohio is suffocating. Having to always be on edge, hide things." He looked at Blaine; devoted, enchanting, gorgeous Blaine. "The only time I can truly breathe is when it's just you and me. And that's not enough."

Blaine cupped his face and kissed him, slow and passionate, full of love and understanding and letting go. Letting go of his own need to have Kurt by his side. Letting go of his fear of setting Kurt free, just when he had the chance to convince him to stay. He pulled away gently, brushing his lips to Kurt's ear. "I know, Baby," he whispered. "It will be okay. We'll figure this out."

"I love you," Kurt whispered and for the first time in weeks, Blaine let himself truly feel those words and believe them.

"So you're really thinking of staying in Lima?" Blaine asked as he and Santana cuddled on his couch watching a movie.

"Honestly, I don't know," she answered. "Brittany doesn't want me to stay for her, but I don't want to leave her either."

Blaine snuggled her closer, nuzzling into her shoulder. "All this time I thought I'd be thrilled if Kurt didn't get in. I never realized how much I wanted him to go until he was staying." He looked up at Santana, puppy dog eyes meeting her strong mocha gaze. "Brittany wants the world for you, and the world is *not* in Lima, Ohio." He sat up, resolved. "You and Kurt belong in New York. Together."

Santana stared at him and laughed. "Oh, Boyfriend, think about that for a minute."

"I *am* thinking about it," Blaine assured her excitedly. "You two would push each other harder than anyone. Kurt could never be outdone by you and I'm sure that you would never let yourself be outdone by him. The two of you will conquer that city by the time Britt and I come and join you." He grew quieter as his words hit him. "And you'll watch out for one another. You'd never let him do anything stupid. I know if he's with you then I can trust his decisions. Whatever they might be."

Santana reached up and brushed her fingers across his forehead along his hairline. "Kurt loves you. He shows it differently, but he loves you as much as you love him. You mean the world to him." She smiled softly as a tear escaped his eye and she brushed it away. "You and I, we over think everything. We feel everything so strongly. We stress about the future. Kurt and Britt, they take it one day at a time. Doesn't mean they love us less."

"I know," Blaine said quietly as he returned his head to Santana's shoulder. "I'll just miss him so much. Everything reminds me of him. I have no place to go that's just mine."

"You have one place," Santana started, but she was interrupted by the front door opening. They both sat up startled as Mrs. Anderson came through the door with two bags of groceries.

"Mom?" Blaine asked. "What are you doing home?"

"I could ask you the same thing," she said, putting the bags on the kitchen table and walking through to the living room. "Aren't you supposed to be on your way to your father's house?"

"Yeah," Blaine said dismissively. "Not going."

Mrs. Anderson sat down with a sigh next to Blaine and he backed himself even closer into Santana. The girl could almost feel his heart beating rapidly against her chest and she grabbed his hand and squeezed.

"Blaine, honey, I let you stay home from dinner and counseling last week, but you are not making a habit of this." She took his free hand and brushed a thumb over his knuckles. "I know things didn't go well the last time, but the more you distance yourself from him the harder it will be to go back."

"What if I don't want to go back?" Blaine grumbled.

"Then you'll regret it someday." She patted his hand and got up. "Come on. I have a letter I need him to get by tomorrow. It's too late to mail it. Go see him at the recruiting office and deliver it if you won't go to dinner. I'll let him know you're coming." She went to her room and came out with a large white envelope.

"And what were you going to do if I wasn't home?" Blaine asked angrily.

His mother just looked at him in response and he knew. She would have gone over there herself tonight after he'd left. He was caught between a rock and a hard place, but he would do whatever he could to prevent her spending the night with him. "Fine," he said, getting up and snatching it from her fingers. "But Santana is coming with me."

"I am?" She stood up surprised until Blaine glared at her and she put her hands on her hips. "I am."

Blaine grabbed her hand and without a second glance back to his mother, dragged her out the door.

The car ride was quiet on their way to Westerville. Santana had never met Blaine's father before and she had never really had much of a desire to. She wasn't sure how she would feel, finally seeing the man who had done the things he had to her best friend. She warned Blaine that she didn't know if she'd be able to remain diplomatic.

"That's okay, 'Tana, I'm kind of that point as well. We'll just go in quickly, give him the letter and leave. One, two, three."

Something told her it wasn't going to be that easy. Her fears came to fruition when she spied a very familiar car in the parking lot across the street from the recruiting office. "Isn't that Finn's truck over there?" Santana wondered aloud.

Blaine's eyes narrowed, wondering if maybe Kurt had gone to see his father for some reason, but he didn't think his boyfriend would do that without telling him. He barreled toward the office, his mind going in a million different directions, and Santana had to run to keep up with him.

He threw open the doors to see Finn in a near embrace with his father, hands clasped and Colonel Anderson patting Finn on the back.

"What the hell is going on here?" Blaine shouted, startling his father and the boy he thought of as nearly a brother-in-law.

"Blaine!" Finn startled, and he stuttered nervously. "I...I didn't know you were going to be here."

"I could say the same thing, Finn. Do you two want to explain what's going on?" Blaine glared at both men, the envelope completely forgotten in his hand as anger melted into a sense of betrayal he didn't fully understand.

Colonel Anderson watched Finn, allowing the boy to speak for himself. Finn shuffled forward, seeing Santana for the first time, and hunched his shoulders with even less nerve than he'd had a moment ago.

"I, um," he said shuffling his feet. "I enlisted. Took my ASVAB, the um, the Army Services Vocational Aptitude Battery," he explained checking in with the Colonel, who nodded, to make sure he got the name right. "I passed. Did pretty well too," he said proudly. "So, I'm going to be going off to Georgia soon."

Blaine just stood dumbfounded, not having any idea what to say, but Santana spoke up immediately. "Does Rachel know?"

Finn shook his head. "Not yet. She's all excited about the wedding, and I haven't really decided what to do yet. I need to talk to Mom and Burt now that I know I'm in."

"But you're not staying in Lima," Blaine said, flatly, the entirety of the situation finally hitting him. Finn shook his head. Blaine looked squarely at his father. "And you did this," he accused.

"What?" Finn started. "No, he didn't. I mean, this was my idea. I came to him before Nationals to ask him to help me get an honorable discharge for my Dad. And as soon as he found out I was Kurt's brother, he did everything he could to help me. But the Army still said no. So I asked him about enlisting and he helped me through the process. It was entirely my idea. I was going nowhere fast. I couldn't just go to New York with no plan and I couldn't stay in Lima. I've been dreaming about this since I was a little kid, following in my Dad's footsteps. I had forgotten, but your Dad helped me remember."

Blaine's eyes softened. He looked at his father. Colonel Anderson gazed back at Blaine, with what Blaine could only call hope. He didn't know how to deal with it, and he looked down, noticing the forgotten envelope. "Mom asked me to give you this," he said, tossing his delivery on the counter.

"Guys, please don't tell anyone about this yet," Finn begged. "I love Rachel so much, but somehow I feel like this is just right, you know? Her staying here for me, isn't what's best for her."

"Setting her free," Santana said softly, looking at Blaine. She saw his face, so mixed with sadness and understanding. She sighed. "Seems the common theme around here lately."

Kurt and Blaine watched as the train pulled away, Rachel inside it, Finn running the whole way beside her until he couldn't run anymore. Blaine's heart ached for him. He would have done the same thing, had it been Kurt.

Kurt. Blaine looked over at him just as his brow puckered and his smiling face fell into a frown. Blaine reached over and took his hand, his eyes squinting with worry. "You okay?" he asked softly.

"I should have been next to her," Kurt bemoaned as he dropped his head on Blaine's shoulder.

Blaine cupped his head and kissed it, leading him back to the car. "Come on. We'll talk to your Dad. He'll know what to do."



Burt walked in the door, fresh off the airplane from DC, to find Kurt and Blaine at the kitchen table. Kurt was face down against an outstretched arm that reached nearly the length of the wooden surface. Blaine looked up at Burt with a worried look.

"How long has he been like that?" Burt nonchalantly asked Blaine as he rolled his carry-on to the base of the stairs. He went to the kitchen, grabbing a glass from the cabinet and filling it with water before leaning against the counter.

"Since we got home from the train station," Blaine told him. "We came in and pretty much immediately he plopped himself down and he's been like this ever since. Been about," Blaine checked his watch with a frown, "an hour now."

Burt raised an eyebrow, first at Blaine, then Kurt. "What are you doing, son?" he asked Kurt, his tone almost amused.

"Wallowing," Kurt murmured into his arm.

"Well wallow while you can, kid. You got two days." Burt chugged the remainder of his water, then reached into a side drawer built into the kitchen counter and pulled something out.

"What's in two days?" Kurt asked miserably.

"In two days we put Finn on a train to Georgia and you are going to stand with your head tall and smile like I'm sure you did with Rachel today. And then when we get home, the three of us," he said looking to Blaine, "are going to go through this." Burt walked over and slammed a manila folder down on the table startling Kurt upright.

Kurt looked at it and moaned. "The back-up plan folder you forced me to put together."

"Boy Scout motto, Be Prepared," Burt said proudly, sitting next to him.

"The Boy Scouts don't allow gays, Dad," Kurt complained.

"Well they should," Burt told him. "You'd be better prepared and they would have better uniforms."

"Bowties instead of bandana scarves," Kurt quipped, grasping Blaine's hand and throwing him a coy smile.

"I didn't know you had this folder, Kurt," Blaine said surprised as he reached over to open it and looked through. His eyebrow raised at some of the possibilities in there and he could see that as many options were chosen by Burt as by Kurt.

"Doesn't matter," Kurt said with a tight smile to Blaine. "The universe is obviously telling me to stay in Lima with you and Dad another year. Rachel will be in the dorms at NYADA. I can't go to New York on my own."

"Blaine," Burt said suddenly. "Would you do me a favor? In the drawer of my desk in my office are a few more pamphlets I stashed. Would you mind going to get them?"

"Sure, Burt," Blaine nodded.

Blaine went to the little room that had been transitioned into an office for Burt once he had been elected to congress. He searched through the drawers until he found what Burt had sent him for. He found pamphlets to a number of acting, singing and fashion programs affiliated with various theaters and fashion designers in the city. None were university based, but as Blaine sat and looked at them briefly, a lot of them looked fabulous. Blaine couldn't help but smile, imagining Kurt doing what he was born to do instead of waiting around in Lima for another year working at his Dad's tire shop. He gathered them up and closed the drawer, bringing them back into the kitchen. But he stopped just outside, out of sight, as he heard Burt and Kurt talking.

"I know you're worried about him without you kid," Burt said gently. "But Blaine needs to do this on his own as much as you need to move on from here. Everything you have done for him has given him the strength he needs. But as long as you are here, he's got one foot out that door and he'll never need to resolve things with his parents. They are his family Kurt. I know that someday you want to be and I have no doubt that you two will fight for that as long as you both want it. But he'll never be entirely yours until he can settle things with his Mom and Dad. Does that make sense?"

Blaine didn't hear an answer, but Burt's words hit him to the core. Burt was right. He clung to Kurt not only because he loved him with all his heart but because Kurt always gave him a way out. He'd been terrified all this year anticipating life without that. But he didn't want to live his life in fear. And he certainly didn't want his own fear holding Kurt back.

He took a deep breath and plastered on a smile, as if he hadn't heard anything that was just shared between the two men. "Here are the pamphlets!" he bounded into the kitchen.

"Thanks Blaine." Burt took them and tucked them back into the folder, closing it and getting up to put it back into the drawer. "Two days Kurt," Burt said with a smile before heading off to his room.

Kurt gave Blaine a soft smile, but Blaine's was darker, more seductive. His eyes bore into Kurt's and suddenly blue eyes narrowed and sparkled. Blaine tickled Kurt's palms before linking his fingers with Kurt's and pulling him to the bedroom, locking the door behind them. "Two more days of denial is a long time," Blaine smirked suggestively.

Kurt arched an eyebrow and grinned. "48 hours to be exact."

Blaine slowly unbuttoned Kurt's shirt and rubbed his hands over his smooth alabaster skin, leaning in to leave small kisses everywhere. Kurt's eyes rolled back and closed with pleasure. "We can do a lot in 48 hours," he said in between kisses.

Kurt moaned and pulled Blaine down onto the bed, pulling Blaine's shirt off above his head. "I say we start at the very beginning."

Their eyes sparkled as they made love, forgetting for the moment the what-ifs and the unknowns and focusing only on what was here and now and right before their eyes.

Blaine pulled up to the house late that night. He'd driven around for awhile, going back and forth in his mind until he came to terms that this was, in fact, exactly what he wanted and needed to do. He cut the headlights shining into the bay windows, but the glow in the windows already alerted his father to his presence. Colonel Anderson opened the door and watched as Blaine exited the car.

"It's kind of late, son," he said gently. "Everything okay?"

Blaine walked cautiously to the front door, his thumbs linked in the back pockets of his jeans. He stopped midway up the driveway, the distance feeling both safe and wrong at the same time. He longed for the day when he felt as comfortable with his own father as he did with Kurt's. "I thought maybe we could talk?" he asked hesitantly.

Colonel Anderson opened the door widely. "Come on in."

Blaine took a deep breath and followed his father inside, hovering around the couch, where his father took a seat and looked up to him. Blaine had planned a speech but it went out the window standing here in the living room where so much had happened. "I don't..." he stuttered, nerves getting the best of him, but he took a deep breath and started again. "I don't want it to be like this."

Colonel Anderson looked up at his son. For the past year he had been trying. Every day since Blaine left he tried to get past the hatred, the fear, the flashbacks that had fueled their relationship since he'd returned from the war. He knew that some days he did better than others. And he realized that none of the bad days were excusable. "I don't want it to be like this either," he said mournfully. "Finn told me what you said, about being a hero. I wish I had been able to be a hero to you."

Blaine looked to the floor, unable to meet his father's eyes. "I wish you had to," he swallowed. "But I meant what I said. I know that somewhere across the world you are someone's hero. And that means something to me."

"It's ironic that my most heroic day on the battlefield was the same day that put enough hate in my heart to turn on my youngest son." The words caught Blaine off guard and his eyes met his father's briefly before the Colonel turned away. Blaine; however, did not waver. "Someday I will tell you the story." His father's voice was softer than Blaine had ever heard him, and his eyes sadder. "But not today."

Blaine considered his father. His eyes looked like his own had so many times, far away, seeing images, feeling pain of the past not the present. He knew now what Kurt must feel like staring into his hazel eyes at those times. Wanting to pull him out, but not wanting to intrude on the private moment inside his head. Kurt always just waited and so Blaine waited too, until his father looked up at him with a sorrowful smile. And then Blaine told him what he came to say.

"Kurt's going to be going to New York in the fall," Blaine said warily as the sadness washed over him again. "I don't know what he's doing yet, but I am pretty certain he's going. There's no place for me here that doesn't have a million reminders of him. School, Mom's apartment, Dalton, our coffee shop. They are filled with memories and I know that sometimes it will be overwhelming. I need a place without them." He looked at his Dad, begging him to understand. "*This* is my one place. But I need it to be safe."

Colonel Anderson appreciated Blaine's honesty. For him this house had a million memories, of his loving wife, his wild child Cooper, and his always sensitive boy Blaine. He escaped all too frequently to the base or the office in town. He owed Blaine a thousand apologies, but his pride prevented him from doing so. He could give him this. "You are safe here, Blaine. I promise you that."

Blaine just nodded, not knowing what to say and not knowing what to do. He looked around and his eyes were drawn to the racks behind the television. "Do you want to watch a movie?" he asked for the first time in six or seven years.

Blaine saw the momentary shock on his father's face before it rested into a soft smile. "I'd like that."

Blaine went to the wall and pulled out *The Two Towers*, the one he knew to be his father's favorite of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. After putting it in the DVD player and dimming the lights, he sat next to his father. Halfway through the movie he flinched when his father reached over to place a hand on his knee, but quickly relaxed as he felt a comforting squeeze and looked into warm eyes. He couldn't remember the last time his father had looked at him that way, but he never wanted to let it go. It terrified Blaine. He waited for the other shoe to drop.

*I can't do this, Sam.*

There was so much pain and hurt between them. Pain they'd experienced together and separately. Hurt they'd caused one another. Once upon a time, they had been just a normal family, then everything changed. Was it even possible for them to move on from that? Was it possible for Blaine to find a way out of the darkness and into the light?

*I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer.*

*Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something.*

Blaine had held on because he had Dalton and Nick and Kurt by his side. He held on because though his entire world was changing, Santana and Kurt and Tina and Brittany would always be there for him. He held on because he knew there was a future out there, in New York with Kurt where they would someday make a life for themselves and raise a family. He would someday be the father he had never had.

*What are we holding onto, Sam?*

*That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo...and it's worth fighting for.*

But first he had to get through his senior year. And he would. For two years, Kurt had been his light in the darkness, but Burt was right. It was time for him to do it on his own. He would fight every darkness and danger that threatened him, and he would fight his way out of Lima, Ohio, just like Kurt, and into a world that accepted him and loved him and allowed him to spend a lifetime with the love of his life by his side.

## **READY TO FLY**

*It's Blaine's senior year and with his boyfriend Kurt and his best friend Santana following their own dreams, he's now left to face the world on his own. No one knows what the future holds, but Blaine knows one thing; he's ready to fly!*

**Author's Note: Glee is back! And with Glee of course comes my Ready to Fly series and the 6th (and last I think) installment, which gives the series title, "Ready to Fly", so named after the brilliant song by my amazingly talented friend, Scott Evan Davis!**

**I am so thrilled to be back in this world and back to writing straight from RIB's rulebook. AU's are fun, but this is such a challenge, it's amazing to write. I hope you love reading it as much as I love writing it.**

**For those new to this world, I beg you to go back and read the rest, but if you don't: Ready to Fly will follow canon unless otherwise stated. Also, unless otherwise stated, everything that happens in the show happens in this world. I tend to write around the show, but sometimes important scenes are included. Major additions are Blaine's back story and his friendship with Santana. This fic is FULL of spoilers, so if you aren't watching S4, don't read yet!**

**So without further ado...here's what you missed on Glee!**

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### ***Chapter One: The New Rachel***

"You didn't have to carry my bags, Boyfriend, I'm probably stronger than you." Santana smirked as she watched Blaine haul two large suitcases that she had packed for Kentucky. Summer was nearly over. Blaine and Brittany headed back to McKinley after Labor Day, but her own classes started August 17 and cheerleading practice began even sooner. Her dorm was ready for her and she needed to move in. And move on.

"I am *sure* you are stronger, Santana," he said grunting down the stairs at the weight. If he didn't know that Brittany was waiting outside with Kurt and Santana's parents, he'd think she was stowed away in one

of the bags. "But I am still a gentleman, born and raised." He reached the bottom of the stairs and set the bags down at her feet harder than he had intended. He exhaled and caught his breath. And his eyes met hers.

They softened as they looked at her; the girl who only a year ago had been hard as nails and hiding from the world. It had taken only one moment, when he had caught her watching the girl she loved across a crowded room. One moment when he gave her his number and told her that she wasn't alone. That one moment had grown into one of the best friendships of his life.

His eyes shined with unshed tears. "What am I going to do without you?" he asked with a sad laugh.

"The same thing you do with me Blaine," she told him firmly. "Keep fighting."

He fell into her arms and she held him tightly. They had spent a lot of time together over the summer. Beautiful double dates to romantic restaurants, and exciting nights out to the jazz club filled the evenings that none of the four of them were working. But there were the days and nights too where Brittany and Kurt did their own thing, and Santana went with him to his father's house, making the visits with his dad easier for Blaine. Much to Blaine's surprise, the Colonel and Santana actually got along well. She was as strong as he was and didn't put up with his insults or demands. Where Blaine would have backed down, she stood up and it helped both men continue moving forward. It wasn't perfect. It never would be. But it was better, thanks to her.

He pulled away and she smiled at him. He smiled back. "I will keep fighting. I promise."

"Don't let them push you around Blaine," she told him. "You're an adult now. If and when you see him is your choice, not his." Blaine nodded. It would be hard, but she'd showed him he had the strength to do it. "Now as for Kurt," she continued in a warning tone. "Don't hold on to him too tight. A Kurt Hummel stuck in Lima, Ohio will be absolutely no good to anyone around him. We've kept him busy and distracted, but everyone is going to be gone now except him."

Sending Finn off to basic training had been harder for Kurt than anyone had thought. In the back of Kurt's mind there had always been the assumption that if either of them would be left behind in Ohio it would be Finn. Then Mercedes and Puck left for LA. Quinn was soon to set off for Yale. Blaine wasn't sure that any of them had truly come to terms with the fact that the one person they were sure would get out was the one stuck at the Lima Bean and signing up for Allen County Community College. The only one who seemed to



accept it was Kurt, and that's what seemed the most wrong to Blaine. But it had been so nice to have him all summer without worry about the goodbyes and the tomorrows like everyone else. It had seemed so right, and yet...

"He can't stick around here for you," Santana continued, reading his mind as always. "You can't let him. Kurt's ready to go."

"I know," Blaine sighed.

She lifted his chin and her eyes were confident. "*You* are ready too." Blaine closed his eyes against the warmth of her fingers. God, he was going to miss her.

"Santana!" Her mother screamed from the front hallway and Blaine exhaled, grabbing the handle to one of the suitcases while Santana grabbed the other, they started out the door.

He took her hand as they walked out the door. "If I can't even say goodbye to you, how am I supposed to say goodbye to Kurt," he wondered aloud.

"Oh believe me Boyfriend," Santana said as she met Brittany's wink. Both girls' faces lit up and blushed, full of secrets from the night before. "Sometimes goodbyes can bring some of the most amazing moments of your life."

He'd texted Santana last night after the ridiculous audition for the new Rachel. Blaine missed her desperately. He missed everything about her, but most of all he missed her fire and her honesty in the choir room. They needed that more than anything right now. The tiny group was lost without their strongest members, and now had a precarious position on the top of the school food chain that they all knew could topple any minute. And Blaine just didn't know his place. He had never wanted to lead New Directions before, but now with Kurt gone, he suddenly felt a need to continue his boyfriend's legacy. He certainly didn't want Unique waltzing in and taking over. It was bad enough he'd just planted himself in Kurt's seat in the choir room without so much as a by your leave. Tina and Brittany, as much as he loved them and they were amazing at what they did, just weren't strong enough singers to maintain their title of National Champions.

*"Keep an eye on Brittany," Santana had ordered him. "If she gets too lost she may never find her way back. Just like someone else we both know."*

Blaine promised he would and ignored her swipe at Kurt. After school the next day he invited Brittany to the Lima Bean for coffee. Seeing Kurt was just an added bonus.

"So how's Santana?" Blaine asked as casually as possible while they waited for Kurt to bring over their drinks.

"She's good, she's just really busy with cheerleading practice and it's hard making out over Skype, you can't really scissor a webcam," Brittany responded.

Blaine shook his head, not wanting to think at all about his best friend's sex life. He breathed a sigh of relief when Kurt came over with his coffee. Even if it was...

"Here's an extra hot soy latte for him," Kurt said feigning cheerfulness as he put the sophisticated drink down in front of Blaine. He stared at it. He really missed his medium drip but Kurt had been on a mission all summer that if he wasn't going to New York, he was going to bring New York to Lima. And that meant Kurt pretending he was working in one of the top Barrista's in NY instead of the Lima Bean, and for Blaine it meant drinking a soy latte instead of his regular coffee order. And whether he wanted it or not, he would do everything he had to in order to support Kurt.

"I can't wait till Friday," Kurt grinned, sitting down quickly with them even though he was in the middle of his shift.

Blaine looked at him askance. "Why?" he asked confused.

"Glee Club auditions," Kurt reminded him.

Blaine traced his finger on the coffee cup, his chest tightening with echoes of Santana's words and something else that continued to nag at him but he couldn't quite figure out. "That'll be nice."

"Is it depressing that I'm more excited about it than either of you?" Kurt asked, already knowing the answer.

"Yeah," Brittany admitted.

"No, not at all," Blaine lied.

"Just a little bit," Brittany told him honestly.

"No, no, it's..." Blaine trailed off shrugging, offering his boyfriend a smile of reassurance that didn't reach his eyes.

"Excuse me, Garçon!" Blaine frowned as the new cheerleader called Kurt over and Kurt excused himself to return to his job.

"So explain to me again why Kurt isn't going to big boy college too," Brittany said turning to Blaine.

"He is going to college," Blaine answered defensively. "He just missed the acceptance deadlines of his second choices because the NYADA decision came so late, and his community college hasn't started yet."

They both turned to watch Kurt as the cheerleaders and jocks teased him like they had his whole life. At least Glee club was getting a reprieve after winning Nationals. But Kurt worked 3 years toward the trophy and didn't even get to reap the rewards. Instead he had to withstand the same insults, just in a new place with new Neanderthals. It broke Blaine's heart. And it was breaking Kurt's. Kurt spent the days taking coffee orders imagining that each night after he hung up his apron, he'd bound out to the streets of New York, and race to make his half hour call for an off-Broadway show he was starring in. In reality, the best he would do here was climbing back into the seats of the McKinley High School auditorium, choose the "New Rachel," and pretend he was following his dream.

"He's starting to remind me of Mr. Schuester," Brittany said with a frown. "I may miss Santana like crazy, but I'm glad she's moving on. We're the ones that are supposed to be miserable Blaine. Not them."

"I know Britt," he said swirling his coffee and checking his watch. "Come on, Kurt has another two hours before he's off work. Let's go do something fun."

They walked to the door, Blaine carrying his soy latte in his hand. He probably wouldn't even drink it. He caught Kurt's eyes and gestured that he'd Kurt call him later. He couldn't stay here and watch anymore. He needed to figure out a way to fix this.

Blaine spied her across the hall in between classes and he jogged to catch up to her. "Hey Tina," he called, slowing as he reached her, and together they headed to their next class. "How are you doing?" he asked gently. "You know, with the whole Mike thing."

"It's definitely weird being here without him. But I'm fine, Blaine, really," she assured him with a smile. Then she looked over with sudden concern. "Why, is Mike okay?"

"I thought you guys talked every day?" Blaine asked. They dodged a group of cheerleaders giggling down the hallway and paused beside the lockers to talk.

"You think he's going to tell me how he really feels?" Tina asked with a raised eyebrow. "If he's going to tell anyone, it'd be you."

Blaine knew Tina was right. He and Mike had messaged every few days since he'd gone to Chicago, and though Mike missed Tina, he seemed to be doing really well there.

"I think he's okay," Blaine told her. He watched her concern fade as she studied him. "You think I should do the same with Kurt," he asked sadly. "Let him go. Don't you?"

Tina shook her head. "Blaine, I broke up with Mike for me, not for him. I didn't want to be 30 years old and married and full of regrets of all the loves I never had. If it's meant to be then we'll still end up together, but I'm not ready to settle down. I need to know what else might be out there for me." Tina smiled softly. "But I don't think that's the same for you."

Blaine thought about Kurt as he had a million times this summer. No matter how he pictured it, if it were his choice, his future was always with Kurt. He'd had no interest in Sebastian or any other boys that might have showed interest in him because he didn't need to know what else was out there for him. He already had exactly who he wanted.

And what he wanted was the fierce, determined, selfish but amazingly caring boyfriend that was slowly slipping away into the distance, not of space, but of despair and resignation. The transformation over the summer had been slow, but watching Kurt face the same bullies all over again at the Lima Bean and choose to walk back into a school that had never protected or embraced him only because he felt he had no other place to go, it was suddenly so clear to Blaine that Kurt was losing everything that was so perfectly imperfect about him. The Lima Bean and community college were not even close to where Kurt

belonged, and no amount of soy lattes or other such feeble grasps at a greater life in Lima, Ohio would change that. Kurt was so much better than that. He deserved so much better and Santana had been right all along. Blaine didn't need to *let* him go, he needed to *make* him go. He couldn't wait a second longer, it was time.

He looked at Tina, his eyes suddenly alight with excitement and plans for a courtyard extravaganza and he quickly squeezed Tina's hand and kissed her on the cheek. "I need to talk to Kurt," he said before he bounded off in the other direction, calling loudly behind him, "Thank you!"

"Are you sure you guys don't want me to come with you?" Burt asked as he started to gather the breakfast dishes.

"Quite sure, Sir," Blaine blurted without thinking, a sparkle in his eye that made Burt laugh. Only then did Blaine realize he'd said that out loud and snagged the last piece of bacon before Burt took the plate to cover the reddening of his cheeks. Thank goodness Carole was still adjusting to not having to cook for Finn's enormous appetite and Blaine was still getting used to not having to grab everything he wanted at the top of the meal.

Kurt side-eyed Blaine curiously then joined his Dad at the sink, drying towel in hand. "I'm leaving for New York tomorrow, Dad, I better get used to doing things on my own. Besides, I've been around cars my whole life, I'm pretty sure I can manage selling one."

"Well don't let them go under the amount we talked about on the phone," Burt counseled. "You need every dollar you can get, everything in New York costs three times what it does here."

"I know Dad," Kurt said rolling his eyes. "That breakfast at Tiffany's Rachel and I had cost about 20 bucks."

Blaine would never stop marveling at his boyfriend's relationship with his Dad. It was never going to be like this again, but Blaine refused to let it get him down today. Today was going to be about building memories and moving on. He'd worry about the emptiness tomorrow.

"So we're just going to drop my car off at the dealership and then go get Kurt's car detailed," Blaine explained to Burt. "Then I have a bit of a surprise for him this evening if that's okay?"

Kurt looked near giddy and Burt looked at them amused. "You guys do whatever you want today, I know how important it is to you. Tomorrow is my turn," Burt said, pointing a finger at Blaine.

"At 5 o'clock in the morning," Kurt grumbled, rolling his eyes.

"You wanted an early flight to get to Rachel, you get an early flight. I'll make sure the pot of coffee is ready for you," Burt told him.

"I think I'll need two pots," Kurt said under his breath.

Blaine chuckled and took Kurt's hand. "Let's go," he said eagerly. "This day isn't going to get any longer and we have things to do and people to see."

"What exactly do you have planned, Mister," Kurt asked with a sly grin as he bumped shoulders playfully with his boyfriend and headed out the door.

"Magic," Blaine promised.

"I am pretty certain that we will not find the necessary equipment to detail the car on lover's lane, Blaine." Kurt eyed his boyfriend as he shifted the soon to be sold car into park on an especially secluded section of the town make out spot.

Blaine said nothing, merely throwing him a roguish wink as he got out of the driver's seat and slipped into the back. Kurt turned around to glare at him, but couldn't help but break into a smile as Blaine suggestively patted the seat next to him.

Kurt shook his head, got out and climbed into the backseat, his smile broadening. Blaine knew he was remembering back to all the times they'd made love back on that seat. After Blaine's disaster of a first attempt at Scandals, he had been afraid to try again. But desperate for one another and no parent-free place to go, they'd stopped here for a detour the second night of West Side Story before Brittany's party, nervous but excited. They had both been surprised to find that the clandestine nature of it sent a thrill down Kurt's spine.

"I thought if we were going to say goodbye to this car, we ought to do it properly," Blaine smirked. "Don't ya think?"

Kurt chuckled at him and rolled his eyes, but melted into Blaine's fingers before he could answer as he quickly cupped Kurt's cheek and kissed him with the passion to last them through the weeks or months they'd be apart. The moan from Kurt's throat drove Blaine wild and he easily pulled Kurt down on top of him, refusing to allow air anywhere between them. They had quickly realized so many months ago that the small space of the car only added to the exhilaration, and the press of Kurt's body against him now, so wanting and willing, reminded Blaine of that first night. They had long since mastered the difficulties of comfort and as Blaine reached for Kurt's belt and clothes were quickly discarded, they moved with one another like dancers, fitting together in perfect harmony to each of their rhythms.

As Blaine slipped inside Kurt, the rest of the world fell away. Nothing existed but the stunningly beautiful man in front of him whose eyes shined down with more love than Blaine had once thought existed in the universe. Feeling the warmth of Kurt's skin as he traced the lines of his chest, he believed in that moment that there could never be too much distance between them because their love had no bounds. Falling together as their pleasure overtook them, they snuggled against one another, listening to their heartbeats racing and then slow. Blaine could not imagine ever feeling safer than he did in these moments. He nuzzled Kurt's neck and lightly nipped at his glistening salty skin.

"You are beautiful," Blaine whispered.

"You only love me for my good looks," Kurt teased.

"Don't forget your impeccable taste," Blaine added, the double entendre evident as he surged forward and kissed Kurt, his tongue diving inside to taste every delicious morsel.

"You're not so bad yourself," Kurt gasped, eyes sparkling, as they took a breath.

Blaine just stared at him, a million feelings washing over him. "God, I love you so much, Kurt."

"I love you too," Kurt told him with one more kiss to the lips. "But now we *really* need to get this car detailed, so it might be best if we put our clothes back on."

"Since when are you the practical one?" Blaine pouted as Kurt climbed off of him and gathered their clothes from where they had fallen.

"Since I'm about to become a New Yorker," Kurt said pulling his shirt on over his head. He stopped short, as a look of panic fell over his face. "Oh my god Blaine, I'm about to be a New Yorker! A real New Yorker!"

Blaine smiled and kissed him, brushing a comforting hand against Kurt's cheek. "The best New Yorker in the whole damn city. The Big Apple won't even know what hit them!"

Kurt was quiet as Blaine drove them into the city after selling the car. They'd done a good job of negotiating, mixing Blaine's charm with Kurt's extensive knowledge of cars, and managed to snag \$1,000 more than agreed to over the phone. But as soon as they'd gotten into Blaine's car, Kurt clasped Blaine's hand and his mind drifted into silence.

Blaine glanced over, worried. He knew that today could be one of the hardest days of their lives, but that's not what he wanted. He wanted it instead to be one of the best. "Penny for your thoughts," Blaine coaxed.

"My thoughts are worth way more than a penny, Blaine Anderson," Kurt chided, but his voice didn't have the bite that it should. Instead it was heartbreaking.

Blaine squeezed his hand. "Come on," he said softly. "You can tell me anything."

Kurt looked over at Blaine, then shifted his gaze back out the window. "I'm just worried about you, that's all."

Of course he was worried about Blaine. Ever since their fight about Chandler and their heart to heart in Ms. Pillsbury's office, Kurt had really taken to heart all of Blaine's feelings about him leaving. But Blaine smiled softly. "I'm going to be fine, Kurt, really. I know I was terrified of this last year, but spending so much time with my Dad over the summer, I know I can do this. Besides, I'm not alone. I have Tina and Britt. And that Marley girl you like so much seems pretty cool. Who knows, maybe she'll be my new Santana."

Kurt scoffed. "There is no new Santana, she's one of a kind. Besides, Marley seems far too nice to take the place of Satan."

"Well, my point is," Blaine said as they pulled into their destination. "We're ready for this." Blaine quickly exited the vehicle and ran around to the other side to open the door for Kurt like a gentleman. Blaine



cocked his head toward the front door of the Night Town Jazz club, where they were now frequent visitors and occasional performers, though only ever in duet with Santana. But Blaine had plans tonight, a solo he'd sung only once before, but it had meant everything to him then, and it meant everything to him today. "Come on," he said, grabbing Kurt's hand. "I'll show you."

They waltzed into the smoke filled club, and the adorable waitress Katie brought them to their usual booth. Kurt watched as Blaine whispered to her and she smiled and nodded. Kurt raised an eyebrow. "What exactly do you have up your sleeve?" he asked.

But Blaine just winked and ignored him, keeping his silence as they ordered their drinks. The piano player who had been serenading the crowd as they walked in finished his set and his audience clapped appreciatively. The club manager caught Blaine's eye from across the room and Blaine quickly kissed Kurt on the cheek before slipping out of their booth.

"Blaine, what are you...'" Kurt started, but Blaine put his fingers to his lips and whispered with a grin, "shhh...."

Kurt sat back and watched as Blaine took the microphone, eyes only on Kurt. It wasn't like it was the first time. He'd done it before here with Santana and out at Karaoke bars, and that one time last year at the theme park only minutes before he'd driven off with Burt to confront his father and change his life forever.

Oh. Of course.

"Hi, Ladies and Gentleman. My name is Blaine Anderson," he introduced himself. "My best friend Santana used to be a regular here, and occasionally she'd give me the honor of singing with her. Well, tonight the Night Town has given me the honor of letting me sing alone."

He took a deep breath, and though he looked out onto the crowd, his heart belonged to only one person and Kurt could feel it. Distance didn't matter. "You see, the love of my life, my boyfriend Kurt, is leaving tomorrow on the greatest adventure of his life. He's going to New York City, and though I will miss him tremendously, I am so excited to watch him leave behind a world that never embraced and go to where he will be loved and accepted. And though he's the one leaving, the sweetest thing is he's worried about me." Blaine's eyes fell on the boy he loved and he let the tears fall. "You see, a little more than a year ago, I did

the same thing. And now *he* is my world of love and acceptance. But Kurt, distance can't change that. Distance *won't* change that. Because everything that you gave me is in my heart forever now and there is absolutely nothing and no one in the world that can take it away." His voice cracked, and he had to wipe away some tears, but he squared his shoulders. "I was scared before. But I'm not anymore. Because we're ready to fly, love."

*Firefly summers and butterfly springs*

*A little boy sings and looks to the sky*

*As a mother whispers through her tears*

*"It's time, come kiss me goodbye."*

Last time he had sang only for himself. This time he sung also for Kurt. Kurt, who had sung since they day he could speak. Kurt, who had been wishing on a star for something greater since the summers and springs of his childhood. Kurt, who had lost his mother too young and too soon.

*Floating and falling, riding the breeze*

*Gliding with ease, I'm flown through the sky.*

*And I'm told that when I'm strong enough*

*I'll be ready to fly.*

*Scared, confused, and angry as hell*

*That I'm left on my own*

*No I refuse to fly into the crystal clear*

*Lose the things I've held so dear*

*If I stay here, my heart will turn to stone.*

Last year Blaine had been scared and angry that Kurt seemed so excited, so willing, to leave him behind.

This summer he'd come to understand what Kurt had always known. That Kurt staying would be the worst thing for both of them. Kurt staying meant losing everything because the Kurt he loved would most certainly fade away into only a ghost of himself.

*I see my reflection, I know that it's me.*

*But all that I see is a beautiful lie.*

*Will the boy fade into memory*

*Once I'm ready to fly?*

He knew they both feared that everything they had together would fade once Kurt flew out into the world. But Blaine was ready to trust. He believed in himself and Kurt and he believed in love. But most of all he believed that whatever was meant to be would be and that more than anything, Kurt was meant to be in the city of dreams. He wasn't fooling himself. Kurt's journey would change them both. But he had faith it would change them for the better.

*Stop!*

*Take hold,*

*Put trust in the wind,*

*Have faith when it calls.*

*Wings unfold and fly into the crystal clear,*

*Letting go of ancient fear*

*Because way up here*

*Nothing ever falls*

They would never know unless they tried. He knew Kurt was scared for him but words spoken by Burt not too long ago had been right. Having Kurt here was always a way out for Blaine. A way to avoid the work he needed to do with his family to either forgive or let go. A way to avoid growing up and being his own man, whatever that may turn out to be. Blaine knew it wouldn't be easy, he would miss Kurt like crazy. He couldn't know what would happen, but he trusted himself now that he would be okay.

*With no expectations*

*Let the journey begin*

*How can I win if I don't ever try?*

*Will I prove that I am strong enough*

*When I'm ready?*

*Am I ready?*

*I am ready!*

*And a voice in the breeze starts to whisper,*

*As I think of the bridges I've crossed.*

*Finding the strength, I'm spreading my wings,*

*Put trust in the wind and see what it brings*

A year ago he sang, terrified of the unknown, confronting his father, leaving his home, but he knew he could do it without Kurt by his side. There were still moments that frightened him when things became too hard; the empty house because his mother was spending the night with his father, the dinners when the triggers for both him and his dad returned and the past became the present too quickly and without

warning. The times when for even a brief moment the hate returned. Santana had stood with him to grow strong, but Kurt had been his angel to save him, to hold him when it hurt too much, to find him when he was lost. He knew with no one to run to he'd have to face those realities on his own, but that's what Burt had meant. And Blaine was ready now. This was his future and he was ready to fly.

*And I'm ready,*

*I'm ready to fly!*

Love swam behind his misty eyes as they fell on Kurt and Kurt alone. A year ago, neither one of them were ready to face the world without one another. Now he knew they both could. He blew him a kiss, as he watched Kurt wipe away the tears and mouth "I love you", and he sang the final words.

*We're ready to fly.*

If anyone asked him, Burt Hummel did *not* cry all the way home from dropping his only son at the airport. But one person knew better.

Burt wasn't surprised to see Blaine's car in his driveway or the boy leaning on the car, waiting, phone in hand as his fingers danced across the screen. Burt pulled up and Blaine slipped the phone, and his hands, into his pockets.

He hadn't been waiting long. He had gone through every moment of the day since he woke at 5am, knowing that Kurt was waking up too. At 6 Kurt texted to let him know that he and Burt were leaving for the airport. 7:30, Kurt was probably just passing through security and stopping at a coffee shop to get his third cup of the morning. He wondered if he'd found a place to get his special New York style drinks, or if he'd had to settle for the basics. He hoped for the flight attendants' sake that he'd been able to grab a latte, otherwise there might be news later that day of a crazy irate teenager escorted off the plane at JFK airport. At 8am, Blaine left his mother's apartment in Lima and drove here.

Burt wiped his eyes one last time to hide his tears, but the red rims were clear to Blaine when Burt approached him. They no doubt mirrored his own. "Hey," Blaine greeted him timidly.

"Hey yourself," Burt answered, his own hands shoved into his pockets. They were both embarrassed, trying to hide emotions to the one person that would understand more than anyone.

"My house was empty," Blaine shrugged in explanation for his appearance on the Hummel doorstep.

Burt looked at his own home in feigned nonchalance and back at Blaine. "Mine too."

"So...ummm..." Blaine stared at his feet kicking a rock in the pavement, then back up at Burt. "Would you like to watch a movie?"

Burt looked away. He had planned to go to work, but he did not in any way feel like going in. His staff could cover him for the day. They'd probably expected it anyway. "Yeah, sure."

Burt led the way inside and hung up his coat. Blaine went immediately to the kitchen. "You know how to make that popcorn?" Burt called out. Kurt had never liked to let either one of them near the popcorn for fear of them burning it.

"Oh, I've learned a thing or two watching Kurt," Blaine answered with a smirk. He flung the bag into the microwave and let it go for 2 minutes and 42 seconds on the dot. Just like Kurt.

He poured it into the bowl, and brought it to the couch, the two men settling in for Burt's choice, Rudy. Sitting side by side, sharing the popcorn, they could almost pretend that Kurt was there with them, but both knew the truth. Kurt was gone, and aside from visits on holidays, he wasn't coming back. They'd both wanted this, and yet it broke their hearts at the same time. The emptiness the felt, of living without him, and of him living without them, made their chests ache.

Burt patted Blaine on the knee, a fatherly gesture that a year ago might have made him flinch, but was now as natural as a kiss from Kurt. It didn't matter that it was 9 in the morning on a Sunday and they were eating popcorn for breakfast. What mattered was that as they sat, the love of their lives was getting on a plane for the city of dreams and neither one of them was alone. "You're going to be okay," Burt assured the boy who was as much like a son to him as Finn.

Blaine nodded without responding. Then he turned to Burt. "Kurt's going to be okay too," he said, though whether it was a question or a statement, he wasn't sure.

Burt though was sure and smiled, his shining eyes trained on the screen in front of him. "Yeah. Yeah he will."

## ***Chapter Two: Brittany 2***

**Blaine: Skype. Now.**

He sat in the darkness of his bedroom, the glow of his computer the only light as he waited for her name to come up on his screen. It only took a minute before Santana's face popped up.

"It's one o'clock in the morning on a school night, Boyfriend," she grumbled with exhaustion as she brushed out her hair. "What the hell are you doing up? Don't you need your beauty sleep?"

"Look who's talking," Blaine teased. Santana looked a mess after nearly 6 hours of cheerleading practice and probably a full day of classes. "I just got off with Kurt," Blaine explanation.

"Wanky," Santana smirked and Blaine blushed.

"That's not what I meant, I" he started, but just buried his head in his hands as the red in his cheeks grew deeper, Santana of course not that far from the truth. "Never mind."

Santana laughed. "You know I'm just joking with you. How is Ladylips?"

"Kurt is getting settled pretty well. Bunking with Rachel in the dorms while they apartment shop," he shared.

"Now that is a scary thought, living with Rachel Berry. But I digress. How are you holding up?" she asked compassionately.

He wanted to talk about how much he missed her and Kurt, and how hard it was being in the choir room without them. But that wasn't the point of his call. He was the leader of New Directions now and it was his job to take care of its members, not to talk about himself. "I'm holding up better than your girlfriend, Tana. You need to do something. I caught her doing a voiceover in the middle of the school hallway."

"That's just Britt," Santana said brushing away his concerns, but Blaine wasn't letting her off that easily.

"That's not just Britt, Santana. She got kicked off the Cheerios today too," he said.

"I know," Santana said sadly. "I talked to her earlier."



"For how long, Tana, five minutes?" Santana was quiet. "That's what I thought," he said, more accusatory than he'd intended.

Santana looked away from him, but she could not hide the guilt radiating from every inch of her body. "It's just not that easy Blaine. I have class all day and cheerleading practice all night..."

"I get it 'Tana," Blaine interrupted. The grief in his voice reflected in his eyes, even in the diminished quality of the video camera. This could just as easily be him and Kurt in only a few short weeks. Or even days. "I understand. We all have different lives now. But if you want Brittany to still be a part of yours, you need to make an effort." He paused a minute as Santana nodded. "And I'll do what I can here to make sure she's okay, whatever you decide. I promised I'd take care of her for you."

"You're the best boyfriend in the world, you know that Blaine?" Santana asked with a sad smile.

He grinned bashfully and ran a hand through his curls. "Well, let's just hope that Kurt keeps thinking so too," he told her.

Blaine high fived Artie, their performance an apparent success, and he gathered his things and swooped in with a grin, sitting next to Brittany. She remained slumped in her chair despite her praise to Mr. Schuester.

"That was really good Blaine," Brittany said and Blaine couldn't tell if it was boredom, sarcasm, or just oreo in her voice. "Want an oreo?" she asked offering him a cookie.

Blaine scrunched his face and politely refused. "No thanks. Britt, are you sure you're okay? I hope you didn't mind the song, we were just trying to inspire you."

"No, it was great," she said flatly as she gathered her things and walked out of the choir room. Blaine raced to keep up with her. "I loved being serenaded by my ex and my lesbian lover's best gay friend. Totally inspiring."

Blaine frowned and took her hand, pulling her to the lockers and out of the fray of the school hallways. "I'm sorry. We were just trying..."

Brittany cut him off though, sincerity in her eyes. "Look Blaine, I appreciate what you and Artie tried to do. But you're Santana's Boyfriend, not mine. Contrary to popular opinion, and that ridiculous song you chose, I don't need a boyfriend. I need Santana back."

"I understand Brittany," Blaine told her.

"No, Blaine, you don't," she countered angrily. "Santana's been gone a month. Kurt's been gone, what, a week? And it's not like he's busy all the time. I'm sure you two talk and text and Skype twenty times a day. I get about ten minutes with Santana if that. All she does is school and cheerleading from morning to midnight. And what do I get to do? While you're leading the New Directions, I'm kicked off the Cheerios."

"I'm sorry Britt," he said again, not really sure of what else to say.

"Yeah well, sorry doesn't change anything. And Santana can't either. The only one who can change it is me," she responded as she stormed off down the hall.

Blaine rested his head against the lockers then glanced down the hall toward the locker that used to be Kurt's. If only he were here now. Kurt would know what to do.

He walked the rest of the way to his science class, put his stuff away and pulled out his phone, sending a quick text before his teacher saw him and confiscated it for the rest of the day.

**Blaine to Kurt: It's Brittany 2.0 here at McKinley and I need your advice. Call me when you have a few minutes.**

He woke in a cold sweat, more alarmed at having had the dream at all than the dream itself. He had thought he was past this. It had been months since he'd last been triggered. But though he had been so focused on Brittany as she attacked Jacob Ben Israel that it hadn't struck him in the moment, his mind obviously held onto it for him.

Inside the nightmare, he had writhed on the floor, covering his head and curling his body against Brittany's attack with her umbrella. But then the umbrella turned to leather and Brittany morphed into the Colonel, and once again he was 14 years old and cowering beneath his dining room table after coming out to his parents for the first time.

Now as he sat at 3am, he counted the hours until he'd see Kurt at school tomorrow, only to fully awaken with the realization that Kurt wouldn't be there. And for the first time the gravity of that hit him as his biggest fear churned in his chest. Who would be there for him the next time he fell?

"I checked in with the base in Georgia," the Colonel told Blaine as they cooked dinner together in the kitchen. Tonight they were making an Asian stir fry, one of his mother's specialties. Blaine chopped peppers and garlic while his Dad started the onion and chicken in the wok. "Sounds like Finn is doing pretty well in basic training."

"That's good," Blaine murmured, his jealousy of the relationship Finn had developed with his Dad evident. "I'll be sure to tell Kurt."

"How is Kurt getting along in New York?" the Colonel asked, and Blaine stopped for a moment, surprised at the question.

"He's doing pretty well I think," Blaine answered more cheerfully, finishing up the vegetables. He turned and leaned against the counter, facing his Dad. "He's planning to audition again for NYADA's second semester and he's applying for a job at Vogue."

The Colonel looked at Blaine, unable to completely hide the discomfort in his face, but trying. "Good," he nodded. "I'm glad to hear it. And how are you doing?"

He considered lying. He was holding up pretty well considering the most important person in his life was hundreds of miles away and starting a brand new life without him. After all, he wasn't a complete mess like Brittany. He had felt like a complete failure at today's "Brittervention." But every time Kurt told him something about New York; Rachel, the apartment, the bagels, the pizza, Blaine just wanted to be there with him, experiencing it all too. "I miss him," Blaine admitted sadly. "I try not to, but I do."

"Well, that will change as time goes on," the Colonel said, coolly.

"Really?" Blaine asked accusingly as his eyes narrowed. "Has it changed with Mom?"

The Colonel's eyes locked with Blaine's for only a moment before he turned back to the wok with the pretense of stirring. "No," he said quietly. "No it hasn't."

They worked in silence for a few minutes, adding the peppers to the wok. Blaine prepared the rice that simmered in the corner, adding seasoning to match the stir-fry. He went out to the dining room to set the table. His thoughts flew, as they often did without his permission, to cooking with Kurt in their own kitchen, setting the table with candles and flowers he had picked up on the corner before coming home. He shook his head. He wasn't going to do this to himself. Kurt wasn't gone, he was only in a different place, and he didn't have to seem so far away. In fact, he thought, glancing at the doorway that led to his father, Kurt didn't have to *be* so far away.

Colonel Anderson brought in dinner and they sat down to eat, making small talk about work at the recruiting station and the upcoming fall assembly at McKinley. Blaine's mind though kept drifting to Brittany and then to Santana and then to Kurt. His heart beat a little faster, but he raised his eyes to his dad and plucked up some courage. "Can I ask you a favor Dad?"

The Colonel raised an eyebrow. "Sure, son, what is it?"

"I want to go to New York," Blaine said with hope and doubt all rolled up into one.

Blaine watched with baited breath as his father gently placed his fork down next to his plate as if in slow motion and slowly wiped his mouth with the napkin. Blaine recognized the motions as the Colonel waited out his initial reaction and thought through his response to his son instead. It was something they'd both been practicing it for months in therapy.

"You can't just run to New York every time you miss him," the Colonel finally said, far more sympathetically than Blaine had expected, and it kept him calm as well when anger could have been his first response.

"I'm not running, Dad. And I'm not saying I need to go now. But I don't want to wait until he comes back for Thanksgiving. Please, I'll just need some money, I'll figure out the rest."

The Colonel went back to his dinner as he considered the request. Blaine waited, his foot tapping the only sign of his nerves. "You come to the office in Westerville, do some filing for me, and I'll pay you for your time. You can do with the money whatever you want."

Blaine let out a breath and grinned. "Thank you," he said and began eating again. He could barely wait to tell Kurt.

The moment the tall, handsome, young man showed up at their doorstep, Kurt knew it was Rachel's friend Brody, but it didn't stop his face from lighting up at the sight of him. Kurt and Rachel had always had the same taste in men, Jesse St. Sucks notwithstanding, and his love for Blaine did not prevent the skip in his heartbeat at Mr. Tango Dancer. Still, the flowers this man brought were clearly for his roommate and he was undeniably excited for her. This is what Finn had wanted. A chance for others to see how amazing she was. A chance for Rachel to see what else was out there.

"Well hello there kind sir," Kurt nearly swooned in the doorway.

"Hey, I'm Brody," the man said confirming his suspicions.

"I'm Kurt," he responded giddily.

"Hi," Brody greeted, but Kurt could tell he was actually desperate for Kurt to leave. Well, he'd be happy to oblige.

"I was just gonna go get some cake," he said and turned to Rachel, his eyebrows arched suggestively. "I'm going to leave you two alone," he mouthed, encouragingly.

He skipped out the door and his fingers were dialing before he even got down the stairs of their apartment out onto the streets of New York. As he walked out into the sights and smells and excitement that were so strikingly different from everything about Ohio, he nearly bursted with anticipation and the need to share. He barely let Blaine even get out a greeting.

"Oh my god, Blaine, you can never even imagine the most gorgeous man who just showed up at our doorstep. With flowers, nonetheless," Kurt raved as he strode down the Brooklyn streets.

*Notice me*

*Take my hand*

*Why are we*

*Strangers when*

*Our love is strong*

*Why carry on without me?*

Blaine frowned, his heart twisting with jealousy on the other end of the phone. Sometimes he felt like he was treading water. Sometimes he felt like he was soaring. But there were moments, like Brittney, when he felt like he just might drown. Hearing of Kurt's life in New York, excitement in his voice; he both loved and hated it. It seemed almost surreal that their lives were going on without each other. Their love was strong, but it had only just begun and they were already becoming strangers.

"I know we share everything Kurt, but if you're going to tell me about every gorgeous boy who tries to steal you away..." Blaine trailed off.

"Well, this one just happened to be coming for one, Rachel Barbra Berry," Kurt assured him. "If ever a gorgeous man comes to my doorstep carrying flowers for me, unless his name is Blaine Anderson, he can just turn around and go home."

Blaine smiled, a blush creeping to his cheeks as his heart settled. "And you are just standing watching them?" he teased.

"No," Kurt said with a pout. He arrived at the storefront and leaned casually against the brick wall outside the door. "I am on a mission for cheesecake."

"Ah," Blaine said knowingly. "Then I will let you go, I don't want you starting to snap at your waitresses in only your first week."

Kurt laughed at his teasing, but the sadness in Blaine's voice was obvious and Kurt wasn't going to let him go. "What's the matter Blaine? Everything at home okay? How's Britt?"

"Brittany is losing it without Santana, Kurt," he told him. "And maybe I am too," he added quietly.

"What do you mean?" Kurt asked concerned.

*Everytime I try to fly*

*I fall without my wings I feel so small*

*I guess I need you baby*

*And everytime I see you in my dreams*

*I see your face, it's haunting me*

*I guess I need you baby*

Blaine told Kurt about their disaster of a fall assembly. He felt guilty as he leader letting them do that when he knew it was wrong. And he told him about Brittany's outburst in the hallway of McKinley, and about his dream.

"I was so scared when I woke and all I could think about was seeing you the next day, and then I remembered," Blaine told him, tears threatening to fall again.

*I make believe*

*That you are here*

*It's the only way*

*I see clear*

*What have I done*

*You seem to move on easy*

"You need someone else there for you," Kurt said. "You have to let someone else in. Sam or Tina. Remember Christmas, Blaine, last year? Sam will understand."

Blaine nodded and wiped a tear. "I'll try," he promised.

"And if that doesn't work, you know who to call. Right?" he prompted.

"Ms. Pillsbury in school and your Dad at home," Blaine responded as if by rote. "I know."

"And me, Blaine," Kurt stressed. "You text me 911 and no matter what I'll call or text you back."

"I love you," Blaine whispered.

"And I *miss* you Blaine," Kurt insisted. "As exciting as New York City is, I promise you I do."

Blaine sniffled. He had planned on telling Kurt that he might come to visit, but for some reason, he decided not to. "I better let you get your cheesecake," he chuckled slightly.

"You're more important than cheesecake," Kurt reassured him. "I love you."

"I love you too. Skype me later?" Blaine said.

"Always," Kurt promised.



### ***Chapter Three: Makeover***

Brittany's downward spiral was enough for Blaine to worry about following a similar path. When he had to check himself in the hallways of McKinley just to be sure the voiceover he heard was in fact only in his head, he knew it was time to take action. He wasn't just "the boyfriend" anymore, Kurt's or Santana's. He had to figure out who Blaine Anderson truly was.

He thought he'd pieced it all together at Dalton, the boy without the hate, but the fear had held him back. Then Kurt saved him and the fear slowly faded, never disappearing entirely, but dimming enough. Since leaving Dalton he'd embraced a lot of the child he had been before his coming out had ironically forced his true self into the closet, but there was one part he'd kept hidden, knowing full well that Kurt would die of embarrassment. Kurt was all about the Chic, not so much about the Geek. But now as Blaine was starting all over again, he remembered the boy he had been before it all began.

Sure, his inner Geek came out at times when he quoted Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings or made the occasional off handed comment about making his Charisma check. But his 3rd edition D&D Players Handbook remained tucked at the bottom of his sock drawer like pornography and his plastic covered comic book collection lay hidden in his desk drawers where Kurt was unlikely to go snooping. Now he was free to recapture the innocence and wonder of those days without risking Kurt's eye roll of affectionate mortification.

But no amount of attempts to recapture the boy he was before Kurt, to keep his mind too busy to think of the gorgeous, determined, perfectly imperfect man hundreds of miles away in New York City, could make him forget. The superhero sidekick club just made him feel like a duo missing the dynamite, and in the D&D club he just kept hearing Kurt in his head saying, *what the hell are you doing?* Even in sewing club, he missed the loving smirks he often got from Kurt as he put the button on wrong, or sewed a hem unevenly. Despite it all, everything he did at home or at McKinley reminded him of Kurt.

Even singing alone in the auditorium. He kept waiting for Kurt to walk in, kept looking up to the alcove where they'd picnicked and fought and made love, and he waited for Kurt to step into view, his beautiful smile shining down on him.

Finding his place without Cooper and Nick and Kurt and Santana was proving as difficult as he thought it would be and harder than he had hoped. He knew it was necessary. He couldn't just be a puzzle piece for the rest of his life, he needed to be whole on his own. But knowing didn't make it any easier.

### **Kurt to Blaine: I got the internship!**

The text came in the middle of calculus, and though he would have loved to answer it right then and there, his teacher for some reason was staring at him with a death glare. So Blaine bolted the minute the bell rang and slipped into the auditorium for a quiet space.

He called immediately and barely let Kurt even answer the phone. "Congratulations, Kurt!" Blaine nearly shouted.

Kurt glanced around the office. He had already gotten a tiny little cubicle and was reading tons of old magazines and binders put together so he could get a real sense of what the website was going for. A few eyes fell on him, and he worried immediately that taking private phone calls was a no-no. He ducked down a bit and whispered. "Thanks Blaine. They've already got me started and I don't want to make a bad impression, so I can't really talk now, but I'll call you later, okay?"

Blaine nodded, his excitement and pride giving way to disappointment, but he understood. "Yeah, sure, of course. Call me later," Blaine said. "I love you."

"You too," Kurt quickly blurted out before hanging up. Blaine slowly put the phone down and stared at the stage. Blaine was only playing at ruling the world. Kurt was actually on his way.

"So how's senior year so far, Squirt?"

Blaine paused the show he was watching and curled up in the corner of the living room sectional with a blanket. His mom was out for the night, no doubt at his Dad's house, though she claimed she was working late. Again. Kurt was also working late or gallivanting around New York with Rachel, Blaine wasn't sure. They'd briefly skyped earlier before dinner, but Kurt said he wouldn't be around tonight. It was too bad, having the house to himself. So he was uncharacteristically delighted when Cooper called for the first time in weeks.

"It's alright," Blaine shrugged. "Mr. Schue has absolutely no idea what he wants to do for competition this year. He seems kind of burned out, he didn't even help us at all with the fall assembly last week, which of course we blew by trying to lip sync," he said wryly.

"Wish I could come down and help you guys," Cooper told him, "but I've got auditions like mad, and this new web series that a few of my friends want to start working on."

"That's okay," Blaine assured him, both relieved and sad. "Hey, I'm running for Senior Class President," he said more optimistically, but then the earlier comments from Britt and Artie came back to him. "Of course, it's all just a popularity contest at McKinley. That's why Kurt lost last year. No one at that school really cares about the issues."

"Are you telling me that my baby brother can't win a popularity contest?" Cooper asked shocked. "That's not the Blaine Anderson I know. At Dalton you'd be voted Senior Class President and Headmaster!"

"Yeah, well, I'm not at Dalton anymore," Blaine frowned.

Cooper was silent for a minute then asked softly. "You ever think of going back?"

Yes. "No," he lied. "I'm sure Dad wouldn't pay for it anyway. He may have changed some, but I'm still a disappointment to him. Besides, at least at McKinley Kurt is still kind of there."

"Maybe that's the problem Blaine," Cooper said matter-of-factly. "Look, Squirt, I hear it in your voice. You're trying to put on that smile but there's nothing behind it. I know you want everything to stay the same but things change. Don't keep yourself stuck. I love you too much for that."

Blaine curled up, wishing more than anything that his brother was here now to annoy him in person. Everyone was on the other end of a computer or a phone. He missed having people around him. "I love you too. I better go to bed. Night Coop."

"Night Blaine."

**Colonel Anderson to Blaine: Westerville tomorrow morning. Meet you in the office at 10.**

Blaine sighed as he got the text from his Dad and collapsed on his bed. Today's makeover of Sam had totally exhausted him. He'd hoped to spend his Saturday working on debate preparation, researching the issues at McKinley, maybe touching base with Kurt about his run for President and most importantly, working with Sam. The last thing he wanted to do was spend the day with his father filing paperwork, but he needed the money and he'd agreed to do the work. As he dressed the next morning, the only thing that cheered him was knowing that after eight hours of lectures and paper cuts he'd get to let it all go with with Nick. It had been weeks since he'd seen his old friend, and he was looking forward to it.

But first he had to survive his father ordering him around dressed in uniform, which always put the Colonel at his best. And by best, Blaine thought to himself as he drove up the office and walked through the glass door, he meant his most rigid and demanding. At least it was public. The Colonel could say what he wanted, but he couldn't hurt him. He shook his head as the thought went through his mind. He wondered if there would ever be a time when it wouldn't.

"You're late," the Colonel barked from behind the counter, not even turning to look at him.

Blaine looked up to the clock above his father on the wall. 10:01. He rolled his eyes while he could get away with it. "Sorry," he mumbled.

"Don't mumble," the Colonel admonished as he picked up a large stack of paperwork and slapped them onto the counter.

"Yes sir," Blaine said, and he felt a sudden need to snap to attention. And to turn and run. Every inch of his skin bristled and he immediately went into fight or flight mode. *Kurt. Burt. Santana. Cooper. Nick.* His mind raced to find escape and he was ever more grateful for whatever had made him smart enough to schedule dinner with Nick.

"This is just the first stack of paperwork that needs to be filed into those five filing cabinets," his father ordered. "There are three other stacks just like this. You finish today and I'll give you a bonus."

Blaine blinked. This was new. He and Cooper had been doing paperwork for his Dad since he was young and there'd never been anything to reward hard work except maybe a night free of his father's scathing attacks.

The brief moment of humanity was quickly gone and the Colonel sat at the computer to begin creating a fourth stack of paperwork that Blaine would have to come and take care of another day. Blaine took a deep breath, grabbed the pile from the counter and brought it to the large table his father sometimes used to sit down with recruits and explain the ins and outs of joining the armed forces. He spread out, beginning the long and arduous task of alphabetizing and ordering by date hundreds of reports.

His mind drifted to the day before as the hours droned on, paper cuts on 5 out of 10 fingers. He'd tried to do what Kurt had told him and bond with Sam, but dressing him up didn't feel anything like it did when he and Kurt spent hours going through their closets. And he missed Kurt and Santana's quick thinking, sass, and intelligence. Sam was fun, like Finn and Puck, but no matter how hard he'd tried yesterday, he didn't fill that emptiness that was growing more and more each day. No one and nothing had.

He went back to the counter to get second, then the third and final pack. He glanced at the clock. Two hours left. His father had chatted with a few potential recruits throughout the day and was now in the back room when the phone rang. Blaine glanced at it warily before picking it up.

"Westerville Army recruiting office," he answered as professionally as possible.

"Colonel Anderson, please," the man on the other end of the phone barked.

"Uh, may I ask who's calling?" Blaine asked tentatively.

"Colonel Fletcher, Fort Benning," the voice answered.

"One minute please," Blaine said as his father came back out to the front. Blaine covered the receiver and whispered, "Dad. Colonel Fletcher on the phone, from Fort Benning."

Colonel Anderson held out the phone and Blaine handed it over, returning to his own work. But he kept an ear out to the conversation. His father kept throwing looks his way as he spoke in hushed tones. Blaine tried to hear, but he couldn't. He knew that Finn was at Fort Benning, and though hundreds if not thousands of other new recruits were too, he naturally wondered if the call had something to do with his boyfriend's brother. When his Dad hung up, Blaine took a chance.

"What was that all about?" Blaine asked as nonchalantly as possible.

The Colonel paused, considering him, and for a second their eyes locked. Blaine saw in his father's eyes the disappointment so frequently directed at himself or Cooper, but in a flash they were back to cold and his father turned.

"Nothing you need to concern yourself about son," the Colonel said as he looked at the clock. "Two hours left and you've one whole stack to complete. You better start getting a move on."

Blaine sighed and turned back to his papers. As he once again started alphabetizing and sorting, he thought to himself that it was going to be the longest two hours of his life.

"I thought you invited me for dinner and conversation, but you just keep staring forlornly at your fork as you silently twirl your spaghetti," Nick teased gently as they finished up their meal at the Westerville version of Breadstix. "If you wanted someone to just stare at your gorgeous face, Blaine, you should have invited Trent or Sebastian."

Blaine's eyes drifted up at his smiling friend, but his chin remained rested on his hand as he did indeed twirl his spaghetti absentmindedly. "Sorry," he apologized. "Guess I'm not great company tonight."

"Eight hours with your Dad would do that to anyone," Nick said knowingly. "But I don't think I need the power of reading your mind to know that isn't what's really bothering you. Frankly your thoughts are written all over your face."

"I just miss him so much," Blaine frowned. "It's pathetic, actually."

"It's not pathetic, it's natural," Nick tried to reassure him.

"But it's not," he insisted, the amber in his eyes flaring, and Nick waited for the anger to boil over. "I am so jealous of Kurt, Nick, it's eating me alive. I should be in New York with him right now. If my Dad had cared at all about me after the Sadie Hawkins dance instead of making it a million times worse, maybe I never would have transferred to Dalton and had to repeat a year. Then maybe I'd be in New York with him instead of left behind waiting to grow up while he grows beyond me."

Nick set down his fork and crossed his arms. "Listen to yourself Blaine. If you hadn't come to Dalton, you never would have even met Kurt. Everything happens for a reason. I don't know where either one of you would be right now if you hadn't found each other. And saved each other."

"No, Nick. We're soul mates. We would have found each other somewhere if we didn't meet now. Maybe at a better time, or a better place." Blaine shook his head. "It's just not fair!" His body tensed and he wanted to scream and shout but he was mindful he was in a public restaurant, albeit in a private corner. "It's not fair that I lost a year of my life because people couldn't accept me for who I was. Because my father couldn't keep his rage to himself." He bit back the tears. "And then I was forced to transfer to McKinley because Kurt couldn't just let things be, he couldn't let things stay as they were."

"Blaine, stop it right now," Nick admonished, and Blaine lowered his head. He knew it was wrong, blaming Kurt after all this time. He'd long since forgiven him. Long since acknowledged that Kurt had done the right thing that day, even if it had been in the wrong way. He'd long since loved Kurt for what he did. Everything just hurt so much right now.

"I joined all these stupid clubs at school Nick," Blaine confessed quietly. "I tried to be the kid I was before I'd met him, the "other" Blaine that didn't know Kurt, didn't miss him. But it didn't work. I'm not that kid anymore. So I signed up to run for Senior Class President. And I'm going to try to be the Blaine he fell in love with. The dapper, smart, sophisticated Blaine Warbler, and maybe it will all be okay again. Maybe then he won't forget me."

Nick watched his friend, so lost and confused. It broke his heart. He reached across the table and took his hand. "Just be the real Blaine okay? You've spent your whole life trying to be the Blaine that other people wanted you to be. It's time to start being yourself. If you two are truly soul mates Blaine, then this year apart won't matter. No one said it was going to be easy. But I believe that you two met exactly when and where you were meant to. And whatever happens from here on out is also meant to be. Kurt Hummel will always be THE most important person in your life and you in his. First loves are like that, whether it's just for a time or for forever."

Blaine blinked back the tears that suddenly threatened to fall. "I don't know what forever would be without him."

A small knock came on his bedroom door and his mother opened it gently to find Blaine going through his bowtie collection, the laptop open on his bed with a blank skype screen.

"Don't stay up too late sweetheart," Mrs. Anderson told him with a soft smile. "It's a school night and you have a big day tomorrow."

"I'm just waiting for Kurt, Mom, he said he'd be on in five minutes," Blaine answered pulling five bowties out and laying them out on the bed. He grabbed his laptop and slumped to the floor.

"I thought Treme was over ten minutes ago?" she asked confused. "You guys didn't watch together?"

"He had this big thing he was doing for work," Blaine said, a mixture of pride and regret evident to a mother in his voice. But he tried to brush it away with a shrug. "No big deal."

"Okay sweetheart. But keep the conversation short, alright? You need sleep to be at your best for the debate tomorrow." She came over and kissed him on his cheek. He smiled up at her.

"I will, Mom," he promised. "Night."

She closed the door and he settled onto the floor with his laptop just as Kurt popped up on his screen.

"Oh my god, Blaine you will never guess what Rachel and I did last night!" Kurt exclaimed.

Blaine listened as Kurt recounted what sounded like the most amazing evening in New York City, making over Rachel with a fashion icon then going out to dinner. When Kurt sent him the raw footage that he hoped would end up on , Blaine was amazed.

"And that is just the rough cut," Kurt told him.

"No, it genius," he told him confidently. "And Rachel looks so gorgeous, the whole thing looks so...professional and like a real fashion video. So what's the next step?" he asked with genuine interest.

"Well, ideally, the dream would be that Isabelle would see it, and love it," he added, "and then put it on . But I mean, she's already committed to so many other concepts..."



Kurt might dismiss his talent and his chances, but Blaine would never let him. "Kurt, of course she's going to choose yours, she's going to pick yours."

"And then..." Kurt continued, "after we made over Rachel, Isabelle took us to this place called Gray's Papaya, and we had guava juice..."

But Blaine had stopped listening, his self-pity and jealousy rearing its ugly head. "You're hanging out with fashion icon, Isabella Wright, and I'm running for student body president with a former stripper," he said with disbelief.

"Oh my gosh I forgot about that," Kurt remembered and for a second Blaine felt a tug at the fact that Kurt had forgotten the very thing that was life or death for him only the previous year. But the excitement in Kurt's voice revitalized him. "How's it going?"

"It's going okay, but I did want to ask you what bowtie I should wear for tomorrow's debate." Blaine had figured out the rest of his outfit, but deciding which bowtie he should wear was always a task that Kurt happily took charge of. He brought them into view of the screen and started holding them up. "I narrowed it down to five, but mainly I have these two..."

But Kurt interrupted with little interest. "Oh, whatever you choose you're going to look great in," Kurt brushed him off.

"Hi Blaine, we miss you!" Rachel yelled in the background.

"Rachel says hi," Kurt told him, then continued chattering about his internship, all thought of Blaine's run for president forgotten.

He stayed on with Kurt until his mother came in again to tell him it was time to shut down, but Blaine's heart had already shattered into a million little pieces without Kurt even noticing. He could blame the poor quality of the Skype session or the distance, but if he was honest with himself, Kurt just didn't take the time to even notice him. Blaine wondered if it had always been that way. Had he been fooling himself all along and just never noticed? Or was New York changing Kurt? Was the city of dreams just going to tear them apart?

"If I was there I would totally kick your ass for beating my girl, Blaine," Santana growled, but then broke out into a grin. "But since I'm not there, I'll just say congratulations, Mr. President."

Blaine could help the smile of relief that broke out on his face. "Thanks Santana, that means...well, it means the world to me."

He was sitting at his desk at home, homework sprawled out in front of him, when Santana had unexpectedly called him. She'd gotten the news from Brittany and had Skyped him as soon as she found another break in her day.

"What did Kurt say? Is he being all "everything I can do you can do better" jealous or is he happy for you?"

Blaine's eyes lowered and his smile faltered. "I don't know," he admitted. "He hasn't returned my calls yet."

Santana sighed, her heart breaking for Blaine, for Brittany, for all of them going through the pain of growing up and growing apart.

"It's hard," she said quietly, almost in confession. "You know exactly where his place is in your life, at McKinley, at home. But everything he does is new. There aren't the memories of you being there. He has to figure out where your place is in all that."

"You speak from experience?" Blaine asked as his heart fell to the floor.

"It isn't any easier on our end of things," Santana told him. "It's just different."

Blaine looked away. "Different as in bigger," he said bitterly. His jealousy from earlier rearing its ugly head again. "His own apartment, an internship at the biggest online magazine with one of the biggest fashion moguls in the biggest city in the world." The tears he'd fought all week suddenly fell and more than anything he wished he could jump through the screen into Santana's arms. "And I'm just little old me, small town boy dressing in Kitty Robin costumes, rolling twenty sided dice in a wizard costume pathetically battling for a senior class presidential spot that none of the student body even really cares about. It's not a surprise I can't compete with any of Kurt's brand new world."

Santana watched him, wishing she could both hug and smack him at the same time. It would be the most significant fight of their lives to stay together. She didn't think any of them had realized it before. But one

thing she knew about Blaine was that he was a fighter. "God, Blaine, stop your sniveling and *do* something. He wanted you to come visit every weekend, so go! Go and show him where your place is in his world. Kiss him in Battery Park, walk him to his internship, visit every coffee shop, sing your heart out to him, and for the love of all that is holy, fuck him in his bed so that's all he can remember every time he goes to sleep at night. The distance that matters is in your hearts, not in miles and he's keeping his distance to protect himself, just like you did last year. Don't let him. You want him Anderson, you fight for him. Don't let the best thing that's ever happened to you slip away."

Blaine wanted so much to believe in her, to do everything that she said. But there was something in his heart that had broken as call after call went to voicemail. He'd asked the question before and it haunted him again now. How many times did he have to forgive? How many times would he have to fight for love? When would someone finally fight for him?

Would anyone ever think he was worth it?

## ***Chapter Four: The Break Up***

Santana hung up with Blaine, congratulating him one last time on his Presidential win before she left, and gazed around her dorm room. Her roommate was out and the pictures of Brittany smiled back at her. She missed her. It wasn't just the sex, which had been fun since long before they were officially a couple. It was her smell, her touch, her laugh. It was the air of innocence and openness that surrounded her, something she had yet to find in anyone she'd met so far in Louisville.

Her heart began to ache, the words she'd just said to Blaine ringing in her head. *"It isn't any easier on our end of things,"* Santana had told him. *"It's just different."* And different meant forgetting Brittany sometimes. She sighed as she grabbed her books and headed out to the library. She had a couple of hours before cheerleading practice began and as much as she hated the class, her sociology work called to her.

Inside it was dim and she switched on the light at a table by the windows as she spread out her books. It was hard to concentrate, the words she highlighted stared back at her with no meaning. Behind her she felt someone's gaze on her and she turned to see a red headed girl in a black hat watching her from a bright red armchair. The girl's stare lingered and Santana's heart beat a little quicker. She was used to guys checking her out everywhere and could easily ignore it, but there had been far fewer girls and this one most definitely caught her eye. The girl's lips turned up in hint of a smile, and despite herself, Santana smiled back.

Guilt immediately washed over her, though she'd done nothing wrong, and she turned back to her studying. But the feelings, both good and bad, stayed with her through cheerleading practice and as she changed her clothes for bed that evening. She tossed her uniform in the laundry, realizing with a smile how full it was. After tomorrow, she had a few days off.

She couldn't wait to go home again.

Blaine missed Kurt so desperately it hurt. He was so lost and alone and was falling fast into the darkness with no one to catch him, and that terrified him. He didn't know what he might do.

Every time his phone rang and Kurt's name flashed on the screen his heart pounded with delight and anticipation. But the calls were growing further and further apart, more and more harried, and less and

less about him and about them. In the excitement of his new life, Kurt couldn't be bothered with him. He worked upwards of 15 hours a day and there were no moments to breathe at Vogue. But Blaine couldn't breathe either.

The kids at school moved around him as always and he talked and laughed, joining in with that old smile but it never reached his eyes, his heart no longer there. Brittany, Sam, Artie and Tina all seemed like fragments of an old world he'd left behind but could not escape. He hadn't felt so trapped since before transferring to Dalton.

He missed Kurt's touch, his lips, his skin on his. He missed the way Kurt could talk him down from the edge, the edge that he was now so close to falling off.

But Kurt wasn't there to pull him off, not in person or on the phone. It was like Kurt didn't see him anymore and Blaine knew he was losing him. He knew the anger and resentment building inside him were defenses to prevent the pieces of his breaking heart from shattering like glass. When he sang in the auditorium he saw Kurt watching him, but it was the Kurt of his past. So much had changed since then. They weren't those kids anymore.

Everyone who meant anything to Blaine was on the other end of a phone or a computer and with the exception of Santana, he always had to reach out for them. He shouldn't have to ask for Kurt to love him. He was so tired of having to ask for someone to love him. He just wanted someone to want him.

That was the thing about Eli. It was easy. He closed his eyes and he could almost imagine it was Kurt. And after trying so hard and chasing for so long, being wanted, being listened to, and being close to someone again felt nice.

Until it didn't.

Run. That's what he always did. He thought it would feel better to run toward someone, but not when he knew what he'd left behind him in his wake.

The moment he saw Kurt and felt soft lips on his, Blaine tried to forget what he'd done. It would be so easy to never tell him, the chances of Kurt finding out were slim. He'd been surprised to see Finn at the apartment, but Kurt explained what Finn was doing there. Suddenly his father's phone call of a few days

ago made sense. Hhe had apparently walked in to the three of them going out to a Karaoke bar and for an instant as they finished dressing and walked out into the crisp New York air, everything seemed right with the world. The gnawing in his heart remained, but his hand clasped Kurt's, terrified to let go, wondering if each touch would be the last, struggling to believe that it could even be possible.

They walked through Battery Park to get to the club. Blaine had expected their reunion to be a flood of words and kisses but they walked in relative silence, their voices hushed when they did speak. Everything Blaine said felt like a lie. Kurt's adorable laughter was like an arrow in his heart, reminding him of everything he'd betrayed. If he told Kurt what he'd done, he'd steal that laughter from him and Blaine wondered if Kurt would ever get it back. How much else would he have stolen from Kurt. The gravity of what he'd done was fully hitting him. In a split second, he'd changed them both forever and Kurt didn't even know it yet.

They sat at Callbacks and Blaine was introduced to Rachel's friend Brody. He watched as they sang together, so much more grown up than when he and Rachel had done the same so long ago on a drunken night in her basement. Listening to the words of their song, his life with Kurt flashed before his eyes.

*The day I first met you*

*You told me you'd never fall in love*

*But now that I get you*

*I know fear is what it really was*

He'd been so scared to love Kurt. So scared to lose the boy that was turning into his best friend. So scared he'd make a mistake, turn into his father, or be the disappointment his father thought he would be. Blaine had held himself and others to such a high standard for years. He believed in courage and honesty and loyalty and he now he had failed himself and Kurt in every way.

*I know you're scared it's wrong*

*Like you might make a mistake*

He remembered how betrayed Kurt had felt that night when Blaine had kissed Rachel. He and Kurt weren't even dating yet, but it still hurt him. This time what he'd done could destroy him.

*I called your cell phone, my love*

*But you did not reply*

All he'd needed was an answer, but over and over again his calls to Kurt were rejected, so quickly forgotten in the thrill of New York City. He looked over at Kurt, still completely oblivious to the anguish and loneliness in Blaine's heart. Kurt smiled watching Rachel, glancing over briefly to Blaine, so happy to have his boyfriend back in town. Blaine tried to smile back through his unshed tears, but the room was suddenly suffocating.

*There's no turning back now*

*Baby, try to understand*

As they clapped for Rachel, the words sang over and over again in his head. Turn back. Turn back. There was only one way to do that.

"I want to sing something," he said suddenly.

He sat at the piano, his fingers brushing the keys. Black and White. It was so simple and perfect until you hit one wrong sharp or flat and then the entire melody was ruined.

Uncharacteristically nervous, he addressed the crowd as he spoke only for Kurt. "Um, hi everyone. I, um, wanna sing a song that's very special to me. This is the song I sang for the first time I ever met the love of my life. Um, so Kurt, this is for you."

*Before you met me I was alright*

*But things were kinda heavy*

*You brought me to life,*

*Now every February*

*You'll be my Valentine, Valentine*

All he wanted was to go back to the start. To be carefree and young, like he and Brittany had said. To go back to the time when everyday was Valentine's Day. His heart pounded and he found it hard to sing when he could barely even breathe, but he kept his eyes trained on Kurt. Kurt. The love of his life. The boy with whom he'd planned forever. The boy that saved him. The boy that had brought him to life and taught him what love truly was.

*Let's go all the way tonight*

*No regrets, just love*

*We can dance until we die*

*You and I, we'll be young forever*

Forever. It was slipping away. Kurt wasn't fighting for it. Blaine tossed it aside. He would do absolutely anything to go back to the first time he'd performed this song for Kurt and just live it all over again. His voice broke as he sang, the tears began to fall from his eyes. He'd do anything to go forward and forget the past. Run away and not ever look back.

*You make me*

*Feel like I'm living a*

*Teenage dream*

*The way you turn me on*

*I can't sleep*

*Let's run away and*

*Don't ever look back*

*Don't ever look back*



Kurt's smile faded as he watched Blaine fall apart. He'd heard him sing the song a million times since the first time, through good times and bad, but this was different. Something was terribly wrong. Blaine had stopped looking at him.

*My heart stops*

*When you look at me*

*Just one touch*

*Now baby I believe*

*This is real*

*So take a chance and*

*And don't ever look back*

*Don't ever look back.*

He tried. He tried so hard to look at Kurt, focus on Kurt. But his voice cracked as the words betrayed him. His thoughts betrayed him, the memory of a hand not Kurt's squeezing his knee, working his way up skin-tight jeans to his thigh. A small smile on lips so different from Kurt's, a kiss revealing skin so much rougher. The brush of a thumb where no one but Kurt had ever touched him, a pulse beneath the touch that woke him from a nightmare and made him feel as sick as he did right now.

*I'ma get your heart racing*

*In my skin-tight jeans*

*Be your teenage dream tonight*

*Let you put your hands on me*

*In my skin-tight jeans*

*Be your teenage dream tonight*

He tried desperately to banish it from his mind and focus on Kurt, their first time, their every time. Kurt turning him on, making him feel like he mattered more than anyone else in the world. He tried to hold on to everything they had, but he was terrified that it was fading before his eyes. The song became a desperate plea for forgiveness, though Kurt didn't even know what he'd done.

*You make me*

*Feel like a teenage dream*

*The way you turn me on*

*I can't sleep*

*Let's run away and don't ever look back*

*Don't ever look back*

Kurt watched, transfixed, nervousness rising from deep within his soul. He couldn't shake the sense that somewhere the universe had shifted and everything had changed, he just didn't know why or how. Blaine's tears broke his heart and yet the distance that had grown between them didn't melt away like it should have. The song felt like a confession, but to what, Kurt wasn't sure he wanted to know.

*My heart stops*

*When you look at me*

*Just one touch*

*Now baby I believe*

*This is real*

*So take a chance and*

*And don't ever look back, No!*

Blaine's guilt overwhelmed him and his anger at himself started to grow. He saw Kurt's reaction, it was cold and knowing. Blaine lost it. He'd lost him.

*I'ma get your heart racing*

*In my skin-tight jeans*

*Be your teenage dream tonight*

*Let you put your hands on me*

*In my skin-tight jeans*

*Be your teenage dream tonight*

Blaine looked at Kurt through his tears, knowing that if he told him the truth, there would be no going back.

Kurt slipped out of bed roughly, sleep eluding him. He wasn't quiet. He wanted Blaine to wake up and follow. The fact that Blaine could even sleep angered him.

Blaine's words played over and over again in his head, each time hurting more than the last. *"I was with someone."* The pain in his chest was excruciating and he wondered if his father's heart attack had hurt more or less. He tried to remember if the agony of losing his mother had been the same, but this somehow seemed even greater. She had had no choice but to leave him. Blaine had chosen to go.

Kurt had wanted to scream, to yell, to hit him over and over again, to make him hurt the way that he was hurting, but he couldn't do that, not to Blaine. It's why he ran. It's why he couldn't speak to him. Part of him wanted to know what Blaine had done, but he knew hearing it would bring him to his breaking point. Even lost in anguish he could never strike Blaine. His instinct would always be to protect him from that. He loved him too damn much.

The hypocrisy was not lost on him. Blaine's pleas for him last year to not cheat when he'd only texted another boy meant nothing compared to Blaine hooking up with some guy. *"If you're unhappy, Kurt, talk to me, but don't cheat on me."* But then Kurt suddenly realized; Blaine had tried to talk to him, over and over and he'd been too busy to listen. It didn't excuse Blaine's behavior by a long shot. But as he thought back, he cursed every phone call he'd ignored.

He sat in the darkness all night, his phone the only light and distraction from the ever increasing speeches and questions that grew inside his head. As the sun came up the heaviness deep in his stomach threatened to come up with it as he realized that Blaine was not coming out. The emptiness that replaced it was just as awful. A rustling from the other room made his heart leap, but it dropped again when he saw it was only Finn.

"You can't just run away," Kurt said smoothly, flipping the light on. He had planned those words for Blaine, expecting him to be the one to try and run. But they worked just the same.

"Dude, you totally spooked me, I thought I was the only one awake," Finn said.

"Been waiting for someone to come out," Kurt said despondently. "I was hoping it'd be Blaine."

"You guys okay?" Finn asked. Kurt though couldn't be further from okay. The words had been on the tip of his tongue all night. He sighed as he finally breathed them aloud.

"I kinda feel like I'm gonna die."

There was only one thing Blaine was certain of as he flew back to Ohio. He hated himself more than Kurt ever could.

He stepped off the plane, his carryon slung to his back as he tried to block out the incessant noise and mass of people surrounding him. If he thought he couldn't breathe before, it had been nothing compared to how he felt right now.

He knew Kurt had gotten out of bed in the middle of the night. Neither of them had slept at all. He waited for the crying, the screaming, the punishment, but it never came. Then he waited for Kurt to roll over and hold him close and tell him that it would take time to forgive him but that everything would be alright,

that he was never going to let Blaine go. That they were forever. But instead, Kurt got up and walked out and no matter how much Blaine wanted to he could not force his body to follow. Maybe it would be better for them both to just let go. Kurt deserved so much better.

He must have fallen asleep at some point because when he woke, the apartment was empty. Finn's bags were gone and there was no sign of Rachel or Kurt. There was no note, just a coffee mug left on the counter by the sink. Blaine traced the rim, where Kurt's lips had touched, and broke down sobbing.

The pain in his chest didn't disappear on the flight, it only grew into self-hatred as they flew further and further away from Kurt. Blaine left him behind, broken and lost and alone, exactly the way Kurt had left him only 10,000 times worse. He rode home in silence, every song too much of a memory. Everything was too much of a memory. He passed the exits for the jazz club and the field of lilacs they'd made love in on one beautiful day that felt so very long ago. He passed the stores they'd shopped in, the restaurants they'd dined at. He passed the parks they'd gone for walks in and he knew he couldn't do this.

Pulling into the driveway of his mother's apartment complex, he left his bag in the car and walked up the stairs, pain turned suddenly to determination. He opened the door and ignored his mother in the kitchen as he stormed into his bedroom, her question, "How was the trip?" barely reaching his ears.

He went to his closet and pulled out a suitcase, dropping it heavily onto his bed and opening the lid. He didn't see his mother watch him as he blindly went through his drawers and his closet, throwing clothes haphazardly inside the cases.

"Blaine, what are you doing?" she demanded.

"I'm going to live with Dad," he answered flatly, never looking at her. He kept his mind focused on the task at hand. Pack. Don't look at the bed. Don't look at the memories. Don't look at Mom. Just run.

But his mother wouldn't let him. She grabbed his shoulders and forced him to stop and look at her. He tried to avoid her gaze but she grabbed his chin and forced his face up. It was streaked with tears and his eyes were rimmed red, emanating a crushing despair and anger that she hadn't seen since they'd left Westerville. Blaine tried so hard not to cry. Her heart broke for him and he didn't deserve it.

"What happened, Baby?" she asked gently as she took him protectively in her arms. "Did Kurt hurt you? Did he do something?"

That stopped the tears and he jerked away from her, angrily. "No. I did," he said, and he went back to the bed, closed the suitcase and grabbed it to go.

"Blaine, talk to me, tell me what's going on," Mrs. Anderson yelled as he reached the door to his room. "You can't just go to your fathers'!"

"I can't stay here!" Blaine screamed. "Do you see that chair? That's where Kurt held my hand while I recovered from surgery. That bed? That's where we made love for the first time. That desk is where we'd sit and do homework or watch silly YouTube videos." Each memory he recalled made his heart break more and more. "We used to fill this room with music and dance and laughter and I can't sleep here every night, knowing that I've lost that and I've lost him and I've maybe destroyed it forever. I can't be here!"

His mother stared at him in shock. "So you're just going to run to the man that you've been telling me for a year isn't safe for you? You're going to run back to him and I'm supposed to sit alone in this apartment?" she asked incredulous. He'd fought her every step of the way as she tried to hold on to the Colonel and now Blaine was just going to go back himself? "And what if he hurts you Blaine?"

Blaine laughed, a cold, empty, guttural laugh that terrified his mother, and his eyes flamed. "I hope he does. I deserve it."

"Your prodigal son returns." Blaine seethed with self-loathing as he dropped the bags on the hardwood floor at his father's feet.

"Blaine, I don't know what you think you're doing." Colonel Anderson stood with his hands on his hips, his face harsh, but confused. "You run off to New York without so much as a request for permission..."

"I'm 18 years old, Dad, I don't need permission," Blaine snapped.

"You are still in high school, Blaine Anderson," he reprimanded, "and no matter whose roof you choose to live under, we still pay your way and we deserve the respect of at least being told you're leaving before you land in another state."

Blaine closed his eyes, shaking his head. "Respect," he scoffed. "None of us deserve respect."

The Colonel pulled every new tool from his belt to keep himself calm. "I don't know what happened in New York to make you think that walking out on your mother is this right thing to do, but whatever you think you did..." But he didn't get to finish as Blaine's eyes snapped to his.

"I cheated on him Dad! Is that what you want to hear? You were right all those years ago," he snarled as his heart raced and the pain in the pit of his stomach grew stuck in his throat. "All a good looking gay boy like me does is fuck around, looking for a cheap thrill. It's all I'm fucking good for, just like you always said. Well, did I for once live up to your expectations, Dad?"

"Blaine, I know you're upset, but that language is not acceptable in this home. Take it down a notch and we can talk about this," the Colonel warned.

Blaine stared at him with an icy glare and a thin sneer. His adrenaline pumped through his veins, every speck of self-hatred flying back on the man who made him who he was today. "Fuck your language and your rules!" he seethed. "You hated that I was gay and wouldn't grow up to be just like you? Well, congratulations, Dad, I fucking did anyway! Only I don't even have to be in the same goddamn room to hurt the person I love. No, from hundreds of miles away I can batter and bruise Kurt better than you ever could in the same room as Mom!"

The Colonel reached a hand out to Blaine, and Blaine struck out without thought. Despite his years of boxing though, his father's military training gave him the upper hand in defense and he caught Blaine's arm. "For god's sake, Blaine, stop," the Colonel yelled.

But Blaine didn't hear and he didn't hesitate, his mind lost in an abyss of rage, hatred, hurt and loss, flashbacks sparking in his brain as his father's grip hit his skin. He struggled toward the Colonel, waiting, wanting the blow that never came and it was taking too long. He reached down and ripped off his belt, slapping it in his hand against his father's chest. "Here!" he urged. "Use it!"

Amber eyes that he always thought too soft stared up at the Colonel hard as gemstone. Blaine's hand gripped the belt so strongly his fingers were turning white. The Colonel stared at the son he had raised. How had they ended up here?

The Colonel pried the belt from Blaine's grip and tossed it like poison to the floor. "You are *not* just like me, son," he said, softly but firm, trying desperately to reach his son. "You're a better man, Blaine, than I will ever be."

Blaine heard the words as if listening from under water, but they reverberated in his ear until the truth and the meaning of them had penetrated all the defenses he had raised and crumbled them to the ground. He didn't realize that he himself had fallen, his father guiding him safely to the floor, as gut-wrenching sobs exploded from the very depths of his soul. He only barely knew that he lay safe in his father's arms as the pain of the last few hours, days, weeks, even months, were torn from his body unwillingly but not unwanted. He let everything go until nothing else remained and his father's rocking lulled him into a deep sleep.

The call had shocked her in so many ways that Santana didn't hesitate to kiss Brittany goodbye that afternoon and drive the two hours to Westerville. The Colonel let her in with the ghost of a smile, exhaustion marking his features. "He's still sleeping. I carried him to his room hours ago."

Santana looked at him, worn, disheveled, so unlike the formidable man she'd seen throughout the summer. She didn't want to ask, but she had to. "Did you hit him?"

"No," he answered quickly, then looked away ashamed. "I know now I never will again."

Santana offered a muted smile but nothing more as she headed up the stairs.

She quietly opened the door to Blaine's room, so devoid of any reflection of himself. There were no pictures on the walls, no photos of the people he loved. She knew that was why he had come back here. Memories were never Blaine's friend. She watched him for a moment in his bed. He looked so small and pitiful, lying curled up beneath the blankets. But from all the Colonel had told her on the phone, the last thing Blaine needed was pity.

"Rise and shine, sleepyhead," she yelled unceremoniously as she pulled the covers off of him. He moaned and tried to grab them back but she was too quick and playfully smacked his thigh as he grabbed his pillow and pulled it over his head. "Wake up, Boyfriend!"

He froze and she heard a soft growl from under the pillow. "Don't call me that."

Broken. That was the only description for how he sounded and it both saddened her and made her angry. "Blaine," she called him, unforgiving.



He pushed the pillow away to watch her with one eye. Her arms were folded, her hip jutted and she looked pissed. He sighed as he threw the pillow aside and sat up against the headboard, his knees pulled to his chest. He rested his arms on top of his knees and stared up at the ceiling. Looking at her was too hard.

"What the hell were you thinking?" Santana snapped.

He didn't know how she knew, he only knew that she did and he was grateful he didn't have to be the one to tell her.

"I don't know," he said quietly, his voice gruff from crying, his eyes trained on the ceiling. He didn't know why he did it, but he knew why he told. "I needed to know. I needed to see if he would fight for me. I needed to see if I would just spend my whole life forgiving everyone else or if anybody would ever think I was worth forgiving too." He bit his lip to keep the tears from falling again. He didn't even know how there were any left, but he supposed that there would always be tears for Kurt. He looked at her as they fell. "I miss him already, San."

Santana sighed and sat next to him on the bed, holding her arms out. He fell forward and buried himself in her warmth and her scent and her love.

"I didn't mean to 'Tana, I swear I didn't," he confessed as he cried. "Kurt never answered his calls and when we did talk it was never about me or about us, it was always just New York and...He was there and I was so lonely..."

"Shhh..." she urged as she rubbed his back.

"I never ever meant for this to happen," he sobbed. "I never dreamed I would ever..."

"Blaine stop," Santana ordered and she forced him to sit up and look at her. Her face softened at the complete despair in his eyes. She cupped his cheeks and wiped away his tears. "Sweetie, you can't undo what you did. Did you tell Kurt what you told me?"

Blaine shook his head. "I tried, but he won't talk to me. I'm sure it's killing him." He looked up at her, eyes pleading. "I just wanted him to fight for me and now I don't even care how I get him back, all that matters is that I do. Tell me how to fix this?"

Her mind flashed to the girl in the library, the quickening of her heart, the shy smile. So easy to cross the line, but looking at Blaine now, she knew that she could never do that to Brittany. She couldn't even risk it, because even if there was going forward from it, there was no going back. She'd cheated before, because it had never mattered. But imagining her beloved Brittany going through this was more than she could bear.

"Seeing him in so much pain and knowing that not only couldn't I fix it but that I had caused it?" Blaine pulled his knees into himself and the color drained from his face. "It was the worst feeling in the world, Tana. His face when I told him, it haunts me. And all I could think of was that I had turned into the very person that I hated. If he had yelled at me, or hit me..." he trailed off, not being able to put his thoughts into words. "But punishing me with silence will kill me Santana. How do I go on after knowing I betrayed the love of my life? How do I live with myself? "

"You just do, Blaine," she told him. "You screwed up here. He's not innocent, not by a long shot, but you closed the door. You have to wait for him to open it again."

Blaine looked at her hopefully. "Do you think he will?"

She sighed. Kurt could be stubborn and selfish and get lost in his own world. But the change in him she'd seen since being with Blaine made him both stronger and weaker than before. She wanted to give Blaine hope, but she honestly had no idea what Kurt would do. She shrugged. "If he loves you half as much as I do, he'd be a fool to let you go."

She kissed his cheek and laid down with him for a while before returning to Brittany. She felt his pulse return to normal, saw the color come back into his cheeks. Her own heart though, ached for him, and for herself.

She had to make sure that she and Brittany never went through this. She knew now exactly what she needed to do.

Blaine woke up late. He'd slept through his alarm, and the first thing he realized when he woke was that his father hadn't roused him, even though it was a school day. That thought alone confused him, but then the memories returned and the crushing despair hit him again. This was the start of life truly without Kurt. It hurt a thousand times worse than what he'd imagined the year before.

By the time he drove to Lima, school had already begun. No one noticed him. No one seemed to care. The pictures in his locker haunted him, but he couldn't take them down. Not yet. Not until he knew for sure that it was over.

He powered through the halls, memories chasing him from every side. He couldn't even look at the auditorium. His loneliness before didn't compare as the other kids walked soundlessly next to him. He saw their lips move but he heard nothing. It was as if he was walking in his sleep.

Rushing into the once sanctuary of the choir room for the first time was hard, but seeing Finn sitting there alone startled him from his haze. Finn knew. Did he hate him? Would he even talk to him? Blaine didn't know whether to run away from him or toward him, so he stopped in the middle of the room.

"Hey," Finn said, more welcoming than Blaine would have expected.

"Um, by the time I got up you were already gone," Blaine explained. "I didn't get a chance to say goodbye."

"Why'd you do that to him?" Finn asked with an ache for his brother.

"I don't know, I just..." There were so many reasons, yet in the end he'd come to realize that none of them made sense. At least they wouldn't to Finn. "There's no excuse, he won't talk to me. I don't even know if we're broken up." But maybe Finn knew. Finn must have talked to Kurt. Maybe Finn could tell him what Kurt was thinking?

He was about to ask, when he was interrupted by Sam and Finn jumped over to give him a big hug. Blaine just turned, ignored once again, and went to sit. Everyone filed in, but no one approached him. No one noticed when they handed out ideas for the musical that he was uncharacteristically silent. No one noticed that his heart was shattered. As soon as Santana went back to Louisville, he'd have no one. He couldn't even go back to Burt anymore.

The fact that Finn would speak to him though was still a sign of hope and he rushed after school to the florist he'd been to before. He found the perfect card and wrote the first words that came to mind.

*Kurt, I'm so sorry*

*Please forgive me*

*xo xo xo Blaine*

He ordered a dozen red roses and a dozen yellow to be sent to Kurt at Vogue. At his apartment Kurt or Rachel might just reject them, but at the office they'd be certain to be delivered. Blaine imagined it wouldn't be enough. He imagined that he'd have to try again and again to get Kurt to open that door, but he'd do whatever it took to get back the love of his life and his best friend.

## ***Chapter Five: The Role You Were Born to Play***

He waited. He called. He texted. He sent present after present, but still Kurt wouldn't talk to him. Blaine didn't really blame him. This was his fault. He'd closed the door as Santana had said, and he'd just have to wait until Kurt was ready to open it again.

Or learn to live with it closed forever.

He wasn't sure he knew how to do that. Kurt was his soul mate. They'd planned a life together...like *When Harry Met Sally* and *The Notebook*. This was never the way things should have gone with them. But now here they were.

He sat on the floor of his room, flipping through the pages of the Grease score and some of his other audition music. He hadn't sung much since they'd broken up. He didn't really feel like singing at all. But one song said everything he felt.

Blaine walked through school in a daze. He heard little of what his teachers said. He never raised his hand, not even in Glee club. He was so lost in his own head, he felt the constant desire to just curl up into a ball on the floor and cry. He went to his locker to grab his history text for his next class, but instead his hand landed on Kurt's scrapbook. He tried to resist taking it out, he'd been ignoring it since they broke up, but his fingers had a mind of their own and pulled it out. He closed his locker, forgetting his history book and walked absentmindedly to the choir room, forgetting his history class.

Even the bell ringing didn't wake him from the dream he was in as he folded his legs under himself and slowly flipped page by page through the book. Memories flooded him, memories he'd been trying to escape. He flipped to his favorite page of Kurt in his tuxedo and bowtie, tears threatening to fall. He turned the page and traced his fingers down the photo. He looked at Kurt's lips on the next page. Lips he might never kiss again. He squeezed his eyes shut and closed the book.

"Santana says to man up and put the scrapbook away." Blaine's lost eyes raised to meet Brittany's as she bounced into the choir room and sat beside him.

"What?"

His phone vibrated next to him and he reached for it as quickly as a snake going in for the kill. Someday, Kurt would answer him.

But it wouldn't be today.

**Santana: Man up and put the scrapbook away!**

Brittany raised a brow at him and smirked. "See," she said and swiped the book from his hands.

"Nobody understands," Blaine whined as his head fell in his hands. "The new kids don't even know Kurt, how could they possibly understand the depth of my despair. And Sam, he's sweet, I know he tries, but he's never had a soul mate. He thinks it's as easy as getting over Quinn or Mercedes."

"I understand," Brittany said quietly. "I remember how much it hurt when Artie and I broke up and I know how much I miss Santana now. I can imagine how it would feel if either one of them weren't in my life anymore. But Kurt will come back, I promise."

"I don't think so, Britt," he cried. "I think I really screwed this up and I think it's forever."

She pried his hands from his head and took them in her own, forcing him to look at her. "He's your soul mate, Blaine. In the end, nothing can keep you apart." She smiled softly and patted him on the knee. "And lucky for you, the end of the world is almost here, so you shouldn't have to wait long."

Blaine couldn't help but chuckle. He shook his head and kissed her on the cheek. "Thanks Britt," he said.

"You're welcome," she said with a smile. "Now I'm going back to class. I suggest you do too."

Blaine took a breath. "I think I'm just going to sit here for a while."

She stood up and gathered her things. "Don't you bail on me Blaine Warbler. I'm picking you up at your locker at the end of the day for your audition. Sam's orders."

"You two have been spending a lot of time together," he said in veiled question.

Brittany shrugged. "Like you said, he's sweet." She headed out the door but stopped and turned at the threshold. "No one should be alone, Blaine," she said before disappearing.

Blaine picked up the scrapbook and opened to where he left off, staring mournfully at Kurt's pictures. Brittany was right. No one should be alone. But Blaine felt in his heart that he deserved it.

"Hey, Dude," Finn called, jogging up to Blaine, moments before he was supposed to meet Brittany. He'd just pulled his sheet music out and was staring at it, second guessing his audition. He glanced up and blinked at Finn's voice. "Saw you signed up to audition." Blaine's stomach tightened. It wasn't easy having Finn around all the time. They still hadn't gotten another chance to talk since that day in the choir room and Blaine's guilt flooded him in Finn's presence. He wanted things to be okay between them, but he knew that loyalties would prevent it and he didn't blame him. Kurt was his brother and of course he should be on Kurt's side. He wondered though if Finn would even want him in his show.

"Oh," Blaine tilted his head shyly. "Well, Sam signed me up. I'm still not sure."

"We need you Blaine," Finn said, a little uncomfortable but earnest. "I hope you'll come."

"Oh he will," Brittany said, bounding up behind them as she linked her arm around Blaine's. Blaine smiled weakly at them both as she led him away.

"I don't know if I can do this, Britt," he complained. He felt sick to his stomach. There was everything wrong about him just going on as if things were normal. Sam hadn't understood him, but he didn't understand how everyone was just going on as if the world hadn't shifted on its axis.

"You can and you will. Santana will kill you if you don't go out there. Besides," she said, with an eye to his sheet music. "I think you have something you need to say. And the Blaine Warbler I know always says it better in song."

He said nothing, his heart pounding in his throat. Brittany waited with him until his name was called and she shoved him out onto the stage when he refused to move. Finally, he awoke a bit to the world around him and walked out on stage to the microphone.

"Hello. My name is Blaine Anderson . And I'll be singing *Hopelessly Devoted to You*."

The music started and from the wings, Brittany aimed her phone and pressed record.

*Guess mine is not the first heart broken,*

*my eyes are not the first to cry I'm not the first to know,*

*there's just no gettin' over you*

Blaine's heart settled, a bit, though he had to fight back the tears. Sam may think that everybody had been there, but no one understood what it truly meant for him. He might think that Blaine would just get over it, but he wouldn't. He couldn't. And he didn't want to.

*I know I'm just a fool who's willing to sit around*

*and wait for you*

*But baby can't you see, there's nothin' else*

*for me to do I'm hopelessly devoted to you*

Finn watched Blaine. He understood. Blaine and Kurt hadn't ended like he and Rachel had. Besides, he knew what it was like to be cheated on and to cheat. He supposed that Blaine thought he'd be on Kurt's side, and he certainly was. But he didn't hold a grudge. He just wanted his brother to be happy. That was all that matter. And all he knew right now was that Kurt was not happy.

*But now there's nowhere to hide,*

*since you pushed my love aside I'm out of my head,*

*hopelessly devoted to you*

*Hopelessly devoted to you,*

*hopelessly devoted to you*

Brittany frowned at how pathetic Blaine was. She needed to call Santana. This needed intervention. Santana would tell her to leave it be, let them work it out, but she wasn't Santana's girlfriend anymore and



she didn't answer to her. She didn't know what she intended to do yet, but one way or another, she'd figure this out. Blaine couldn't go on like this, and she was certain that Kurt couldn't either.

*My head is saying "fool, forget him",*

*my heart is saying "don't let go"*

*Hold on to the end, that's what I intend to do*

*I'm hopelessly devoted to you*

Blaine would do whatever it took to get him back. He couldn't listen to his head if he tried. Kurt meant everything to him. Kurt had saved him, had brought him back from the brink too many times to count. Kurt had loved him and held him when no one else would. Blaine would fight for his friendship and for his love for the rest of his life.

*But now there's nowhere to hide,*

*since you pushed my love aside I'm not in my head,*

*hopelessly devoted to you*

*Hopelessly devoted to you,*

*hopelessly devoted to you*

Brittany quickly saved the video and emailed it to herself at home. There was no way she was going to lose this. She looked up to see Blaine's face screwed up in tears as he raced off the stage.

"Blaine wait," she said grabbing his hand. Tears streamed down his face, unable to control his sobs. "Come on," she sighed. "I'll take you out."

Blaine shook his head violently. "I'm sorry, Britt, I can't."

She watched as he ran off and out of the building. Yes, she'd definitely have to do something.

"His audition was amazing Kurt, but he's a mess," Finn said into the phone as he drove back to the Tire Shop.

"Finn, you promised you wouldn't..." Kurt begged. He tried to stay focused on the insane amounts of work that sat on the computer in front of him, but he knew immediately that thanks to Finn, the rest of his day would now be a wash.

"He sang *Hopeless Devoted to You*, Kurt. He sang it to you," Finn insisted.

"I can't do this with you, Finn" Kurt barked. "I'm glad you're there, but you promised you wouldn't talk to me about him. I need to focus at work, I can't have my mind on him all the time. He messed up. And I need time. It's hard enough that *he* doesn't stop trying to contact me, but I can't take you too. How would you like it if I was giving you constant updates about Rachel?"

Finn sighed. "You're right. I'm sorry. So how's Vogue?" he asked changing the subject.

"Vogue is fine," he answered tersely. "How's Dad?"

"Your Dad's fine," Finn said. "They've been out campaigning a lot with the election so tight in Ohio, so I pretty much have the house to myself most of the time."

Kurt heard someone calling for him across the cubicles and Finn motioned that he'd be right there. "I have to go Finn. Take care of yourself," Kurt told him.

"You too, Kurt," Finn said, meaning every word. He didn't think Kurt was doing any better than Blaine.

Sebastian was futzing around on Facebook avoiding his homework when suddenly his jaw dropped. He wasn't sure why it had taken him so long to put two and two together. It wasn't like it had been the first time he'd trolled the McKinley kids pages in weeks, he monitored Blaine's goings on r. But the sudden realization hit him like a ton of bricks. He picked up his phone and spread the news like wildfire through the Dalton dormitories.

Nick was in the middle of writing a ten page paper on the role of friendship in Ralph Waldo Emerson's works when his phone beeped. He reached over, leaving it on the table, and slid the lock. Reading the text, he was glad he hadn't picked up the phone since he probably would have dropped it from shock.

**Jeff: CODE RED - Blaine and Kurt broke up.**

He heard the footsteps of young men racing down the hallway and Jeff and Trent burst into the room without knocking, slamming the door behind them.

"Nick, we have to do something," Jeff squeaked out of breath.

"It can't actually be true," Trent said, shaking his head.

But Nick was already dialing. He thought about how long it had been since he'd spoken to Blaine. A couple of weeks at least. Guilt washed over him. He knew how much Blaine missed Kurt, but he had no idea what could have possibly happened to cause them to break up. He'd been so caught up in the start of a new school year and preparing for Sectionals, that the time just slipped away from him. As the phone rang and rang, Nick nearly thought Blaine wouldn't answer, but finally he picked up.

"Hey Nick." Blaine sounded more despondent than Nick had ever heard him. It was true. He looked to his friends and frowned.

"Hey buddy, Jeff and Trent and I were thinking of heading out tonight, catching a movie or going to Karaoke. We'd love for you to join!" he said with forced enthusiasm. He bit his lip in anticipation of Blaine's response.

"Oh," Blaine said lowly, his voice a whine that was unfamiliar to the Warbler. "Thanks Nick, but I'm not really much in the mood to go out tonight. I'm afraid I would be really poor company."

Nick quickly changed his tone. "Blaine," he said seriously. "We're here for you. Always. Don't shut us out."

"I know guys, I appreciate that," Blaine answered miserably. "I'm just not up for it. Thanks though. I gotta go." He hung up before Nick could even respond.

Nick turned to Trent and Jeff, his head spinning with worry and ideas. But before he could speak, all three of their phones went off. They looked down to see a text from one of the new leaders of the Warblers.

**Hunter: Warbler Practice Room. 5 minutes. MANDATORY.**

Nick's eyes fell on his paper, left half unfinished on his computer screen. One line jumped out at him. "The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, not the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when you discover that someone else believes in you and is willing to trust you with a friendship." It was one of his favorite quotes, one of the reasons he loved Emerson so much. The value of friendship was something incredibly important to Nick. And he'd screwed up royally.

"Where did your information come from Jeff?" Nick asked quickly.

"Sebastian," Jeff whispered.

The news of Blaine's break up would only mean one thing to some of the more competitive members of the Warblers. Time to get him back. The boys looked at each other and swallowed nervously. There was no way that anything good could come of this.

Blaine unlocked the door to the house and went in with a relieved sigh, closing it behind him. It was only six o'clock, but he was ready to go upstairs to bed, curl up with Margaret Thatcher dog and drown himself underneath the warmth of his blankets, even if sleep would remain elusive. He didn't feel like forcing himself to eat another meal, he was ready to just disappear.

Instead he bumped into two full suitcases on the floor and looked up to see his father standing against the couch, his arms crossed. He stared at the luggage, unable to figure out why on earth they were there. "What's this?" Blaine asked, his eyes narrowing.

"They're your bags," the Colonel answered matter-of-factly.

"I see they are my bags," Blaine snapped crossly, "what are they doing here?"

"You need to go back home," he answered. "To your mother."

Blaine looked at him incredulous. "You're kicking me out?"

"Blaine, I love that you are trusting me enough to try to make this work, but it's not working, not for you," his father said. "You're leaving the house at five in the morning to get to school on time, you drive two hours home. You have no time for school, homework, your friends. You don't want to do the school musical. You're spending too much time alone in the car. You think I don't see how red your eyes are by the time you get back? You're not eating, you never leave your room when you're here. You can't go on like this."

"What else am I supposed to do," Blaine cried.

"Go to your classes and get your homework done, for one," the Colonel said sternly. Blaine's eyes shot up. "Skipping class is not an option. I've never been okay with you doing less than your best, Blaine."

Blaine stared for a moment, as his heart raced with fear of what was coming next, but his father made no moves. His hands never flexed or fluttered. His eyes dropped to the bags at his feet and then he understood. "So this is my punishment. Making me leave." Everyone punished him by leaving him.

The Colonel's arms dropped and he walked over to Blaine, placing his hands slowly and gently on his son's arms. Blaine tensed and looked up. "No punishment this time," the Colonel told him. "But you can't keep doing this. You can stay here on weekends, but on school nights you need to be in Lima."

The tears loosed as he thought about going back to that bed and all those memories. "I can't, Dad," Blaine begged.

"You will, Blaine," he answered without hesitation. "It's where you belong."

His father's insistence fueled his anger and he pulled away from him, storming across the room. "Don't you see? I don't belong anywhere!" he yelled through his tears. "I don't belong with you or with Mom! I don't belong at McKinley or at Dalton! I don't even belong with Kurt anymore and he's the one place I've always belonged! No matter what." Blaine collapsed on the sofa.

The Colonel sighed and walked over and kneeled down in front of his son handing him a handkerchief. "There's one place you will always belong, Blaine," the Colonel said, "and that is on a stage. It took me forever to figure that out and accept it but you have always known. And if there's one thing I know about Kurt, it's that no matter what, he would never ever want you to give that up. He would want you to take care of yourself, so you can be as amazing as you are up there."

A ghost of a smile played across Blaine's face and he wiped his eyes and blew his nose. Somehow his father had known the one right thing to say.

"And there's one other thing I know, Blaine," the Colonel shared.

"What's that?" Blaine sniffled.

"I know that Kurt would never miss a chance to see you perform."

## ***Chapter Six: Glease***

Blaine returned to his mother's house and to some new kind of normal. He moved his way through the day, much like he had during his early days at Dalton, with a small smile whenever necessary, but lost in the pain of his inner world. The emptiness he felt deep in his soul was crushing, but he had a lifetime of practice looking okay.

Of course, no one was fooled. Artie and Finn were glad they didn't cast him as Danny Zuko, and not only because Ryder was doing an amazing job. Blaine had lost the spark that made him shine on stage. There were times when they could draw it out of him, and for a moment Blaine could forget that his world had fallen down around him, but staring into the seats he'd always lose it again. His father was sure that Kurt would come and the thought both terrified and exhilarated him to the point that he tried to convince himself it wasn't true.

He wasn't sure what he would do at all if Kurt came back. He had so many things he wanted to say, things he'd typed and erased a million times, never feeling right in a text. More than anything in the world, he needed Kurt to know exactly what had happened that day with Eli. But he knew Kurt. It would take a lot for him to be willing to hear. He tried not to get his hopes up. And yet as he rehearsed in the choir room at the top of the steps, the only thing that got him through was imagining that Kurt was there.

"Sweetheart, you've barely touched your eggs," Mrs. Anderson scolded, but her face was scrunched in worry. Blaine wasn't himself. He most certainly wasn't the Blaine she knew when he was dating Kurt, but he seemed even worse than before they'd left Westerville. The last time she'd seen him anything like this was following the Sadie Hawkins dance. She hadn't done anything to help him then. She didn't want to make the same mistake twice.

"I'm not hungry Mom," he said, pushing the plate away and finishing his coffee. He got up from the table and grabbed his satchel for school. "I'll see you later," he mumbled as he turned to the door.

"You have an appointment with your therapist this afternoon," his mother told him before he opened the door.

Blaine shut his eyes in frustration. "I told you I'm not going."

"Why not?" She came up behind him and turned him around to see his face. She hated seeing him like this. She'd always wanted to stop his pain, even when she hadn't known how. Once she'd had the power and failed to use it. Now she had the will, but not the power. This was the hardest thing that any parent could go through, watching their child's heart break over lost love. She wanted to make it better, but Blaine had thrown up a wall of brick and wouldn't let her in.

"I'm not talking to anyone until I can talk to Kurt. He deserves to be the first one to know. The first to understand." Blaine fought back the tears that were constantly threatening to fall. He was learning to live with the guilt and the pain until Kurt was ready to forgive him. He deserved it.

She sighed and kissed him on the forehead. "In some ways you are just like your father," she said lovingly.

He bit his lip at the comparison, but took it the way she meant it. "I've gotta go," he said, his voice caught in his throat.

"Have a good day at school Blaine," she wished him.

He choked back a sarcastic laugh as he reached for the door. He didn't remember what a good day felt like. "Yeah, thanks."

"Come on, Tina, is this really necessary?" Blaine whined. Shouts and claps and bellows from the Cheerios and Coach Sylvester in the auditorium nearly drowned him out as they stood backstage, but Tina heard him.

"Yes Blaine, it is," she barked resolutely, slapping a bag into his hands. He instinctively caught it and hugged to himself. "I bought these for you and I need to make sure they fit right, now put them on."

Blaine rolled his eyes and slunk into a corner of the costume closet to pull off his jeans and slide on the snow white slacks. He tucked in his white button down and pulled on the sweater from the bag over it. He avoided himself in the mirror, not wanting to see the lines developing on his face, the dark circles forming under his eyes from lack of sleep. He didn't want to see himself in his costume and have his heart beat quicker at the thought of the Kurt who loved him seeing him in it.



He stepped out to Tina standing guard by the door, and her stern face softened at the sight of him. "Breathtaking Blaine," she smiled as she quickly checked each measurement to make sure it didn't need any adjustments. "You're going to break every heart in the house," she mused.

Blaine swallowed against the lump in his throat. There was only one heart that mattered, and he'd already broken that one.

"Hey Tina," Finn called as he walked over. "I know you're hoping to do the fitting for some of the other guys today, but I'm holding rehearsal this afternoon at Hummel Tire and Lube, so if you could be quick with them, it would be great."

Tina scowled so only Blaine could see, but then turned to Finn with a phony smile. "Of course, Finn. Wouldn't want to interfere with the really important things. Who needs costumes anyway?"

Finn looked at her funny, not recognizing the dripping sarcasm in Tina's words. "Thanks, Tina, you're the best," he smiled and turned to Blaine. "Looks great, Teen Angel," he beamed.

"Thanks Finn," Blaine answered contritely.

It troubled Finn how sad Blaine seemed all the time, and he honestly didn't want his brother's ex to feel uncomfortable around him all the time, especially now that he was taking over Glee club. "Hey dude, I know you're not in Greased Lightning, but you're welcome to join us down at the shop if you want," he offered, then added reassuringly, "Burt's in DC, he's not going to be there."

Blaine's chest tightened and his eyes shifted with emotion. He hadn't even allowed himself to feel the pain of losing Burt yet. He was sure though that the man wouldn't want him even stepping foot in his place of business after what he'd done to Kurt. "Thanks for the invite, Finn, but...I think I'll pass this time."

Finn nodded in understanding. "Alright, well, I'll see you guys later."

Finn waved as he took off and Tina sighed, her mind already overwhelmed with having to fit four guys in thirty minutes. At least her Teen Angel was perfect. "Alright Blaine, you're all set. Hang the clothes up on the hangers with your name on them in the closet and I guess you're done for the day. At least *you* get to go home," she grumbled.

Blaine returned to the closet to change and do as he was told. Home. He didn't even know what the word meant anymore.

Santana finished up with Finn and Artie, running through the blocking and choreography as quickly as possible. Sam had told her that he and Blaine had a student council meeting and she didn't want to miss him after he got it. Thankfully, she found him at his locker as she passed by on the way to her car.

"Hey doll face," Santana called from down the hall.

Blaine turned from his locker and raised an eyebrow. "Doll face, Santana? Really?"

"Well you won't let me call you Boyfriend anymore, so..." she smiled, sidling up beside him. She took in the pictures of him and Kurt that still hung in his locker, but decided to stay silent. She hadn't taken down the photos of Brittany in her dorm room either, no matter how much it hurt, so who was she to say anything.

He noticed her gaze, and turned sulkily back to his books. "I'm not even close to a doll, Santana," Blaine said flatly.

"I don't know. You bear a striking resemblance to a Ken Doll, only shorter and with dark hair. Though right now you look more like a broken, beaten puppy but..." Blaine winced and Santana stopped and cringed. "Sorry, poor choice of words."

"Actually that's pretty much exactly how I feel," he confessed.

Santana frowned sympathetically and reached out for his hand, pulling him into an embrace. He fell lifelessly into her arms, soaking up the warmth like the sun on a summer day. It was just nice to be close to someone again. "He still won't talk to you?" she asked delicately.

"No," Blaine admitted. "It's been weeks Santana." Actually he knew exactly how many days it had been since he'd heard Kurt's voice on anything but a voicemail, but he kept it to himself. "Everyone keeps trying to tell me it will start to hurt less, but if anything it just hurts more."

She rubbed his shoulders soothingly. "Look at me, Blaine. When he first fell in love with you, he was a scared boy just needing someone to love him. Now he's a strong, confident man."

"And I'm the scared boy," Blaine muttered.

"No, Blaine, you're a strong, confident man too, you've just forgotten," she told him. Her frustration with him was growing. She knew it hurt, but he was better than this depression he was plunging into and someone needed to snap him out of it. "Since Kurt went to New York, he wouldn't really talk to you before you did what you did and he won't talk to you after. Did it ever occur to you that maybe he just needs some time alone. To figure out who he is and what he wants, and he's just been too afraid or too selfish to ask."

"Of course," he snapped, pulling away with a mix of anger and sadness. He sighed, rubbing his face in his hands. He knew his fuse was short these days and he didn't want to take it out on the one true friend he had. "I tried to tell him last year this would happen. Not the cheating, of course," he said ashamed, "but pulling away. A new life, new friends. But he refused to believe me."

"Of course he did, Blaine. Kurt Hummel can be the most annoyingly stubborn person when he doesn't want to believe something is true," Santana said. "If he can't literally stick his fingers in his ears and ignore whatever it is, he'll do it figuratively."

Blaine let out a choked laugh, but his face quickly fell again. Santana closed his locker for him and took his hand, leading him out to the parking lot. "My dad thinks he'll come to see the show," Blaine said softly. He looked up at her with hope and apprehension in his eyes. "Do you think he will?"

She smiled softly at him. She didn't want to get his hopes up. She'd heard nothing from anyone about him coming. But she knew Kurt too. "I don't think he'd miss it for anything."

He wouldn't let himself believe it was true. He convinced himself it was false hope. So when he nearly bumped into Kurt backstage, he almost thought it was a dream.

What had he been going over to do? He couldn't remember. Seeing Kurt again had robbed him of all sense, not to mention the bones in his body that kept him upright. He could barely even remember his first name, much less what song he was supposed to sing tonight or why the hell he'd been walking across the stage.

As if hit by a truck, he staggered in a daze back to Santana's dressing table and dropped into the seat next to her. "He's here," Blaine whispered.

Santana's face lit up at first and then fell as she took in Blaine's broken expression. "Didn't go so well I take it," she frowned.

"I think I'm going to be sick," he moaned. Blaine dropped his head in his arms. She rubbed his back, keeping him focused on sensations that would help the panic pass. "It was like staring at a ghost, San. A shadow. I know every inch of him. Every freckle, every scar. I know every look in his eye, but the one that glanced back at me today, I didn't recognize it." He looked up to her, eyes pleading. "What am I going to do?"

"I'll tell you what you're going to do, Gorgeous" she said strongly as she raised his chin. "You are going to go out on that stage and make him fall in love with you all over again. You're going to stand tall and proud and sing your heart out and remind him of every sexy thing he is missing."

"I don't want him to think I'm okay, that I've moved on." Worry shook his voice. "I need him to know he still means everything to me. That no one else matters and no one else ever did."

She placed her hand on Blaine's. "There's time for that after, Blaine. Now you need to take a deep breath and get ready to perform."

"I can't even remember the words," he said pitifully.

She took his face in his hands and reminded him.

*Your story's sad to tell,*

*A teenage ne'er do well,*

*Most mixed up non-delinquent on the block!*

She smiled, her eyes loving and a little mischievous, as she sang the words to him. His soul was and always would be the most beautiful mix of perfection and brokenness, and now, with no one he'd let in but her, she worried he might not come out of this stronger.

*Your future's so unclear now,*

*What's left of your career now?*

*Can't even get a trade in on your smile!*

She traced his lips and forced them up into a smile until his utter sadness broke and his lips turned up on their own, with a slight laugh. She smiled wide and kissed him quickly on the cheek. "You can do this Blaine. Go out there and break every heart in the house. And send all your energy to the one you are meant to heal."

Blaine tried to catch his eye during curtain call, but Kurt avoided him completely. He impatiently endured Artie's after show congratulations and notes, wanting nothing more than to race out so he didn't miss him. Tina would kill him, but he didn't even change from his costume. As soon as he was free he ran out to search the hallways. He finally heard Rachel and Finn's voices and followed them, catching Kurt just as he turned to leave.

"Kurt, I need to talk to you," Blaine called.

Kurt turned reluctantly and forced himself to meet Blaine's eyes. "I'm not interested," he said before walking away. He thought he could do this, he thought he needed this. But it was just too damn hard. He wasn't ready.

Blaine wouldn't let him go that easily. It had been weeks and there was no way he was giving up what could be his only chance to say everything he'd been thinking for weeks. "I never told you about what happened. The guy that I hooked up with. I need you to know every..."

But if he wanted to hear anything from Blaine, those details were the absolute last thing in the world he would have chosen. "What are you going to tell me?" he asked exasperated. "That it wasn't serious? That you only made out? That you didn't care about him?"

"I didn't care..." Blaine said in disbelief, not knowing what else to say. This wasn't at all how he'd imagined the conversation going.

"Do you really think any of that matters to me?" Kurt asked him. "Relationships are about trust. And I don't trust you anymore."

The words hit Blaine like a slap across the face. He didn't understand. He was expected to forgive over and over and over again. But for him? One mistake and it was all over? One strike and Kurt had counted him out. Just like he'd done his father and Sebastian. But others...how many others had Kurt given second chances? Finn, Rachel, even David Karofsky. What the hell made him so different?

"I was stupid to come back," Kurt continued. "Rachel was right. This isn't home anymore."

Blaine watched him go. He wanted to run after him, to make him listen, to make him hear. Make him yell and scream and cry and *face this* and tell him what on earth he had to do to *fix this*. But he knew right now it would do no good. This time, Blaine wasn't the one running away.

He really had nowhere to run from.

Kurt was right.

This wasn't home anymore.

No place was.

Blaine checked his watch as they all gathered up their belongings in the choir room after the show. 11pm. He had to be back here in fourteen hours for tomorrow's matinee and part of him felt he'd rather just sleep here. He didn't want to go back to the apartment. He didn't want to go to Westerville. Everything felt wrong and there was no place he belonged.

Until Santana grabbed his hand and pulled him out the door, nearly making him trip down the stairs. "Come on, Boyfriend, and don't tell me not to call you that because no matter what, you will always be *my* boyfriend, so you can just deal with it."

It made him smile, despite himself, and his eyes actually brightened when he saw that Santana's other hand was clasped with Brittany's. "Where are we going?" he asked.

"Where you need to go," Santana answered cryptically.

They piled into Santana's car, leaving the other two vehicles behind, and talked about the show as they drove out of town. It didn't take long before he realized that Santana was taking them to the jazz club, and though it held memories of Kurt, it was first and foremost his and Santana's place.

"Text your Mom that you're staying over my place tonight," Santana told him and he did as she ordered. He received a quick reply from his mom giving her approval with a happy face attached.

They pulled up and were escorted to their regular seats in front of the stage. They bantered with the wait staff, who had missed the teenage singers, and asked if any of them wanted a turn at the mic so they could inform the stage manager. Santana turned with an expectant glance to Blaine.

"Yeah," he said softly. "Yeah I do."

They ordered their drinks and some dessert to share and waited for the stage manager to beckon Blaine up to the stage. Blaine felt some of his tension melt as he soaked in the familiar environment, the perfect mix of darkness and soothing lighting, the dull roar of happy chatter and clinking glasses and silverware. The warm flow of music from the piano and saxophone washed over him, bringing him to the exact place he needed to be to perform. The hole in his heart remained, burned brighter by Kurt's exiting words, and though singing about it wouldn't heal him, it would at least slow the burn.

Before he knew it, the audience was clapping and he heard himself being announced by the pianist. He walked on stage and whispered to her. She welcomed the break and they traded places. Blaine pulled the microphone close.

"Hi everyone," he said. "My name is Blaine Anderson. Some of you know me and you know that the love of my life has recently moved to New York." He looked over at Santana and Brittany, where they sat smiling at him encouragingly, near to one another, but not touching. "Things haven't been easy for us. For a lot of us," he said looking to his friends. Santana and Brittany looked guardedly at one another. They were doing well considering. They would always love each other and support each other. But it was different and it was awkward. They were still finding their place in all this. "It hurts a lot when love is lost. Nothing feels like home anymore." And he feared that nothing ever would.

Blaine closed his eyes as his fingers glided along the piano keys and all he could see was Kurt walking away. He took a deep breath and sang.

*Is this home?*

*Is this what I must learn to believe in?*

*Try to find something good in this tragic place,*

*Just in case I should stay here forever*

*Held in this empty place.*

*Oh, but that won't be easy*

*I know the reason why*

*My heart's far, far away*

*Home's a lie*

Lima, Westerville, McKinley or Dalton. It didn't matter where he went or who tried to make him see that life could still go on without Kurt. None of those places were home, they were places he'd been. Places he'd lived full of people who had abused him, neglected him, hurt and ignored his pain. He hadn't even known what home truly was until Kurt found him on the staircase at Dalton and saved him on the staircase of his father's house. Now the only home he knew was wherever Kurt was. His heart was shattered in two and Kurt still held a piece. He hadn't given it back. He hadn't said goodbye. He hadn't even breathed his name. He knew that Kurt still loved him, he could see it in eyes that shone with tears and betrayal. It killed him that Kurt couldn't trust him when he knew he would never ever hurt Kurt like that again. But he'd just have to work harder and do whatever it took to get him back.

*What I'd give to return*

*To the life that I knew lately*



*But I know that I can't*

*Solve my problems going back*

Santana bit back tears as Blaine sang, the lyrics hitting her as she remembered Brittany's words to her earlier. The only time in her life that things had been simple was when she was out and open with Brittany on her arm. Them against the world. She missed it. She missed her. Even though they still talked and texted, and she could sit here right next to her and smile, she still missed everything about the two of them being together. She glanced over to Brittany who was recording Blaine on her phone. "What are you doing?" she mouthed suspiciously, but Britt just pressed a finger to her lips and ordered silence. Blaine saw the phone recording, and stared right at it.

*Is this home?*

*Am I here for a day or forever?*

*Shut away*

*From the world until who knows when*

*Oh, but then, as my life has been altered once*

*It can change again*

*Build higher walls around me*

*Change every lock and key*

*Nothing lasts, nothing holds all of me*

*My heart's far, far away*

*Home and free!*

He would come out of this. No matter how long it took, he had faith that he and Kurt would rebuild their trust, their love, and their life together. Kurt could do whatever he had to. Blaine would suffer in silence if it was what Kurt needed to believe in him again. He would let his guilt teach him the lessons Kurt thought he needed to learn and he would change and do better next time. He would give Kurt his freedom to let him fly and learn to forgive, and he'd pray that someday Kurt would realize that there was no other home than with each other.

## ***Chapter Seven: Dynamic Duets***

He woke in Santana's bed as the sun came up. She was already dressed and in the midst of packing. "I wish you didn't have to go back to Louisville," Blaine frowned, rolling over to watch her. "I wish you could stay here with me. Or in NY watching out for Kurt."

"You mean spying on Kurt," she smirked as she glanced over to him. His hair was a disheveled mess, his eyes were red from crying again last night in her arms. She wished she could stay too. Not just for him. "Morning sleepyhead," she teased.

His sat up, his hands immediately reaching for his hair and tried to flatten it down. Knowing he would fail he swung out of bed and gathered his things for a shower. He wanted to take her out to breakfast before she left. "Sounds like Tina and Mike may be getting back together," he mused casually, a bit of jealousy hidden in his voice.

"Yeah," Santana answered, throwing some winter clothing in her bag. "Good for them, I think."

"Did you and Britt talk anymore?" he asked carefully. "Do you think you guys will..."

"We did the right thing Blaine," she said, cutting him off. Just looking at Blaine she knew that. For all her talk, if she'd cheated on Brittany she would have felt exactly the same as Blaine, and she knew she didn't have the best history of faithfulness. It was something she never wanted to risk and college just held too many temptations. Besides, it was better for them both to see what else was out there before they made a mess of things. Now they were still best friends. Santana had heard whispers backstage of romance budding between Brittany and Sam, and though it hurt her heart, she was also glad Brittany wasn't alone.

"Yeah. Sometimes I wish Kurt and I had just..." He couldn't say the words. He'd been thinking it for a while though. If he and Kurt had made the break before Kurt left, they could have done this right. It would have hurt, but he wouldn't have destroyed everything.

The look of devastation that washed over his face in a matter of seconds broke her heart but also infuriated her. It had been weeks and he was slowly killing himself. Enough was enough. "You can't keep doing this to yourself Blaine, you have to move on. It's not forgetting. It doesn't even have to be forgiving. It's just living," she chastised. "You figured out how to do it before, when things were horrible with your parents, Do it again now. Here."

He knew how he did it before. The Dalton mask. He hid behind it, within it. He pushed away everything dark in his life and he showed the world only his good side. It hurt when he took it off, but when the mask was on he could almost pretend that he was happy, that things were okay. He almost forgot in those moments that he was broken and alone.

Santana took his face in her hands though his eyes remained cast down. "Use it, until you don't need it anymore." Santana tried to pour her strength into him. "What do they say, fake it 'til you make it? I promise, once you let yourself let go, it will be easier to let yourself forgive."

"And then what?" Blaine asked sadly, looking up at her.

"Then we will all finally see your beautiful smile again." Santana wrapped him safely in her arms, just hoping it was true.

She heard the banging of the gavel from inside the room. "The Secret Society of Superheroes Club is now in session..." Her phone in her hand, Brittany rolled her eyes and sighed as Artie, Becky and she waited for their entrance outside the classroom doors.

**Brittany: Please talk to Blaine, he is making us dress up like superheroes.**

**Kurt: I'm not his keeper, Britt.**

**Brittany: Don't make me take out the big guns.**

**Kurt: I don't even want to know what the big guns are.**

"Candidates come forth!" Blaine yelled and Brittany quickly tucked her phone between Artie's thigh and his chair. Artie quirked an eyebrow at her and she shrugged as they made their way into the room.

"Glad to be here Blaine," Artie announced.

Blaine's face immediately dropped. "First of all, there are no civilian identities in here, k? I'm Nightbird," he said, slapping on the character he'd created. "The Nocturnal Avenger."

Brittany tuned him out, catching Tina's eye with a quick wink. Tina whipped her phone out and typed.

"Next!"

"I'm Queen Bee and I can sting like a bitch," Becky buzzed.

"Welcome, Queen Bee. Next!"

"I'm the Human Brain," Brittany said mysteriously.

"Welcome Human Brain," Blaine hesitantly answered. His phone rang and he picked it up importantly.

"What's this? A text just came through on my night phone."

### **Asian Persuasion: Have you talked to Kurt?**

He closed his eyes. Why didn't anyone understand? This was the one place that he could forget. In costume, in a club that Kurt was never a part of, this is where he could literally put the mask on and feel like the old Blaine again. "I've already told you, Asian Persuasion, this account is only supposed to be for emergencies. And you cannot use your powers of manipulation to coax me into getting back with my ex, so stop trying" he said angrily, slamming down the phone.

Tina frowned in apology to Britt who just shrugged back. This was going to be a gradual process. It wouldn't happen overnight, it might even take until the end of the world itself. But she knew that Kurt and Blaine were soul mates and would be together in the end.

"Emergency in the choir room!"

They all raced down the hallway, Blaine's cape flowing brilliantly in the breeze, to the trophy case inside the choir room.

"Someone took your Nationals trophy and left that laptop in its place," Dottie explained.

"Who leaves a laptop?" Artie asked.

Blaine knew who it was immediately. "Someone rich. Someone who wants to send us a message." Sebastian Smythe. He had no doubt. "I got this," he said pressing play.

They all watched the Warbler on the screen, Blaine's eyes narrowing all the time. He thought his friends had learned their lesson last year. Hell, he thought that even Sebastian had learned his lesson, but here they were again, doing nothing but making trouble for his show choir.

When the video ended, every face in the room turned to Blaine. "I'm going to kill him," Blaine growled.

"Not so fast, Blaine," Artie said, trying to be a voice of reason. "We need to talk to Finn first. We don't want things getting out of hand like last year."

"Last year?" Marley asked.

Artie and Sugar told the newbies all about the slushie incidents and Blaine's history with the Warblers, while Sam and Blaine searched the laptop for more clues. Brittany was whispering with Tina when her phone buzzed with an incoming text.

#### **Kurt: What's his costume?**

Brittany smiled and showed Tina the text. The girls quietly high-fived. Tina sent Brittany the picture she'd taken of Blaine earlier then Britt sent it to Kurt. They giggled with one another on their way out to the parking lot, stopping at Tina's car when Brittany's phone buzzed again. They looked at it together and broke out laughing.

#### **Kurt: Damn.**

Nick and Jeff raced to Trent's room and banged on the door. "Come on Dude, hurry up, we're going to be late!" Jeff yelled.

The door opened, but no one came out. Nick pushed the door open to see Trent just sitting back down on his bed. "Come on Trent, Hunter expects the four of us to be down there in a few minutes to confront Blaine. Beatz has already gone. " he insisted.

"I'm not coming," Trent told them.

Nick stopped. "What do you mean you're not coming?" Nick asked, his eyes narrowing.

"Come on Trent," Jeff coaxed him. "We know you had issues with the whole slushie thing, but this isn't the same thing at all. Blaine needs us."

"I talked to Kurt last night," Trent announced. Nick and Jeff froze, exchanging looks of surprise. "I'm sorry, but I can't be a part of this."

"Did you tell him the plan?" Jeff asked nervously. If Kurt knew then that would mean New Directions knew and Hunter would kill them.

"No, I wouldn't do that," Trent assured them. "But Blaine doesn't belong here anymore. He belongs at McKinley."

"Trent, if you don't come, Hunter will never let you perform at Sectionals," Nick pleaded.

"Well, maybe there are things that are more important than being a Warbler," Trent said firmly, but one look at his best friends' faces made him concede just a little. "Fine, I'll be there for Blaine with the rest of the guys. But I'm not giving him the blazer."

The boys sighed, but they had to respect Trent's position. "It's okay man," Jeff told him and Nick nodded in agreement.

"We'll see you in a few," Nick said.

"Good luck," Trent called as they left, then collapsed on his bed. He hoped he was making the right decision.

Hunter pet his cat calmly, knowing full well his plan would go perfectly. After all, this wasn't his first mission. He was military trained and had led his last show choir to victory, not with his voice, but with his shrewdness. He'd studied New Directions top to bottom. He took in every word that the other boys had ever said about the rivals they sometimes also called friends. He knew that Trent had crushed on Blaine when they were younger, but could just as easily have pursued Kurt once he'd arrived if things had been different. He knew that Nick and Jeff both harbored feelings for Quinn, who had gone to Yale. He also knew that Sebastian was and remained madly in love with Blaine. Hunter knew they lost their lead vocalists when they'd graduated and that Blaine was primed to take over that top spot for Sectionals. And he

definitely knew that while he and Sebastian would be formidable foes to the Nationals Champions, with Blaine Anderson on their side they'd be unstoppable and his scholarship would be secure.

And now thanks to the boy pacing in front of him, he knew that Blaine was lost and alone after breaking up with Kurt, and that was exactly where Hunter wanted the vocalist to be. Vulnerability. Hunter knew exactly how to prey on that.

"Relax Smythe, you're making me dizzy," Hunter ordered. "He'll be here, and you can jump his bones as soon as his transfer papers are signed."

"How do you know he's going to transfer? After everything that happened last year, his loyalty is with his friends. With Kurt's team. I know him Hunter. In Blaine's eyes that will be Kurt's trophy you've stolen. Everything he's ever done has always been for Hummel," Sebastian said.

Hunter didn't miss the pain in Sebastian's face as he said that, but he could and would use that too. "Well that's about to change," Hunter smirked devilishly. "Come on Smythe, that's what you want, isn't it? For Blaine to forget Kurt? To walk down the spiral staircase and have his face light up when he sees you at the bottom?"

"How do you..." Sebastian started, but Hunter just laughed.

"I know everything there is to know about Blaine Anderson and Kurt Hummel. I know how they met and I know how they broke up. And I know that if you and the boys do what you're supposed to do, you'll deliver him to me hook, line and sinker." Hunter leaned back in his chair and looked at his pocket watch. He clicked it shut with a snap that seemed to reverberate through the room. "It's time Smythe."

Sebastian steeled himself and straightened his blazer. He gave one last brush through his hair and walked out. His heart raced, as he stared up the stairs waiting for Blaine to arrive. But then again, it always did when he was going to see the boy he loved.

*Will you love me?*

*Even with my Dark Side Don't run away, do*

"What did I tell you?" Sebastian gloated to Hunter, his eyes raking over Blaine. "Flawless."



Blaine ripped off the blazer and Nick saw it in his eyes. Blaine felt anything but flawless. He felt like he was running away again. Nick knew that despite finding exactly what he needed at Dalton, he had always regretted running away from the pain instead of facing it head on. He also knew that it was who Blaine was, it protected him, as sure as armor. Dalton had helped Blaine escape yes, but it had also given him the power to face his demons when the time was right. Watching Blaine walk out the door, Nick was torn.

"Go after him," Hunter ordered Nick. "Don't let him leave without the blazer."

"Maybe we should just let him go," Nick's brow furrowed in uncertainty. He wanted Blaine back just as much as Hunter and Sebastian, but after seeing Blaine's face, Trent's words played over in his head.

"We're not letting him go," Hunter asserted. "Word is you were his best friend when he was here. Go after him and finish the deal."

Nick glanced at Jeff, who looked at him with encouragement. He met Trent's disapproving eye for only a second before taking off onto the Dalton campus.

Nick *was* Blaine's best friend and he knew exactly where to find him. When he was nowhere to be seen in the gardens, Nick entered the school chapel, closing the large wooden door quietly behind him. Inside, the chapel was both warm and imposing, made of dark woods and stain glass with a cathedral ceiling. Blaine sat alone, about halfway down in the pews, blazer on. He sat with his hands clasped, his head resting on them. Nick walked softly up the aisle and sat a few rows behind Blaine so as not to interrupt him. Silence filled the hall.

Finally, Nick heard Blaine's voice, soft and sad. If he hadn't been listening for it, he would have missed it, but the words were clearly meant for him. "You know, Kurt and I talked about get married in this chapel? Well, really I talked about it. Kurt didn't want to."

"You are and always will be a Dalton boy," Nick affirmed.

"He never belonged here," Blaine said despondently.

"You always did," Nick said.

Blaine turned and looked at Nick, the boy he used to call his best friend but had hurt him and abandoned him just like the rest. The boy who had thrown slushies at his best friend and his boyfriend. The boy who

had helped steal the New Direction's trophy. But he'd sought forgiveness. He was here now when no one else was. Nothing was Black and White anymore. "What does Hunter want from me," Blaine asked.

"It doesn't matter," Nick said dismissively. "It shouldn't be about winning Sectionals or even the Warblers. Trent was right, there's more to life than that."

"Then what's it about," Blaine challenged.

"It's about coming home," Nick said softly.

Blaine scoffed. "Home. Everyone keeps saying that word, but it doesn't mean a place. Home is where the heart is, and my heart is in New York. Finding another guy that he can trust."

"Home is the place where no matter what you do and where you go, they'll always accept you back. We want you here, Blaine," Nick said. "But even moreso, you belong here. You come back and we'll love you no matter what. Can you say the same for the kids at McKinley?"

"Dynamic duets."

The moment Blaine heard the words, the hole in the pit of his stomach ached anew. Duets. He dreaded it. Sure he had sung with Artie earlier in the year but that was before. Since he had broken up with Kurt he hadn't sung with anyone and he didn't want to. He and Kurt were *the* dynamic duo and he didn't want anyone else to take that place. If he had to sing, he'd do it alone.

Though with the Warblers, he'd never be alone again. He'd share the stage with brothers who would back him up, would support him and understand him. They had their own demons. They'd accept him with all his faults. And he deserved to be with them, not in Kurt's school with Kurt's friends. They deserved better.

"Look at the Avengers," Finn was saying. "Individually they all have amazing powers, but as a team they cannot be stopped. Right now we're a bunch of individuals with great powers and talents, but, we're not a team."

Blaine closed his eyes, wanting to huddle so far inside of his cape that he'd just disappear for good.

"Some of you even have mortal enemies in this very room, allowing the dark side to turn us against each other when we should be focused on the Warblers," Finn said.

"Nightbird is handling the missing trophy," Blaine announced. He knew what he had to do. He'd make the deal. New Directions would get the trophy back and all he had to do was go back where he belonged. It would be his parting gift to them, his thank you for all they had given him.

Blaine walked out of the choir room, glancing back at the New Directions still trying to figure out what had just happened between the new guys. He wasn't running away, he tried to convince himself. He was merely going back to where he belonged. Where he'd always belonged. Of course, he wasn't the only one he had to convince of that.

He pulled into the parking lot in Westerville and walked across the street to the Recruiting Center, taking a deep breath. His superhero costume and his Dalton blazer lay in the back seat of his car, but it didn't change who he was. He was Nightbird. He was Blaine Warbler. He could do this.

The bell rang on the door and his father looked up from the counter where he was filling out reports from the Base. "Blaine," he said, pleasantly surprised at the visit. "You come here for work? I have a ton of filing I could give you."

Blaine smiled slightly but shook his head. "No, I um...I need to talk to you about something."

The Colonel raised a disconcerted eyebrow. "You still cutting classes Blaine? Your free pass for that is over, young man."

"No," Blaine quickly responded. "No sir, I've been doing what I need to. But..." his pulse jumped as his nerves hit him. "It is about school." He looked at his father expectantly, but the Colonel waited for Blaine to continue. "Would you...would you let me go back to Dalton? If I wanted to?"

The Colonel put his pen down and sat back in his chair, folding his arms across his chest. He'd taken Blaine out of Dalton unfairly, he knew that now. But even so, he thought it had been the right decision for all of them at the time. Had Blaine remained at Dalton after everything, they all would have continued to run from their problems. None of them would have been forced to change anything, and they were so much better off for it no matter how hard the journey had been and continued to be. But the journey did

continue and maybe it was time to reevaluate. Was living in Lima and going to McKinley better than having Blaine return to Westerville and go back to Dalton?

"Dad?" Blaine said anxiously and the Colonel realized he'd been quiet for a while.

"If you were going back for the right reasons, Blaine, then yes. I'd let you go back," he replied.

"What are the right reasons?" Blaine asked, and he looked so small in that moment to the Colonel.

"You tell me son," he answered.

But Blaine didn't know. He didn't know if he was running from or running to. He didn't know if he was crawling back or flying on his own. He knew that the Warblers accepted him, for who he was and despite everything he'd done, dark side and all. They'd embraced Sebastian despite his faults. The new leader wanted him back, not for his body like Sebastian, but for his talent. He wouldn't have to keep hiding what he'd done there, they wouldn't care. And though there were memories of Kurt at Dalton, they weren't *all* of Kurt. Not like at McKinley, where his ex's ghost haunted him on a daily basis. Where his friends loved Kurt more than they loved him and would probably hate him if they ever learned the truth. He could breathe at Dalton. He could *sing* at Dalton. McKinley was suffocating.

And he didn't think that any of those reasons were the ones his father wanted to hear. The only thing he could say though was the truth. "I think it's where I belong," he shrugged.

The Colonel got up and walked over to Blaine, placing his hands on his son's shoulders. Blaine looked up at him with that ever present mix of fear and love that the Colonel thought for years was perfect but now broke his heart. He'd unfairly ripped Blaine away from the only place that ever kept him safe. How could he possibly keep him from it now. "Ok. I'll talk to the headmaster in the morning."

Blaine sighed, his head falling in relief. So why did his heart hurt even more now?

*"Blaine's decided to finish the rest of his senior year at Dalton Academy."*

Dazed by Finn's announcement, Sam and Brittany sat frozen to their seats while the rest of their friends buzzed with the gossip as they gathered their belongings and went home. Soon they were left alone, too shocked to follow.

"I had no idea he was thinking of leaving," Sam muttered to himself. He knew Blaine had been hurting, but he thought it would pass with time.

"I thought he loved us," Brittany said innocently. "How could he leave us?"

"He does love us, Britt," Sam said sadly. "I think he just doesn't believe we love him."

"There's something you need to see," Brittany said and she pulled her phone out of her bag. Scrolling through her photos until she found the video of Blaine singing the other night at the jazz club, she settled down next to Sam. She played it for him and watched his face fall.

"Santana says he's felt like he doesn't belong here anymore since Kurt broke up with him," Brittany told him.

Sam thought about it. Between being Senior Class President, teen angel, head of the superhero club and leader of New Directions, Blaine always seemed to Sam like he'd made McKinley a part of him. He couldn't fathom why Blaine would want to return to a school whose façade of grace and decorum hid a truth of liars, thieves and cheaters.

And then suddenly, he understood. That was exactly how Blaine saw himself. It's where he felt he deserved to be. "This isn't about Kurt," Sam said with certainty. "We need to show him what the rest of us already know. He's a superhero on his own," Sam said. "No mask. No costume. No blazer."

"No Kurt," Brittany added.

Sam nodded. "Just Blaine."

Blaine stood in Principal Figgins office as the man held out the manila envelope. "You are certain about this Mr. Anderson?"

"Yes sir," Blaine said with a heavy heart. He took his transcripts from the principal and placed them at the bottom of his empty box. "Thanks for everything."

"Be well, Mr. Anderson," he said, then held up a finger. "But not too well. I'm still rooting for the New Directions to win Sectionals."

Blaine smiled softly. "I know you are, sir."

He left the office and walked down the busy hallways, for the last time, to his locker. He opened it and came face to face with the pictures of him and Kurt. He wouldn't put them up at Dalton. Kurt didn't belong there, and it would just be too difficult a reminder of all he had lost. Dalton would be a fresh start, where the real Blaine belonged. He sighed and carefully took them down. He began emptying his locker, each book feeling heavier and heavier, weighed down with the guilt of leaving and the pain of staying. He couldn't win. But he knew he didn't deserve to. He'd earned this. His father had taught him to accept it well.

A voice, sounding shallow in the echo of his metal locker, tore at his heart. He should have told Sam. After all he was his vice president and he would become president now. But Blaine was better at running away than facing people. The only time he hadn't run was with Kurt.

"Dude, this is part of some master plan, right? You're going back to the Warblers to gather intel for us so we can kick their ass at Sectionals?"

Blaine rolled his eyes and kept on with the task at hand. "Sam, don't," he begged, a desperate bite to his words. "I feel awful just as it is."

"Stop," Sam said with a hand on Blaine's back. Blaine took a breath and turned at the gentle touch. "You've been beating yourself up for like, weeks, since you and Kurt broke up." Blaine leaned with his back against the locker, trying to contain his anger, at himself, at Sam. He didn't want anyone trying to talk him out of this, if he had he would have told Santana. But he didn't want to be talked out of this, the Warblers were what he deserved, pure and simple. Just like Magneto's Brotherhood, just like he'd told Finn. But Sam had his number. "You told Finn it's because you feel more at home there, but if you ask me it's just another way to punish yourself. And for what, what did you do exactly?"

Blaine closed his eyes, the smell of that room overwhelming his senses more than anything else. Blaine had tried to forget what he'd looked like, what his lips had tasted like, what he'd felt like. But the smell of the room he couldn't forget. He'd tried to keep it all inside, a secret for him and Kurt along, but he couldn't do it anymore and before he could stop himself, the words just came pouring out. "It was a guy that friended me on Facebook," Blaine confessed. Blaine knew he wasn't worth forgiving. He was never worth forgiving. So he'd tell and then Sam and the others would understand the kind of person he was and they'd let him go. Just like Kurt. "I went over to his place, because it felt like Kurt was moving on with his life and I wasn't a part of it. And I got to thinking that maybe Kurt and I weren't meant for each other, that we weren't supposed to spend the rest of our lives together. But the horrible thing is right after I did it..." His stomach turned as it always did when he thought about it, knowing what he had lost. What he had thrown away in one terrible moment of weakness. "I knew that we were."

"Dude, you got to tell Kurt that," Sam whispered.

"What, you think I haven't told him that, you think I haven't tried?" Blaine yelled angrily, his frustration mounting. What did Sam know anyway? He'd called, he texted, he sent flowers and gifts, he'd even tried in the hallway of this very school and Kurt had shut him out every single time. Kurt didn't want to hear it. Blaine slammed the locker shut and tried to walk away

"Calm down, it's okay," Sam said.

"No, it's not okay, Sam!" Blaine snapped, turning to him and lowering his voice. Because he was his father's child, hurting the ones he loved to their very core. Because he was his mother's son, forgiving over and over again because it was the only way he knew to be truly loved. "Because I cheated on the one person I love more than anything in this world. I hurt him. So of course he's not going to trust me, he's never gonna forgive me."

"Even if he doesn't you gotta forgive yourself," Sam told him. "You gotta stop...what's the world when you make someone into a villain, uh..."

Blaine leaned back into the locker. "Villianize?" he offered.

"Yeah, you gotta stop villianizing yourself," Sam told him. "Yeah, you hurt Kurt, that wasn't cool. So you're trying to make it right," Sam told him. "But exiling yourself to Dalton won't fix anything."

*Exiling myself protects you*, Blaine thought. Sam's words echoed in his head, but so did the memories of his past. Voices that told him he was sick and immoral and a disappointment. Hands that told him he was willful and unlovable. He'd once heard Burt tell Kurt that just because he'd done something bad it didn't make him a bad kid. His parents had never believed that. His father had abused him for everything he'd done wrong, and his mother let him. He'd grown up his entire life thinking that he must be a bad kid, otherwise why would he deserve to be treated the way he was. He'd told Finn it was his destiny and his birthright to go to Dalton and he had meant it. He was raised in pain and abuse and it's what he would do to others, whether he wanted to or not. But he didn't want it to be that way. With Kurt's love and trust he had changed the voices in his head, he had started to believe that he was good. But if the one person he loved and trusted couldn't forgive him now, what was he supposed to believe?

"I just wanna stop feeling like I'm a bad person," Blaine whispered through the tears he held back.

"You're not." Sam insisted. "You're one of the good guys. And I got a whole glee club that agrees with me." Blaine looked at him. He didn't believe it, how could anyone else? "Give me a day. One day before you pack it all up. One day to be the hero we all know you are." Blaine lowered his eyes. "And then you can decide where you really belong."

Blaine held back the screaming in his head and looked up to Sam. "Ok," he whispered.

Blaine entered the auditorium, hesitant, his heart hurting. Even more than the choir room, this is where he and Kurt belonged. Center stage, hand to heart. In their special alcove, picnicking, making love. In the audience, hand in hand, smiling up at their friends. Blaine never felt he belonged here without Kurt. But Sam was about to change all that.

"I don't know if I can do this," Blaine said brokenly in the darkness of backstage.

"I said that to myself every night in Kentucky," Sam admitted. "Those evenings when I was about to step out on stage to sell myself?" Blaine blushed remembering their fight, but Sam had said it purposefully. "You are *not* for sale, Blaine Anderson. Not on a stage like that. Not for a trophy. And not for the Warblers." Blaine lowered his head. "Nobody is perfect Blaine. We've all made mistakes here too. We've loved, and we've cheated, and we've lost. But we've also learned from our mistakes and we support one another to be better. Can you say the same for Dalton?"



Sam grabbed his guitar and walked out center stage, sitting on the stool. Blaine watched him in shock, his mind reeling as his friend began to sing.

*I, I wish I could swim*

*Like the dolphins*

*Like dolphins can swim*

*Though nothing, nothing will keep us together*

*We can beat them, forever and ever*

*Oh, we can be heroes just for one day*

Once upon a time, Blaine had been a hero to Kurt, but since then Kurt had been his. Could he learn to be one again, even for a moment, without Kurt by his side? Without the mask or the cape or the blazer? Just him, facing his own world while Kurt faced another. Could they both learn to be heroes and someday come back together, once again a dynamic duo?

*I, I will be King*

*And you, you will be Queen*

*Though nothing will drive them away*

*We can be heroes*

*Forever and ever*

Sam came over to join him and Blaine smiled at the sudden realization. He had at least one friend here who knew the truth and would stand by his side. Someone who didn't hate him for what he'd done. Sam nodded at him and smiled, glad to see the old Blaine finally returning. So engrossed in the song, neither saw Brittany in the audience recording them.

*Yeah we can be heroes*

*Just for one day*

*We can be heroes*

*We can be heroes*

*Just for one day*

Sam wasn't Kurt, but he was a friend and with him and his other friends by his side, pushing him to do the right thing, to be the good guy, Blaine suddenly understood that *this* was right. Going to Dalton was giving up on himself and on Kurt. And he knew now that he couldn't do that. He would earn back Kurt's trust. He would do everything he could to deserve his love again. And he would learn to love himself and stop hiding in the meantime. He smiled at Sam as they sang, the first real smile in a very long time. He'd stop floating and start flying. That's what heroes did after all.

Sam playfully pushed Blaine's head and Blaine smiled, pushing back. They gathered their things and Sam walked over to Blaine. "Well, what's your decision?"

Blaine grinned devilishly. He may be a member of New Directions, but they were right about one thing. Once a Warbler, always a Warbler. "One last mission first." He threw Sam a mask. "You in?"

Sam and Brittany made the calls and Saturday morning the New Directions loaded a school bus full of donated clothing and painting supplies to the shelter they'd gone to last Christmas. Watching the faces on the children as their parents and the staff sorted the clothes, Blaine felt good about himself for the first time in a long time.

"That's only the start, Blaine," Sam said nudging his shoulder.

Blaine grinned at him and cocked his head. "Let's go."

Outside they met the others who had the painting supplies all laid out. Blaine rolled the paint onto his roller and started tackling the graffiti that marred the building. Playing superhero was one thing, but

being one was entirely different. He felt his heart healing, the hole slowly being filled with the love that only comes from forgiving and loving oneself. But looking around at the amazing group of friends around him, he finally felt again like he belonged. They all had their faults, none of them were picture perfect. But they all tried to be better. That was what New Directions was all about.

His grin was bright as the paint started flying and Brittany caught his eye across the crowded way. She came over, a mischievous look in her eye and pretended to paint next to him, when she attacked him with a handful of white, spreading it along his face. He laughed and she kissed him on the cheek.

"Welcome back Blaine Wa...." She stopped herself, her eyes softening. Blaine's heart melted with love for her. "Blaine Anderson," she finished. "Or maybe I should just call you Boyfriend?" she flirted coyly.

Blaine turned to the wall and innocently brushed a stroke of white on the wall. "How about we stick with just Blaine," he said, then suddenly attacked her with the brush. She screamed and ran and he ran after her, as they all dissolved into painting each other more than the wall.

Standing back at the end of the day looking at all they had accomplished, he knew that Kurt would be proud of him if he knew. Then suddenly he realized with a shock that that was the first time he'd thought of Kurt all day, and the thought didn't hurt him like it had before. He smiled and walked over to help the others pack up. Brittany slipped an arm around his waist and Sam patted him on the back. This is what belonging felt like, and unlike at Dalton, it felt good.

They gathered in the auditorium, red shirts on, just like Finn had told them. "Thanks for finding those old ones in the costume closet," Finn told Tina, a huge smile on his face. For the first time, he felt confident, like he knew what he was doing and Tina grinned up at him.

"Just like the old days," she said.

"Okay, listen up everyone!" Finn waited as everyone settled down and turned their attention to him. "Three years ago, a few of us threw on some red shirts, sang a little song called "Don't Stop Believing" and we never did stop until we won that Nationals trophy Blaine and Sam recovered! Those shirts were the start of New Directions and today marks a new start." His eyes fell to Blaine for a moment. He appreciated that it couldn't be easy for him to stand here. On that very stage he and Blaine and Kurt and Rachel had so

many memories. Finn knew all too well what Blaine had meant in the choir room. But growing up, he was learning, meant not letting ghosts haunt them and hold them back. It was time to move forward together. "See, it's not about where you are. It's about who you're with. It's about family, and New Directions was then and always will be family. Even if you leave for a time, whether you graduate," he said indicating himself, "move for a time," he said looking at Sam, "Or just need to take a break to figure things out," his said his eyes meeting Blaine's, "we're always here when you're ready to come back."

"Thanks Finn," Blaine said. "I owe all of you an apology for ever doubting that McKinley's my home. You guys are my home. We've got a real fight ahead of us with the Warblers at Sectionals, but I'm not worried at all. Because we've got the team, we've got the talent and we have," he looked at Finn and smiled his thanks, "most importantly, the leader."

Everyone clapped for Finn as he beamed, but then he quickly brought the room to order. "Alright guys, this is our closing number for sectionals. We finish strong with this and Blaine is right. There is no way those Warblers will beat us!"

Blaine took center stage, closed his eyes and centered himself. He felt the energy of his friends around him, old and new, and as Kurt once told him, he poured his heart out on the stage. After all, that was why New Directions wins.

*Some nights, I stay up cashing in my bad luck*

*Some nights, I call it a draw*

*Some nights, I wish that my lips could build a castle*

*Some nights, I wish they'd just fall off*

*But I still wake up, I still see your ghost*

*Oh Lord, I'm still not sure what I stand for*

*What do I stand for? What do I stand for?*

Blaine knew he'd continue to have good days and bad days. Days where his demons seemed just too much and days where he'd be able to feel the love and acceptance that was out there for him. Some days he'd

remember the beauty of what was out there for him and some days, the guilt would overwhelm him. That was life he supposed, learning to live with one's own dark side. Trying to figure out what love was all about.

Sam jogged over to him. "You gonna come to Breadstix with us?"

Blaine shook his head, a soft smile on his lips. "Next time," he promised. "Right now I have something I need to do."

*Well, some nights I wish that this all would end*

*Cause I could use some friends for a change*

*And some nights I'm scared you'll forget me again*

*Some nights I always win*

He stopped at the florist on the way and bought a single white rose, before continuing the drive just outside of town. He'd been there only once before, nearly a year ago, but as he got out of the car, he remembered the exact path. His hand was empty this time, and he shoved it in his pocket. This was about moving forward, not going back.

*That's alright.*

*I found a martyr in my bed tonight*

*She stops my bones from wondering just who am I*

*Who am I*

After a short walk, he reached the headstone. *Elizabeth Hummel. Devoted Mother and Wife.* He cleaned the bit of dirt off with his hand and knelt down, twirling the flowers stem unconsciously between his fingers.

*So this is it? I sold my soul for this?*

*Washed my hands of that for this?*

*I miss my mom and dad for this?*

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice quiet, almost reverent. "Kurt won't talk to me and Mr. Hummel would kill me, I'm sure. But I needed to tell someone who loved him like I do. I'm so sorry." He paused, wiping the tears from his eyes, letting the guilt and the shame go for the first time as if she lifted it from his heart. "I haven't had the best role models to learn how to live and how to love. Not like you and Mr. Hummel. But I'm going to learn to be the man that Kurt deserves."

*Man, you wouldn't believe the most amazing things that can come from...*

*Some terrible nights*

*The other night, you wouldn't believe the dream I just had about you and me*

*I called you up, but we'd both agree*

*It's for the best you didn't listen*

*It's for the best we get our distance...*

He laid the white rose carefully at the base of her headstone. "The rose is not surrender. I won't ever stop loving him or stop hoping that someday he will forgive me. It's a promise, to move on, to keep living for him and to keep working toward being worthy of him again. I'll give him the space he needs, to do whatever he needs. To grow, to," the word choked him but he forced it out, "to love, to trust. Whatever he needs, for however long. I'll leave it in Kurt's hands. Because I know that what we had together was meant for eternity. So that's how long I will wait."

## ***Chapter Eight: Thanksgiving***

He had good and bad days.

On the good days Blaine smiled as Brittany linked arms with him down the hallway or he jammed at the piano with the kids in the choir room.

He laughed with Tina as she struggled to learn every word of Gangnam Style, helping her as much as he could with the bit of Korean his mother had taught him.

He worked with Finn to perfect the choreography for their second number and he and Sam proudly reported to the student council the number of items they'd collected for the homeless shelter.

He passed his calculus exam and he increased his weights on his bench press and he whispered goodnight to Kurt's voicemail before bed without tears and memories keeping him up half the night.

But the bad days came crashing down on him, reminding him of all he'd lost.

**Kurt: Please stop calling me to say you're sorry.**

It took every ounce of courage and willpower to drag himself out of bed, if only to avoid the rage of Santana if he missed their first day back in the choir room. He knew she'd arrived back in town yesterday and was going out to Breadstix along with all of the rest of the gang. Well, most of the rest of the gang.

As he tried to hide in the back corner of the choir room, seeing Santana, Quinn, Puck, Mike and Mercedes all back where they belonged, the glaring absence of Kurt and Rachel made his heart tighten in his chest. He couldn't help but blame himself that Kurt wasn't here, with his family, where he belonged. Burt must be disappointed, and he hated knowing that it was his fault they were apart for the holiday. Blaine tried to summon his enthusiasm with the others and get excited that his friends were home, but the voices in his head insisted that had he transferred to Dalton, Kurt would be back for Thanksgiving.

"Hey man, you okay?" Joe leaned over and whispered to Blaine.

His arms folded in on himself, he only turned slightly and gave a curt nod. He wasn't at all okay, especially not after Kurt's text. Not even seeing Santana helped because there was trouble there too.

He'd never told Santana how he'd tried to transfer to Dalton, but the way she kept glaring at him out of the corner of her eye told him that she knew. Finn had probably told them all last night and they probably all were angry with him. He avoided her gaze just as he'd avoided talking to her this past week. The verbal lashing he was sure to receive was something he dreaded, but right now his head was pounding with the words "stop calling" and he couldn't stand the thought that Kurt was writing him off for good.

He just wanted to go home and curl up in bed and hope that tomorrow would be better.

"Not so fast, Boyfriend!" Santana yelled after him as he tried to slink out of the room unseen. He kept walking to his locker in a fog of staunch determination to ignore her. He stayed focused as he undid the lock and opened the door until the pictures he'd put back up of Kurt stared back at him like a slap in the face. His breath hitched and his heart dropped to the floor. He rested his forehead on the cold metal of his locker door so as not to fall himself.

Santana stopped inches from him and sighed. "Brittany told me you were doing better," she said with quiet sorrow.

"He finally texted me this morning San," Blaine choked, fighting the tears he'd held back all day. "And it was to tell me to stop calling him." The tears flowed anyway saying the words and he quickly wiped them away with the heel of his hand. "And I know he's right and I promised myself and..." he caught himself quickly, "I promised I would give him the space that he needs, but..."

Santana's curiosity was peaked but she let Blaine's near slip pass for now. "No buts. Just do it," she said. "Give me your phone," Santana demanded, her hand out.

"Why?" he challenged her, but she reached around him and into his pocket and took it out. He turned on his heel. "What the hell Santana?"

She scrolled through it, quickly finding what she was looking for and holding it out to him. "This is why you keep calling him," she snapped. Kurt's beautiful, angelic, devastatingly sexy, loving, can't possibly look away from it face was smiling down at Blaine. He stared at it longingly then tore his eyes away.

"It won't help to delete his number," Blaine said quietly. "I know it by heart anyway."



"I'm not stupid, Blaine," she rolled her eyes as she pressed buttons that made his stomach queasy. She quickly handed it back. "There. Call all you want now, but his porcelain face and oceans of love eyes will *not* be staring back at you." He took his phone back and slipped it in his pocket. He knew she was right, but it didn't make it hurt any less. "But for god's sake Blaine," she pleaded. "Don't call him. Just let him come to you. Stop running, stop chasing and just stand still." He nodded but caught her narrowing glance just in time. "Speaking of running,"

He slammed the locker door shut and walked away. "I'm not talking about Dalton with you."

She set a stride to catch up with him. "Why Blaine? Because you know I'd tell you what an idiot idea it was? Putting yourself in the lion's den of temptation? Running from your problems again? Hiding yourself away where the people who love you won't be there to pick you up if you fall?"

"I have friends there too, Santana," Blaine snapped as he threw open the front doors of the school. He knew he was getting defensive for no reason. He'd come to the same conclusions that she was barking at him now, but he didn't need the lecture.

"Friends who nearly blind you and treat your boyfriend like crap. Fabulous Blaine," she said her voice dripping with snark.

Blaine turned angrily and threw his arms out in the middle of the parking lot. "What do you want from me Santana? You want me to run all my decisions by you first? I thought I'd gone too far to the dark side to stay. I thought I didn't deserve to be here anymore. I thought that once everyone found out what I'd really done that they would turn from me anyway, just like Kurt, so why not run before they could hurt me too?"

Santana stood frozen in the middle of the street, listening to the pain behind his words. Her own heart hurt too, but she wasn't sure why. "So why did you stay?" she asked softly.

Blaine looked back at the school then to the pavement beneath his feet, thrusting his hands in his pocket. "Sam," he said, glancing up at Santana. "He made me realize that all my fears about becoming my father would come true if I went there. The Warblers aren't who they were. Sebastian and now Hunter, they do what they want and don't care who gets hurt. I don't ever want to be that person. If I went back there, I'd never deserve Kurt. Staying," he sighed knowing that all his efforts could very well be in vain but he would do it all anyway. "Staying I just might. And the kids here, they know me and accept me for who I am. Which is the furthest thing from flawless possible," he added wryly.

Santana closed the distance between them and rubbed his arms affectionately. "Oh I don't know, Boyfriend. It's your flaws I love the most about you."

Blaine squeaked a laugh and nuzzled into her. "Why can't you just stay here forever?"

He would have much preferred to have been at McKinley with the guys dancing for the lead in Gangnam Style than sitting in his father's living room in Westerville staring at his Mom and Dad. He didn't want the lead, he didn't even really want to dance and he and Finn had decided it was best to give one of the new kids a chance to shine if possible, but sitting on the couch as if he'd done something wrong and was awaiting his sentence made him reconsider the intelligence of that decision.

"Look, if I did something wrong can we just get this over with please?" Blaine asked harshly, his nerves and patience frayed.

Amy Anderson looked at him with surprise but the Colonel just sighed. He was used to this Blaine. "Unless you have something you need to tell us son, we're not here because you're in trouble." Blaine just shook his head. They had no reason to be upset at him right now, it was just always his first assumption when his father looked at him that way with hard, solemn eyes that glowed like ice. "Okay then," the Colonel said, relaxing. "Your mother has something to tell you."

Blaine looked at his mom. She was nervous, fidgeting with the hem of her dress and pursing her lips as if she was looking for the right words but every one that came to her lips were wrong. It told him that there was no right way to say what she was going to say and he decided instead to say it for her. "You're moving back in with Dad," Blaine said flatly. It wasn't a question. It was obvious.

But she shook her head. "No," she said quietly, exchanging a quick cautious glance with her husband. "Well, maybe, but not now. I wouldn't move from Lima until you graduate Blaine. Maybe if you'd gone back to Dalton, but you didn't and I wouldn't do that to you."

"Then what is it?" he sighed, wishing they would just get on with this. He had no idea what he wanted to be doing right now, but it was most certainly not this.

"We're spending Christmas together," the Colonel told him. "All of us. Here in Westerville." Amy took her husband's hand with a tentative smile and stared up at Blaine, nervously awaiting his reaction.

Blaine's eyes flitted to the clasped hands and his muscles pulled taut, but he just shrugged. "Fine. Whatever," he said flippantly, then stood up. "Can I go now?"

"Sit down so we can talk about this, Blaine," his father ordered.

"There's nothing to talk about," Blaine said harshly, ignoring his father's command. "It's not like it matters what I want. It's not like there's anything else for me to be doing for Christmas anyway."

"This is about Kurt," Amy said gently.

"No Mom," Blaine snapped, even though it was at least in part. Last year, wrapped in Kurt's arms, had been his best Christmas ever, but he tried to tuck those memories away to the back of his mind where he'd been storing the thoughts of a Christmas without Kurt for weeks. "This is about the fact that Dad has made Christmas miserable for us for years and yet you just keep going on forgiving and forgetting, just like that."

She stood up and took his hands tightly in hers and his heart fluttered. He looked down at her stern gaze, biting his lip like a little boy not sure if she was about to hug him or swat him. "It has not been *just like that* Blaine. It's been over a year of work by both of us to learn to trust again. For me to learn how I deserve to be treated, what I will and will not accept and for him to learn how to communicate without striking where and how it hurts the most." She reached a hand to his cheek and stroked it as a mother would. "I know it's felt like very little time to you, but to me and your father it's felt like eternity."

Eternity. It had only been at least that long since he'd heard even a breath of hope from Kurt and as much as each passing day got easier each lonely night grew harder. "What makes me so bad?" Blaine asked desperately, his face scrunching in pain. "Why can we forgive him when he hurts us over and over again year after year but I do one thing wrong and..."

"Shhh..." his mother said, wrapping Blaine in her arms. It broke her heart that he was in so much pain and there was nothing she could do about. "You're *not* bad. These things take time. He'll come around Blaine, I know he will."

"How do you know?" Blaine asked tearfully, his head resting on her shoulder, trying to hope, trying to believe.

"Because you love him with all your heart, and he loves you. And that kind of love doesn't just go away," she told him as she stared up at her husband. "True love isn't perfect or easy. It hurts and it's terrifying and when all is said and done, it's the most beautiful thing in the world."

Blaine was curled up cozy and warm beneath his mother's fleece blankets alone in the darkness of the living room. The only glow was from a small lamp above him that lit the worn and tattered pages of *The Hobbit*. He'd been reading it over in preparation for the movie and welcomed the opportunity to lose himself in the magical world. An hour in, and he was just about falling asleep when the buzz of his cell phone snapped him alert. Bzzzz. Bzzzzz. Bzzzzz. He finished the paragraph he'd been staring at for the past ten minutes, then swiped his phone.

**Santana: We're coming over.**

**Sam: Bringing pizza**

**Brittany: Bringing Candy Land**

A roll of his eyes and a thrilled smile that betrayed his bad mood was all he could manage before the rapping on the door announced their presence. Of course they'd given him no notice to back out if he'd wanted to, which he didn't. He raced over and flung the door open only to be nearly run over by pizza boxes piled high in Sam's arms.

"Uhh...how many people are coming over?" Blaine asked, watching him drop them down on the kitchen table just inside the door.

"It's just us Boyfriend, but Sam and Brittany can each eat a pie by themselves," Santana said, with a wink to her best friend. She offered Blaine a comforting pat on the shoulder before she took over Blaine's kitchen and grabbed the plates and napkins.

"So not that I'm objecting," Blaine said as he grabbed a slice of pizza, "but to what do I owe the honor of your company?" Santana slipped a plate under his pizza with a stern glance and he kissed her on the cheek affectionately.

"Come on, man, we need to have a reason to come visit you?" Sam said as he explored the apartment on his own and started rifling through the movie collection in the living room. "Iron Man, awesome!" he exclaimed, pulling it out. Blaine laughed.

"We just missed you after school today Blaine," Brittany said with a kiss on the cheek then sought out Sam in the other room to help her set up the Candy Land board on the coffee table.

"Besides, I had to make sure you haven't called Porcelain yet today," Santana smirked. Blaine wrinkled his nose at her but gasped as he truly took her in for the first time.

"San, what happened to your cheek?" he asked reaching for it. He brushed a thumb gently over the bruise that had formed.

"It's nothing Blaine, don't worry," she said wincing, but shrugging him off.

But worried was going to quickly become an understatement if she didn't explain. "Don't give me 'it's nothing' Santana, I know a slap when I see one," he said seriously. "I'm an expert on the subject."

She reached a hand up and grabbed his wrist to gently pull it away, slipping her fingers in his. "It was just Quinn," she said softly. "Brittany saw it happen, so don't freak out on me. Ok?" Blaine nodded, though his concern only diminished slightly. "Come on," Santana smiled and pulled him into the living room.

They gathered around the coffee table playing two games of Candy Land, debating the character histories and making up stories about them. Sam lamented the loss of Plumpy the green goblin and Santana debated whether Brittany was Lolly the Fairy (who used to be a Princess) or Princess Frostine (who used to be Queen). In the end they all could agree that Hunter Warbler was Lord Licorice and that he needed to be defeated.

They settled in comfortably on the couch to watch Iron Man. Halfway through, Santana excused herself from the darkness of the living room to go pop another bag of popcorn, since half of the current bowl had ended up on the couch where it landed from Blaine and Sam's food fight. Blaine heard the rustling in the kitchen and the microwave go off, but he found himself growing cold as his cuddle buddy did not return. He peered into the kitchen to see her sitting wistfully at the kitchen table, her chin resting on her hand gazing back at them. He quietly went to go join her.

"My mom's not going to be home until morning. Can you sleep over tonight?" Blaine requested hopefully as he slid in next to her. "Make sure I don't call you know who?"

Her face brightened and her lips slipped into a smile as she nudged him with her shoulder. "Sure," she answered, secretly relieved for the invitation. She'd been dreading going home alone all night. "Brittany's taking Sam home, so..." she faltered, her eyes once again dimming with sadness.

"Does it hurt?" Blaine asked following her gaze. Sam and Brittany were snuggled close, giggling with one another as if sharing a secret. He was sure it was only matter of time before Kurt started dating and though the thought killed him, he was trying to prepare himself for it.

Santana's eyes flitted to Blaine, then to the table, embarrassed. "Yes," she admitted. "But I'm glad she's not alone."

And in that moment, Blaine realized that no one was more alone than Santana. He often felt alone but usually it was his own doing. He and Brittany had friends here, Kurt had Rachel, but Santana was alone in Kentucky with no one. "I'm sorry I didn't call last week Santana," he said gently as he took her hand.

"I don't tell you enough how much you mean to me Blaine," Santana said, her eyes shining with vulnerability.

Blaine understood everything unsaid. It was hard for Santana to admit that she was lonely and needed him as much as he needed her. "Why don't you just go to New York with Rachel and Kurt, San? It's where you belong."

"Maybe," she muttered, her eyes quickly jumping back to Brittany. "But you know as well as I do Blaine, we only belong where our hearts lead us."

Nick spotted Hunter across the quad in between classes and jogged to catch up with him. "Hey," he called to the Warbler leader. "Can I talk to you a minute?"

"I'm on my way to the gym," Hunter said flatly without breaking his stride. "Talk fast."

Nick gathered his courage. He and Jeff had argued about who was best to confront Hunter, but neither could decide so they agreed that whoever got to him first would do it. Of course, they both had hoped the other would be the lucky one. Neither wanted to be his next victim. "A bunch of the guys were talking and, well, don't you think you might want to change your mind and let Trent perform at sectionals?" he asked, not allowing his nerves to betray his confidence.

"No," Hunter said, rolling his eyes with boredom. "I don't."

Nick suddenly grabbed his arm and made him stop. Disgusted, Hunter looked down at Nick's grip as if he needed a tetanus shot and Nick let go, but didn't let him walk off. "We need his vocals, Hunter, but even more we need his energy," Nick entreated.

"No, Nicholas," Hunter hissed. "We needed Blaine Anderson's vocals and energy, and I need a team who is going to stand behind one another and do whatever it takes to win, not feel sorry for our competition. I heard how Trent led the reconciliation with New Directions last year after Sebastian's hideous attempts at leading the Warblers to victory. And Trent showed his loyalty to them again when he failed to help present the blazer to Blaine. If he loves them so much, he can transfer to McKinley. But there's not a spot for him here. Not now."

Nick's eyes narrowed as the words about his friend made him love and respect Trent even more. He wished he'd had the strength to follow in his footsteps. He knew he let Blaine down over and over again, but a Warbler was who he was, even though the respect they'd earned through years of history was slowly being torn away by ruthless leaders. He understood that he and Jeff and Beatz couldn't fix it from the outside though. Their only hope was to fight from within. "You're making a mistake," Nick warned him.

Hunter though took it as a challenge and his eyes gleamed. "We'll see," he crooned.

Blaine paced in the corner of the choir room, his head pounding with nerves and heartbreak. He'd already snapped at both Sam and Tina, and Finn gently suggested to the others that they give him his space. Everyone of course was happy to oblige, except for Santana.

"Do you want to tell me exactly what has crawled up your ass, Boyfriend, because you're about wear a hole into the floor and rip off the heads of your teammates," she demanded, her hands firmly on her hips.

He stopped and looked at her, his face inches from bursting into tears or rage, or both. She rolled her eyes. It was always about Kurt. She should have known.

"He's been by my side for every competition since sophomore year, Santana," he said low, so no one else overheard. "Every performance he's either been there, or called or texted, even Grease. But he's not here Santana."

"You don't need him here," Santana said with a gentle but firm hand to his shoulder. "You can do this."

"I know I can," he said fighting back his emotions in front of the whole group. "I just don't want to."

She pressed a sympathetic hand to his cheek then walked away. He turned back, trying his best to put Kurt out of his mind, center himself, and warm up.

His phone vibrated in his pocket and his heart leaped into his throat as he considered not answering so close to performing. But he'd left the phone in his pocket instead of the dressing room where it belonged for one reason and one reason only and ignoring it could be the biggest mistake of his life.

He pulled it out and the name that flashed across the screen took his breath away, but immediately his mind started searching for alternatives as he whisked away to a corner for some privacy. He could have dialed by accident, or it could be Rachel using his phone, or maybe he was hurt and someone was dialing for him.

"Hello?" he answered with a mix of hope and shock. He heard the rush of noise, the honking of horns and the wail of sirens before he heard the most beautiful sound in the entire world.

"Hey, can you hear me?" Kurt asked. Blaine didn't miss the hesitation and the nerves in his voice but it didn't stop him from thinking for a minute that he must be dreaming. "It's kinda loud out here."

"Um yeah, yeah I can hear you," He assured Kurt quickly, afraid that he might hang up. His heart beat frantically, adrenaline and hope and fear rushing through his veins even more than it had the night so long ago when he'd kissed Kurt for the first time.

"Have you guys performed yet?" Kurt asked.



"No, not yet." He said, glancing back at his teammates as he rested on the rung of a ladder. He should have known, he should have trusted that Kurt wouldn't let a performance go by without calling, but if that was all Kurt had called for he wasn't going to let the moment escape. "Kurt, I just want you to know that no matter..."

"Just let me talk for a second," Kurt interjected.

Time stopped for Blaine. His relationship with Kurt, his *life* with Kurt was made of moments that moved them and changed them forever, and this was one of those moments. For good or for bad, their story would go on, but he listened and he let go and placed the ending in Kurt's hands.

"Look, you've...you've said you're sorry a million times," Kurt said. "And I believe you. And I'm trying to forgive you, but I'm just not there yet."

Blaine's heart cracked, doubt filling it to bursting, but he didn't let it break, holding his breath letting Kurt continue. "But it's Thanksgiving and it's Sectionals and I miss you like crazy."

At those words, he did fall apart, his knees nearly buckling beneath him as the tears that had threatened all day fell with relief. Kurt missed him. He hadn't forgotten him, he didn't go through his day without Blaine on his mind. Kurt missed him, maybe even as much as Blaine missed Kurt. That alone would have been enough, he did not dare dream for more. But then Kurt spoke the most beautiful words he had ever heard in his life. "because you're still my best friend."

Blaine's heart swelled. Even though so much time had passed, he still had a hundred moments everyday when he went to look for Kurt, to talk to him, to share with him and to reach for him when he fell. Losing his boyfriend hurt in the special moments, but losing his best friend was what nearly killed him every day. "You're mine too," Blaine cried.

"At Christmas, we need to have a mature heart to heart," Kurt said. "And maybe if it's cold enough we can go ice skating on the Aqualize river and get a hot chocolate? Anywhere but the Lima Bean because when I was working there I saw a mouse."

Blaine choked out a laugh with overwhelming delight because Kurt's wit was one of his most favorite things in the entire world and it surged through him like Valentine's Day in November, and Kurt wanted to

see him for Christmas and for just a moment everything was absolutely right. "So, we're really gonna see each other at Christmas?" he asked with a cracked voice, wanting to make sure what he heard was real.

"Yeah," Kurt answered. Blaine stood quiet, overwhelmed as his mother's words rushed back to him. Love hurt, and it was terrifying, and it was in fact the most beautiful thing in the world. "Well don't let any of those hideous Warblers win, alright?" Kurt rushed out to break the silence. "Break a leg. Happy Thanksgiving."

He breathed in the gift Kurt had given him, worth so much more than anything he could have ever dreamed. "Happy Thanksgiving," he exhaled and closed his eyes, wishing, wanting more but accepting this for now because he had stopped believing even this was possible. He needed Kurt to know how much it meant to him. How much he meant to him. "Kurt, I love you so much," he whispered through his tears.

He heard Kurt's hesitation, but it didn't matter. "I love you too," Kurt said. Blaine hung up, emotions flooding him, relief, hope, love. A chance. The weight of the world lifted from his shoulders.

"Blaine, come on, it's places," Sam called jogging over. Blaine quickly wiped away his tears and tucked his phone into a hidden nook. "Kurt?" Sam asked apprehensively.

Blaine nodded and turned to Sam with a small smile, but his eyes sparkled with life. "He still loves me," he said.

## Chapter Nine: Swan Song

Everything happened so quickly with Marley that he nearly forgot that he'd left his phone tucked away in a corner backstage. Blaine whispered to Santana that he was going to grab it and left his shocked and saddened team in the choir room.

Walking into the now near pitch black wings of the auditorium, he couldn't help the memories that always flooded him. He didn't dare venture out onto the dark stage to glance up at the spot tower. Memories were never Blaine's friend. He reached behind the ladder into the hidden nook in the wall that as far as he knew only Glee club was aware existed. He couldn't help the relief that his phone was still there. The last thing he needed was Sebastian or Hunter finding it and searching through a year's worth of emails and texts he'd saved. He turned it on just to make sure, and a text from Kurt stared back at him.

**Kurt: Call me when you win.**

*Someone to hold you too close  
sleep*

*~~Someone to hold~~  
And make you aware of being a live*

*Someone to*

Blaine's heart leapt into his throat and he couldn't help the grin that exploded on his face. Kurt wanted him to call, no, *asked* him to call!

He took a deep breath and dialed the number, nervous despite the request. Kurt had refused his calls for so long now, what if he changed his mind this time and didn't answer. The phone rang and rang and Blaine bit his lip with worry, nearly giving up, but finally Kurt answered.

"Sorry, my hands were full of dish soap," Kurt answered a bit frantic, and once again the sound of his voice took Blaine's breath away.

"That's okay," Blaine whispered bashfully, willing his voice to be stronger. "Hi."

"Hi," Kurt said, this time a little more cautious and hesitant. Kurt was sure that this would get easier over time, but it had only been an hour since that first call and it was still hard to hear Blaine's voice.

"We um," Blaine cleared his throat. "We didn't win. I hope it's still okay that I called," Blaine said with a mix of disappointment and nerves.

"What do you mean you didn't win?!" Kurt screeched. He was suddenly glad that he'd gone into his bedroom to take the call. He was surprised Rachel didn't come barging in immediately.

Blaine slowly explained how Marley had passed out on stage. "Santana thinks that Kitty was feeding her laxatives to help her lose weight, not that she needs it," Blaine added.

"Who's Kitty?" Kurt asked confused.

"Oh, well, she was Patty Simcox in Grease?" Blaine prodded. Kurt nodded, remembering, though Blaine couldn't see him. Blaine continued. "Jake and Ryder didn't seem to know anything about Kitty messing with Marley, even though they both spend a ton of time with her and she's dating one, though honestly I'm not sure right now which one."

Kurt shook his head at all these names he barely knew. "You have a whole new life there Blaine," he whispered in wonderment, barely realizing he'd said it aloud.

Blaine was taken aback by the comment and squared his shoulders, a touch of anger brewing just beneath the surface. "Yeah, well, I kinda had to," he answered roughly, even though all he wanted to say was that his whole life was with Kurt.

"No Blaine, it's good," Kurt said, wondering where this sudden undercurrent of jealousy was coming from. He buried it down again as quickly as it had surfaced. "It's good," he repeated.

Blaine bowed his head, rubbing his neck, and looked into the darkness. "Well I should go," Blaine said. "I'll talk to you soon?" he asked hesitantly. "See you at Christmas?"

"See you at Christmas Blaine," Kurt answered and hung up. Blaine pressed his phone unconsciously to his lips.

*Someone to need you too much*

*Someone to know you too well*

*Someone to pull you up short*

*And put you through hell*

*And give you support for being alive*

"Kurt huh?" Santana said.

Her voice surprised him but he turned and smiled shyly as he took a seat one of the lower rungs of the ladder. "Yeah," he said a bit sheepishly. "In all the craziness, I didn't get a chance to tell you that he called me. Before we performed."

Santana smiled. "And what did Mr. Hummel have to say for himself?"

"That he still hasn't forgiven me. That he missed me like crazy. That I'm still his best friend. That he loves me." Blaine's smile grew with each word.

"And you said...?" Santana asked, her eyebrows arching.

"That he's my best friend and I love him," Blaine answered, his cheeks flushing.

"That's great Blaine," she said softly. "Though I don't know how I feel about him dumping you as a boyfriend then usurping my role of best friend," she said wryly.

"Well then it's a good thing I'm still *your* boyfriend," he said with a wink.

Santana couldn't decide where her sadness came from, but she couldn't deny it. "So what does that make me?"

Blaine smiled fondly and stood, linking his arm in hers. "Santana, you will always be my girl."

Santana smiled and rested her head briefly on Blaine's shoulder as they walked back to the choir room. Everyone was dejectedly gathering their belongings and heading out to their cars. Blaine suddenly realized he had no real place to go. He'd expected celebratory turkey pasta at Breadstix, but instead he was going home to an empty apartment. "Hey," he called, a questioning eye to Santana. "My parents are in Westerville and I have no interest in driving two hours to interrupt whatever it is they might be doing. What are your plans tonight?"

She glanced briefly over to Brittany who was being consoled in the corner by Sam. Santana shrugged. "Heading home to an empty house since my parents are at Abuela's and I'm still not welcome. They only

went because they thought I'd be out. My flight's not until three tomorrow, so no need for them to get home early."

"Good," he said with a grin and he grabbed her hand and pulled her to the door. "You're coming home with me."

*Being alive, make me alive, make me confused*

*Mock me with praise, let me be used*

*Vary my days*

*But alone is alone, not alive.*

Santana sat with her back against Blaine's pillow at the headboard of his bed. Blaine was sprawled on his stomach, his head resting on his folded arms, every once in a while reaching back to grab a handful of popcorn from the bowl wedged between them to share. They'd considered watching a movie, but neither could ultimately decide on anything, so instead they sat in silence, each one occasionally wallowing in misery or scolding the other to stop being miserable.

"I just really want to compete," Blaine was saying, his voice wistful. "I mean, I know that I've got Student Council and the Superhero club, but neither of those challenges me. I'm not worried about college. Well okay, I am, but not because of that. I just need to stay focused on winning something."

"Other than Kurt," Santana added sarcastically.

He rolled over to give her an exasperated look. "Yes. Other than Kurt."

"You could always try cheerleading," Santana said with a twinkle in her eye, and Blaine wasn't sure if she was joking or not. Then he wasn't sure if he wanted her to be joking or not.

"You really see me as a cheerleader San?" he asked sarcastically, but a part of him wanted her honest opinion.

"I don't know," she shrugged. "You're strong as hell, you got amazing moves, a confident air, and a gorgeous face. Pretty much sums up the cheerleader qualifications."

Blaine sighed and rested his hand back on his hands, staring ahead of him. "There's got to be something else I can do."

"Look Boyfriend, you're too short for basketball and I don't think that you got the legs like Kurt to be a kicker for the football team," Santana said. Blaine frowned. He definitely didn't have Kurt's flexibility, something he sorely missed. "There's always the chess team," she teased.

"Reminds me too much of my father," Blaine said into his hands, then sat up to face Santana. "You're seriously telling me that the only choice I have to be on a National Championship team at McKinley is the Cheerios?"

Santana shrugged again. "I wouldn't knock the chance for you and Kurt to have matching Cheerios outfits," she said. "It's pretty sexy, believe me. Especially taking them off."

Blaine blushed and collapsed on the bed in surrender. Santana played dirty, the one hand that she knew he wouldn't fold. He didn't know if the images in his mind would ever be more than a dream, but he'd do what he had to for the possibility that it might someday be reality. Still, he moaned with anticipated regret. "Okay Santana, you win. Just call me Blaine Cheerio."

*Somebody hold me too close*

*Somebody force me to care*

Blaine glanced at his watch and headed to Sue's office where she'd summoned him at precisely 3pm. He was surprised to see Tina outside her door as well. "Fancy meeting you here," Blaine said with a questioning smile.

"Yeah well," she blushed with embarrassment. "I kinda asked Coach Sue if I could be on the Cheerios now that Glee is done."

"Really Tina?" Blaine asked, his voice filled with amusement and maybe a touch of relief. "Why?"

Tina shrugged. "I don't know. I always kind of wanted to be a cheerleader. Mike said I'd be good at it. So I thought I'd give it a try."

Sue opened the door and shouted out to them as she climbed on her Stairmaster. "Come in Cheerio wannabees and take a seat."

It was Blaine's turn to blush and shrug as Tina shot a shocked glance at him. "Santana thought it would a good idea."

*Somebody make me come through*

*I'll always be there as frightened as you of being alive*

Cheerios practice was exhausting and though it reminded him of the early days with the Warblers, it also reminded him how lax he had become when it had come to hours of practice. He welcomed the brief break when he and Tina and Brittany were reluctantly dismissed, with a slew of words Blaine didn't care to repeat, to meet Finn in the auditorium.

It had only been two days, but the truth was, he missed his friends. He missed singing. He missed performing. And he felt bad for Finn. Finn had been like a brother to him for a while, that kind of brother that you never truly understood and never totally got along with but when you really needed him to be there he was there. And as the rest of the Glee club turned on him and walked away, Blaine kept hoping that *someone* else would stay. But he watched Brittany leave. He watched Sam go. He watched them all walk away from the very thing they all had promised him only two weeks ago: Family. As he stood alone with Marley on the stage, maybe if Finn had asked him to stay he would have. But Finn said nothing, and Blaine walked off. Maybe holding onto Glee was once again just holding onto Kurt. Maybe it was better to just let it go too and embrace his whole new life.

*Someone you have to let in*

*Someone whose feelings you spare*



*Someone who, like it or not*

*Will want you to share a little, a lot, of being alive*

"Where are you off to?" Amy Anderson asked Blaine as he grumpily packed envelopes, notebooks and his laptop into his bag.

"Dad asked me to come over to fill out my college applications so they're not late. And by ask, I mean, ordered," he grumbled. Things were changing, but he still knew better than to ignore his father's demands when paying for college was involved. Whether it was true or not, Blaine still felt like one misstep and just like Dalton, it could all be taken away.

She kissed him on the cheek as he put on his coat and pulled his messenger bag over his head. "Don't fight with him Blaine," she begged as he headed out the door. "Let him in a little bit. He means well and he just wants to be a part of this."

"He wants to control this," Blaine shot back before heading out to his car where he couldn't hear his mother's response.

The drive to Westerville was long, but since Kurt's phone call he'd started listening to music again so it passed quickly. He pulled into the driveway of his father's house and walked to the door. He tried the knob and was pleased it was left open for him. He still hadn't taken a key back, but he hated ringing the doorbell to his own home. Pride sometimes didn't make for comfortable choices.

"Hey Dad, I'm here," he called tiredly. He didn't want to do his applications with his father. He wanted to do them alone, in his room, where he could concentrate on being himself rather than the man his father wanted him to be. But each one needed an application fee and for that he needed his father.

"I'm in the office Blaine," Colonel Anderson called and Blaine walked through the living room to his father's office. It had two desks, his father's and a second one that Blaine set himself up at. He pulled out his laptop. As it booted up, Blaine looked around at the memorabilia and medals that the Colonel had up around the room. There were also pictures of him and Cooper. Older ones, when they were little. It never escaped Blaine's attention that there were few pictures of him during the years that things were terrible between him and his Dad, but he was surprised that his father had added his school picture from this year to the wall. He smiled happily, despite himself.

"How many applications do you have to do?" the Colonel asked, glancing up from his own work.

"Oh, um, I figured I would work on Columbia and NYU today. Maybe Berkeley too. And NYADA," Blaine added under his breath.

"You think that's a good idea?" his father asked, an eyebrow raised.

Blaine shrugged and turned away. "Doesn't hurt to apply," he mumbled. "As long as Kurt's okay with it."

Blaine had been so proud of Kurt for getting into NYADA that he couldn't help but share it with everyone. The Colonel had known then exactly what Blaine would do and it was one of the reasons why he'd asked him to do his applications there. The Colonel sighed and came over to Blaine, sitting on the desk. Blaine bristled at the invasion of his space and the lecture he was sure was to come, and he kept his eyes trained on the computer. "Blaine, you can't plan your life around Kurt. Maybe you two will get back together and maybe you won't but college is the biggest decision of your life and you have to make choices that are right for *you* not that are right for him or for the two of you. I know you've thought in terms of "we" for a long time now son, but you have to go back to planning for yourself." He stared at Blaine who was trying desperately to ignore him. He didn't want Blaine throwing his future away for his high school sweetheart. He only wanted the best for his son. "And I don't think that NYADA is the best choice for you," he finished.

"I don't want to plan for being alone Dad," Blaine snapped, his eyes flying up to look at his father. "And besides, NYADA is an amazing school and Cooper thinks I should apply. He thinks that with that kind of training I really can make it on Broadway if I want. Or in movies."

"I thought you wanted to do music," the Colonel questioned.

"Yeah, well, that's why I'm applying to Columbia and other schools. Please Dad, don't tell me I can't apply to NYADA. If Kurt says it's okay..." he cut himself off, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. Those were precisely the words his father didn't want to hear. "I just want to leave the possibility open. That's all. It's a long time until September. A lot of things can change."

The Colonel studied him. He didn't think it was a good idea for so many reasons. But he wasn't going to push anymore. This was Blaine's choice. His life in which to make mistakes. "Very well," he nodded and returned without another word to his desk.

Blaine let out a sigh of relief and for the next three hours set to work on completing online applications, writing essays and filling out paper forms. His father wrote him checks or plugged in credit card information and Blaine pressed send and sealed envelopes.

His father held out a check for him made out to NYADA.

Their eyes met. Blaine saw the worry and the disapproval in his father's eyes. The Colonel saw the hope in Blaine's. Blaine silently took the check and the Colonel said nothing as he turned and walked out of the room, letting Blaine do what he would do.

Blaine placed the check inside and folded the envelope over almost reverently, but he didn't seal it. If he went to Columbia or NYU, he would always be there for Kurt, best friends forever. But NYADA was different. He turned the envelope over and pushed it to the corner of the desk. He was scared that Kurt would say no, because he knew that it was the promise of a future that he and Kurt had once upon a time dreamed of. If Kurt said yes, he'd be admitting that he hadn't entirely closed the door on that future. He'd be giving Blaine a chance to come back into his life, to let him prove himself, to maybe spend the rest of their lives together. Blaine was willing to place that future entirely in Kurt's hands, as scared as he was, because it was the only future he could imagine right now that truly made him feel like he was living.

*Somebody let me come through*

*I'll always be there*

*As frightened as you to help us survive*

*Being alive.*

## ***Chapter Ten: Glee, Actually***

Blaine stood in the living room of the house in Westerville hanging ornaments on the tree. His mother was baking cookies in the kitchen as his father worked silently in his office. The fireplace crackled beside him as the stockings hung from the mantle and all should have felt absolutely right with the world.

Except it didn't.

It had been more than a year since Blaine had started going to counseling and as he and his father began to find a place of relative peace and the pain of losing Kurt was starting to ever so slowly ease, the flashbacks had nearly ceased. Until today. Today he found himself in moments of panic, his heart racing, his head spinning and his stomach fighting to settle, and all it took was a certain ornament hung on the tree or the crash of his mother accidentally dropping the cookie sheet on the floor.

"Sorry!" his mother yelled from the kitchen seconds after the heavy metal clanked on the tiled floor. "Sorry!" she repeated.

"Everything okay in there?" his father yelled from the study.

But Blaine didn't hear the words. He heard a crash and yelling and that was all it took for Blaine to once again be 8 years old on that dreadful night when Christmas was forever ruined.

Until Kurt.

Last year Christmas had been perfect as he and Kurt and his mother hung the ornaments on their small tree in the Lima apartment. They'd exchanged presents and promises, including the promise that it would be their first of many Christmas' together. That promise was all that was holding Blaine together right now.

"First batch of cookies," his mother sung as she exited the kitchen with a plate of snowflake sugar cookies. Blaine forced a smile, the smell of her baking helping him relax.

"You're doing a great job on that tree, Blaine," the Colonel praised as he swept out of the office and quickly snatched a cookie from the plate, settling into the couch.

"Thanks," Blaine said with surprise.

He turned back to the tree, continuing to hang the ornaments. Blaine smiled fondly at the ones he had quietly stolen last year from Kurt's trash pile and snuck back to his keep pile. Out of the corner of his eye he watched his parents tenderly interact with one another. They looked surreal to Blaine and it felt like a dream he'd be awoken from as soon as the screaming and the hitting started again.

The truth was, he wasn't ready for this. He was still on pins and needles waiting for the other shoe to drop, waiting for the battle to begin. He still walked on eggshells around his father. He was still angry at his mother for forgiving so easily. He still didn't trust either of them. And he wasn't ready to pretend that it was all better.

The phone rang and for the first time that day his face lit up when he saw it was Kurt. He glanced over to his parents before heading upstairs to his room for some privacy, hitting the answer button halfway up the stairs. "Hey!" he beamed into the phone.

"Hi," Kurt said, more hesitantly than Blaine would have liked. "How are things?"

"Things are...weird," Blaine remarked as he slipped into his room and closed the door quietly behind him. "I'm in Westerville decorating a Christmas tree while my mother makes cookies and cuddles with my father on the couch. I honestly don't know how long I can take this."

"I'm sorry," Kurt said earnestly then paused. It was a pause filled with avoidance and regret and Blaine waited him out while his heart dropped and he sunk onto his bed with it. "Look, Blaine, I, um..."

Blaine closed his eyes and sighed with resignation. "Just say it Kurt," Blaine told him, his voice low. "You're not coming to Ohio for Christmas."

"I'm not coming to Ohio for Christmas," Kurt echoed. "It's just with my NYADA tuition and they're all going to go to Zanesville to Carol's sister's house, which doesn't sound like any fun..." he prattled on until Blaine interrupted him.

"Yeah, yeah, of course," Blaine said, his voice thin and forced. Blaine felt the tears come to his eyes as disappointment and guilt washed over him and god how he was sick of crying over Kurt and his parents and everything. "My Dad's calling Kurt, I gotta go," he lied. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas Blaine," he heard Kurt whisper before he hung up the phone.

Blaine heard giggles from the first floor beneath him and he threw himself face first into his pillow. There was absolutely nothing merry about this Christmas.

Blaine's nerves raced as he drove straight from Glee rehearsal on the last day before Christmas break to meet Burt at Breadstix. The call was a huge surprise. Maybe Kurt had changed his mind about coming to Ohio. Or maybe Burt was going to finally confront him for betraying Kurt and preventing his son from wanting to come home to his family for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Or maybe Burt felt sorry for him and was inviting him to Zanesville. Or maybe...

He decided getting out of the car and walking into the restaurant was a better idea than sitting alone in the parking lot staring at the door as he mulled over the possibilities of why the man he respected more than any other in the world had called him out of the blue and asked him to meet for dinner. He walked inside and scanned the crowd, seeing Burt sitting toward the middle of the restaurant in a booth for two. Blaine headed over and stood tentatively next to the table once he'd arrived. "Hello Sir," he said formally.

Burt kept on his best poker face, the one that Blaine found more intimidating than any other, and invited Blaine to sit.

"Thank you Sir," Blaine said quietly and he took off his coat and laid it neatly beside him. Blaine forced himself to meet Burt's eyes briefly, but his guilt and shame weighed heavily on him in the presence of Kurt's father. He hastily averted his eyes, concentrating intently on the menu.

Burt allowed Blaine his time and his silence, knowing how hard it must have been for the boy to even come to meet him. Kurt had told him everything he knew about what had gone on and while it wasn't much, it was enough. Burt had his own thoughts but he had kept them to himself this long, believing that Kurt had to make his own choices about his relationship with Blaine. He still believed that. But he also believed that everything happened for a reason. Even the bad things.

"So Kurt tells me you're going to be hanging out in Westerville for Christmas," Burt broke the silence once they'd placed their orders. "How do you feel about that?"

Blaine avoided Burt's gaze, concentrating hard on stirring his coffee. "Spending Christmas watching my parents navigate their tentative reconciliation while I brood over the fact that Kurt's not home for ice skating and hot chocolate like he promised? Sounds like the worst Christmas ever," Blaine grumbled.

Burt chuckled at the pout that was so similar to Kurt's, but he looked at Blaine and saw not the bright eyed always smiling boy that he'd come to know. He saw the hurt, broken kid of two summers ago. It pained him to see that Blaine back in front of him again and he frowned. "Look kid, I've been meaning to call you, but some things have gotten in the way."

"You don't need to explain Sir," Blaine said into his coffee. "I understand."

"No, you don't." Burt's voice was so firm it made Blaine look up. "Look, I don't know how I feel about telling you this before I tell Kurt, but I feel like I owe it to you. I know how much you must have needed a Dad with all this going on with Kurt, and I wasn't there for you like I should have been."

"It's okay, really. I mean, I get that you're on Kurt's side. I mean, you should be. I mean, I am too, mostly, there's no excuse, so..." Blaine rambled on, stopping only when Burt placed his hand on top of his own. It was so much rougher than his son's, but just like that summer, they were as caring and soothing as Kurt's.

"Blaine, stop," Burt said gently and he waited until Blaine's eyes settled on his before continuing. "I have prostate cancer. That's why I didn't call you sooner."

Blaine froze, trapping his breath for a moment before it was swept from his lungs. The room suddenly swayed and spun until Burt tightened his grip on Blaine's hand, bringing his thoughts back from the depths of despair. He lowered his eyes slowly and forced back the tears that threatened to fall. A life flashed before his eyes. A life without Kurt or Burt in it. A life without love. A life without a father who he could be safe with. Or if by some miracle Kurt came back to him, a wedding with no one to give his beloved away. He imagined children without a grandfather they could ever truly trust. That was all it took for the tears to fall for real before Blaine could catch his breath and wipe them quickly away, fighting them back with all his might.

"It's okay son," Burt said gently.

Blaine wished they weren't in a public place because his heart hurt so much that all he wanted to do was break down sobbing. "What do..." he took a deep breath and tried again to get the words out without falling apart. "What do the doctors say?" he whispered.

"They say I'm going to be fine," Burt assured him. "They caught it early, the tests indicate it hasn't spread, so they'll do some surgery and hopefully all will be fine. 100% cured."

Blaine nodded and looked away. "I feel like I shouldn't be allowed to feel the way I do," Blaine said, not being able to stop the tears from rolling down his cheeks. "I mean, you're not my father, and after what I did to Kurt..."

"You messed up kid," Burt acknowledged, but his voice was tempered. "And I'll never say that what you did was okay because it wasn't. You remember that talk you asked me to have with Kurt two years ago? You remember what I told him?"

"Yes sir," Blaine said softly. "You told him that he matters."

"Well what you did...I'm sure it kind of made him feel like he didn't matter that much, at least to you," Burt said honestly, not pulling any punches. He needed to know what Blaine was thinking.

Blaine dropped his head in his hands as his heart once again shattered, his words trembling. "Kurt is the only thing that matters to me."

Burt took his words in for a minute before answering. "Did you tell him that?" he asked.

"I tried. He wouldn't listen."

"Ah yes," Burt nodded knowingly. "I am quite familiar with the fingers in the ears, the humming..." Blaine chuckled into his hands at Burt's words despite himself. "And I know I'm not Kurt, but if you want to talk to someone, a Hummel who will listen, I am happy to do that."

"I don't know what I'd do without you, Burt," Blaine whispered. "At times you've been the closest thing I've had to a father, but I wasn't sure, and then..."

Burt gripped his hand again. "You're like a son to me Blaine, and one mistake ain't gonna change that. I've told you time and again, you are a part of this family and that's true whether you and Kurt are together or



not. I don't turn my back on family." Blaine took in his words and wrapped them up like a hug he would hold onto forever. "So listen to me when I tell you," Burt said turning stern. "Kurt's not the only one who matters. So this listening I'm going to do when we get back from New York will also have a little talking about you not throwing yourself around either, understood?"

Blaine nodded. "I'd really like that Sir," Blaine said with a ghost of a smile, then did a double take. "Wait, what do you mean *when we get back from New York*?"

Burt shrugged nonchalantly, though the twinkle in his eye betrayed him. "Well, I thought you might want to come with me to the city for Christmas. There's no way I'm going to let Kurt get away with not spending time with his old man two holidays in a row. Plus, I hate flying alone and my son owes you a hot chocolate and some ice skating. I hear Bryant Park is way better than the Aqualize."

"You're serious?" Blaine asked, his heart leaping excitedly in his chest.

"I'm not really much of a jokester Blaine," Burt arched his brow and smirked. "We'll be in Zanesville for the weekend then I'll come get you in Westerville early Monday and we'll head over to the airport. As long as it's okay with your parents."

Suddenly Blaine frowned. "You think Kurt will..." he trailed off, but Burt knew what he was asking.

"I think Kurt will need you there," he said seriously. "Even if he doesn't know it."

"You are not going to New York and that is final," the Colonel fumed. It was the weekend before Christmas and Blaine had been scared to bring it up, but he was running out of time. His bags were upstairs in his room, packed and ready to go, though he'd allowed his father to just assume they were for the Christmas vacation. Finally though he knew he had to tell him. Not ask him, Blaine reminded himself.

"I'm not asking your permission Dad." Blaine held firm while his heart beat wildly in his chest with fear. "Burt invited me to New York with him and I'm going. You'll have Cooper here, he arrives tomorrow, right?"

"Cooper's not coming sweetheart," his mother said softly, trying to diffuse the argument. "He got a last minute gig to tape a local commercial in Jersey over the Christmas holiday. He thinks it's really going to explode like his last one, so he doesn't want to give up the chance."

Blaine's shoulders fell as he frowned. "Well, I'm sorry. I really am. But I'm not giving up the chance to be with Kurt on Christmas."

"It's always about Kurt, isn't it," the Colonel muttered under his breath, but Amy shot him a look and he took a breath and started again more calmly. "Blaine," he said as he took Amy's hand. "This is the first Christmas in a really long time where things are okay. No one is scared. Your mom and I wanted to enjoy it together as a family."

"I was scared of you for 18 years, it doesn't go away that quickly," Blaine grumbled.

"You can't keep running away to Kurt," the Colonel insisted. "You have to face it eventually."

"I'm not running away from anything Dad, I'm running *to* him," Blaine snapped. "And I'm sorry if it hurts you, but there is no one I would rather spend Christmas with than Kurt." He stormed up the stairs to his room and slammed the door, knowing he was acting like a small child instead of the grown man he was trying to be, but in the heat of the moment he was unable to control himself. He waited for the shouts and the heavy footsteps of his father but he heard neither. Instead the sound of soft whispers traveled up the staircase followed by the delicate stride of his mother. She rapped quietly on the door.

"Come in," he murmured as he sat up against his headboard and picked up his phone to pretend he was scrolling through text messages or Facebook or anything other than listening to her reprimands for his insolence.

She sat on the bed and rubbed his leg tenderly and he looked up at her. "Your father just had high hopes for Christmas this year and he's disappointed."

"I know the feeling," Blaine muttered, setting the phone beside him. "I just...I can't give up on Christmas together, ya know? Not when his Dad is the one that invited me. Not knowing that Kurt is going to need me." He looked at her, hoping she would understand.

And she did. She knew how much Kurt meant to him. She'd never tell Blaine, but she'd seen the same look in his father's eyes many times over the years. *One more chance*, they begged. Well she'd given his father a

hundred more chances. How could she deny Blaine just this one? "I'll give you my blessing if you promise me one thing," she told him.

"What is it?" he asked, a bit suspiciously.

She picked up Blaine's phone and held it out for him. "See Cooper while you're there? I don't want either one of you to spend Christmas without family, and if things don't go well with Kurt, you're going to need him," she said.

Blaine broke out into a grin and took the phone, hugging her. "I promise," he chimed.

"Have a Merry Christmas Blaine," she smiled, tracing a hand softly on his cheek before leaving him to call Cooper.

Blaine dialed the number but it went to voicemail and he left a message. "Ho ho ho, Coop, guess who you're picking up at the airport Christmas Eve morning?"

"Chauffer for Blaine Anderson," Cooper called with not so veiled sarcasm as he saw Blaine and Burt head out of the restricted area. Neither had checked any bags. Since flying to and from Washington D.C. on a regular basis, Burt was a master at packing his carry on and he'd repacked Blaine's bags at the house before they left.

"Looks like your ride's here Kid," Burt said cheerfully, slapping Blaine on the back. "8pm at Bryant Park. Have your skates on. Don't be late," he winked.

"I won't Sir," he assured him. "Thanks," he smiled.

Burt greeted Cooper and they shook hands, then he headed off in a taxi for Kurt's apartment. It would cost him about seventy bucks but it was a hell of a lot easier than dealing with public transportation.

Cooper looked Blaine up and down. "I assume you want to go back to the hotel and get changed before heading out to the city. Maybe take a shower?"

"Sounds like a plan," Blaine said and Cooper led them through Newark airport to the hotel shuttles. They sat on the bench, waiting for theirs to arrive. "So what's this commercial?"

"Oh!" Cooper exclaimed excitedly. "It's for a local insurance company! The jingle is really catchy and my agents say it could become even bigger than Free Credit Rating!"

"And they're filming over Christmas?" Blaine asked dubiously.

"Well, they're filming the day after Christmas, and they needed me here yesterday for some fittings and the studio recording and stuff. I think they got a discount on the space because it's off-season," Cooper explained as if he knew what he was talking about. The little bus pulled up. "Here's our shuttle."

They rode back to the hotel, which was only a few minutes away, in relative silence. Blaine let Cooper lead the way to his room and he sat down on the double bed that didn't look lived in. Now that he was here, excitement disappeared and nerves took over. Cooper didn't miss the change. "So what's the plan Squirt?"

Blaine fidgeted and kept his eyes trained on his fingers. "Um, well, Burt wants me to meet Kurt at CitiPond in Bryant Park. Kurt promised me ice skating and hot chocolate before he changed his mind about going back to Lima for Christmas, so Burt thought we could do it here instead." He looked up at Cooper suddenly with panic in his eyes. "Please tell me this wasn't a stupid idea."

"This wasn't a stupid idea," Cooper echoed.

"What if he isn't happy to see me?" Blaine fretted.

"What if he is?" Cooper retorted, an eyebrow quirked in amusement.

"I'm serious Coop," Blaine shot back. "What if he just turns around and walks away like he did at Grease, or worse, tells me that he didn't come to Lima because he realized he can't forgive me and doesn't want me in his life anymore?" The sweat on his brow was gleaming and his hands shook just enough for his brother to see.

Cooper knelt down in front of his brother and took his hands. "Then at least you'll know where you stand," he said matter-of-factly. Blaine nodded in sad acknowledgement. Cooper looked at his little brother, so hopeful yet broken. It was the face he had seen and ignored when they were little. When Dad would blow up at them and Blaine seemed resigned to the fact that one or both of them was going to be in big trouble

but just hoped it wasn't him. On those days, Cooper just wanted to take the pain for both of them, even if Blaine had been at fault. Why didn't Kurt feel the same way? "I have to admit, Blaine, I don't understand how Kurt could just abandon you after everything you've been through with Dad. He has to realize that you wouldn't have done something like that if it weren't for all the shit that he put you through."

"Cooper stop," Blaine ordered and Coop shut his mouth and watched his brother. "I don't want a free pass. I don't want Kurt's pity. I don't want him to spend the rest of his life with me because my father was an asshole who abused me and taught me crap about how to be a real man. I don't want Kurt settling, putting up with less than he deserves because he feels sorry for me."

"That's not what I meant," Cooper said carefully.

"Kurt is a romantic," Blaine said trying to explain to Cooper. "He's the type of guy who grows up to tell his kids this fantastic love story of how he married his high school sweetheart. That they'd loved each other so much that they'd never been with anyone else, because no one else could ever hold a candle to what they had. He deserves that fairy tale."

"Blaine," Coop said softly, hating to see his brother beating himself up, but Blaine wouldn't let him continue.

"I took that from him," Blaine shouted over him, "and everything that happened to me before doesn't change that. No matter what happens now, even if he somehow forgives me and we spend the rest of our lives together, that's something that I can't ever give back to him. What does he tell his kids now?"

Cooper sighed and sat next to Blaine on the bed, placing a hand on his knee. "If you end up together, Squirt, you tell your kids that true love isn't perfect. It's not the absence of dark times, it's finding your way through the darkness. It's falling in love over and over again. It's being willing to trust even when it's hardest. It's doing whatever it takes to earn trust back when you mess up. It's forgiving yourself. It's loving yourself as much as you love someone else. Kurt doesn't deserve a fairy tale Blaine. Real life is so much better."

Blaine stared at his fingers, clasped tightly in his lap. It was a beautiful sentiment, but he wasn't sure he believed it. "Where'd you learn that from?" he asked doubtfully.

"I learned it from you Blaine," Cooper said tenderly. Taken by surprise, Blaine's eyes snapped to Cooper, who smiled down at him. "You took a chance to trust me again. You let me go back. You let me in. And I learned to forgive myself for abandoning you."

"Like Mom...and Dad?" Blaine said quietly.

"Yeah," Cooper breathed. "Seems to be what the Andersons do. Now I don't know if the Hummel men are the same, but if Kurt's anything like his Dad..."

Blaine nodded. "He is, in some ways."

Cooper smiled. "Then there's always hope Blaine," he said. "Now, why don't you and I put this deep talk behind us and go paint the town before your date tonight."

Blaine blushed and ran a hand through his hair. "It's not a date, Coop," he murmured bashfully.

Cooper shrugged and gave him a teasing shrug. "I don't know, sounds like an arranged date to me!"

"Yeah, well, no one asked you," Blaine said ducking his red face as he disappeared into the bathroom. He wouldn't admit it to Cooper, but he hoped very much that it would end up being a date.

Cooper and Blaine took the train into the city and took advantage of as much of their day together as they could. After spending the rest of their morning and lunch at the Holiday Train show at the NY Botanical Gardens, they headed downtown to window shop, marveling at the beautiful Christmas displays at Bloomingdale's and getting lost amongst the amazing toys at FAO Schwartz. They indulged in roasted chestnuts that they found on every street corner, each bag keeping them a little bit warmer inside. At 3 o'clock, they headed to Midtown to the stunning St. Thomas Episcopal Church. Throughout the day, Blaine had been filling Cooper in on all the things he'd neglected to share over the last few months. They talked about how weird their parents had been, Blaine's feelings about being alone at McKinley and finally how he'd almost returned to Dalton.

"It's just not the same as it was when I was there," Blaine was telling Cooper sadly as the world-renowned choir filed into the Church. His eyes glanced over the large assembly of men and boys in their white and red choir robes until they landed on two good friends who Blaine sorely missed for more than one reason.

Wes and David were looking for him as well and finally caught his eye and smiled before they were brought to attention by the choir director.

It was a beautiful service, the children of the congregation invited up to sit near the steps of the chancel, near the crèche, midway through the service. Blaine sang along quietly when he knew the words, but mostly he sat mesmerized by the beauty of the music and the pride at seeing his friends in such a prestigious choir.

Wes and David came quickly to find him after the services and their warm embraces were exactly what Blaine needed to calm the nerves that were starting to creep back up mere hours before he was due to meet Kurt. "Hey Blaine!" they both exclaimed excitedly.

"It's amazing that you could make it out to the service," Wes said.

"You guys sounded fantastic," Blaine beamed proudly.

"It's so good to see you again, man," David said. "What have you been up to?"

Blaine shrugged. He didn't want to talk about Kurt. He could tell them how Sebastian and Hunter had turned the Warblers from a respectable and esteemed show choir to a petty and scheming one, but he was sure they'd already heard and he didn't want to bring anyone down. Not today. "Nothing much really. Just student council and Glee, though we lost sectionals to the Warblers, so..."

"So New Directions will be hitting the nursing home circuit then?" David grinned mischievously.

"You can take them on a tour in Columbus," Wes chimed in.

Blaine laughed heartily. "Yes, I absolutely could."

"So how long are you in New York?" David asked.

"Um, Kurt's dad and I are heading back home to Ohio on Wednesday, so just a quick trip. But hopefully a nice one," he added nervously.

They all smiled softly. Wes and David knew the story, as best as they could, from Nick. They also knew better than to ask too much about Kurt.

"So we're going to head out to some dinner before the service tonight," Wes said. "You and Cooper want to come or are you heading out?"

Blaine turned to ask Coop, then realized that he'd disappeared throughout the conversation and was now nowhere to be found. He scanned the crowd and spied him flirting with a pretty young blonde a few pews away. Blaine rolled his eyes and pulled out his phone, sending a quick text.

### **To Cooper: Dinner...with her or with us?**

The boys watched amusedly as Cooper pulled his phone out of his pocket and quickly checked the text. He smiled, hit a few buttons and, whispering something to the girl, handed his phone over to her. She smiled coyly and inputted what could only be her cell number then handed the phone back. He offered his best grin and a quick wink before nearly bouncing back to where Blaine, David and Wes were standing. "So where are we going boys?" he asked beaming.

They all laughed, and Blaine threw an arm around his brother's back as he let David and Wes lead them out onto the street. Dinner was delicious, full of small talk and hilarious stories about Wes and David's college experiences. It was nice to be away from Ohio, away from the pettiness of high school competition and out in the real world. For the first time, he could almost understand how easily it must have been for Kurt to pull away. New York was like a whole different universe.

Time flew by and before he knew it, it was nearing 7 o'clock and Blaine wanted to make sure he got to Bryant Park with plenty of time to spare. He said goodbye to his friends, promised to write to keep them up to date on everything, and then he and Cooper headed out to the rink. Finally he let his nerves overtake him and he brushed his hands together not because of the cold, but because the blood in his veins was turning to ice. Cooper looked over and grabbed him tightly as they walked.

"It's going to be fine Squirt," he guaranteed him. "Whatever happens, it's going to be fine."

They reached the pond and Blaine rented his skates and flew onto the ice, warming up, getting warm, and working off some of his nerves. At 7:45 he skated over to Cooper who sat at one of the tables away from the front door. They didn't want to ruin the surprise.

"What if he doesn't come," Blaine asked for the third time, as he stood breathlessly against the rail.



"He's going to come Blaine, and you're going to miss him if you keep spinning around the pond or fretting over here next to me." Blaine took a deep breath and Cooper took a glance at the entrance, his eyes lighting up. "In fact, he's here now," Coop said and Blaine immediately snapped his attention to the entrance where a beautiful sight filled his eyes. He felt a pat on his back and heard the words, "Go get him tiger," before he closed his eyes, said a quick prayer, and skated over to the love of his life.

Seeing your child hurt is one of the hardest things a parent can go through, and seeing Kurt torn between forgiveness and fear nearly broke Burt's heart as he watched Kurt and Blaine skate together on the ice. If only he'd known then what he knew now, he would have given Blaine more of the attention he so desperately needed after Kurt left. He would have made sure Blaine knew that he mattered, not just to Kurt, but to him.

Walking to Bryant Park, following Kurt at a safe distance where he couldn't be seen, Burt never realized how beautiful New York could be. But Kurt was right; it was a city full of magic.

He hoped the magic could help his kids take that first step again. They were just not the same without one another. He nodded as he watched them together on the ice. They were beautiful.

If Burt had known then what he knew now, he would have done a better job of showing Kurt how much work went into a relationship. He would have taught him that love is earned, not given freely. That it takes attention and care. That taking it for granted was the surest way of losing it.

Burt sat at a table by the frozen pond and watched children and families and couples all skate hand in hand. Some fell only to give up. Some reached a hand and supported one another. And some skated by, seemingly without a care in the world.

He'd always taught Kurt to reach a hand, but never had he told him what to do when it burned him.

He watched his son catch his eyes, and Kurt smiled softly, whispering to Blaine that he'd be back in a bit. He skated over, nearly falling once but hanging on, as he came slamming to the edge. He wobbled his way next to his father, where he sighed heavily as he took a seat.

"I hope I didn't mess up your Christmas," Burt said earnestly. "I thought you might need him...after my news."

Kurt's eyes stayed trained on Blaine, who skated as well as the professionals out on the ice, face beaming with hope and excitement, like a child on Christmas morning. Kurt shook his head slightly at his Dad. "No, you didn't mess it up. You did maybe complicate things a bit though," he smirked.

"I'm sorry, Kurt," Burt confessed with a heavy heart. "I don't think I gave you all the tools you needed to handle this."

"I still love him, Dad. But I don't know if we're meant to be. I'm afraid to trust him. What if I take him back and he does it again?" Kurt asked, his fear caught in his voice.

"What if he doesn't?" Burt retorted. He turned and placed a comforting hand on Kurt's knee, wishing as always that this was as easy to fix as the scrapes from falling of his bicycle had been so many years ago. Kurt looked at him, his blue eyes so much older than those days, but still searching for his Dad to have all the answers. "There are an infinite number of what ifs in a relationship, but we can't tell the future, Kurt. I couldn't have known that my time with your mother would have been cut short. But if I had known then what I know now, I still would not have changed a single second with her."

"So what do I do?" Kurt asked.

He rested his head on Burt's shoulder, and held his hand. It struck Burt in that moment how he'd do anything to stop his child's pain but nothing to prevent his own, because without it, he wouldn't be who he was today. And he realized, he had to let him go. He'd done as much as he could. This was part of Kurt growing up, and Burt couldn't push him any further.

"This is your life son, your future," Burt told him. "So the only question to ask yourself is can you imagine it without him."

They skated for a couple of hours after their impromptu duet. Cooper and Burt had gone off together somewhere and both boys were a little apprehensive about what those two could be up to. As they each took their moments resting on the sidelines, they watched the other closely. So many thoughts raced through their heads. The uncertainty of their present and their future most prominent in their minds.

Despite promises of a mature heart to heart, the words they both needed to say went unspoken that night. They went to warm up at Celsius, sharing a pumpkin cheesecake, as they allowed themselves to focus on

the skaters below rather than each other. Meeting one another's eyes, especially for Kurt, was too powerful, too full of emotion they still weren't ready to explore. When Kurt did look at Blaine, as he had on the ice, his stomach tightened and his heart beat quickly at the reminder of his infidelity. But the thought of walking away from him forever felt even worse.

"I'm sorry about your Dad, Kurt," Blaine said gently. The subject was hard, but it was safer than talking about them. And it was why Burt had brought him here after all.

Kurt lowered his eyes to the table. He'd been trying not to think about it, but that was the other thing weighing heavily on him and he needed to talk to his best friend about it. "I'm just so scared," Kurt admitted, his eyes shining with unshed tears. "I keep imagining him not being here for my first starring role, or my NYADA graduation, or my wedding." The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them, and though both of their faces reddened at the image, they looked away and didn't acknowledge the awkwardness.

Blaine pulled his hands into his lap to prevent himself from reaching out for Kurt, but with the power in his voice, he forced Kurt to meet his eyes. "Listen to me Kurt," he said firmly. "Your father is the strongest man I know, next to you, and there is no way he isn't going to fight like hell to be there for all of those things and more. So don't even let your mind go there. This may slow him down a bit, but it is *not* going to stop him. Nothing stops the Hummel men," Blaine said. "Getting into NYADA is proof of that," he added with a proud smile.

Kurt blushed and averted his eyes. "Yeah, it is, isn't it."

"Don't ever give up on your dreams, Kurt. Whatever they are, whoever they're with. Don't give up and your father will be there to see you make them come true."

"Thanks Blaine," Kurt replied, though the words seem to fall incredibly short of all he wanted to say. Luckily Blaine seemed to understand.

"You're welcome," he answered smoothly. "Come on, let's go get that hot chocolate you promised me. This is most definitely not the Lima Bean."

They went to the counter and ordered two Chocolate Storms to go. They held the warm cups firmly between their fingers, in part to keep warm, but also to keep from holding hands, something that felt so

natural and yet so precarious to them both. As they walked out of the Park, the church bells chimed. Blaine's face lit up. "Listen, hey, it's midnight!" Kurt watched him and nodded. "It's Christmas."

"Officially," Kurt said quietly, awkwardly.

Blaine looked at him. He knew Kurt was hesitant. This wasn't the grand reunification that he'd hoped for, but it also wasn't the complete rejection that he'd dreaded. It was friendship. And he could be okay with that. "No matter what, no matter where, even if we're not together, we're always gonna be there for each other."

"Yeah," Kurt smiled and wrapped an arm around Blaine in a gentle hug. Blaine squeezed his eyes closed and sighed against Kurt's shoulder, breathing in the scent that he'd missed so much. He opened his eyes to see Burt smiling back at them, but by the time Kurt let go, Burt was gone.

Blaine ducked his head, not wanting to make Kurt any more uncomfortable than he already was. "I should be going. It's a long trip back to Newark." He shuffled his feet, absentmindedly tracing a heart on the ground with his toe. "It was great seeing you, Kurt," he said in farewell.

"Wait, you're not coming over for Christmas tomorrow?" Kurt found himself asking, wondering as soon as it was out of his mouth if he regretted it or not.

"Oh, well, I didn't want to assume," Blaine stammered. "Or intrude. I mean, I know it's important for you and your dad to spend that time together."

Kurt was pretty sure his Dad would kill him if he didn't invite Blaine, but he didn't want to say that and imply he didn't want Blaine there. He also didn't want to say how much he would miss Blaine if he didn't come and give him false hope for a Christmas miracle. "My dad says the game starts at noon," Kurt said off-handedly, a crooked smile on his face. "He'll need someone to watch with. And I'll need someone who can appreciate Vogue."

Blaine smiled, consciously softening his eyes to temper his excitement. "Great," he said with veiled delight. "I'll see you at noon tomorrow."

Memories. He didn't know why they had such a powerful hold over him, he just knew that no matter how hard he tried to banish the ghosts of his past, they continued to haunt him. Stepping up to Kurt's apartment door, he took a deep breath and reminded himself that this time was different. Except it didn't feel that different.

Kurt opened the door and welcomed him not with a kiss and a hug but a tight-lipped smile that clearly gave away the battle Kurt was fighting inside. Blaine returned it and walked inside, thankful for the warm presence of Burt.

"Hey Kid," Burt greeted from the couch. "The games just starting and Kurt is busy cooking. Keep an old man company?"

Blaine's smile brightened as he hung up his coat. "That's why I'm here," he laughed, side-eyeing Kurt, who nodded and turned quietly back to the kitchen. Blaine took a deep breath. The tension was palpable, but it wasn't that Kurt didn't want him there. It was more that Kurt didn't *want* to want him there. And that Blaine understood. The last time Blaine was there had been one of the worst nights of both of their lives.

Glancing to the bedroom where they'd spent hours in silence, not saying all the things that needed to be said, Blaine took a seat next to Burt and tried to shake off the past. Burt's cheerful and knowing grin helped. "He's glad you're here," Burt whispered. "Don't let him make you think otherwise."

Blaine blushed and smiled at his fingers.

They watched the Celtics game together in relative silence, munching popcorn, letting their opposite cheers and yells carry to Kurt's ears in the kitchen. Clearly his father was rooting for the Celtics and Blaine the Nets, though Kurt knew Blaine didn't really care either way. He wouldn't be surprised if he'd done it just for the sake of a bet. It made Kurt smile to think of the friendship that Blaine and his father had developed. He felt guilty that he wouldn't be home to care for his father during his surgery and after, but knowing that Blaine would be there, would be the son that he couldn't be right now, meant a lot to Kurt. It meant more than maybe it should. As he put the last of the dishes in the oven, and cleaned up the kitchen, he fought back the urge to let this change the way he felt about what Blaine had done. Still, he was grateful.

Kurt walked into the living room and sat with them, staring at the men in ugly shirts and shorts run around the court passing the ball. When there was so much going on in the world, he didn't understand how anyone could care so much about whether grown men were able to throw a ball into a tiny hoop, but

he guessed everyone needed their distraction. He glanced at his father and then at the Vogue magazine on the table and gave in to temptation.

Blaine took out his wallet and slapped a bill into Burt's hand and Kurt just rolled his eyes. They were two peas in a pod, two childish peas in a pod.

Burt happily took Blaine's money. He was pretty sure he'd be giving it right back when the Celtics lost tonight but he'd be the last to admit it now. "So," he said. "Graduating...plans for the future?"

Blaine's heart skipped a beat at the question. This wasn't the where or the how he had wanted to talk to Kurt about it. But somehow he thought that Burt knew that and also knew best. So he went with it. "Uh, well, I haven't talked about this with Kurt, and I wouldn't want to do anything to make him uncomfortable, but I was thinking about applying to NYADA. Would that be okay?" He held his breath as he looked behind Burt to Kurt. If Kurt said it wasn't would he throw his application out? Would he give up on the chances he and Kurt had dreamed about since they'd seen their first Broadway show last January? Would he give up on this part of his future because Kurt didn't want to be a part of it? Would Kurt ask him to?

Blaine saw the hesitation, the doubt and the fear in Kurt's eyes. He didn't ignore them, he watched Kurt carefully. But when Kurt answered, "I think that'd be great," Blaine couldn't help the small smile that escaped. Because Kurt didn't ask him to give anything up, and really, Blaine never should have thought he would. "Me, too," he said popping a popcorn piece in his mouth.

The rest of the night was everything for Blaine that Christmas at his own house would not have been. All games over and bets paid up, Blaine helped Kurt set the table for Christmas dinner. It smelled delicious, the place looked fantastic, Kurt looked absolutely gorgeous and there was no way that Blaine could banish the thoughts in his mind even if he wanted to, which only a part of him did. He would do everything he had to in order to keep Kurt in his life. To keep this wonderful Christmas tradition a part of his life. In whatever way the fates allowed, he never wanted to spend Christmas without him. As friends, as lovers, or as husbands, Blaine believed in Kurt more than anything else. It was okay that Kurt wasn't yet sure where Blaine belonged in his life. Because this night, that smile, meant that there was still a place for him, somehow. And that was enough for now.

As he pulled the chair out for the man who had taught him what it was to be a man, as he watched Kurt and his Dad chatter about anything at everything, he was overwhelmed once again by their relationship. This was what family was. It was a father and son who loved each other, respected one another, and cared

so deeply that maybe sometimes they overstepped boundaries that ought to be knocked down anyway. It was sharing happy memories of Christmas' gone by. It was not being afraid. Not walking on egg shells. It was not waiting for the next shoe to drop but instead for the next laugh to make you choke on your drink. This was family. This was Blaine's family, for better or for worse, and there was nowhere else that he truly belonged. And that gift was given to him not by the beautiful boy sitting next to him, but by the man who had somehow miraculously offered him trust and respect despite his mistakes. Burt had invited him in, two years ago and again tonight. And because of that, Blaine was most definitely having a merry little Christmas now.

## **Chapter Eleven: New Year's Eve**

*"Get your coat on Blaine, it's time to go," Colonel Anderson yelled.*

*Blaine walked slowly down the stairs, his sheet music in hand and grabbed his peacoat.*

*"Jenny's really been looking forward to this duet," he told Blaine. "She's been asking about you a lot," he said with a sly wink. "Asked if you had a girlfriend."*

*Blaine froze in place, his stomach quickly tying into knots. It was moments like these he knew his father was just itching to pick a fight. "What did you tell her?" he asked cautiously.*

*"I told her you didn't," his father smirked. "She was very pleased."*

*"But why would you tell her that?" Blaine questioned unable to hold back his frustration. "It's just leading her on. She'll think I'm interested."*

*"Well you should be," the Colonel answered bluntly.*

*"Dad, wishing it away is not going to make me not gay," Blaine said.*

*Blaine knew the strike was coming and he knew it was aimed for his face, but at the last minute Blaine's public performance in a little over an hour was remembered and it was redirected. The blow against his arm still stung and knocked him off balance, but it could have been far worse. His father's finger was instantly in his face. "There will be no more of that talk in my house," he commanded. "Now get your coat on."*

*I really can't stay*

*Get over that hold out*

*Ahh..But it's cold outside*

*Blaine smiled at Jenny as the audience filled with serviceman and their families applauded for them. She beamed back at him, her pale cheeks rosy, her bright blue eyes shining with delight and pride. She nearly skipped as she grabbed his hand and pulled him backstage, her arms flinging around him in a giant hug before the next act barely even made it onstage.*



*"That was amazing Blaine!" she exclaimed breathlessly before gathering her nerve and kissing him. Blaine's eyes opened wide in shock and he brusquely pulled away from her lips.*

*"What's the matter?" she asked, hurt and confused. "Don't you like me?"*

*"Of course I like you, Jenny," he answered quickly, trying to make her feel better. "We've been friends since our dads came back from the war."*

*"Well aren't I pretty?" she asked, running a finger through her long blonde hair dejectedly.*

*"You're beautiful," Blaine answered awkwardly, his brow furrowing. He hated that he was making her doubt herself.*

*"Your dad said you didn't have a girlfriend," she said, still trying to figure out why Blaine didn't like her.*

*"I **don't** have a girlfriend," he said definitively, then flushed nervously. "I mean, I'm not dating anyone," he clarified.*

*"Then why Blaine?" she coaxed.*

*"It's just," Blaine stammered.*

*"If you don't have a girlfriend then it's just what?" she asked impatiently.*

*Blaine stared through her as he weighed his options. He hated lying, but he was scared to tell the truth. He could just walk away without an explanation, but he knew that would hurt her even more. He started and stopped half a dozen times before he lowered his eyes and quietly answered as honestly as he could. "I don't have a boyfriend either."*

*She opened her mouth to speak and then closed it, dropping her hands that had still been on his arms. "Oh," she said, and he knew she understood.*

*"Please don't tell my Dad I told you," he pleaded desperately.*

*She looked at him questioningly. "Why? He doesn't know?"*

*Blaine looked to the floor. "No, he knows. He just doesn't want anyone else to."*

*He looked up at her hopefully. She simply nodded and walked away.*

*An hour later, a painful grip grabbed him by the arm and pulled him into a corner. "Why am I hearing whispers about my son being gay?" Colonel Anderson hissed.*

*Blaine blanched and shook with fear, but he stood up to his father as he always did. "Jenny tried to kiss me, what was I supposed to do?"*

*"Kiss her back," his father sneered, "like every other boy at this party would die to do."*

*"You know I don't want to," Blaine whispered.*

*"No. You just want to be a buckboy whore who sleeps around and sells his pretty boy body to all the fags for a dollar at the closest strip club," the Colonel snapped. Blaine's breath hitched at the hideous words and he battled back the tears that wanted to fall, fearing they would just make things worse. "Go wait for us in the car," his father ordered.*

*"But it's freezing out there," Blaine protested, glancing at the snow falling amongst the Christmas lights outside the country club windows.*

*"Don't worry, I'll be sure to warm your ass as soon as we get home," he threatened as he shoved him in the direction of the door.*

*Blaine was curled up in the car, shivering with cold and nerves for nearly an hour before his mother and father drove him home to make good on the threat.*

Blaine woke with a start, shivering as sweat covered his skin. "Shhh..." he heard Cooper say as he was gently pulled from his dream. "It's okay Blaine, you're safe."

Blaine took a deep breath and pulled the blankets tighter around him, trying to reorient himself to the here and now. He wasn't in Westerville two Christmas' ago, he was in the hotel room with Cooper in New York. He'd spent Christmas with Kurt today. He'd be meeting Burt at the airport in the morning.

"Nightmare?" Cooper asked worried. He'd tried to wake Blaine as soon as he'd heard his brother's terrified moans.

But Blaine shook his head. "No. Memories." He pulled his knees in tight and looked at Cooper, his face resting on his knees. "I should have known it was coming, but it's been a while."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Cooper asked.

Blaine considered it. He'd told Cooper about most of the things his father had done, but this had not been one of them. The words his father had said to him that day had damaged him more than anything else he'd ever done to Blaine. "No."

Cooper grasped his hand and looked Blaine straight in the eye. "Whatever Dad did to you, you can tell me."

"I know," Blaine said softly. "But you don't need to be filled with those memories Coop. Dad may still be a lot of things. But he's not that man anymore."

"No one ever told me that I mattered," Blaine said, staring out the car window as Burt drove him back to Westerville from the airport. Burt sat quietly letting the boy talk. "In fact quite the opposite. My Dad was pretty clear that he was sure I would just sleep around, sell myself. When I was with Eli, those words came rushing back to me. I wonder if Kurt and I would be where we are today if he'd never said those things to me." Blaine spoke more out loud to himself than in search of an answer and Burt just listened carefully. After a few moments, Blaine continued. "I'm afraid he might fall in love with someone else," he whispered.

Burt looked over to him than back out the windshield. "He might," he admitted and raised an eyebrow. "You might too."

But Blaine shook his head. "No. Kurt's it for me."

Burt was quiet for a minute. When he spoke, it was pensive. "You know, when Kurt's mom died, I thought that was it for me. She'd been my high school sweetheart, the love of my life. It wasn't perfect, we had our ups and downs, but she was all I ever wanted. I couldn't imagine life without her." He glanced over and Blaine was watching him intently. "Then Kurt introduced me to Carole. And somehow, I knew that though a door had closed, another had opened. And I had to make a choice whether or not to walk through."

"I haven't closed the door on Kurt," Blaine insisted.

"All I'm saying is that you need to be open to other possibilities. I know you love Kurt. You always will and he will always love you, I'm sure of that. But right now, you have to accept that the door closed the moment you did what you did. Now I know for a fact that Kurt hasn't locked it, or thrown away the key. But don't be surprised if he starts looking to see what other doors are open." He looked over at Blaine. He couldn't totally read what the boy was thinking, but he knew he'd heard. "But that's enough metaphors from me for one day."

Blaine sat quietly the rest of the trip lost in his racing thoughts of Kurt dating. He knew he would. He knew he should. But the thought of Kurt's lips on someone else's lips, of Kurt sharing his secrets with another man, twisted his heart painfully.

They pulled into the driveway in Westerville where his mother's car still sat and Blaine took a deep breath before moving to exit the car. He reached for the door, but Burt stopped him with a hand on his knee. Blaine turned. "I got something I want to say before you go," Burt said seriously. "And since you're family, I'm not going to sugar coat it. But it's your choice to go or hear me out."

Blaine considered him briefly then took his hand off the door. He would always hear Burt out, even when it hurt, because he always knew it would be what he needed to hear.

Burt nodded at his choice. Blaine was a good kid, but what he'd said earlier had struck a nerve with him and he couldn't shake it. "The last two years, over and over again, I've seen you defy your father's words and expectations to be an incredible friend and an incredible man. The things that he's done, they are a part of you, but they don't control you. Your choices are your own. Your responsibility. So it's time to stop blaming your Dad for them and let him off the hook."

Blaine took the words in and let them settle in his mind and his heart. He closed his eyes and nodded. "Thanks Burt," he said pensively, as he grabbed his bag at his feet and opened the door.

Blaine tried the doorknob and once again was pleased to find it unlocked. His father must have seen them pull up, they'd been sitting in the driveway for a while now. The living room was empty and he left his bag by the front door. He saw the headlights from Burt's car disappear from the bay window and he went in

search of his Mom and Dad, finding his father in his office. "Where's Mom?" Blaine asked casually as he grabbed some peanuts from his father's desk then relaxed in the chair at the second desk.

"I drove her home, she left the car for you," the Colonel told him, finishing the last note in his report before closing it up and turning his attention to Blaine. "We um, we decided to take things a little slower."

Blaine's heart fluttered nervously. "Did something happen?"

The Colonel's eyes bore into Blaine's seriously for a minute, then he smiled understandingly. "No, nothing happened. We just," he hesitated, finding the right words. "Well, we saw how uncomfortable you were and realized it wasn't fair to you. To try and do this now. Not with everything you're going through and you and me."

"About that," Blaine interrupted without even thinking. His father's brow quirked in curiosity and Blaine shuffled, unsure, in his chair. "You and me, I mean. I want to," he swallowed down his fear. It was hard to say. Hard to forgive, even if forgiveness was just putting the past behind him and moving forward. But Burt was right. He had to. "I want to spend New Year's Eve with you. Here."

The Colonel's jaw dropped with surprise before he gained his composure, and his eyes glimmered with sudden tears of happiness. Despite himself, it made Blaine blush and laugh in a way he wasn't sure he ever had with his Dad. "What about your friends? Santana?"

Blaine shrugged. "I think whatever Glee club is doing is going to be incredibly awkward. So why not be awkward in my own home with my Dad instead," he joked, but they both knew the truth behind the statement. And the incredible courage.

His father smiled, hope for a second chance with his son filling him. "I'd really like that."

Blaine was up in his room getting the noisemakers he'd packed in his bag. He and his dad had champagne flutes filled with sparkling cider waiting for them downstairs as well as the confetti canons that Blaine had insisted they buy. They'd watched a movie until 11:30, but then they turned on the television to watch the ball drop on in Times Square. It had been a nice evening, almost comfortable, and there were times when Blaine let his guard down and was not disappointed.

"Come on Blaine," his father yelled excitedly from the bottom of the stairs. "It's only ten minutes until the ball drops."

Blaine found the noisemakers in his suitcase then stood to leave. Passing by his desk, his eyes suddenly fell on the key that had sat there for more than a year now. The key to the front door. Blaine had left it behind 15 months ago, rejecting it and the house that had held so much pain for him. Now, as he headed downstairs to bring in a new year with the man who had hurt him so deeply, he picked up the key and slipped it into his pocket.

"What took you so long?" the Colonel asked with amusement as Blaine finally made his way down the stairs. Blaine said nothing, but simply grinned and tossed him a noisemaker, which his father deftly caught. The Colonel placed an arm around Blaine's shoulder and for possibly the first time, Blaine didn't flinch or stiffen at the touch. "Come on, let's go watch."

They sat together on the couch and Blaine couldn't help his mind wander. Was Kurt tucked in warm with Rachel watching the ball drop, or was he in Times Square partying with the millions of New Yorkers on the screen? Would he think of Blaine? Who would he kiss at midnight? He felt a warm hand rub his back and squeeze his shoulder. He tucked his chin into folded hands and stared forward, but his thoughts turned back to the man sitting next to him. "I want to start again," he whispered, then looked up at his Dad. "The other night I had a dream. Memories, really. Of things you said and did. Cooper asked me if I wanted to tell him, but I didn't. I didn't want him to have those memories. I told him that you weren't that man anymore."

"I'm trying Blaine," the Colonel said softly. "I'm trying really hard."

Blaine nodded. "I know you are. And so am I. I don't want to have those memories anymore either. I want to start again."

*"Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, Happy New Year!"*

"Happy New Year, Dad," he wished softly.

The Colonel wiped away a tear and hugged Blaine tightly in his arms, never wanting to let go of the moment. "Happy New Year, Son."

## ***Chapter Twelve: Sadie Hawkins***

Blaine returned to school after winter vacation feeling as if the weight of the world had been lifted from his shoulders. Things with Kurt were good, things with his Dad were better than he ever could have imagined they'd be, and he was ready to start off fresh. When he opened the door to his locker his eyes immediately flashed to the picture of him and Kurt, but instead of the feelings of guilt and shame a smile crossed his face as he remembered their conversation last night. Yes, things were good indeed.

"I'm looking for someone to share in an adventure," came a perfect Gandalf impression behind him and Blaine turned to find Sam.

He smiled fondly at his friend but closed the door and melted against his locker with a sigh. "Shut up Sam, I haven't even seen it yet!"

"What!" Sam nearly shouted turning a few heads in the hallway, including Tina's, who stopped as she passed by.

"What's going on?" she asked.

Sam flung an arm around Blaine's shoulder and they started walking down the hallway to their morning classes. "Blaine here, has still not seen *The Hobbit*. A travesty. An abomination. A disgrace to every geek that has ever walked the planet!"

"It's been a busy vacation Sam," Blaine said with an exasperated laugh.

"And you will tell us all about it," Sam said. "Saturday night. Dinner, the *Hobbit*, and a sleepover at my place. No excuses," Sam warned, a stern look on his face. "You in Tina?"

"Do I get to sleepover too?" she teased, then shrugged. She wasn't a huge fan on Tolkien, she was far more of a Twilight girl, but it was the best offer she'd gotten all week. "If Brittany's in I'm in."

"Awesome!" Sam yelled, squeezing his friends tightly. "Double date!"

Tina grinned and Blaine smiled, overwhelmed by Sam's enthusiasm, but excited nonetheless. This is exactly what he wanted, what Kurt and Santana had been telling him all along. It was what Tina and Brittany and Sam and Blaine had promised the end of last year. They'd be there for each other while they

floundered and found their way without the friends and loved ones they'd come to rely on so much. A new dance partner, a new singing partner, and someone to tell it how it is. It was time to start living in the moment again, in the here and now and not the future or the past.

It was time for Blaine Anderson to move on.

*Far over the misty mountains cold*

*To dungeons deep and caverns old*

*The pines were roaring on the height*

*The winds were moaning in the night*

*The fire was red, it flame spread*

*The trees like torches blazed with light*

"Are we going to have to listen to you singing that entire idiotic dwarf song..." Tina asked with an eyeroll.

"And quoting the entire movie..." Brittany piped in.

"All night long?" Tina finished.

"Because as much as I enjoy watching those lips sing, I prefer kissing them," Brittany said, cupping Sam's cheeks and pulling him toward her for sweet kisses.

Blaine glanced over at Tina and chuckled uncomfortably. She simply sighed and moved over on the chair, patting the arm for Blaine to join her before Brittany and Sam took over the entire couch.

The evening had been fun. They four of them had laughed and gossiped over an early dinner at Breadstix before going to the movie theater. Blaine had sat between Sam and Tina, which led to a very interesting viewing experience of quoting along with the movie in one ear, and cries of "too ugly" in the other.



Eventually he'd had to tell them both just to shut up and watch the movie, otherwise he'd miss the entire thing himself.

He scooted over to the arm of the chair, legs draped casually over her. Tina rolled her eyes at Sam and Brittany making out on the couch and Blaine glanced over, his stomach clenching unexpectedly. He missed Kurt, missed kissing him on the very same couch, that was all, nothing else. He looked away, focusing on Tina.

"Student council meeting after school on Monday," he said, making small talk. "Think anything exciting is gonna happen?"

Tina shrugged, a glint in her eye. "I might have an idea or two to propose."

Blaine grinned down at her. "Cool!" he said.

Blaine heard the footsteps, quite attune to them after more than a year of avoiding them, long before Sam and Brittany did. Blaine glanced up at Burt, smirking at the imposing figure standing just over the couple who were still too lost in one another to notice. Burt winked at Blaine and then cleared his throat threateningly. Sam sat up quickly, pushing Brittany off of him, while she just smiled innocently up at Burt. After all, she'd be caught by him before.

"I think it's time the girls go home," Burt said, and Blaine got up to let Tina off the chair. Giving her a kiss on the cheek he held out her coat for her like a gentleman. Sam did the same for Brittany then kissed her quickly on the lips. Again Blaine's stomach fluttered, and again he brushed it aside as just missing Kurt.

Sam walked the girls out to the car and Blaine returned to the kitchen, finding Burt cleaning up the mess that he and his friends had made. "Let me get that," Blaine said taking the bowls from Burt's hands and nudging him away. "You go sit down and rest."

"I'm neither an invalid nor old, Blaine," he argued but sat down at the kitchen table anyway. He certainly didn't mind having someone else clean up.

"So how are you doing?" Blaine asked, a bit of worry in his brow.

"I'm doing good," Burt answered reassuringly. "I had the pre-op tests yesterday and they all came out fine. Doctors say my heart is definitely healthy enough for surgery, so we're all set for next week."

"Good," Blaine said with a relieved smile, though he could see the nerves in Burt's eyes that he tried to hide. He knew that Burt didn't want any of them to worry, but the fact was, they all were very worried. Especially Kurt. "Did you call Kurt to let him know?"

"Yes, I did, thank you for the reminder Blaine," Burt teased fondly.

Blaine blushed bashfully. He knew Burt didn't need him reminding him to talk to his son. It was just that he'd promised Kurt he'd watch out for Burt. And he'd promised himself he'd always watch out for Kurt. "I just know he's been worried about you, that's all."

"I appreciate you looking out for me," Burt assured him. "How are things with your Dad?" he asked.

Blaine turned and leaned against the counter. "They're actually good," he said and Burt could not have been happier to see Blaine's eyes light up with a smile when he said that. He got up and grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge as Blaine continued. "Since I took your advice, things have never been better. It's still hard. I keep waiting for the next shoe to drop. But I'm trying to just take it one day at a time," he shrugged.

"Good man." Burt clapped a hand on Blaine's shoulder. "I hoped I wasn't overstepping," he added a bit apprehensively.

"You can't overstep," Blaine shook his head seriously.

Burt choked a laugh. "Kurt would disagree," he smirked.

"Yeah well, Kurt and I disagree on a lot of things," he said with a broken laugh.

"Not as much as you think," Burt responded knowingly. "Chin up," he said tapping a finger under Blaine's chin. "Sam's made up the guest room for you. He'll stay in Kurt's room."

Blaine's eyes softened at Burt's thoughtfulness. He'd been dreading the suggestion that he stay in Kurt's bed tonight. He was doing much better, but he didn't think he was doing that well. "Thanks," he smiled.

"No problem." Burt understood. "Goodnight."

**Blaine: Are you busy?**

**Kurt: If you call busy being curled up in my bed wishing my thighs would just fall off rather than do one more pli  , then yes, I'm busy. Otherwise I'm doing absolutely nothing.**

**Blaine: I saw your Dad last night. Slept over at your house. With Sam. I mean, I slept over at Sam's house.**

**Kurt: I know what you mean Blaine. How's Dad?**

**Blaine: He's putting on a really brave face, but I can tell he's nervous about the surgery next week.**

**Kurt: I'm nervous too. I wish I could be there, but with classes just starting there's no way that I can bail.**

**Blaine: He understands completely Kurt, don't beat yourself up. I promised I'd look after him for you.**

**Blaine: How is NYADA going? Other than the pli  s.**

**Kurt: It's going. I'm trying to find a club to join and I really wanted to join the show choir, Adam's Apples, but Rachel says it's at the bottom of the social ladder and I shouldn't.**

**Blaine: Are they any good?**

**Kurt: I don't know. I've only seen the signs for them and met Adam, the "founder and fearless leader". At least that's what he called himself.**

**Blaine: Pretentious much?**

**Kurt: No, it's not like that at all. He seems like a really great guy.**

**Kurt: Said he could see me playing Brick in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and called me a young Paul Newman.**

**Kurt: Crazy, right?**

**Kurt: Blaine, you still there?**

**Blaine: I'm glad you're happy there.**

**Blaine: But I don't know if we should keep having this conversation.**

**Kurt: Are you upset at me?**

**Blaine: Never.**

**Blaine: I think you should join. If you want to. Don't let Rachel tell you what to do.**

**Kurt: Do you want to call me? Talk about this?**

**Blaine: No, Kurt, I'm fine. It's totally okay.**

**Blaine: I should finish my homework before school tomorrow. I'll talk to you soon. Love you.**

**Kurt: Love you too.**

"You sure you're going to be okay going to this dance?" Santana asked. She was painting her nails at her desk while she skyped with Blaine, her roommate out for the night with one boyfriend or another.

"I'll be fine Santana, I've been to a ton of dances with girls," Blaine said dismissively. "Dalton and Crawford County Day had school dances practically every other week and it's not like I had a boyfriend or anything for most of that."

"First of all, you're exaggerating. Second of all, it's not like you had a girlfriend either, Blaine. Going to a dance where there are girls, is *not* the same thing as going to a Sadie Hawkins dance *with* a girl," she remarked rolling her eyes. "And third of all," she added her eyes narrowing, "you're totally not telling me the truth. Something is wrong Boyfriend and I want to know what it is."

Blaine averted his eyes and looked away. The one benefit of Skyping was that Santana couldn't reach through the screen and force him to look at her. He could examine his fingernails in peace, though he

suddenly noticed that he seemed to have bitten through his nails a lot in the last few days. The bad thing about Skype was that Santana couldn't extend that manicure to him.

"All right, Boyfriend, enough is enough," she snapped putting the nail polish down and pulling the screen toward her. She'd had enough of his avoidance and she meant business. "Are you being triggered by going to another Sadie Hawkins dance?" Blaine shook his head quiet. "I mean, it would be natural. Especially now going with a girl, like your Dad would have wanted the first time. It would be natural."

"I know it would Santana, but honestly, I'm not. I've had enough counseling and my Dad and I are in a really good place right now. He actually laughed when I told him I was going to go with Tina at the irony of it all. He finally accepts me and *then* I go with a girl." Blaine chuckled remembering. It had been a conversation that made him nervous but it had turned out to be a really great moment for them.

"Ok, then. Well is it Tina? I know that girl can be crazy sometimes," Santana said wryly. "She ain't no Santana that's for sure."

"No, it's not Tina, not really, and no I'm not replacing you with her any more than I'm replacing Kurt with Sam." Blaine's eyes shot up to Santana in panic and his face flushed before he could look away.

"Oh my god Blaine Anderson, you have the hots for Sam Evans!" Santana screamed at the computer.

"I do not have the hots for Sam," Blaine stammered completely unconvincingly.

"What the hell is it with you people and trouty mouth?" Santana snapped. "First Brittany, now you? It's not even like he's that good a kisser."

"That's because you're a lesbian Santana," Blaine reminded her. He pulled his knees up to his chest protectively. He'd been afraid to tell her and he hadn't meant to. But it just kind of slipped and now he was kind of glad it was out in the open.

"No, it's because he has giant wet fish lips that he uses to envelope and suck on, oh...." She paused as comprehension set in and she smiled deviously, wagging her eyebrows at him. "Wanky."

He blushed as she had never seen him blush before, as he buried his face in his hands. "No Santana," he mumbled into his palms. "It's not wanky, it's awful."

She sympathetically wiped the smile from her face. "It's normal Blaine," Santana told him, seriously. "He's a guy, he's cute, you'd like him to give you a little somethin' somethin', it's totally normal." He didn't look up, his face getting even redder with the images she was putting in his mind. He needed them to go away, not make them even stronger, but Santana of course would hear nothing of that. "He's totally safe Blaine. He's not Kurt, but he's not gay. So you can jerk off all you want to thoughts of him without feeling bad. It's not painful like thinking of Kurt but you also don't feel like you're cheating again because Sam's straight."

It made sense, even more sense than what Tina had told him by the lockers. He loved Kurt. He wasn't putting his love on Sam, but his desires? Maybe. Blaine rested his chin on his hands and glanced up at her. "I just kinda wish I didn't have to see him every day," Blaine admitted glumly. "It sucks. And it's embarrassing."

"You could always think of me instead," Santana said enticingly.

"Ew, no thank you," Blaine blurted out. "And now you're the second girl I've said that to this week. Some best friend you are!" he teased.

"Yeah, but you're not breaking my heart, Boyfriend," Santana said. "Just be careful with Tina's. That girl cries at the drop of a hat."

"You know I will," he promised as he glanced at the clock. Midnight. "Time for bed 'Tana."

"I thought you'd never ask," she said winking, then smiled gently. "Night Boyfriend."

"Night, 'Tana."

Trent was sure this was not a date, but it didn't stop his heart from skipping a beat the moment he pulled up to Blaine's house. He knew it must be important, he'd never been invited to the Anderson estate before. But a date? Not a chance.

Blaine answered the door and invited Trent in, taking his coat and hanging it in the front hallway. He'd put out some refreshments on the coffee table in the living room and Trent eagerly partook, grateful to have something to do other than stare and wonder. Blaine sat next to him on the couch.

"I'm glad you came," Blaine said in that beautifully melodic voice that Trent loved whether it spoke or sang. "I could sit and make small talk, but I don't want to be disingenuous in any way, so I'm going to cut right to the chase. Why didn't you sing with the Warblers for Sectionals?"

Trent's jaw stopped mid chew and he swallowed hard, his heart beating wildly in his chest. Panic filled him, but he took a breath and answered truthfully. "When I wouldn't help them lure you back, Hunter benched me." Trent shrugged. It was the truth. Just not the whole truth.

"And why didn't you want me to come back?" Blaine eyed him curiously, somberly, and Trent knew this could be his moment to unload everything that had been haunting him for weeks.

"I didn't want you getting hurt," Trent confessed. "Becoming one of Hunter's victims. It was bad enough what Sebastian had done to you. But Hunter's even worse, Blaine."

"There's more to why he sat you out." It wasn't a question. And Trent guessed that somehow, Blaine already knew the truth. So he simply nodded.

Blaine took his hand and the warmth was something that Trent had missed for weeks. "Don't be scared Trent," Blaine said. "I'm here with you. They need you to tell me the truth."

Blaine's eyes were so soft and caring that Trent couldn't help but tell him. "It started small, with herbal supplements, and everyone was on board. But then he brought in the needles, said it was vitamin shots, but we all knew better. Hunter said whoever didn't take one for the team wasn't on the team anymore. Nick went first, then Jeff, then Beatz. But I couldn't do it."

"You have to tell," Blaine urged forcefully.

Trent pushed his hand back and leapt to his feet. "They're my best friends Blaine! How can I do that to them? If this goes public they can lose everything! Scholarships, college acceptances, job offers!"

Blaine stood up to meet him. "And if you don't tell, then what happens to them? This isn't supplements Trent, this is dangerous, especially for teenage boys. I know you've seen it! Nick's barely called me in months, only that once when he found out that Kurt and I broke up, and he hadn't even pushed to see me. The old Nick would have been banging down my door or bringing a caravan to McKinley, but I haven't heard a word Trent!" Blaine's eyes flashed with anger and Trent understood. He'd been feeling the exact same way, with no one to share it with.

"He thinks you'll know," Trent admitted quietly. "If you see him. He's scared. He and Jeff both are."

"Then we have to end this. This isn't the Warblers that David and Thad and Wes raised us to be. They'd be so ashamed if they knew. And Trent," Blaine took his hand again and squeezed. "They'd be so proud of you if you told. And I would be too."

Trent dropped his eyes, seeing their hands together. Brothers. A team. That's how it was supposed to be. "And you'll be there?" he asked raising his eyes to meet Blaine's.

"Every step of the way," he promised.

Trent knew it was the right thing to do. He knew it was what he had to do. Even if they hated him, he had to protect them now that they were too far gone to protect themselves. He'd held them accountable before, he would do it again. "Ok."

"Oh, sweetheart, you look so handsome," Amy Anderson beamed at her son as he closed the door of his bedroom and headed out to wait for Tina.

"You say that whenever I am dressed in a tuxedo Mom," Blaine laughed. She came over to straighten his lapel and bowtie even though he knew for sure that they were already straight. She leaned in to give him a kiss on the cheek. "Hey, watch the hair. One dance with my hair crazy is enough, and this time I don't have Kurt to soothe away the humiliation."

"Your hair is perfect as always Blaine, not a strand out of place." She looked up at him. "I'm so proud of you Blaine for going to this dance. It was nice of you to say yes to Tina."

"Well it was nice of her to invite me," Blaine answered just as the doorbell rang. He went over and answered it, smiling warmly as he let her in. "You look gorgeous," he said, kissing her on the cheek.

"You look amazing Blaine," she said, her eyes wide and twinkling with delight. She handed him a boutonnière and together they placed it on his lapel. "Tina, this is my Mom. Mom, this is Tina," he introduced politely.

"It's very nice to meet you Mrs. Anderson," Tina said.



"You too sweetheart. Let me get some pictures of you two," Mrs. Anderson said grabbing her phone.

Blaine and Tina laughed as they posed for her. Amy was certain that Tina had a real crush on Blaine, and she was just as certain that he barely noticed. She'd have a talk with him later about being careful with a young lady's heart. It was a talk they'd never had but she suddenly realized that this probably wouldn't be the last time her son would be in this situation and he needed to understand better how to handle it.

"Ok Mom, that's enough," Blaine teased, linking his arm with Tina's. "We need to go or we're going to be late and I'm singing in the first set."

"Alright, darling," she pouted and once again straightened his tuxedo. "You two have fun! And be safe!" she called.

Blaine turned to her, his smile fading as he saw the worry in her eyes. He'd been so focused on himself that he'd forgotten that this night might be even harder for her than it was for him. "We will Mom," he promised softly and blew her a kiss. "I love you."

Blaine drove back to Westerville after the Sadie Hawkins dance. He and his Dad had plans to go golfing tomorrow as long as the weather cooperated, which one could never be sure of in Ohio during January. But a warm spell had washed over them and his father wanted to enjoy it. His mind wandered. He pushed thoughts of Sam out of his mind and focused on the Warblers. Even when he met with Trent, he hadn't wanted to believe that his friends had been juicing, using drugs just to win a show choir competition. In his day they'd competed through hard work, discipline and a healthy dose of fun. When they lost it hadn't mattered. The joy they brought to the Westerville community was more important than any trophy had been. Nick and Jeff and Beatz had been a part of that, had known what it truly meant to be a Warbler. He still didn't understand at all what could have possibly led to them being desperate enough to cheat. It broke his heart, but even moreso, it made him angry.

He didn't notice getting off at the wrong exit until he found himself driving down the long, dark road that led to Dalton Academy.

He pulled into the parking lot next to the Warblers dorm, his old dorm, and stopped the car. What on earth had led him there he didn't know, but he took a moment to try and figure it out. He got out of the car and

leaned against the hood, gazing out into the quad. He smiled softly, remembering fondly Trent's words. *"We were a band of brothers. A group joined by harmony and honor."*

"If you're here to pick me up on a date, I confess I am woefully underdressed." Blaine turned to see Sebastian smirking playfully at him, his head cocked to the side in amusement. Blaine couldn't help the scowl that crossed his face and Sebastian smiled softly and gestured in truce. "Nick and Jeff aren't here. They both went home for the weekend, something about a wedding and a Bar Mitzvah. Looks like you're dressed for the occasion, maybe you can still make it," Sebastian added, eyeing him up and down.

"I didn't come to see them. I just came from our Sadie Hawkins dance at school." Blaine felt the need to explain his tuxedo, trying to hide the anger that rose to the surface the moment he'd seen Sebastian. "Honestly, I don't know why I'm here."

"Oh, well it's obvious, isn't it?" Blaine looked at him blankly, his nerves jumping as he waited for the attack. Did Sebastian know that Trent had blown the whistle on them tonight? "Where else would Blaine Anderson go after a Sadie Hawkins dance?"

Blaine crossed his arms and started to sneer but then thought better of it. Let Sebastian think that, since he was likely to be reporting back to Hunter. Better than the alternative. "Yeah, that must be it," Blaine nodded.

"After all, I can only imagine the trauma you must be feeling spending the whole night dancing with girls. You should've come to pick me up before the dance," Sebastian suggested. "I would have given you a good time. Win-win for both of us."

"You know winning isn't everything, Sebastian," he snapped angrily. "There's so much more to life, it really isn't even anything."

Sebastian stood quiet a minute, his eyes shifting, his thoughts scrambling as he stared at Blaine. What he was thinking Blaine didn't know, but when a pained look crossed his face, Blaine's anger dissipated. Sebastian glanced up at lights shining through the windows of the dorms, then back at the boy that had the ability to turn his world upside down. He had a sudden premonition that Blaine was about to do it again, and he wanted, no he needed, for Blaine to understand. "The world isn't like that for all of us Anderson. For some of us, winning isn't everything, it's the only thing."

### ***Chapter Thirteen: Naked***

Santana groaned and stepped out of bed, the cold air of her dorm room hitting her bare skin. She grabbed her phone from the night stand and walked across the room. It wasn't too far from the still sleeping woman in her bed, but hopefully she wouldn't wake her.

"You better be on fire Lady Hummel, because I have left a warm and talented naked woman in my bed and it's almost time for me to wake her up," Santana hissed into the phone.

"Oh for the love of God, can't everyone just keep on their clothes?" Kurt barked.

Santana physically had to bite down the urge to suggest that perhaps that was one of the problems between him and Blaine. Instead she simply asked, "Why, who else is taking off their clothes?"

"You mean other than Rachel's bare ass boyfriend who's suddenly invaded my refuge to sit that bare ass on my vintage chairs?"

"Yes, other than that, though that's a lovely image from the pictures Rachel's sent me of the guy," Santana said.

"Believe me, he's better in pictures, quieter," Kurt mumbled under his breath. "No, I'm talking about one Ms. Rachel Barbra Berry who is hell bent on going topless in a student film project thanks to said boyfriend telling her she needs to in order to win an Oscar."

"What!" Santana screeched then clapped a hand over her mouth. The girl in her bed shuffled and rolled over but didn't wake. Deep sleeper. Good to know, Santana thought.

"Thus my phone call. Believe me, only this kind of desperation would lead me to call you. And a suggestion from Blaine, but that's neither here nor there," Kurt added quickly.

Once again, Santana bit her tongue. She wasn't getting in the middle of that, not here and now. Besides, she had plans to make and she could lay into him later. "I'm coming to New York," she announced. She expected an argument, but his words surprised her.

"That's the same thing that Quinn said," Kurt told her.

"Wait, you called Quinn too?" Santana asked, not sure why her pulse suddenly quickened at the idea.

"If anyone knows about the lifelong impact of making sex tapes and bad reputations, it's you two," Kurt explained matter-of-factly. "And maybe you two can talk some sense into her about that Brody guy. It's not that I'm on Finn's side, it's just that Brody's an arrogant prick."

"Well I can't wait to meet him then," she said. "When's Quinn coming?"

"She said she could make it down on the train this weekend," Kurt said.

Santana quickly glanced at the calendar on her wall. She had a paper due Monday and cheerleading practice Saturday, but if she were honest with herself neither of those things excited her as much as the prospect of going to New York City and preventing Berry from doing something that she'd regret for the rest of her life. Who cares if Coach was mad. She was no Coach Sylvester, Santana could handle her.

"Ok," she agreed. "I'll talk to Quinn and catch a flight and then we'll head over to your place Saturday afternoon. Don't tell her we're coming."

"She won't hear a word from me," he assured her wryly. "Oh and Santana?"

"Yes?" she asked suspiciously.

But his voice softened, and she could hear his grateful smile. "Thanks," he breathed.

She gave a soft smile herself. "You're welcome."

Santana hung up the phone and turned back to the girl in her bed. She carefully pulled the covers back and slipped in next to her, pulling their bodies closer to get warm. She kissed the back of her neck and the girl turned, a sleepy smile on her face. "Morning, sunshine," she said.

Getting an extension on her paper was easy. All she had to do was lay on the Lopez charm with a professor who she was certain would be right up Quinn's alley if the girl were here. Her cheerleading Coach on the other hand, was reading to rip Santana apart.

"Ms. Lopez!" her coach reprimanded. Santana stood still and tried desperately not to laugh as the vein in her Coach's forehead threatened to pop out of her skull. "I am beginning to wonder exactly how serious you are about your place on this team! You are not only one of our best members but you are also here on scholarship, and I would hate to have to kick you off the team because you can't seem to prioritize our practices over whatever it is you keep leaving to do instead. But I will do it if I have to."

"I'm sorry Coach Thompson, but this is kind of a family emergency," Santana begged, lying only slightly in her mind, part of her bristling at calling Rachel Berry family. "I promise it will be my last time."

"It better be or I will have no other choice but to suspend you from the team," she warned.

Santana wondered if maybe it would all just be better if she got kicked off anyway. She didn't want to be here, away from everyone who really mattered to her. Blaine, Brittany, Quinn, even Kurt and Rachel. Her friends needed her, they were falling apart without her to smack some sense into them all. She hadn't found anyone at school that mattered to her like they did. She knew high school friends weren't supposed to be forever, but New Directions was different. It was special. "I understand," Santana said, humbling herself as much as her stomach would let her, but the whole thing got her mind racing.

"I hope so Ms. Lopez. Now give me five extra laps, and then fall back in with the other girls," Coach ordered.

Santana packed her bags for the weekend, slipping in some extra outfits in case they decided to go out on the town to a jazz club or a Broadway show. An email from YouTube flashed on her computer, catching her eye. Brittany had uploaded a new Fondue for Two.

She placed her bags aside and sat down at her computer, clicking through the link. She couldn't stop the smile that graced her lips when she saw her best friend, the girl she'd always love, but the smile quickly faded. She watched in embarrassment through fingers that covered her eyes as Brittany unknowingly outed and humiliated Marley Rose. Santana's eyes flashed to the view count: 3,249. It was too late to call her up and ask her to pull down the video. The damage was already done. That's how it always was with the internet. The minute something got out, it was too late to get it back.

She sighed as she returned to packing her bags, even more determined now to prevent Rachel from making the same mistake that Marley just had. The same mistake that she herself had made. Whether it was baring your body or baring your soul, some things were not meant to live on in perpetuity.

As for Brittany, she'd have to deal with that another day. But soon.

"What's this I hear about a Men of McKinley calendar?" Santana asked into the phone as she left security behind and wheeled her luggage toward her terminal. "I thought Blaine Anderson's body wasn't for sale?"

"Oh my god Santana," Blaine exclaimed in a panic. "Do you think I shouldn't do it?"

Santana laughed and pulled up to a little coffee shop at the airport. She definitely needed coffee. "Relax Boyfriend, I'm just mad I'm not going to be there to see it. You better send me pictures."

"I'll be sure to send you a signed calendar when it's all done," Blaine promised.

"Caramel Machiatto. Extra Whip," Santana ordered quietly, then turned her attention back to Blaine. "No, Anderson, I mean pictures during your photoshoot. I want the spoilers Boyfriend, on my phone, in the moment. Understood?"

"How'd you find out about it anyway?" Blaine wondered. She heard him rustling around with papers or something in the background.

"Believe me if Brittany S. Pierce knows about something, the whole world will too as soon as she can upload it to YouTube. Be careful with that by the way," Santana warned.

"No worries, 'Tana, you will never see me on Fondue for Two," Blaine assured her. "Did you hear about her SAT scores?"

"Yes and I read about Sam's as well. They are quite a pair aren't they?" Santana smirked sarcastically.

Blaine groaned. "Let's not talk about that," Blaine urged.

"Still pining away for the young and the unattainable are we Boyfriend? Well don't you worry your pretty little gelled head. I am on my way to New York City and I will get you all the 411 on your boy Kurt," she teased, an announcement for her flight interrupting her. "And it's boarding time. Gotta go, bye!"

Santana's phone lit up the instant she landed.

10:14am **Blaine: WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN YOU ARE ON YOUR WAY TO NEW YORK CITY?**

10:39am **Blaine: I mean, that's very nice of you to do that for Kurt. And Rachel I assume.**

11:15am **Blaine: Please don't give me the 411 on Kurt. He's interested in this guy. That leads the Glee Club there. He didn't say as much but I can tell. I really don't want to know anything about him.**

12:03pm **Blaine: On the other hand, maybe it would be better if I heard it from you rather than him. Maybe it will hurt less.**

12:30pm **Quinn: I'm here and I'll be at the airport when you land so come find me near the taxis by your terminal. Then we can head right over to Kurt and Rachel's.**

12:46pm **Blaine: No forget it. I don't want to know anything until Kurt tells me. It's his life to live. I'm just going to be happy for him. All that matters is that he's happy.**

1:00pm **Kurt: I am heading out to rehearsal for Adam's Apples, but I'm leaving a key under the doormat for you. Please bring it in with you. It's not like that's the most original of hiding places, but a rock would look quite conspicuous outside an apartment hallway.**

1:27pm **Blaine: Just call me back when you get there, okay? Please? I'll just be here working on my abs.**

1:28pm **Blaine: Feel free to share that piece of information with Kurt.**

1:29pm **Blaine: No wait, don't. That's just pathetic. And Mr. Fabulous probably has better abs than I do anyway.**

Santana chuckled and sighed as she made her way to find Quinn at the airport. Blaine was losing it, the poor boy, and she could only imagine that seeing Sam half naked all weekend as they shot the calendar was only going to make things a thousand times worse for him.

**2pm Santana to Blaine: Take a breath and calm down Boyfriend. I just got here and I'm going to find Quinn and head over to the apartment. Kurt's out for a while. I'll talk to you later. AND DON'T FORGET TO SEND ME THOSE DAMN PICTURES!**

**Santana to Quinn: I'm here! See you in a sec!**

**Santana to Kurt: What the hell is an Adam's Apple?**

Anyone who was looking on would have thought they were long lost lovers in the midst of the biggest fight of their lives. The moment Santana saw Quinn, both of their faces lit up and they ran into each other's arms. Their smiles faded quickly though when Quinn whacked Santana hard on the shoulder. "That is for smacking me at McKinley!" she snapped.

"How dare you!" Santana growled back. "I only smacked you back! You smacked me so hard you had Blaine freaking that I was being abused!"

"Blaine's oversensitive," Quinn quipped as she headed outside and hailed a cab. "And I'm still waiting for an apology."

"Keep waiting," Santana muttered and rolled her bag over to the taxi that stopped. The driver popped the trunk and Santana threw her bag in. She climbed into the seat next to Quinn, who'd already given the address to the driver. "So how are things with the Professor?" Santana smirked.

Quinn turned with daggers blazing in her eyes. "None of your business."

"You know, it's a bit hypocritical to talk to Berry about not making mistakes that will haunt you forever if you're still doing it," Santana retorted pointedly.

Quinn smiled the condescending smile that Santana knew all too well. "Let me explain a little something about Yale," she said. "Everybody wants to be the best at everything. The best scientist, the best writer, the



best singer, the best athlete, and yes, the best at sex. The professors there aren't any different. So things happen. I'm not ashamed."

Santana's eyes softened and she took Quinn's hand. "I'm not saying you should be," she assured her. "Any more than Rachel should be ashamed if she decides to proudly do a nude scene in a legitimate movie. I just want you to be careful and make the right choices for you. We have enough regrets Quinn. It's time to get some things right for a change."

At Santana's insistence, they went to the hottest jazz club in the city to celebrate Rachel's sensible decision, a wonderful day of shopping, and one last night together before the return to reality. Santana though was finding less and less that she wanted to return to Louisville. As they walked and chatted together on their way to the club, Santana was reminded of the photo Blaine had showed her last year. Everywhere she looked she saw couples being free; women kissing, men holding hands, the nuzzle on the neck, the hugs between lovers. Louisville wasn't Lima but it certainly wasn't New York City and she once again couldn't help but wonder if here was where her life was truly meant to begin.

Their drinks arrived and they clinked glasses. "Here is to making smart decisions," Quinn began.

"Mature decisions," Rachel piped in.

"Decisions that don't require Berry getting naked because ain't nobody wants to see that!" Santana finished.

"Brody wants to see it," Quinn interjected teasingly.

Rachel blushed while the girls grilled her about her relationship with him, Santana insisting on every last detail down to, and most especially, their exploits in the bedroom. "Well he's gotta be better than Finn Hudson in bed," Santana chimed, rolling her eyes.

Rachel merely smiled coyly. "He's not better, just...different," she shared, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"Oh boy, she's got it bad," Quinn laughed.

When their dinners came they sat back and watched the performers filling the stage with their gorgeous vocals and amazing music. Santana closed her eyes and dreamed of being up there, staring out into the crowd and finding Blaine and Kurt and Brittany, just like all those nights in Lima. She didn't know how Quinn and Kurt and Rachel had done it. How did they just get up and move and leave it all behind without dreams of the past overwhelming them? She and Blaine, they just weren't made that way. Maybe they clung to the good things because there had just been way too much bad.

The vibration of her phone interrupted her thoughts and her peripheral attention to Rachel and Quinn's argument over whether Yale or NAYDA's theater program was better.

**Blaine: If this doesn't prove how much I fear you...I mean love you...I don't know what does.**

The text was accompanied by picture after picture of shirtless Blaine in New Years attire complete with champagne bottle, noisemaker, and a ridiculously gold hat. But that wasn't what made Santana shout. It was the pictures of Christmas Blaine with his candy cane, like he was a gift from Santa Claus himself that made her lose her cool.

"Oh for the love of all things holy," she shouted before slipping her phone to the center of the table.

Quinn and Rachel took turns scrolling through the pictures that were still incoming. Pictures of Sam and Jake and Joe and Ryder soon followed, "just for fairness" Blaine texted, and the girls could not stop their eyes from gaping wide or their hysterical laughter.

"Damn, Joe looks absolutely ridiculous in those outfits," Quinn giggled.

"But baby Puckerman looks H-O-T, hot," Santana remarked. "Too bad Finn didn't pose, huh Rachel?" Santana teased.

"I don't need Finn posing topless," Rachel said with a blush, "I've got pictures of my own back home."

"Don't let Brody find them," Quinn giggled.

"Think I should forward these photos of Blaine to Hummel?" Santana teased, grabbing her phone.

"No!" Rachel shouted harshly.

Santana's lips quirked with a trace of amusement and she put the phone gently down. "What's wrong Rachel? Don't want Kurt's new beau getting a hold of those pictures? Or are you just afraid that if Kurt sees them he'll go running back to Blaine and you'll be all alone in your rejection of all things Lima?"

Quinn looked at both girls, the tension suddenly palpable at the table as the two girls stared each other down. Rachel, unsurprisingly, ducked her eyes first.

"Look, I love Blaine too and I know he's your best friend, but Kurt's my best friend and he needs to grow up. He needs to embrace NY and leave Lima behind, and if that means Blaine too then so be it. I don't know if Adam and Kurt or dating or what, but he's cute and Kurt needs to get back out there." She looked up, her eyes sad as they shifted between the two girls who had been more enemies than friends much of her life. "We can't all be with our first loves."

Santana knew she had a point. She realized that maybe Rachel wasn't meant to be with Finn and Quinn wasn't meant to be with Puck and maybe even she and Brittany weren't meant to be together. But Kurt and Blaine were different and anyone with eyes to see the love those two boys had for one another should have been able to tell that, especially Rachel Berry. "You're right Rachel. Kurt needs to see what's out there. He needs time to forgive. Even Blaine understands that. But stop projecting your feelings about Finn onto Kurt. Because if you keep pushing him? Then none of us will be with our first loves. And if anyone deserves that happy ending, it's Blaine and Kurt."

Santana crawled out of the inflatable plastic mattress on the floor that some people called a bed and pattered into the kitchen. Kurt was closely examining the cereal box as he spooned up his Rooster O's. "Cock a doodle you, Hummel," Santana smirked as she swiped the box from Kurt's gaze.

He glanced up at her bored. "Shouldn't you be out with Ms. Thing 1 and Ms. Thing 2?" he asked.

Santana grabbed a banana from the table, peeling it seductively. Kurt rolled his eyes at her, but lowered them and smirked into his bowl. "They went out for early morning coffee before Quinn takes the train back to New Haven."

"And you stayed behind just to torture me?" he asked dryly as he arched a brow.

"Mornings aren't my thing, Hummel," Santana shrugged. Kurt though could read right through her and the sly glint in her eye. "So how's NY treating you?" she asked with feigned nonchalance.

"Cut the pleasantries Lopez and just ask what you want to ask," Kurt demanded.

"Fair enough Lady Lips," she said dropping the act. "Tell me about this Adam guy."

"No." Kurt picked up his cereal bowl and stood from the table taking it to the sink.

Santana looked up at him in shock. "I'm sorry, I must have misheard you. I thought you just told me 'No'."

Kurt turned and leaned against the counter. "I'm not giving you details of my love life for you to pass on to Blaine. I'll tell him what I'm ready to tell him when I'm ready to tell him."

"Oh, so there *is* a love life," Santana grinned wagging her eyebrows.

Kurt sighed and headed to his bedroom singing over his shoulder, "Not having this conversation!" Santana followed him though as he flounced in his desk chair and turned his laptop on. "Don't you have a flight to catch back to Kentucky?"

"It's not until later. I came all this way to help you with your little Rachel Berry problem, you owe me," Santana insisted crossing her arms.

Kurt turned tensely, studying her and Santana could see his mind working, deciding what to say, whether or not he trusted her. Finally, his shoulders relaxed. "There's really not much to tell," Kurt shrugged. "I asked him out to coffee and he said yes. He's a nice guy. He sees me differently. He sees me just for me." Kurt's eyes drifted to the pictures on his desk, the photo that he and Blaine had taken in NY over Christmas. "I don't even know what to tell Blaine yet," he whispered.

Santana got out her phone and scrolled through it past the calendar pinups and to the texts Blaine had sent her on the plane. She found the one she wanted and held it out for Kurt.

**Blaine: No forget it. I don't want to know anything until Kurt tells me. It's his life to live. I'm just going to be happy for him. All that matters is that he's happy.**

Kurt's eyes teared up, and he pinched the bridge of his nose to make them stop. "I need to do this 'Tana," he said softly. "For me. It doesn't work if only one of us knows for sure, ya know?"

Santana kneeled beside him and took Kurt in her arms, her thoughts immediately turning to Brittany. "Yeah," she said softly. "Yeah, I know."

"New York City is amazing," Santana said to Blaine as she lounged waiting for her flight. It was delayed thanks to snowstorms in the Midwest and she was beginning to wonder if she'd be better off finding herself a comfy spot to settle into for the night.

"I told you didn't I?" Blaine said. "Though it's not like it's your first time there."

"Last time was different though, with everyone and most of the focus on Nationals. This time it was like a glimpse of what it would be like if I lived her." Her voice trailed off dreamily.

"'Tana, are you thinking of..."

"Just considering the idea, Boyfriend, don't get your boxers in a twist," Santana bit back.

The line was silent for a minute then Blaine's tentative voice returned. "How was Kurt?"

"He's good Blaine," Santana told him honestly. "He misses you."

"He said that?" Blaine asked surprised.

Santana smiled softly into the phone. "He didn't have to. It's written all over his face."

Blaine was quiet again and Santana hoped he wasn't crying. Blaine had shed enough tears the last few months. But Blaine had only been thinking. "Hey can you do me a favor when you get back home?"

"Yeah sure, anything," Santana said.

"Well, Sam's been feeling really down on himself since the SAT results, thinking that his body's the only thing that makes him special," Blaine explained. "So I thought I could make a video reminding him of all

the other reasons that we all love him, but I'm kinda worried about recording myself. So I'm trying to get everyone else to help out. Will you send me something?"

"You really are the best boyfriend in the whole world you know that?" Santana teased.

"Other than that cheating thing," Blaine said wryly. "And I am as far from Sam's boyfriend as the earth is to the Sun."

"Well then you're just a pretty damn good friend Blaine Anderson," Santana grinned. "And I would love to share my awesome memories of Trouty Mouth."

"The point of the video is to be nice," Blaine gently chided.

"I'm always nice," Santana argued. Her ears pricked as she heard her flight announced. "Oh finally!" she exclaimed. "I'll see you soon Blaine and I'll email that video as soon as I get back."

She hung up and grabbed her bag rolling it toward the line waiting to board. A quick thought flashed through her head, and she wondered if this might be the last time she would ever board a plane back to Kentucky.

## ***Chapter Fourteen: Diva***

Santana had made her decision before the plane touched down in Kentucky. There was nothing for her back there. She didn't want to be a professional cheerleader, she didn't want empty sex with random girls in her bed every night, and she didn't want to be alone anymore. New York was a world full of adventure and possibility and though Kurt and Rachel weren't exactly who she would typically go running to for companionship, when push came to shove there really wasn't very much for her in Lima. Sure she could settle in for a time and while away the hours waiting for Blaine and Brittany to graduate, but they'd all just end up in NY anyway. She didn't need to wait for them.

Tina's phone call was only the icing on the cake.

She stopped at the Registrar's office and filled out the Voluntary Withdrawal form. Then she went to Coach Thompson's office, respectfully resigning from the squad. Her coach was frustrated but understanding and Santana left feeling a huge weight lifted from her shoulders. Her only concern was how her mother would take the news, but she could handle that.

Santana invited over Eileen, who was at the library studying and certainly didn't mind the interruption, especially from Santana. The cheerleader closed her books and headed across campus to the dorms, knocking on Santana's door. Santana called for her to come in and Eileen didn't know what she had expected, but it was most certainly not a room full of empty drawers and two packed suitcases on the stripped bed.

"What's going on?" Eileen asked, frozen to the spot.

Santana looked at her apologetically. She suspected that though their relationship had stayed very much in the realm of friends with benefits, the girl had always wanted more. "I dropped out."

Eileen did a double take. "I'm sorry, you what?" she nearly shrieked.

Santana though didn't want to discuss it further. This was her decision and she'd made it. No regrets. She flipped her hair and hardened her eyes. "I dropped out of school and I'm going to New York. My mother gave me the money for it the end of last year, I might as well use it," she shrugged. "It's what I need to do. What I should have done all along. It's just that Brittany..."

"It's always about Brittany," Eileen interrupted, rolling her eyes.

Santana turned and saw the pain in her eyes. She sighed and drew closer, rubbing Eileen's arms comfortingly. "You knew that going into this," Santana reminded her. "You've been the best friend I've had here and I probably wouldn't have lasted as long as I have without you. But I don't belong here."

Eileen hated that it was true, but she knew that it was. "I always did think you were too big for Louisville." She smiled sadly and kissed her one last time. "I wish I had known, we could have thrown you a blow out goodbye party."

Santana chuckled and tucked a lock of her behind her ear as her eyes turned quickly from soft to mischievous. "There is one more thing that you and the girls could help me out with, if you're up for a road trip."

Kurt and Adam strode down the streets of Manhattan, coffee held close to their chests, keeping their fingers and their noses warm against the bitter cold wind. The smells of the city filled their heads as they dodged the steam from the vents. "Some things in NY I'll never get used to," Kurt grumbled as he side stepped some terrifying unknown liquid on the sidewalk.

Adam laughed and nudged his shoulder. "You'll get so used to everything by spring that you won't remember life without it all."

Kurt smiled and nodded, pausing slightly as his phone vibrated in his pocket. People around him swore as they nearly hit him and Adam once again laughed and grabbed his jacket, pulling him aside against the wall. "You're gonna get yourself run over if you do that," Adam warned.

Kurt looked at the name on the phone, then the man who glanced down curiously next to him, and made a quick decision on instinct alone. "Hey Blaine, everything ok?" He looked up quickly to Adam and mouthed a bashful 'sorry', before linking the older man's arm and starting to walk together again the few more doors to the rehearsal hall.

"You sound busy Kurt," Blaine said, his voice gravely and tentative. "Are you busy?"



"I'm just on my way to show choir rehearsal, hang on one second," he explained. He and Adam rounded the corner and approached the building. They both went inside where it was warm and Kurt motioned for Adam to go up to the room, he'd meet him in a minute. Adam climbed the stairs and Kurt leaned against the wall. "Ok, what's up?"

"Nothing," Blaine said, sniffing and clearing his throat, clearly rethinking his phone call. "Nevermind."

Blaine sounded as if he had been crying or had a cold, and if it was the former Kurt wasn't going to let him just run away. "Hey, don't do that," Kurt told him gently. "You've got my attention for at least five minutes, so tell me what you called for."

"Ok," Blaine relented and Kurt could hear him take a breath. "Tell me what you think when you hear Diva and Blaine Anderson."

Kurt arched a surprised brow and laughed. That wasn't at all what he'd expected. "You mean other than Blaine and the Pips?"

Blaine chuckled in that shy way that Kurt knew meant he was blushing. "Yes, other than that."

Kurt thought for a moment, taking a seat on the bench, trying to ignore the cold air that rushed at him every time someone opened the front door. "Well, I don't know. Are we talking private Blaine or public Blaine?"

Kurt heard Blaine swallow and sensed this was precisely why Kurt was the one he'd turned to. "Please expand on this," Blaine breathed nervously. "Well, I mean private Blaine is all about letting yourself go, being ultra-fabulous, theatricality and glamour. I know how much you love singing Adam Lambert," Kurt teased, blushing himself as he remembered private moments. "But I don't think that side of you is for public viewing. In public you can still be a Diva but you're reserved, pleasing, generous."

"I was like that privately sometimes too," Blaine purred and Kurt couldn't help but shiver. He told himself it was because of the cold.

"Yes, yes you were," he remembered sweetly, but he had to get this conversation back on track. "Look Blaine, you're a Diva because you're an amazing performer. No more, no less. Sure you can own the feather boas or the sass, but you don't need it, because you can own the stage with nothing but a piano and your voice. Your talent speaks for itself and that's what makes you a Diva." Kurt heard his name whispered

from above and he turned his head to see Adam gesturing that it was time for rehearsal to begin. "I'm sorry Blaine, I have to go. See you next week?"

"Yes, absolutely," Blaine said. "Thank you." Kurt hung up quickly before their typical goodbyes. He glanced up to Adam and sighed before smiling broadly and racing up the stairs. The last thing he'd needed Adam to hear were his and Blaine's I love you's.

Blaine had a blast performing Freddie Mercury for the Glee Club, but as always, tried and true Santana Lopez blew him away. Still, he was as confused as Brittany about why she'd not told either of them of her arrival in Lima and he for one wasn't buying her story. She'd been well aware of Sam and Brittany dating even before the two had realized it themselves.

He chased her down the hall as she left with her Cardinals teammates, grabbing her arm to stop her. She turned and glared at him, hands on her hips. He dropped his hand and took a nervous step backward. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming," he asked tentatively, baffled and hurt at the way she was looking at him.

Her eyes hardened even more than they had in the choir room. "Why didn't you tell me that Brittany and Sam had married?" she spat. "Dating is one thing Blaine, but married? You're supposed to be one of my best friends but I have to hear it from Tina Cohen-Chang?"

Blaine felt his stomach drop. He hadn't realized she didn't know, but he'd never considered it his place to tell her. If Brittany had wanted her to know she would have told her. He knew that would be little consolation to her at the moment though. "They aren't really married Santana," Blaine said instead to try and soothe her.

"Do you know how many times Brittany and I talked about getting married Blaine?" she snapped. "And how many times she said no, that it wasn't for her. And then she dates Sam Evans for a week and decides that she'll commit to him for the rest of her life?"

"She thought the rest of her life was like 48 hours 'Tana," Blaine argued, upset that Santana was getting so upset.

"And how would you feel, if Kurt met a guy and they hopped a plane to Vegas and 'got married' even though it's not legal," she challenged him. Blaine felt a twinge in his chest at just the idea of Kurt saying 'I do' to someone else. And then he understood.

"I'm sorry you didn't know," he admitted, biting his lip with regret.

"Just tell your boy Sam to meet me in the auditorium after school. We've got a score to settle," Santana ordered, then stormed off out the door, leaving Blaine behind feeling hurt, confused and more than a little vulnerable.

Amy Anderson arrived home at midnight after a long day at work. She'd been glad that since Christmas she'd changed to second shift. It had been better for Blaine, making sure he was sleeping by the time she got home, being able to be there for him in the morning before his day at school. She'd tried hard to get him stay home from school today, but her son was as stubborn as his father and insisted that he could not be absent during Diva week. She'd checked his forehead, gave him orange juice and sent him on his way.

She tossed down her keys and hung up her coat, surprised to find a girls jacket that didn't look like it belonged to Santana. She checked the living room to see if maybe Blaine and a friend had fallen asleep during a movie, but the room was empty. She entered Blaine's room and was shocked to find Tina lying next to her sleeping son, gently massaging his chest.

"Tina? What's going on in here?" she whispered.

Tina sat up quickly and shuffled off the bed, holding up a small container. "Vaporub," she explained handing the medicine to Mrs. Anderson. "Blaine wasn't feeling well so I gave him some soup and medicine and rubbed the vaporub on his chest."

Blaine's mom raised a curious and suspicious brow. "It's midnight, how long has he been sleeping?"

"Oh my God, is it that late?" Tina suddenly scrambled out of the room and grabbed her coat. "My parents are going to kill me."

"Tina," Mrs. Anderson called sternly and the girl turned and looked at her. The older woman relaxed into a motherly smile, understanding what it was like to love someone who didn't know how to love you back.

"Blaine...he's had a hard time of things lately and he," she paused trying to find the right words to explain it to her. "He doesn't always know what love looks like. His father and I haven't really been the best example for him. But sweetie, I can see it in your eyes and I'll tell you what he'd be too polite to say even if he understood how you felt. He loves Kurt. He'll always love Kurt and if by some chance he did fall in love with someone else, it wouldn't be with a girl. So don't try and hold him back. Because if Kurt's not the one for him, he deserves the chance to find the man who is."

Mrs. Anderson watched as tears filled Tina's eyes, but before they could fall she let them turn cold. The girl said nothing as she turned sharply, flung the door open and stormed out of the apartment. Amy sighed and closed the door behind her. She went into Blaine's bedroom and gently sat next to him. She caressed his head softly, kissing his forehead to check for fever, and looked at the container she still held in her hand. She opened it and rubbed a tiny bit more of the nearly empty medicine onto his chest before buttoning him up and pulling his blanket over him, leaving the container at his bedside in case he woke in the middle of the night.

"Mmmm....hi mom," he mumbled in his sleep.

"Shhh, baby...go to sleep," she whispered. He rolled over onto his side and she rubbed his back for a minute before quietly leaving the room. She wondered sadly when her little boy had become a man.

Blaine awoke the next morning feeling a million times better than he had the day before, other than having fallen asleep in his clothes. He showered and dressed and kissed his mother's cheek before grabbing a quick breakfast. She slid into the chair next to him.

"Blaine, sweetheart, I need to talk to you about Tina," she said carefully.

"I know Mom, isn't she amazing! I just feel incredible this morning. Whatever was in that chicken soup it worked like a charm," his smile quickly fell to a frown. "I feel kinda bad that I fell asleep on her last night though."

"Do you remember what happened?" his mom asked cautiously.

"Not really," he said putting his bowl in the sink and grabbing his bag for school. "I gave her my laptop with a bunch of songs I thought she could sing for Diva week. I'll have to talk to her today about which she chose."

She grabbed his hand, making him slow down and really look at her. "Just be careful Blaine," his Mom urged. "Sometimes girls don't always make the best choices."

"Oh I'm sure she'll choose the song that's just perfect for her. I gotta go Mom," he said as he ran out the door to his car.

Amy sighed. The idea that Tina liked him was barely even on his radar. This was going to be a harder conversation than she'd thought.

Blaine nearly skipped up the steps, so excited to finally have a clear head and nose, and raced up behind Artie. "Looks a little slippery up that ramp there Artie, let me give you a hand!"

Artie looked over his shoulder at Blaine with a grin. "Thanks man," he said. "You're looking better."

Blaine helped wheel him up the ramp and they entered the school, rounding the corner. "Yeah, Tina came over and gave me some miracle Chinese concoction that worked like a charm," he smiled. "It was amazing, she just had everything I needed, it was awesome." Blaine stopped when he saw Tina approach them. "Tey Tey! I was just telling Artie how awesome I thought..."

"Will you excuse us please Artie," Tina ordered, her raging eyes never leaving Blaine's.

Blaine's eyes shifted between Artie and Tina, confusion marring his face. "But I..." Artie started, then recognized Tina's bitch face and backed away quickly.

"Is everything okay?" Blaine asked, "Oh! That chicken soup you made me was magic I feel great today!"

"You wanna know why? Because of me, because I took care of you," Tina barked.

Blaine remembered what he'd grabbed off his nightstand in the morning, and took it out of his pocket. "Oh, and I guess I used most of this," he said examining the container. "I don't know how that happened

but it's all gone, sorry," he said apologetically. She just continued to glare at him angrily though and he didn't think it was because he'd finished all her vaporub. He shifted uncomfortably. "Wait, are you mad?" Maybe it was because he'd fallen asleep instead of helping her choose a song.

"Look, I give you all of my heart, gladly," she huffed, "and I love hanging out with you, Blaine. I love..." she paused and Blaine watched her, trying desperately to understand, flashing back to the conversation his mother had tried to have him with him that morning. "It's sad, because you don't see that it's me that gives you that support."

"Why are you acting so pissed off?" he asked.

"Because I get it now. A diva doesn't settle for less than what she wants, and she won't apologize for wanting it, and I can't get that here. So next time, don't come crawling back to me, I'm all out of soup," she snapped before walking out.

"That seems a little crazy," he called out after her.

She turned and glared at him. "No, that seems a little Tina Cohen-Chang. Respect."

Blaine stared after her as she walked off, then took a step into the empty classroom nearby. He took out his phone and dialed his mother's number. "Hey Mom?"

"Everything okay Blaine?" she asked in slight alarm.

"Yeah, it's just," he sat down, putting his bag on the floor. "What were you trying to tell me about Tina earlier today?"

"Oh no, what happened?" she worried.

"Nothing really," he hesitated, still trying to figure out in his head exactly what had happened. "She just kind of went off on me. And it's really weird because I'm pretty sure we left everything ok last night. I mean, is she mad because I fell asleep and didn't help her?"

"No sweetie, she's not mad because you fell asleep. She's mad because her heart is breaking," Amy explained gently.

Blaine put it all together in his head and he flashed back to another argument, when he'd acted like an oblivious idiot and gotten drunk and kissed Rachel and Kurt had snapped at him at the Lima Bean. And another where he'd gotten drunk and came on too strong and Kurt had shouted at him at Scandals. And suddenly something clicked in his mind. "Oh my god Mom, you don't think I kissed her, do you? I mean, I was totally out of it with the cough medicine, and I have a tendency to get a little handsy when I'm not entirely sober," Blaine panicked. He wracked his brain trying to remember if he'd done anything that he'd consider inappropriate, but all he remembered was an amazing night's sleep.

"No Blaine, I don't think so. You weren't woozy, you were out cold," his mother reassured him and Blaine felt his heart start beating again. "But Blaine, she likes you. So think about how you would feel if you liked someone who wouldn't like you back, not in that way. And then multiply it by 10 because girls are different than boys and we can give our hearts completely no matter what the boy thinks."

The bell rang and Blaine jumped out of his chair. "I have to go Mom. Talk to you later?"

"We'll continue this discussion tomorrow morning, starting with how you know you're a little bit handsy when you're not sober," she said sternly.

Blaine cringed at the realization of what he'd told her. "Yes Ma'am," he replied. "Love you," he added before he hung up the phone and headed to class.

Blaine and Sam waited nervously in the hallway while Brittany and Santana talked. It wasn't too long before Brittany ran out of the auditorium. Tears started streaming down her face but instead of falling into Sam's embrace it was Blaine who she wrapped her arms around. "Go see if she's okay," she whispered, then looked up at him pitifully. "Please."

Blaine wasn't sure he'd be welcome given Santana's lack of communication all week, but there was no way to deny Brittany's wishes. "Sure," he smiled, wiping her tears.

He made his way to the side door of the house and heard her before he even pushed the curtain aside. Santana's voice washed over him like dark clouds before a storm. Electricity filled the air, but it was somehow soothing to him as well, familiar. He listened for a few moments before walking in.

*She's just a girl, and she's on fire*

*Hotter than a fantasy, longer like a highway*

*She's living in a world, and it's on fire*

*Feeling the catastrophe, but she knows she can fly away*

Santana looked out into the empty auditorium, wondering how she'd gotten here. No school, no Brittany, she didn't belong anywhere, but she remembered the energy that had pierced her skin and opened her eyes in New York City. It was a world of possibilities, with friends who would be there for her, and opportunities that were just waiting for her to seize them.

*Oh, she got both feet on the ground*

*And she's burning it down*

*Oh, she got her head in the clouds*

*And she's not backing down*

Blaine pushed the curtain aside and walked slowly into the dark auditorium. Santana turned at the movement and their eyes locked immediately. Her anger at Blaine still burning, she sang to him and he listened with all his heart.

*This girl is on fire*

*This girl is on fire*

*She's walking on fire*

*This girl is on fire*

She snapped her eyes away, flames burning inside them, and stormed down the stairs and up the aisle opposite Blaine. Blaine raced across the auditorium, chasing her and blocking her way so she could not leave. Tina meant nothing compared to Santana. He needed her to forgive him and he needed her back. He sang, his own amber eyes dancing with his own fire.



*Looks like a girl, but she's a flame*

*So bright, she can burn your eyes*

*Better look the other way*

*You can try but you'll never forget her name*

*She's on top of the world*

*Hottest of the hottest girls say*

Santana watched him sing, a smile betraying her, escaping onto her lips. She'd taken her anger at Brittany and Sam and everyone else out on him and she hadn't been fair. It was just easier to leave them all behind than to have too much of heart remaining behind. She had to let him back in though. He needed her, and she needed him. She took his hand and joined in with him.

*Oh, we got our feet on the ground*

*And we're burning it down*

*Oh, got our head in the clouds*

*And we're not coming down*

Blaine smiled at her as he led her back to the stage, sitting in the front row to watch her perform. She was breathtaking, as always, and his heart filled with warmth knowing that she would always be a part of her life, because the spark that lived inside her helped bring him to life when no one else was there.

*This girl is on fire*

*This girl is on fire*

*She's walking on fire*

*This girl is on fire*

*She's just a girl, and she's on fire*

Santana jumped down from the stage, her always disarming and mischievous smile bright as her eyes twinkled. Blaine stood to meet her. "Your fire's what I love best about you," he said softly. "I'm sorry. Maybe I should have told you."

"No." Santana shook her head. "People can trust you with their secrets. That's what they love about you. What I love about you." She paused, her eyes sweeping over the floor, then she tentatively looked back at him. "I quit school. I'm moving to New York."

Blaine's eyes opened wide. "Santana..."

"No," she interjected firmly. "Don't say anything. It's what's right for me."

"Santana, I've known that since last year," he told her gently, and she smiled sheepishly. "So what are you going to do?"

"I'm gonna show up on Hummelberry's doorstep and tell them I'm moving in," she answered matter-of-factly.

Blaine whistled. There was one thing he knew for sure, McKinley had never known a bigger Diva than Santana Lopez. "Kurt's gonna blow a gasket," he warned.

"Well maybe, he needs his gasket blown," Santana snipped then winced at Blaine's face. "Sorry," she apologized.

"It's okay," Blaine laughed ducking his head.

She took his hand reassuringly. "I'll tell you everything I find out," Santana promised.

But Blaine shook his head. "No. Don't. Let Kurt tell me what he wants when he's ready."

Santana smiled softly, understanding. "Ok," she whispered.

"I'm gonna miss you," he said reaching up to tuck a hair behind her ear. They'd see each other next week, but they both knew it wouldn't be the same anymore. Santana would be in NY to stay. She wouldn't be coming home every couple of weeks, she'd get lost in the city just like Kurt and Rachel. They both had every sense that next week would be it for them until he joined them next year.

Santana grabbed Blaine's hand and pulled him in, feeling so safe and comfortable in his arms. She didn't know how she was once again leaving both Brittany and Blaine behind, but she knew it was the right choice for her. Still, she'd be leaving a huge part of her heart behind. A tear rolled down her cheek. "I'll miss you too...Boyfriend."

## ***Chapter Fifteen: I Do***

"Good evening Mrs. Lopez, Dr. Lopez," Blaine greeted formally, always the prim and proper suitor when he needs to be.

"It's nice to see you again, Blaine, you're looking well," Santana's mom smiled and Blaine returned it. He was feeling well for the first time in a while, though nerves played at his skin. "Santana's in her room."

Blaine took off upstairs. It had only been a week since he'd seen her, but she'd spent that last week living with Kurt, had flown in with him and Rachel that afternoon, and he even if he didn't really want her to tell him what was going on with Kurt, he still really wanted to *know* and maybe he'd just learn it by osmosis. He shook his head and chuckled at himself.

"My parents aren't that funny, Boyfriend." Santana side-eyed him as she pulled out her dress for the wedding and held it up to her. "Like it?"

"Gorgeous as always, 'Tana," Blaine told her. "Though you really can't go wrong."

She smiled and put it back in the closet. She'd already changed into her pajamas. She reached into her unpacked suitcase and pulled out a brush and some hair ties.

"How was your flight?" Blaine asked as he curled up on her bed, hugging a pillow.

"You spend any time on a plane with Rachel Berry and tell me how your flight was," she answered gruffly as she fixed her hair. She pulled it tight into a ponytail all the while watching him pick nervously at the pillow in the mirror. She raised a brow. "You gonna ask me about Kurt?"

"You gonna ask me about Britt?" he retorted, glancing up at her reflection. Santana paused, nearly giving into temptation but she looked away and shook her head. She knew there was nothing she wanted to hear. Blaine relaxed into the wall. "Anyone else join you guys on that flight?" he inquired, attempting innocence that Santana could see through with a blink.

"'Bout 200 other passengers, but none of them a plus one for Kurt Hummel," she assured him and Blaine sighed with relief. She grabbed her own pillow and curled up next to him. "Also thankfully, no plus one for Rachel. I never thought I'd say that I liked Rachel better with Finn, but there is something slimy about that kid Brody."

"Yeah, Kurt doesn't like him either, and I trust Kurt's taste in men," Blaine said, watching Santana carefully.

She stared him in the eye, waiting for him to crack, but he didn't. "You really want me to just come out with it, don't you?" Santana said, calling him on his evasiveness. "You don't want to ask, but you're desperate to know about this Adam guy."

"No," Blaine told her looking away, the angel over taking the devil on his shoulder. "It's none of my business until Kurt tells me."

"Oh my god, you are pathetic, Blaine, and sometimes it is so clear that you grew up in Westerville and not Lima," Santana snapped playfully. Blaine made a confused face and Santana rolled her eyes. "Kurt and Adam are sort of dating, he seems like a nice guy, but no, they haven't tapped it, and Kurt's as nervous to see you as you are to see him. There. Now you know as much as everyone else in New Directions."

"I didn't want to know all that," Blaine said with a hidden smile.

"Yes you did," Santana said knowingly, and rested her head on his shoulder. Blaine cuddled into her.

"I'm just scared," Blaine told her, as if it was a secret that wasn't written all over his face. "I mean, I know we talk all the time now, but what if he keeps his distance. What if it's completely awkward?"

"Was it awkward over Christmas?" Santana asked.

"No," Blaine admitted. "But he hadn't met Adam yet. I mean now he's kind of dating someone."

"You're thinking too much, Boyfriend," Santana admonished. "Stop thinking and worrying and just let what happens, happen. He's not some scary blast from the past Blaine. He's just Kurt. Your best friend," she said reassuringly and he nodded in agreement. "Good. Now pretend you're not a Warbler and don't tell me anything at all about Britt and Trouty Mouth," she prodded with a grin.

He kissed her head and scoffed, holding her in his arms as he stopped thinking and just shared all he knew about Brittany and Sam.

"It may only be for three days, but it is so good to have you home Kurt," Burt told his son. He even turned off the game as he lay on the couch and let Kurt put on one of those romantic comedies he loved so much.

"I'm just glad you're feeling okay," Kurt said with a tentative smile. "I'm sorry I couldn't be here for the surgery."

"It's fine Kurt. I'm fine, and there's nothing you could have done anyway. Carole took great care of me," Burt said, glancing up lovingly to his wife. She brushed a comforting hand on his head as she put his glass of water on the coffee table where he could reach it, and took a seat in the armchair. "Make sure you tell Mr. Schuester we're sorry we can't make it."

"I think he'll understand Dad," Kurt assured him. "You're still technically on bed rest."

"And I'm peeing everywhere," Burt added. "Pretty sure he doesn't want that on the most important day of his life."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Thank you so much for that image," he said wryly. Kurt turned back to the movie, but the nerves that had begun when he boarded the plane remained with him, and no matter how hard he tried, his thoughts kept returning to Blaine.

Burt noticed to furrow in Kurt's brow, the pursed lips. "Nervous about tomorrow?" he asked casually.

"No, why would I be nervous?" Kurt answered quickly and completely unconvincingly to the man that knew him better than almost anyone.

"I don't know," Burt said carefully. "You haven't been home in a while, and you've changed a lot since you've been gone. Your whole life is different. It's hard coming back to old friends when that happens."

"You mean Blaine," Kurt mumbled.

"I didn't say that," Burt answered was an easy tone.

"But that's what you meant. I'm not stupid Dad. I know you love him. I know you would like us to be together," Kurt pointed out. "Otherwise you wouldn't have brought him to see me for Christmas."

"I want you happy, Kurt," Burt corrected him. "And Blaine has made you happy before, yes. But if someone else can make you even happier Kurt, then I'll be your biggest cheerleader. Once I'm off of bed rest, of course."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Of course," he chuckled, but grew quickly somber again. "What if it all comes back tomorrow. Seeing him in his tux. At a wedding. We planned that for us someday. I'm just afraid of making a mistake. Falling into a moment." His voice had grown soft, almost a whisper, as he tried to build walls around his heart that would not hold.

Burt sat up with a groan, and took Kurt's hand. "If you remember that as quick as moments are they stay with you forever, then you'll be alright."

Kurt nodded, not fully understanding, but letting it percolate so he'd remember it when he needed to. In the meantime, he soaked in the warmth of being home with his father who had come out of the hospital okay for the second time in three years, and considered how important moments could be, and how abruptly they could be taken away.

Kurt and Rachel arrived at the church together, both nervous and excited and trying to hide it from one another. They made small talk along the way, neither wanting to admit what they were both thinking. Their first loves were inside. This wedding could have just as easily been theirs.

They greeted Mr. Schuester at the door and made their way inside. They hung up their coats in the coatroom and entered the chapel. Kurt's eyes immediately fell on Blaine talking with Tina in their pew. Rachel looked at him questioningly, and Kurt nodded, so they made their way toward the pair and took their seats a row behind.

As soon as she saw Kurt walk over, Tina linked her arm with Blaine defensively. "Hello, Kurt," Tina said sharply, being sure to punctuate the T. "It's nice you came with Rachel. Blaine here is *my* date for the evening."

Kurt raised a brow and offered a flashy smile with a tilt of his head. "Yes, I've heard about your lovely friendship from Santana," he mocked, with a glance to Blaine. His mood immediately tempered as he stared into Blaine's hazel eyes, so warm and inviting, but at the same time disapproving of his attitude

toward Tina. Something pulled at his heart, and he needed a moment alone with him. "Blaine could I talk with you a minute?"

He didn't miss the death glare Tina sent his way, but Blaine noticed nothing, his attention focused entirely on Kurt. "Sure," he agreed nervously, and patted Tina's hand before he pulled his arm free. "I'll be right back," he promised her.

Blaine shoved his hands in his pockets, and followed Kurt toward the front of the chapel, his heart racing with the endless possibilities of what Kurt wanted to talk about. "Is there somewhere private?" Kurt asked looking around.

Blaine unconsciously took his hand, and Kurt's easy acceptance of the gesture calmed him. Santana was right, it was just Kurt, whom he loved and trusted he would be with forever. He led him to a small room hidden from view just off the coat storage, where an attendant could lock up valuables. "When Mom and I come on Sundays, sometimes I'll take the job of coat check," he offered in explanation. Kurt nodded, but said nothing and nervous silence filled the small room. Blaine finally took the chance to fully appraise Kurt and he was breathtakingly beautiful. "It's really good to see you today," Blaine said in a hushed tone. "You look amazing."

"So do you," Kurt answered, his discomfort tempered by the overwhelming familiarity and a slight sense of déjà vu he couldn't explain. "Look, there's something I need to talk to you about."

Blaine pressed his lips together uneasily. He'd been waiting all this time for Kurt to tell him, but now that it came down to it, he didn't want to hear him say it. "If it's about Adam, you don't need to tell me anything."

"I don't?" Kurt asked, wondering exactly what Santana had said.

"No. I mean, you're not exactly the best at keeping secrets, even over the phone." Blaine took a step closer and Kurt found himself up against the wall. Blaine didn't reach out for him though. "I know everything about you Kurt, and I know when you like someone. I can hear it in your voice. I can read it in your words," Blaine said with quiet confidence. Kurt suddenly felt the small room grow stifling with heat and he licked his lips as Blaine continued. "But it's okay. I understand what it feels like to be lonely and to be searching for who you are and who you're meant to be with. I know you don't always believe in things like God and



destiny and soulmates, but it's okay, because I believe enough for both of us. You deserve to be happy, Kurt, and if Adam is what you need right now then -"

Blaine couldn't finish his sentence because suddenly Kurt's lips were on his and his words were swallowed, by the most delicious feeling in the entire world. Pure instinct took over as Blaine linked their fingers and he pinned Kurt's hands by his head, pushing him up flat against the wall. Kurt moaned into the kiss, and Blaine pressed into him, only then letting Kurt's hands free to drape over his shoulders. Blaine grabbed Kurt's hips as they kissed one another frantically, as if making up for lost time, because they were in fact, doing exactly that.

Kurt reached for Blaine's tie, fumbling to loosen it as he kissed Blaine's neck, when light suddenly streamed in, the door flung open, and Kurt threw his head back in frustration. Blaine took a quick step away.

"Oh for the love of...you have got to be kidding me," Tina snapped in shock. "Is this what they call talking these days? What are you two suddenly back together now?"

"No!" Kurt yelped, before turning bashfully to Blaine. "I mean, we're just friends."

"That's right," Blaine concurred, though a small wave of disappointment washed over him at Kurt's quickness. "We're just friends," he insisted to Tina.

"Well, you're *my* date, Blaine, so could you please come back inside because I'm kind of pathetic sitting there by myself," Tina huffed as she crossed her arms demandingly.

"Yes, Tina, I will," he assured her sweetly with a squeeze to her arm. "Just give me one more minute, please."

"Fine," she huffed, rolling her eyes, and stormed away.

Tina left them but the crowd outside had grown and they were getting odd looks from passersby. "Come on," Blaine urged, grabbing Kurt's hand and pulling him out the door. "We need a little more privacy."

Blaine had planned to just find a quiet corner, but the wind was picking up and the cold seeped into his skin fast after the heat of the last few minutes. He took out his keys and unlocked his car. "It'll be warmer

in here at least," he said as he pulled Kurt inside. "So, is this a New York thing? Kissing friends like that?" he smirked.

Kurt had every intention of taking Tina's interruption as a sign that they need to slow down and really talk about the fact that Kurt had a sort of boyfriend and they shouldn't be acting this way, but sitting in the backseat with Blaine, Adam barely reached his mind. All he could think about was the last time they'd made love, in the back of his car before selling it, and he wanted nothing more but to pick up exactly where they'd left off. "No," Kurt leaned forward and purred into Blaine's ear. "I'm pretty certain it's a Lima thing."

Blaine grinned against Kurt's neck and he shivered as Kurt started nibbling on his own. "Well then I thank God that we are best friends," he stammered as he slowly leaned back onto the seat.

Brody shivered once as he ducked into the coffee shop from the cold streets of Manhattan, on his way to acting class Thursday. He waited in line, texting his scene partner, before placing his order and grabbing his coffee. He turned to head out, but stopped when he saw Adam, sitting pensively at a small round table in the corner, nursing a latte. He walked over and turned a chair, straddling it without even asking. Adam didn't even look up.

"You look like you just lost your puppy," Brody mused.

Adam finally raised his eyes and glared at the guy and his ever present amused smile. They'd never been friends. Hell they'd clashed more than once in various classes and auditions. Brody looked down on everyone, so Adam didn't take it personally, but just because their respective others were best friends, it didn't change one thing about their relationship. "And you look awfully chipper for someone whose girlfriend is back home at a wedding with her ex-fiancé," Adam said.

"Ah, so that's why the long face," Brody smirked in understanding. "'Fraid ole Kurt will fall back into Blaine's arms the moment romance hits the air?"

Adam hated that Brody could read him so well. "Well you've met the guy, I haven't," he prompted. He didn't know why he was even engaging Brody in this conversation. He didn't really want to even think

about what Kurt was doing right now, but he found himself riveted to Brody's answer, like a bad accident you just can't look away from. "What do you think?"

"I think Blaine cheated on Kurt and Kurt still loves him anyway but refuses to admit it," Brody answered honestly. "Rachel agrees with me," he added smugly for good measure.

"Brilliant," Adam huffed with a roll of his eyes. He knew it was true. He'd told himself the same thing. But hearing it from Brody was something entirely different. He could have convinced himself he was making it up to lessen the blow just in case Kurt did go back to Blaine. Prepare for the worst, hope for the best. But if Brody and Rachel saw it too...

"Doesn't mean Kurt won't decide it's over after he sees him again," Brody insinuated, quirking a brow. "Maybe he just needed a new man to sweep him off his feet."

"And is that all Rachel needed?" Adam quipped back. "You think she'll go back, to the romance of a wedding that should have been theirs, and not shag him?" At the other man's unconscious twitch of surprise, it was Adam's turn to smile. "Kurt can talk too," he shrugged.

"Honestly?" Brody chirped taking a drink of his coffee and standing up. "I don't care what she does with what's his name in the middle of nowhere Ohio. I know she'll come back to me and in the end, that's what matters."

Adam scoffed and muttered under his breath. Brody peered down. "What was that?"

"I said, Kurt told me you had balls," Adam smiled up politely. Brody grinned and winked before buttoning his coat to head back outside into the cold. Adam shook his head. His thoughts turned back to Kurt, wondering what he was doing, what he was thinking. He truly liked Kurt. He was unlike anyone he'd ever met before. But being caught in the middle of unfinished business wasn't precisely what he had in mind. When Kurt returned, they needed to talk. If he and Kurt were going to be something more than friends, then he wasn't willing to settle for just a piece of his heart.

Performing with Kurt was always exhilarating, but this may have been Blaine's favorite duet ever. His pulse quickened at the flirty eyes, and the touch of Kurt's arm around his shoulder made his knees go weak. They fell into perfect step with one another as if they were alone in Blaine's bedroom practicing for

Glee club instead of singing for a hundred strangers navigating a precarious friendship. But Blaine knew it was because they would always be in perfect step with one another, and every moment together they had was one more step toward Kurt realizing the same thing.

"I'm gonna get some punch, do you want anything?" Blaine asked as they flew off the stage.

"Yeah I'll take one," Kurt said. "But just remember we're..."

"Not dating, we're just here as friends," Blaine finished for him with a small smile. It didn't matter what Kurt said, Blaine's heart was humming with joy because even if they were just friends, they were the closest they'd ever been today since they'd broken up and the night was not even half over. He wouldn't let himself think about the possibilities that lay ahead, the empty rooms that just waited for them upstairs. He couldn't get enough, but he could be patient, and wait until Kurt was ready, whether that meant today or three months from today. Because Kurt could deny their love all he wanted, but he couldn't deny that every step they'd taken had been a step closer.

Blaine poured two cups of punch then went over to the bar to ask for some maraschino cherries.

"Gotta make sure you have those cherry stems," Santana winked at Blaine as she sipped her wine at the bar. Her eyes flew quickly to Kurt and back again. "You two are looking nice and cozy tonight."

Blaine side-eyed her, holding out the cups for the bartender to drop in the fruit. "I could say the same for you and Quinn," he said, glancing at the blonde chatting with Puck by Santana's side.

"You're crazy," Santana scoffed unconvincingly.

Blaine chuckled. "And you're drunk," Blaine informed her. She dismissed him with a sweep of her hand, but he took it and held it tight, forcing her attention. "Don't do anything you'll regret 'Tana. I know it's hard watching Brittany here with Sam, but I also know how a one night stand can ruin the best thing that's ever happened to you." He swept an eye over the crowd for Kurt, finding him chatting across the room with Mike and Tina. "I don't know if we get second chances, Santana, but if there's one thing I've learned, it's that running from love is never the answer."

Behind Santana, Quinn was laughing hard at something and brushed a shoulder against her. Santana shivered slightly as Quinn's hair tickled her skin and she smiled hopefully. "And what if I'm running to love?" she asked.

Blaine looked out again to Kurt who turned to meet his gaze with a small smile and a little wave of his fingers. Blaine couldn't help the color that rose to his cheeks and his eyes sparkled as he kissed Santana tenderly on the cheek. "Always run to love," he whispered before walking off to return to Kurt's side.

"Your drink, Sir," Blaine bowed jokingly as he handed over Kurt's punch.

"Well thank you, Sir," Kurt smiled back brightly, before taking a sip.

"What were you guys talking about?" Blaine inquired, tilting his head toward Mike and Tina.

Kurt glanced back over with a smirk, and linked his arm with Blaine's, pulling him away from the pair. "Just encouraging her to find someone else to dance with. Nostalgia seems to be in the air, after all," he said, nudging Blaine to look to the stage.

As Blaine looked up to see Finn and Rachel take the microphones, he felt his drink pulled from his hand. He twisted back to see Kurt place it on the table, then reach out a hand. "May I have this dance?" Kurt offered nervously.

Blaine flashed a delighted smile. "Of course," he accepted.

Kurt led him, hand in hand, to the dance floor and Blaine wrapped himself into Kurt's arms. He couldn't help the sigh that escaped as he felt the pieces of his heart click into place. He reached his hand up Kurt's back, tracing the fabric of his suit beneath his fingers. He nuzzled into the perfect space of Kurt's neck, taking the time to breathe in his scent, to re-memorize it once again before it was gone to soon.

*I know it's late, I know you're weary*

*I know your plans don't include me*

*Still here we are, both of us lonely*

*Longing for shelter from all that we see*

*Why should we worry, no one will care girl*

*Look at the stars so far away*

Kurt knew there was a possibility he might consider it a mistake in the morning, but he wondered right now how on earth he could. Everything was perfect. The music spoke the words of his heart. They were here, they were lonely, and they wanted each other. For now, New York was a world away. Blaine was here, tonight.

*We've got tonight, who needs tomorrow?*

*We've got tonight babe*

*Why don't you stay?*

"I'm glad you're here, Kurt," Blaine whispered, his voice vibrating on Kurt's skin.

His breath sent shivers down Kurt's spine, and he knew Blaine didn't mean the wedding. "I'm glad I'm here too," he sighed, resting his chin on Blaine's shoulder, closing his eyes to the crowd.

*Deep in my soul, I've been so lonely*

*All of my hopes, fading away*

*I've longed for love, like everyone else does*

*I know I'll keep searching, even after today*

Even the faltered romance of the wedding had mirrored Kurt's own emotions. He understood why Ms. Pillsbury had run. He understood the fear, the doubt, the strength it took to trust again. He understood the wonder of what else might be out there. He and Blaine were still so young. It was no longer their mistakes that kept them apart. He felt safe in Blaine's arms. But it was precisely that safety that Kurt wasn't sure he was ready for.

*So there it is girl, I've said it all now*

*And here we are babe, what do you say?*

*We've got tonight, who needs tomorrow?*

*We've got tonight babe*

*Why don't you stay?*

Their hearts weren't racing. Their nerves weren't tingling. A familiar calm washed over them. There were no more doubts, no more fears in either of their hearts. Because in one another's arms, they were simply home. His father's words came back to Kurt and he understood what they meant. This wasn't something he'd regret in the morning, or a week from now or a year from now. Whether it was a new beginning or the perfect goodbye, he was completely certain he'd want to remember it forever.

*We've got tonight, who needs tomorrow?*

*Let's make it last, let's find a way*

*Turn out the light, come take my hand now*

*We've got tonight babe*

*Why don't you stay?*

*Why don't you stay?*

"Do you want to go upstairs?" Kurt whispered in his ear.

Blaine pulled back so he could see Kurt's eyes. They swam with desire.

He took a deep breath. It wasn't everything he wanted, but it was enough for tonight. "Okay."

They savored the moments, knowing that they were not soon to come again. Their passion in the car had been fast and frantic, but this was purely a continuation of their dance, deliberate and slow so that it burned into their memory. Making it last.

Blaine poured languid kisses on Kurt, but he let Kurt take the lead. Clothing was discarded, little by little, remembering and rediscovering without reserve. They spoke little, afraid of the words that might pour out, but concentrated solely on the feel of one another, beneath their fingers, their lips, against their skin.

It was all they had remembered and more, every sensation heightened by the very real possibility that this time could be their last. Blaine didn't believe it, he wouldn't, but he was desperate to feel everything, to let every sensation erase the memories of the mistakes he had made. He'd missed this so much and he just let it fill him, let Kurt fill him, until his heart burst with pleasure and Kurt soon followed.

They laid together side by side, slick with sweat and trying to catch their breath as they stared at the hotel ceiling. Their fingers found one another and laced, a contented smile flitting across Blaine's face, a weak laugh coming from Kurt.

"We should head back downstairs before Tina or Mercedes send out a search party," Kurt said, only partially joking. He twisted out of bed, grabbing his boxers and pants and slipped them on.

Blaine did the same while Kurt grabbed his shirt and headed over to the mirror. "Are we gonna talk about this?" Blaine asked determinedly.

Kurt's face fell, as he stared back at himself, pulling on his t-shirt then his button down. He knew it was coming but he didn't want it. It had all been perfect, why did Blaine have to try and ruin it with questions and definitions? Kurt knew he wasn't being totally fair. Blaine was so sure that they belonged together forever, and there was a very real possibility that Kurt had just played with Blaine's heart in the worst possible way. But what had just happened between them didn't change the fact that Kurt wasn't ready to make any decisions. "I don't know that there's anything to talk about Blaine," he said hesitantly, only glancing slightly at Blaine sitting mostly dressed on the edge of the bed, out of the corner of his eye.

"Tell me now that we're not back together," Blaine insisted and it was exactly the one thing that Kurt had been afraid of.

"I mean, it was fun, but..." he attempted casually, knowing there was nothing casual for Blaine about what had just happened.

"I'm not going to let you minimize this Kurt," Blaine insisted. He picked up Kurt's jacket and brought it over. He knew Kurt was scared, but Blaine had absolutely no lingering doubts in his mind no matter what



Kurt wanted to tell himself. "It's no accident that we were together on Christmas, and again on Valentine's Day." Blaine slipped the jacket on Kurt, as he had a hundred times before, and just like that it was like nothing had ever changed and they were back exactly where they belonged. "And we're going to be together, for many, many, more, no matter how much you pretend," he drew close, knowing that Kurt wouldn't pull away, and whispered boldly in his ear, "that this doesn't mean anything."

For a moment time froze as they gazed into the hotel mirror. A picture of two soulmates, two hearts that were destined to be together since long before they even knew who they were. Kurt longed for the confidence and the surety, to know that Blaine was wrong, that it was time for him to move on. He wished he could believe that someone else, Adam or some unknown stranger still out there waiting for him, was the man he was meant to be with for the rest of his life. But he couldn't. Because here he was, his Teenage Dream, the boy who had taken his hand and run down the hallway with him. The boy who had danced with him at prom. The boy, no the man, who had made him feel that he could let go of all the fear and all the embarrassment and all the voices in his head that said he wasn't man enough. The man who had taught him that romance and passion were not mutually exclusive but two parts to an amazing whole that he wasn't even sure he ever truly wanted to share with someone else.

As Blaine brushed his shoulders, Kurt turned with relief that Blaine wasn't hurt. He looked at lips that only minutes earlier had been kiss swollen, screaming his name. He stared into hazel eyes that had been blown dark as night with lust. He leaned in to kiss Blaine again, to feel his mouth against his, to taste him one last time before the night was over. But instead he pulled back, leaving Blaine wanting, heart racing and skin tingling. "I'll see you downstairs," he whispered seductively as he left the room.

Blaine was so sure about them, Kurt thought as he left, and maybe he was right. Only time would tell. But he knew for certain he would be making no decisions before returning to New York. Because even if they were meant to be together forever, they both still had things they needed to learn. There was a long time in between now and forever.

Kurt stopped just outside the door, a sly smile still on his lips, feeling drunk on sex and power. He took a minute to find his footing before venturing back down to the reception, when another door opened. Not sure whether to run or to stay, he hesitated too long and saw Rachel quietly closing the door behind her as if not to disturb the occupant left inside.

"Rachel?" Kurt called softly, concern written all over his face.

She turned, surprised, but quickly recovered and offered him a faint smile. She nodded quickly to the door. "You and Blaine?" she asked, not really needing him to answer. She'd been wrapped up in Finn all night, but she wasn't so oblivious as not to notice the two dancing so closely during her duet.

"Yeah," Kurt answered, turning back toward the door. "He's just...I mean, he's gonna meet me downstairs in a minute."

"Are you guys back together?" she asked, starting down the hallway. Kurt fell into stride with her.

"Oh, no," he answered quickly. "That was just," he paused, a blush creeping up his neck as he looked at her sheepishly. "Well, I don't even know what that was."

"I do," she said softly, taking his hand as they descended down the stairs. "It's love. Just like me and Finn. They'll always be with us, Kurt. Handprints on our hearts, just like the song."

"Just like the song," Kurt said, smiling fondly at the phrase. "Whichever way our story ends?" he asked her, squeezing her hand.

Rachel looked back up the stairs and Kurt followed her gaze. Blaine stood beautifully at the top, staring down on them, beaming from ear to ear. She glanced at Kurt fondly, who couldn't help but return to Blaine a winsome smile. "I'm pretty sure I know how it ends," she mused confidently.

Blaine entered his apartment with the smell of Kurt still on his skin and his clothes. He could still feel Kurt's hands on him, their bodies pressed together, Kurt inside him as they made love, and he couldn't have felt more perfect. Lost in the haze of the evening, a smile permanently etched onto his face, he didn't even notice his mother come out of her bedroom at the sound of the door.

"Did you have a nice time, sweetheart?" she asked with a yawn.

"It was the best wedding ever," Blaine answered dreamily. "You didn't have to wait up for me," he told her, but his eyes said that he loved that she had. And his eyes said so much more as they sparkled even in the darkness of the apartment, only the moonlight shining in off the snow through the windows, and the small

kitchen light kept on for him over the sink. He went to the fridge and grabbed a bottled water. He leaned on the counter as he took a sip.

Mrs. Anderson sat at the kitchen table. "Did Ms. Pillsbury look beautiful?" she asked.

"I don't know," Blaine responded, his brow furrowing as he thought back on it. He'd nearly forgotten the actual wedding. "We never saw her. She left Mr. Schuester at the altar."

"Oh my goodness, that's terrible!" she said sympathetically. "Was he alright?"

"I think he left to try and go find her," Blaine tried to remember. "They still had the reception, and everyone had a great time."

"Even Tina?" his mother asked with a knowing glance, starting to put the pieces together. There was only one thing, one person, who could make Blaine forget everything else around him. Blaine's blush, as he dropped his eyes in shame, confirmed it. "Did you pay any attention to her at all tonight or did you just spend the whole evening with Kurt?" she asked with reproach. When he continued to avoid her gaze without an answer, she gently scolded him. "I told you to be a gentleman tonight, Blaine."

"I know," he said quietly. He'd screwed up and he knew it, he'd just been so lost in everything Kurt, he hadn't even remembered she was his date. But he'd make it up to her and invite her to the movie tomorrow as long as Kurt was okay with it. He raised his eyes bashfully. "I'll apologize."

"I know you will," Mrs. Anderson smiled softly and she got up and gave Blaine a kiss on the cheek. "I'm going to bed."

"Night mom," he wished her lovingly, the giddy smile returning quickly to his face as the thoughts of Kurt flooded him again.

She stopped and eyed him carefully. He looked different from when he left. His eyes were alight with confidence and happiness, sparks of his old self before Kurt left. "Did you two -?" she started, but Blaine kissed her hurriedly and slipped out from behind her with a grin that answered her question.

"Night Mom," he called again behind him, disappearing into his room.

Tina rolled her eyes as Blaine and Kurt quoted nearly every line from All About Eve, but at least they were quiet during Showgirls. She sat between them, at Kurt's insistence, and they went out of their way to make her feel included. She could see what Kurt couldn't, or at least refused to, but the truth is it helped. Loving someone meant wanting them to be happy, and when she finally put all her feelings aside, she could see without a doubt that they were meant for one another. She only wished she had someone like that for herself.

She hugged them both as they dropped her off at her house, and she apologized again for how she'd acted. Both boys forgave her easily and that was what she'd always loved about them. Their hearts were always open, always forgiving.

Blaine drove Kurt to the airport to meet Santana. They barely spoke but sang along to the radio like always, their voices that always blended perfectly together soothing the awkwardness between them. They hadn't talked further about what had happened between them at the wedding, but they didn't need to. They both understood.

Standing on the sidewalk of the terminal, Blaine swung back and forth slightly with nervous energy, hands fisted in his pockets to stop himself from sweeping Kurt into his arms. "Happy Valentine's Day, Kurt," Blaine smiled, kissing him sweetly on the cheek.

Kurt smiled coyly, looking away from Blaine's love-filled eyes. If he stared too long, he might do something he didn't really want to. The time spent with Blaine had been perfect. The way they were leaving things was perfect. He didn't want to mess that up. He just hoped that Blaine agreed. "No regrets?" he asked, making sure.

Blaine grinned and shook his head as if it was the most ridiculous question in the world. "Just love," he crooned. Kurt nodded thankfully, but said nothing, an awkward pause filling the air as both held instinct at bay. "Are you coming back anytime soon?" Blaine asked.

"Not that I have planned right now," Kurt told him somewhat regretfully. "The Apples will be rehearsing over spring break, plus some other work I have to do. Hopefully everything with Dad will be okay."

"It will," Blaine assured him confidentially. "Your Dad's strong, and he has Carole taking amazing care of him."

"And you," Kurt acknowledged gratefully.

Blaine shrugged. "I'd do anything for your Dad, you know that."

"I know," Kurt said with quiet empathy. He knew exactly how important his Dad was to Blaine.

"I'd do anything for you too, Kurt," Blaine added sincerely. He hadn't planned to say it, but he wouldn't apologize for the truth.

Kurt met his gaze. "I know," he responded, his voice soft with affection. His eyes fell, and he caught the time on Blaine's watch. "I have to go if I'm gonna make my flight."

"Oh, well, then I should find some way to keep you here just a little bit longer," Blaine gently teased, but tears started to fill his eyes.

"Don't cry Blaine," Kurt begged quietly, as he blinked back his own. "I'll see you soon. Don't let Tina near you while you're sleeping again," Kurt warned and Blaine laughed softly.

"Don't let Santana drive you crazy, I need both of you alive," Blaine answered.

"I'll do my best," Kurt smirked as he grabbed his bags and waved goodbye.

Blaine watched Kurt disappear inside the airport where no doubt Santana was already waiting for him. His heart was heavy, missing him already, but he wouldn't have traded the last few days for anything. He knew that Kurt wasn't ready, that he still needed time to explore and to grow and discover who he was in the world. To understand, or at least accept, what Blaine already knew – that they were soulmates. But If Blaine were honest with himself, he needed time too. He needed to learn who he was without Kurt, and figure out his future plans. He needed to fly, on his own, no anchor, nothing holding him down. But there was one thing that he was absolutely certain of now that he hadn't been before.

Anything could happen.

## ***Chapter Sixteen: Come What May***

"Stop the cab," Kurt ordered two blocks from their apartment. He paid the driver extra, just wanting to get the hell out of the taxi and away from Santana. The driver popped the trunk and he grabbed his luggage and started off toward home, not caring at all if the girl followed. She'd been relentless the entire trip home with the flippant remarks and the double entendres and the outright grilling about what had happened with Blaine and what he was going to do about Adam.

Kurt stormed into the apartment and to his room, throwing his bags on his bed. Santana tossed her own onto the couch and followed him expectantly. He rolled his eyes at her complete inability to understand the meaning of the word privacy and swung around to face her. "I knew you were going to take Blaine's side Santana, but if you're going to insist on getting in the middle of this then you need to go."

"I'm not going anywhere Hummel and I'm not getting in the middle," Santana told him, arms folded across her chest. "But I am keeping my eye on you, and if you hurt him-"

"If I hurt..." Kurt stared at her incredulously. "Santana, he cheated on me! Do you think I just came to New York and forgot about him? Do you think I didn't hate every time I had to ignore his calls or cancel a Skype date for work? Do you think I didn't cry myself to sleep some nights missing him, Santana, because I did! But he's the one who cheated, not me."

"And as soon as he did he flew out here to be honest with you, Kurt," Santana said.

"Well why the hell didn't he fly out here *before* he did it?" Kurt yelled. He turned away, fighting back the tears that had threatened since he walked away from Blaine at the airport. He folded his arms in on himself protectively. "You know him so well, you tell me that," he said softly.

"Because he was hurt and scared and feeling abandoned yet again," Santana tried to explain. "Because he needed someone to finally fight for him and he needed to know if you would be that someone. And because he doesn't have a damn clue what it means to be in a healthy relationship."

"No!" Kurt snapped back around, his finger flying up in reprimand. "He doesn't get that excuse."

Santana paused. Kurt was right and she knew Blaine didn't want it used as an excuse. But it was the truth nonetheless. "I don't mean it as an excuse Kurt, but it is a reason," she said.

"It's an excuse if you want it to be why I forgive him," Kurt told her firmly. He turned and sat on his bed with a sigh. "But I have forgiven him Santana. Not even remotely because of that, but I have forgiven him. I wouldn't have..." he stopped, not able to say the words now that he was once again so far away. "I wouldn't have spent Valentine's Day with him if I hadn't forgiven him. It's not about that."

Santana walked over and sat next to him. "Then what's it about," she asked gently.

"It's about being apart for a while," he explained carefully. "We know who we are together, but it's about learning who we are without each other. He's the first boy I ever truly loved, and maybe he will be my last, I don't know. But should he be my only? Is that fair to either one of us? For me to always wonder?" He looked at her sadly. "Blaine understands Santana, I wish you would too."

"I just love him Kurt. And I don't want him hurt."

"I love him too," Kurt told her, tears in his eyes. "And because I love him, so I *don't* hurt him, I have to do this."

"Squirt, I've missed you so much!" Cooper yelled into the phone.

Blaine took the phone away from his ear and rubbed it, switching to the left as the right recovered from his brother's scream. "Where are you Coop? You don't need to scream, I can hear you just fine."

"Oh, sorry," Cooper said much more quietly. Blaine took the last few steps up to his apartment and threw his backpack on the kitchen chair. He grabbed a quick snack from the cabinet and curled up on the couch, forgetting about the mountains of homework he had for just a few minutes. It wasn't everyday Cooper called. "So what's going on with you little brother? Did you get your college applications all sent away?" he asked.

"Yup," Blaine smiled. "NYADA, NYU, Columbia –"

"Berklee?" Cooper pressed expectantly.

"Yes Cooper, I promised I would," Blaine sighed. "The others too."

"Good. How was the wedding?" he asked with a mischievous lilt.

Blaine closed his eyes, letting the pictures of him and Kurt flash before his eyes. There were still as vivid as they had been a week ago. "It was amazing," he nearly purred dreamily.

"Hmmm, if I didn't know any better I'd say my little brother got a lotta action," Cooper teased good-naturedly. "Hummel action I hope."

Blaine blushed and quickly changed the subject. "So hey, my friend Artie's gonna be making a movie," he said.

"And I assume you're starring in it, right?" Cooper suddenly grew serious. "I mean, he can't make a movie without an Anderson as a leading man, and as much as I'd love to help you kids out, I've got my own movie deal in the works here in LA. Please give him my regrets, but you'll do almost as well."

Blaine scoffed and shook his head. "I will," Blaine promised. "And I'll be sure to let him know that I'm the leading man for him. That is if the boys win Mr. Schuester's latest boys against the girls movie music competition."

"There is no way the girls will beat any team you're on Blaine," Cooper assured him. "You guys could do Danger Zone and still win that one."

Blaine's mouth slapped shut. "We are doing Danger Zone," he pouted.

"Your idea?" Cooper asked frankly.

"What's wrong with Danger Zone Coop, you love the 80's?" Blaine whined.

"No one looks sexy in a flight suit, Blaine, not even Tom Cruise," Cooper argued.

Blaine laughed and stretched out on the couch. "Oh big brother, how wrong you are," he smirked.

*Never knew I could feel like this*



The snow kept falling as Kurt changed into his pajamas and climbed into bed that night. Adam was just outside, trying to fit his tall frame onto the small couch, but he was all but forgotten in the darkness and solitude of Kurt's room. In the eerie silence of the City during a blizzard, the haunting melody of Come What May instantly returned. Images of a sinfully handsome Blaine on a rooftop mixed with memories of their young love flooded him. His chest seized with want. He was desperate for it.

He just didn't know what *it* was.

*Listen to my heart, can you hear it sings*

*Telling me to give you everything*

Or was it just that he refused to allow himself to believe? It was too soon. He was too scared. Everything was just so complicated. Their future of duets and wedding bells and children, god they had talked about children. Every step they'd taken felt like a step forward, but Kurt was never one for the leap of faith. Not like Blaine. Not when everything was still so uncertain. He couldn't be with Blaine when they were still miles and hours and months apart and neither of them knew where next year would lead them. What if Blaine didn't get into NYADA or another school in New York? What if he went to California or Chicago or Michigan?

*And there's no mountain too high no river too wide*

*Sing out this song and I'll be there by your side*

But even if none of that had mattered, he couldn't leap when he was so uncertain about himself. Things had never been okay for him before he met Blaine. His mother was gone too soon, he was bullied by his peers, he was worried about his father. He'd spent so much of his life afraid of being left alone. Blaine had changed all that and with Blaine in his life everything had started to feel okay again in a way it hadn't since his mother had died. But Kurt now understood he couldn't just be okay with Blaine. He needed to be okay without him. Kurt had felt like he was going to die when he'd lost Blaine and at the wedding he felt truly alive again for the first time since. That terrified him more than anything else. He couldn't go through that again. If there was one thing he'd learned from his Mom and Dad, it was how quickly even the most perfect of loves could be lost forever in an instant and he never wanted to feel so lost again.

*I will love you until my dying day.*

He traced the screen of his phone with his thumb, as he held it tentatively in his hand. His tears fell down onto it and he wiped them away. He needed to move on, if not forever at least for now. He needed to live and learn and love someone else. It was impossibly hard when his heart wanted no one else but Blaine, but he knew that he had to do it.

Still, the guilt overwhelmed him. The feeling that he was betraying his heart froze him.

He swiped his phone and texted two words:

***I'm sorry.***

It didn't make sense. But he knew Blaine would understand.

...

Blaine smiled at the text from Santana and he shut out the light, climbing into bed. He curled up hugging his extra pillow and stared at Kurt's picture. It didn't matter that Adam was with them. He may be hundreds of miles away, but Kurt was thinking about them, about Come What May, and about their future.

His phone lit up and he pulled it from his dresser.

***From Kurt: I'm sorry.***

...

Kurt clutched his phone to him as he waited, hoping that Blaine was still awake and he wouldn't have to wait until morning. When it buzzed, he took a breath before reading it. He smiled through his tears.

***From Blaine: Take your time Kurt. I'll be here when you're ready.***

Blaine put the finishing touches on his flight suit, slipped his glasses on and posed in the locker room mirror. Okay, so the costume wasn't nearly as flattering as the one Tom Cruise wore in the movie, and maybe Cooper was a little bit right, but he snapped a photo anyway and texted it to him. He fingers

lingered on the key pad as he thought of sending it to Kurt as well, but instead he slipped his phone back into his bag. Kurt needed his space, not pictures of him looking like a fool.

"How do I look?" Sam asked and Blaine spun around to see Sam slide in like Tom Cruise in Risky Business, an all white dress shirt, and very little else, hanging loosely on his frame.

"Oh merciful...", he muttered under his breath, suddenly grateful for the sunglasses he wore and the coverage his costume provided. Blaine had thought that topless Sam was tough enough, but bottomless Sam was a new level entirely. He cleared his throat and sat down on the bench. "You look perfect Sam," he gushed as normally as possible. "Exactly like the movie."

"This was literally the best idea ever Blaine," Sam beamed back at him, slapping him fondly on the shoulder. "We are going to win this thing for sure."

"You just bring it out there," Blaine flirted without even realizing it. "Cause I'm raising my game for this one and you better meet me note to note."

"Oh it's on brother," Sam declared, putting a hand out for a fist bump.

Blaine raised his fist. "Those girls don't stand a chance," he grinned and they bumped fists with a boom.

Kurt entered the empty apartment, Rachel still overachieving at NYADA, Brody probably drug dealing down in the park and Santana doing whatever the hell it was that Santana was doing in New York. His date with Adam had been fun. The movie had been good. But he hadn't felt anything he desperately wanted to feel.

He sprawled out on his bed, confused and exhausted from trying to figure it out, but his mind just kept racing and words tumbled on top of one another just creating a bigger puzzle than the one he'd started with. He went through his phone, pausing on a number of people. Rachel was way too invested in Adam and Santana and his Dad were too invested in Blaine. He just wished he had someone who could make sense of everything for him and figure out what he was missing in all this.

Then he stopped on a number and pressed call.

"Kurt!" Brittany squealed as she sat up on her bed and crossed her legs beneath her. "I've missed my unicorn so much!"

Kurt laughed, a hearty carefree laugh that had been missing from his life in New York and he felt his tension immediately lessen. "I've missed you too Britt. How's life treating you in Lima?"

"Life is great Kurt," she said, smiling with a sly glint in her eye. "But you're not calling to talk about me," she accused playfully.

Kurt bit his lip and took a breath. "Can I ask you a personal question Britt?" Kurt asked nervously. It wasn't something he'd normally ask, people's relationships were private and he had no business knowing. But she'd done what he couldn't and he needed to know how.

"Of course," she smiled and twirled her finger around a thread in her blanket. Loose threads never bothered her. She saw them as the start of a wonderful secret hidden within.

"Do you love Sam?" Kurt asked, then blanched at his own audacity. "I'm sorry. You don't have to answer that if you don't want to."

But it was a simple question for her to answer and she smiled. "Yes I do," she said easily.

"How?" he wondered aloud.

Brittany's eyes sparkled. "Because he's sweet and he's kind and because he's always thought I was one of the smartest people he's ever met even before my SAT scores proved him right."

Kurt chuckled, then grew quiet. "But do you still love Santana?"

"Yes, of course," she declared as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "I'll always love Santana."

Kurt ran his fingers through his hair and closed his eyes. He pulled his knees into his chest and rested his chin on them. "How can you love two people at once?"

"Our hearts are big enough to love a million people Kurt. There's no limit on love," she explained. "Why? Are you falling in love with Adam?" she asked with curious excitement.

"No," Kurt jumped, maybe a bit more quickly than he'd intended. "No," he said more calmly and he knew for certain it was true. Still... "But what if I was?"

"While you still love Blaine you mean?" Brittany asked. Kurt nodded though she couldn't see, but she didn't need to.

"If you asked me years ago if I would ever go back to a man who betrayed me I would have told you there wasn't a chance." Kurt's voice was brittle with disappointment and bewilderment. "What he did *really* hurt me Britt. Why do I still love him so much after he hurt me like that," Kurt asked painfully, falling to little more than a whisper.

"Because if you didn't love him that much he couldn't hurt you that much. And hurt doesn't make that kind of love go away." Brittany's heart clenched a little as she breathed out the next words. "That kind of love is forever."

"It shouldn't be," Kurt sighed as tears slipped down his cheeks once more. "I'm scared Britt. I judged Blaine's mom so much for always going back and yet here I am, wanting to do the same thing. I thought that maybe if I could go out and date that I wouldn't still feel like I belong with him despite it all. But I do Britt. I still feel like he's where I belong."

Brittany hesitated. She'd held onto it so long. Kept it just in case. But that was before she'd fallen in love with Sam and she understood now that she shouldn't choose sides. But Kurt's words rang in her ears and she couldn't ignore it. "You know I'm on Team Kurt, right? I just want you to be happy whoever you choose to share your life with right?" She needed to make sure he knew that.

His brow furrowed in concern. "Yeah Britt, I know. That's why I called you."

"Good. Then I'm going to send you something, okay? You can call me when you're done watching it or not, but promise you'll call if you're mad because I can't stand thinking you might be mad at me," she said quickly.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

"Just promise Kurt," she said.

"I promise Britt. Thanks for talking to me." He hung up the phone and waited.

Brittany ended the call and took a deep breath before scrolling through the videos she'd saved. A shift in the bed and a warm arm around her waist brought her a little comfort.

"Why now?" Sam asked softly, knowing exactly what she was doing.

"It will either set him free or draw him back home. But either way he'll know that Blaine is letting him go," she said resolutely as she clicked send on the video and turned to him. "And that's something that Blaine's father never did."

He stared at her, love shining in his eyes, and kissed her softly on the lips. "You really are the smartest girl I know," he whispered and her smile was bright enough to light up the whole world.

## ***Chapter Seventeen: Feuds***

*Is this home?*

*Is this what I must learn to believe in?*

*Try to find something good in this tragic place,*

*Just in case I should stay here forever*

*Held in this empty place.*

Kurt had forwarded the video to his laptop. After only a moment of hearing Blaine's broken voice, lit by the colors and the smoke of the so familiar jazz club, he needed to see it in full.

*Oh, but that won't be easy*

*I know the reason why*

*My heart's far, far away*

*Home's a lie*

*What I'd give to return*

*To the life that I knew lately*

*But I know that I can't*

*Solve my problems going back*

Now he sat, curled up with his knees tucked into his chest on his desk chair, tears running down his face as he watched it through a second time. His heart was in his throat and his skin had grown hot with emotion as Blaine's fingers glided on the keyboard and his tear-filled eyes met Kurt's through the screen. He had no idea how long ago Blaine had sung this, but he knew for certain Blaine was singing directly to him.

*Is this home?*

*Am I here for a day or forever?*

*Shut away*

*From the world until who knows when*

*Oh, but then, as my life has been altered once*

*It can change again*

*Build higher walls around me*

*Change every lock and key*

*Nothing lasts, nothing holds all of me*

*My heart's far, far away*

*Home and free!*

Kurt closed his eyes, the image of Blaine never leaving him despite his tears trying desperately to wash him away. And he knew why Brittany sent the video now. Somehow, in some way, Blaine would always be where he belonged. But Blaine had figured out long before Kurt, just as Brittany had tried to explain, that they could hold on and let go at the same time. That something good had to come out of something awful. And that he could keep Blaine locked away in a part of his heart while still giving away the key to another.



In his own beautiful way of communicating through song, Blaine had both held on strong and set him free that day. It tore at Kurt's heart even more, but somehow also managed to lighten it, so he could fly.

Santana stood in the door frame watching him, knowing exactly the video on Kurt's screen. She remembered that night like it was yesterday but there was something about seeing Kurt's reaction to it that made her snap. "What do you do, watch him like this when he's not around then throw around crap like *we're just friends* and *bros helping bros*?"

"I've never seen it before," he whispered, still staring at the screen in shock. "Britt just sent it to me." He looked up at her, his cheeks tear stained. "When did he sing it?"

"About 2 hours after you told him he wasn't home anymore and stormed off," she snarled.

Santana's tone finally pierced his daze and his eyes narrowed with focus. "I told him Lima wasn't home anymore," he clarified, but as soon as the words came out of his mouth he knew that wasn't true. He'd still been angry that day and he'd meant exactly what Santana had said. Hell some days he was still angry and Santana's presence was making it worse.

"Even if that were true, which it's not, do you really think it would make a difference with him? You're the only place that ever felt like home to him and you threw it back in his face like it meant nothing to you. Jesus what is it with you and Berry, so blind to everything that is going on around you?"

Kurt slammed the laptop shut and got up. "That's it Santana," he yelled, his voice getting higher by the second. "I'm trying here. I'm trying to figure out what I want and who I am and the fact is that who I *date* is none of your business. I know that he's one of your best friends, but he's one of mine too and this is between Blaine and me and has nothing to do with you! Just like things between Rachel and that douchebag Brody have nothing to do with you, or me for that matter. So why don't you go get a job or something and just stay out of our love lives!" He grabbed his coat and stormed out of his room.

"Where are you going Hummel?" Santana called. "Isn't it too dark out there for you?"

"I'm going to buy some drugs from Brody on the street corner so I can forget about all of you for just a few minutes!" he shouted sarcastically before slamming out the door.

Santana sighed with regret. This wasn't at all how she'd promised herself she would be when she boarded the plane for New York. She'd wanted things to be different between her and the Hummelberry twins this

time around. They'd be mature and talk things out and she'd be a better person than she'd been in Lima. But those two brought out the worst in her with their naivety and their hopeful dreams and their emo need to find a man to cling to whether or not it was the right one. And Donkey Face and Dr. Who were most definitely not the right choices for either of them.

She changed into her pajamas and curled up with her blanket and a pillow of Kurt's she'd stolen. Oddly it reminded her of Blaine but probably only because her friend tended to spray Kurt's cologne all over when he was feeling sad. She pulled out her phone and dialed, smiling softly when Blaine answered.

"Hey 'Tana, how's New York treating you?" Blaine asked, his voice chipper.

"Far better than your ex-boyfriend is treating me," she grumbled. "Seriously I don't know why you still pine away for him. He's insufferable sometimes."

"Well, so are you, but I still pine away for you too," he teased. "Maybe I'm just a glutton for punishment. I'd come by it pretty naturally I would say," he added wryly.

"How are things with you and your Dad, since you brought it up," she asked.

"Good," Blaine answered. "I mean, it's not perfect, there are still moments when I can see his eyes blaze, but he's been walking away. Or if he doesn't then I do and he calms down in time."

"You've inherited that eye blaze you know," Santana reminded him.

"Yeah, but I don't even want to act on it anymore," he said with conviction. "My therapist actually thinks maybe I don't need to see him anymore, though Dad's gonna continue and I can join him anytime I want. We're gonna have our last appointment later this week."

"That's good, right?" Santana asked.

"Yeah, it's good. I'll let you know how it goes," he promised.

"You better," Santana told him with a smirk. "Night Boyfriend."

"Night 'Tana."

Blaine was exhausted when he finally entered his apartment and he really just wanted to lock himself away in his room, stare aimlessly at some YouTube videos, maybe talk to Kurt or Santana, and not come out until morning. Coming face to face with his father and mother at the kitchen table was the last thing he had expected. Seeing the fire emanating from his father's eyes was the last thing that he wanted. He kept a hand on the doorknob and stayed flat against the wood. If his Dad had heard about the plane banner, this was not at all going to be pretty.

"Have a seat," his father ordered. His mother looked nervous, but she was here, and that was at least a little reassuring.

Blaine swallowed, but kept his heart from racing. "I'd rather stay right here," he said, keeping a safe distance.

"Fine. Would you care to explain this?" His father pushed something that looked like a bill across the table. "And don't you dare lie to us Blaine."

Blaine's face was screwed up with uncertainty, but at least it didn't seem to be about the plane. He stepped forward and took the paper, recognizing it immediately. It was the bill to the credit card his father had given him, but as he read it through, the charges to the card were outrageous. He looked up at his Dad with confusion. "I don't know anything about this," he asserted.

"And I don't suppose you know anything about these then either?" the Colonel challenged as he took a stack of envelopes and slammed them on the table. "That card is yours, Blaine!" the Colonel yelled, unable to keep his temper under control any longer. "And these were all taken out in your name. That bill is going to take forever to pay off and who knows what kind of damage has been done to your credit and to mine."

Blaine closed his eyes and took a deep breath then met his father's gaze again. "I understand that Dad, but I didn't do this," Blaine protested calmly.

"Do you expect me to believe you have absolutely no idea how all of those charges were racked up?" the Colonel challenged.

"It's true," Blaine nodded pleadingly. "Please you have to believe me."

"The card is still in your possession isn't it?" his father asked incredulously.

"Yes Sir, I think so." Blaine's voice quivered with uncertainty though, as he fumbled through his coat pocket and took out his wallet. He pulled out the card and threw it on the table. The Colonel grabbed it immediately and tucked it away.

"This is mine until we get to the bottom of this. Go to your room," he ordered.

But Blaine stood firm. "I'm going to the Hummels' for the night," he said. He'd made the decision the minute he'd seen his father's anger.

The creases in the Colonel's forehead twitched and their eyes met in a match of wills. Blaine unconsciously grasped the door handle tighter, but it was the only move he made. Blaine's mother placed a soothing hand on the Colonel's shoulder and he flicked out as if to strike but immediately pulled it back. Amy got up from the table and took a few steps back, leaning an armchair in the small attached parlor. The Colonel put his head in his hands, and ran his fingers through his hair. "Ok," he finally answered softly.

Blaine glanced at his Mom who nodded and he turned back to his Dad. "I know you're angry, but we didn't do this. So call Cooper to have his buddies at the Credit Rating place figure out what's going on. And please, go home, before you do something you'll regret," he asked before walking out the door.

Blaine racked his brain the whole way to the Hummels', but the only explanation he kept coming back to was Coach Sylvester. She was the only one who was horrible enough and connected enough to somehow steal Blaine's identity and create such extensive damage and she was the only one who had any reason at all to do so. He had thought the plane was bad enough, humiliating him in front of the whole school, but threatening his relationship with his father was going way too far.

Blaine pulled into the driveway and grabbed his messenger bag. He was coming uninvited, but he knew he would be welcome. He rang the doorbell.

Burt answered the door and though he was surprised, he took one look at the tension in Blaine's face and his subtle fidgeting and understood. He asked no questions. "Dinner's in five," he said, stepping aside with a soft smile. "I'll go tell Carole to set another place."

"Thanks Mr. Hummel," Blaine answered with a sigh and he went inside to hang up his coat. As the sights and sounds of the Hummel home washed over him, he felt the tension he didn't even know he was holding melt away.

Sam came bounding down the stairs. "Hey dude," Sam called with surprise. "What brings you here?"

Blaine ran his fingers through his hair, considering how much to tell Sam. Sam knew a little about his Dad and his situation, but not too much and Blaine kind of liked it that way. It was simpler, not having someone who looked at him and saw his past. Everything about Sam was just simple and he wanted to keep it that way. So he dodged the question. "How's Brittany feeling?"

"She's doing better," he said, forgetting his own question. "I still can't believe that Coach Sylvester made them practice in the freezing rain for six hours last weekend. She should have stayed home since she was already sick, but you know Britt. She'll never do anything to let Coach Sylvester down," he complained.

"Someone has to take that woman down," Blaine grumbled. Sam raised a brow but was interrupted by Carole.

"Dinner boys," she announced and Blaine headed into the kitchen. Carole wrapped an arm around him and kissed his head with a smile. "It's good to see you, Blaine."

Blaine blushed slightly and leaned into her a bit. "Thanks," he grinned and sat down at the table. He looked at Burt who was watching him closely and he grew a bit shy under the scrutiny. "I'm fine," he assured him softly, a wary eye to Sam. "But I was wondering if I could stay over tonight?"

"Of course," Burt said without hesitation. "But you tell me what's going on after dinner." Blaine nodded his agreement.

Conversation was stilted at dinner, topics of Finn and Mr. Schuester's feud as well as Coach Sylvester were avoided. It was clear to Burt and Carole that both boys were hiding things and they didn't like it, but they respected it for now. Burt talked about the shop and Carole talked about the hospital and Blaine stared across the table at Sam wishing that life were just a little bit different right now in far too many ways.

Afterwards they cleared the dishes and retired to the living room where Sam and Blaine sat on the couch and Burt took a seat in his armchair. Carole, as always, perched on the arm next to Burt, his arm wrapped around her waist.

"Ok, out with it boys. What aren't you telling us?" Burt prodded, his voice gentle but leaving no room to keep hiding.

Sam had promised Finn not to say anything to his Mom or Burt about what was going on with Mr. Schuester and he wasn't going to break that promise. He looked at Blaine. His friend was pensive, not exactly nervous, but for certain he was embarrassed about the banner. He wondered though if it was something more.

"When I got home to my Mom's house my Dad was there," Blaine started softly. He glanced up at Burt who realized the importance of that statement alone. His Dad had never been in the apartment before and Burt understood that something serious must have happened to bring him there. He also understood that something dangerous, or almost dangerous, must have occurred to bring Blaine straight here after. "Apparently someone charged a fortune on my credit card, and took out a ton of other credit cards. My Dad thought it was me. He says it's gonna ruin our credit. He was pretty angry," Blaine finished weakly.

"I can imagine," Burt proclaimed. "But it wasn't you," he clarified, his eyes forcing Blaine to tell the truth.

"No Sir," Blaine answered automatically, then shuffled slightly in his seat. "But I think I know who it was." Burt raised a questioning brow. "I think it was Coach Sylvester."

Burt turned worriedly to Carole, then returned his attention to Blaine. "That's a serious allegation to make, son," he said carefully. "What would make you think that?"

Blaine slowly told Burt and Carole about everything that had been happening the last week, with Sue forging his name on the Cheerios contract, the little snide remarks she had been making in the halls, and the airplane banner this afternoon. His face reddened when he told them that, even though he left out the specifics.

"Sure sounds like she could be behind it," Burt said with a frown. He patted Blaine's knee and stood up. "I know better than anyone how far Sue Sylvester will go to get what she wants. Let me talk to your Dad about it?" he asked. Blaine nodded his consent and Burt and Carole left for the kitchen to call the Colonel.

"Dude, we have to do something about this!" Sam said. "We can't just keep letting her get away with treating us all like her minions ready to do her bidding at every turn. First Brittany, now you. We've got to take her down!"

"Mr. Schue's been trying for years though," Blaine argued. "No one's been able to touch her."

"Not from the outside," Sam pointed out slowly and Blaine could see the wheels turning in his head. "Maybe someone needs to start trying from the inside." He looked at Blaine conspiratorially. "How would you feel about going toe to toe with Coach Sylvester?"

Blaine thought about it. He was tired of being taken advantage of, exploited and abused. He was tired of being what everyone else wanted him to be, but he was an expert at hiding behind a mask to fit in. Maybe it would feel good to do it on his own terms for a change. "Count me in," he grinned.

They talked all evening, hatching plan after plan, knowing that Sue was completely unpredictable. Blaine's father called him and apologized, telling him that when the Free Credit Rating staff ran the reports there were nearly 30 credit cards plus a mortgage taken out in his name. The Colonel was still furious, but he'd taken Blaine's advice and gone home. Blaine called his Mom to make sure she was okay. She told him she was fine, his father had left shortly after Blaine and hadn't hurt her in any way. He told her he was still going to sleep over and she agreed.

Blaine walked into Kurt's room. He grabbed some pajamas from a drawer and the green outfit he had left there last year. He still had a few things hanging in Kurt's closet, just for these situations. He allowed himself a moment, just a moment, to let every sensation and memory fill him. Last year after a day like today he would have been curled up in Kurt's arms, trembling with fear and flashbacks. But as he sat on Kurt's bed he realized that he didn't have Kurt's arms any more. And that he didn't need them. Not for that.

"You okay?" Sam asked softly in the doorway, breaking him out of his revelry.

He turned and gazed at Sam. Sam who laughed at his jokes and understood his love of comic books and superhero movies, and silly songs like Red Solo Cup. Sam who never rolled his eyes at him or thought that his undying love for Kurt was pathetic or stupid. Sam who really was adorable in the dorkiest sort of way.

"Yeah," Blaine said and the honesty of the answer both surprised and delighted him. He grinned broadly at the realization. "Yeah, I am definitely okay."

"Hey 'Tana!" Blaine smiled as he answered her call, home after Mr. Schue and Finn's battle. "We just did the coolest mashup, you'll never believe-!"

"They kicked me out," Santana said quietly and he was sure he heard her crying.

"What?" he asked with disbelief. He sat down on his bed and curled his legs underneath him.

"They kicked me out of the apartment for calling Brody on his shit. I swear to God Blaine, that kid is trouble and he's going to hurt Berry and no one is allowed to do that except me," she raved. Between the whir of the wind and the sirens and honks in the background, Blaine was certain she was out on the streets of Manhattan. "I'm gonna get him though. I'm gonna figure out what the hell he is up to and I'm gonna nail his ass to the wall," she seethed.

"Wait, why did Kurt kick you out though," Blaine asked confused. "Kurt doesn't like Brody either, I think he'd be more than happy to get him out of his hair."

"Yeah, I would think so too, but apparently I meddle too much with their relationships," she said mockingly. "Honestly I think he just can't stop thinking about you when I'm around," she grumbled with an eyeroll.

Blaine stopped breathing for a minute. "What?" he squeaked.

Santana stammered for a few seconds then sighed. "I shouldn't have said that," she deflected. "Look I gotta find a place to stay tonight. I told Hummelberry I'd be staying with Lena Dunham, but then she tweeted that her house was full of teenage lesbians so I need to find somewhere else," she snapped.

"I don't have my credit card or I'd get you a hotel room, but Cooper has some friends in the city. I can try and hook you up," he offered.

He heard her hesitate, but he doubted she had many other choices. "Yeah, that'd be great Boyfriend," she answered reluctantly. "Text me an address."

"Will do, 'Tana. Stay safe," he answered and hung up.

He called Cooper and quickly got a name of a buddy of his currently on Broadway and Blaine texted Santana with the name and address. That resolved, he was able to sit back and mull over what she had



said. It seemed crazy to him that Kurt would put Santana out on the street for meddling in Berry's life, especially if it was over a guy Blaine knew he had his own reservations about. But if Santana really was making it hard for Kurt by constantly reminding him of Blaine, then it meant that Kurt was still thinking about him as much as he was thinking about Kurt.

He raced over to his collection of music and found exactly the song he wanted. He might be throwing this mash-up with Coach Sylvester for a greater cause, but he'd go down still fighting for Kurt. Because no matter what anyone said, he really did still believe that someday they would find themselves in love again.

Blaine walked out of Sue Sylvester's office feeling powerful. Like he'd already defeated her. Like he wanted to hire his own plane to fly the banner "Who's on the bottom now!" But it wasn't for all the reasons Sam thought, though those were real and valid. But more meaningful to Blaine, he'd stood before Coach Sylvester as he had his father a hundred times. And his heart did not race. He felt no fear. He had no flashbacks of moments past, no urges to run from the room. He'd held his ground just as he had with his father the other night.

He felt amazing.

He drove with a huge grin to his therapist's office in Westerville after school. Earlier in the week he'd been nervous but now he knew that he really was truly ready to put this part of his life behind him. To move ahead with confidence, with a sense of belonging and ultimately with trust.

"It really thrills me to hear that you know you are as ready to do this as I do," his therapist said when Blaine told him all about his week.

"Me too," Blaine answered with a grin. "But how did you know?"

"I recently went to a seminar, by a woman named Brene Brown. She's a researcher who studies human connection. And as she spoke, I just kept thinking about you."

"What did she say?" Blaine asked curiously.

"She talked about vulnerability and how what made people vulnerable is what made them beautiful."

Blaine smiled. "Kurt taught me that."

His therapist nodded. "She also said that the people who are able to embrace their vulnerability, who have the courage to tell the story of who they are with their whole heart, who have the willingness to say "I love you" first, to do something when there are no guarantees, to invest in a relationship that may never work out, those are the people who are able to feel connected to the world and have a sense of worthiness with a strong sense of love and belonging. And it's taken you some time Blaine, you certainly didn't have it when we started out a year ago, but I truly believe that you're there now."

"Wow, that's just...wow. You really think all that of me?" Blaine asked in amazement.

His therapist shrugged. "Doesn't matter what I think. Do you remember your goal when you started coming here more than a year ago?"

But of course Blaine didn't even have to think back, his goal was a part of him every minute of every day. And as he thought back over the past few days and weeks and months he too was certain.

*And a voice in the breeze starts to whisper,*

*As I think of the bridges I've crossed.*

*Finding the strength, I'm spreading my wings,*

*Put trust in the wind and see what it brings*

He'd faced his father and developed a relationship. He'd faced life without Kurt and come out on top. He'd found his strength and he'd reached out to develop friendships that didn't just challenge him but embraced him for everything he was. And he trusted, with every fiber of his being, that against all odds Kurt would come back to him.

"Yeah, I do," Blaine whispered with a confident smile. "And I'm ready. I'm ready to fly."

## ***Chapter Eighteen: Guilty Pleasures***

"Just give her a chance Kurt," Blaine implored his ex-boyfriend over Skype. "She's been holed up at Cooper's friend's house, but he's not going to let her stay much longer."

"Color me surprised, Blaine," Kurt muttered sarcastically. "What happened, did she rifle through his drawers too or did she break up with his girlfriend for him?"

Blaine ignored the digs, knowing Santana deserved it, and put on his best puppy dog face. "Please Kurt," Blaine begged, his hand to his heart. "I know she's not easy to live with and I know it..." he hesitated, choosing his words carefully. "It isn't easy for you with her there. But like it or not, Santana is family. And I'll tell her to lay off."

Kurt stared at him and those adorable eyes that he could never resist, not even to this day, and his resolve disappeared. "Fine," Kurt agreed reluctantly. "But convincing Rachel may be a little harder, so when does she intend to come back?"

Blaine pursed his lips and the buzzer rang. Kurt shot him an exasperated glare through the screen. Blaine just shrugged back. "Now?" he quipped with the most irresistible mix of guilt and innocence Kurt had ever seen. "Go get the door Kurt, I'll wait here and talk to her."

"Blaine Devon Anderson! I just..." Kurt stammered before the buzzer rang again and he huffed out of his chair and out of the room to slide open the door.

"Surprise!" Santana grinned, her arms open, but her eyes were sad and questioning.

Kurt took a long breath in and exhaled slowly before he moved aside and gestured toward the apartment. "Welcome back Santana," he said dryly with a controlled smile. Santana entered and threw her bags on the floor by the couch, trying hard to keep on her game face and be strong. But it had been a long two days in New York, feeling alone in a city full of people, and she truly was happy to be back with the friends she loved. "Blaine's waiting for you on Skype in my room. Touch. Nothing," he ordered and went to the kitchen to get himself a drink.

Santana went into Kurt's room and sat down at his desk. "Hey boyfriend," she greeted Blaine with a sly and conspiratory grin.

"Don't screw this up Santana," Blaine immediately warned her. "You're not going to get another chance with either of them."

"I know," she said softly, her eyes falling with guilt. "I just hate seeing you hurting. It makes me hurt too."

Blaine saw the love in her face and smiled warmly at her. How he had somehow managed to fall into her heart he would never know, but he would forever be grateful that he had. "I appreciate that Santana, but you don't have to be my champion with Kurt. Yes, I miss him and I love him but its okay. I'm okay," he assured her and it was true. He looked around his room at the pictures of Kurt he'd put up alongside the ones of his dad and took in a breath, comfortable with the fact that those things didn't hurt anymore. He turned back to Santana. "Truth is, I'm quite practiced in loving people who have walked away. And you know what I've learned?"

"What?" Santana asked, glancing up at the doorway. Kurt stood silent, his hip against the wall, out of sight of the computer but listening.

Blaine was interrupted by a soft knock on his bedroom door and the Colonel opened it slowly, sneaking his head in slightly. "Game's all set up downstairs," he told Blaine with an eager grin.

Blaine smiled at his Dad and gave him a signal that he'd be there in a minute. The Colonel nodded and walked out of the room. Blaine turned back to Santana, his eyes sparkling. "I've learned that when they're ready, they will always come back."

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"I don't know what to do though Britt," Sam said as he and the cheerleader lay curled up on her bed. "I mean, I know he likes me, but it's like this thing that hangs between us and it's been getting worse rather than better. You saw him the other day in the choir room. It makes him nervous and I don't want him to feel that way. But maybe he wants to keep it secret, I don't know," Sam shrugged.

"Secrets aren't good for anyone, most especially Blaine," Brittany told him with surety. She thought for a moment then her eyes lit up with an idea and she bolted upright. "I could bring him on Fondue for Two," she suggested, clapping her hands with delight. "It worked for Kitty! Everyone shares their deepest secrets on the internet!"

"No," Sam said, shaking his head. "There has to be a better way to get him to talk to me."

"But Blaine doesn't really talk to anyone except Kurt and Santana and now they're both gone," Brittany pouted, petting Lord Tubbington . "Maybe you can get him to sing again? That's how he does most of his talking anyway."

Sam looked at her and his face erupted in a grin. "I've said it before and I'll say it again. You seriously are the smartest girl I know," he beamed and kissed her gratefully on her smiling lips.

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"What's up?" Blaine said, putting down his Goosebumps book. He'd been hanging out in the library, not quite ready to head home.

"Here's the thing," Sam said standing before him. "So far this week you've been talking the talk, but now I need you to walk the walk, Pilgrim," he intoned in his best John Wayne impression to ease the awkwardness of the moment, but Blaine just looked at him like he was crazy. "I've been honest about my guilty pleasures, and I even wore those tiny little Wham shor-" he was shushed by the librarian and bent down lower, whispering to Blaine. "I wore those tiny little Wham shorts, which is a great number," he said sitting down, "but now it's your turn to be honest. Because you haven't really been yet, so far," he pressed, hoping he hadn't gone too far.

Blaine stared at him nervously. Sam couldn't possibly know, could he? He'd been so subtle, trying never to do anything to make Sam uncomfortable. He had to think there was something else, something he was hiding, maybe about Kurt, or his parents or maybe he'd just somehow found out about his giant movie ticket stub collection. He lowered his feet off the table and leaned forward. "I don't know what you're talking about," he bluffed.

"Well you know you're only as sick as your secrets, dude, and that's what this week's assignment is really about," Sam said. The words hit Blaine like a ton of bricks, but he kept a straight face. "This is your chance to really set an example for the Glee club! What's yours gonna be?" Sam asked with a smile before leaving without another word.

Blaine watched Sam go, his heart beating in his chest. He'd never wanted Sam to know about his crush on him, he didn't want to screw up their friendship at all, but now it almost seemed like Sam wanted to know. He had no idea what to do. But he knew exactly who to ask.

---

"And now he wants me to reveal my guilty pleasure and he keeps calling me on it. I don't know if he knows or if he doesn't and, I don't know what to do Santana," Blaine whined into the phone, not wanting to risk Kurt overhearing a Skype call. He was grateful his mother wasn't home as well. "I'm starting to act like an idiot around him. Asking him if he had feelings for me?" Blaine squeaked, running his fingers self-consciously through his curls. "I mean, what the heck was I thinking?"

"You were thinking you want in his pants," Santana smirked as she shoved some pretzels in her mouth. She was curled up on the couch, some Spanish soap opera paused on the television as she sat alone in the apartment while Kurt and Rachel were at some sort of recital at NYADA.

"Oh my god, 'Tana, no, I do not want..." Blaine stopped, uneven to even say the words. "We're just friends, Santana, that's all."

"Just friends like you and Lady Lips are 'just friends', or...?" she smiled knowingly.

"No. Precisely *not* like me and Kurt, that's the point," Blaine spat back.

Santana sighed. "Look boyfriend. Trouty Mouth is a lot of things, but afraid of a little gay on guy crush is not one of them. I promise. Maybe it'll be weird, maybe it won't, but you should tell him Blaine. You obviously can't just keep this inside."

"He's all I have at McKinley, 'Tana," Blaine admitted softly. "He's the only one I can really talk to. The only one who really knows how I feel..."

"Then shouldn't he know *all* of how you feel?" She waited for Blaine to answer but he stayed silent, too nervous and unsure. "We all have those crushes Blaine. The ones that fill the empty spaces while we wait for the right one to come along? I remember how much Trent crushed on you and guys were still great friends. Hell, how many of those guys did I date before I was ready to admit how I really felt about Britt?" She heard Blaine exhale, but that was all. "Blaine, he knows you love Kurt. He made you macaroni art of Kurt's face for goodness sake. You've trusted him with that. Trust him with this too."

Blaine's heart beat in his throat, but he knew Santana was right. Blaine didn't think he could have the courage to say the words outright, but maybe in song. Maybe Sam would hear and appreciate what he had

to say and the words themselves could just go unspoken, but understood. "Okay," he whispered, having decided. "I think I know what to do."

---

Blaine had planned on grabbing some time at the piano to rehearse before performing for Sam and Glee, but he noticed the girls chasing Jake angrily into the choir room and it looked like Jake might need a bit of rescuing first from whatever the girls were on him about. As he got closer though he heard the conversation, and he pressed against the wall outside, listening and waiting.

"And what about Rhianna?" Jake argued with them. "Do we really think that bad girl Rhi Rhi is some kind of role model? I mean, she's the one who got back together with him." The girls attacked but Jake held his ground. "Yes, seriously, we always do Rhianna songs and do we always agree with the things she says and does? Are we saying that it's okay to go back to someone who abuses you?"

Blaine closed his eyes, relaxing his hands that had just clenched. He took a breath and wiped the vision of his mother that flashed before his eyes. And he waited.

The girls each left out the door one by one with a parting blow and Jake sat alone in the choir room. Blaine steeled himself and joined him. One look at the kid and Blaine could see the number the girls had done on him. "Rough day?" Blaine asked casually, throwing his bag down next to the bench and leaning on the piano.

Jake snapped his eyes up to Blaine and stood up, shuffling. "What? Oh no, it's fine. It's just –"

"I heard," Blaine admitted. "You're playing with fire there," Blaine smirked, eyeing the door where the girls had disappeared. "Those girls can burn."

"Yeah," Jake scoffed. "I have no idea what their problem is," Jake said, joining Blaine at the piano. "I mean, I get that Chris Brown isn't a role model, or even a good person. But does that make his music bad too?"

Blaine shook his head. "Music is never bad if it speaks to your heart," he said earnestly. "But if you're performing it for others, you have to think about what it's gonna say to your audience." Jake's forehead creased. Blaine considered him briefly and explained as best he could, trying to keep his voice from breaking. "I guarantee you Jake, that sitting in those choir room seats will be kids who have watched their parents or their aunts and uncles or their friends be hurt by domestic violence. There will be kids who

have watched someone go back and who know that as hard as it is to stand by them, you should never blame the victim." Blaine felt the lump in his throat and his eyes misting and he looked away, sitting down at the piano, running his fingers across the keys for an anchor. "You have to decide what kind of impact you want to have."

Jake watched him and took in Blaine's words. The last thing he wanted to do was hurt any of his friends, and if singing Chris Brown could possibly do that then it wasn't worth it. He'd let it stay a guilty pleasure that he kept to himself. Some secrets, he guessed, weren't meant to be shared. "Thanks Blaine," he said, grabbing his bag.

Blaine looked up and smiled, totally composed again as he started playing. "Anytime Jake," he answered and watched him go. He stopped playing for a minute and gripped the bench to steady himself. He felt the pull and reached into his bag and pulled out his phone.

**Hey Mom. Was thinking about you and just wanted to say I love you.**

---

As the guilt of his guilty pleasure rolled over him while his fingers played the keys, Blaine had to remind himself that this wasn't cheating. Sure, Kurt was a phantom in the auditorium that always haunted him, but that was all he was. Sam was here. Now. And that was exactly the point. Everyone needed someone who made them feel special but for Blaine even more, he needed someone who he could make feel special. And Sam filled that void.

*How can I just let you walk away,  
Just let you leave without a trace  
When I stand here taking every breath with you.  
You're the only one who really knew me at all.*

*How can you just walk away from me,  
When all I can do is watch you leave  
Cos we've shared the laughter and the pain,  
And even shared the tears  
You're the only one who really knew me at all*



Sam watched from the auditorium, his eyes never straying from Blaine. He knew how hard it was for him to be up there in front of them all, singing out everything that was inside his heart, and he'd never been prouder of his best friend. When Blaine had needed someone to catch him as he fell, Sam had been the one to step up and he hadn't regretted one day of it. So no matter what, despite what Blaine feared, he'd never walk away from something so special.

*So take a look at me now,  
'Cos there's just an empty space  
And there's nothing left here to remind me,  
Just the memory of your face  
Take a look at me now,  
'Cos there's just an empty space  
And you coming back to me  
Is against all odds and that's what I've got to face*

Sam understood more than anyone at school how important Kurt was to Blaine. He and Blaine had talked for hours about the life they'd planned together, the love he had for Kurt. He knew how much Blaine felt like he'd possibly lost the best thing that had ever happened to him. And he knew how painful the empty space and the wishing and hoping was for him, how much it sometimes still tore at Blaine's heart even though he put on a brave face. He'd seen it when he showed Blaine the macaroni art of Kurt's face he'd made for him. So if he could be the one to help ease the pain, and fill the hole if even just for a moment, then Sam was honored to be the one.

*I wish I could just make you turn around,  
Turn around and see me cry  
There's so much I need to say to you,  
So many reasons why  
You're the only one who really knew me at all*

Blaine looked out at the audience throughout the song, his eyes catching Sam's. Did Sam understand what he was trying to say? Did he truly understand it himself? Sometimes it was so jumbled in his own mind. Waiting for Kurt, being faithful with hope, but trying to be realistic. Filling the void with someone safe, someone who cared about him and made him feel good and normal, someone who accepted him and all his quirks like Kurt had, but this time even shared them.

And he came to realize as he sang that Sam didn't fill the void left by Kurt. That space was sacred. Instead, he was everything that Nick and Jeff and Trent had been. Sam and his crazy antics and his voices and his prep school stories were everything he missed about the Warblers.

And the last thing he wanted to do was lose that again. He had lost enough already.

*So take a look at me now,  
'Cos there's just an empty space  
And there's nothing left here to remind me,  
Just the memory of your face  
Take a look at me now,  
'Cos there's just an empty space  
But to wait for you,  
Well that's all I can do and that's what I've got to face  
Take a good look at me now,  
'Cos I'll still be standing here  
And you coming back to me is against all odds  
That's the chance I've got to take.  
So take a look at me now.*

So he said the song was about Kurt, and it really was in a way, but it was also about so much more. It was about Nick and Cooper and his Dad and Mom. It was about Sebastian and Eli and Jeremiah and Jason who he'd lost touch with since the Sadie Hawkins dance. And it was about Sam and Santana and Kurt, so much about Kurt. It was about the people who had left and those still with him and how he'd never truly be who he was without any of them, because they were all a part of what made him who he was.

It was about how people could move in and out of his life, some for just a moment, some forever, but they would always take with them a piece of his heart. And Blaine would, no matter what happened, wait for them to return and always welcome them back with open arms.

## ***Chapter Nineteen: Shooting Star***

The shot rang out and Blaine froze in his seat. He'd heard gunfire before, at the shooting range on his father's base, but there couldn't possibly be gunfire here.

Another shot fired though, and he looked to Mr. Schuester who was reaching towards the kids. "Everyone just spread out and hide, spread out and hide." He ordered.

Blaine ran to the piano, moving it to the wall as the lights went out. The metronome fell to the floor but he left it there. He grabbed Artie from his wheelchair and helped him to the floor, crouching across from him against the instrument that had always brought him comfort. Still his heart raced, and his ears were ringing. Everyone was scurrying around him. He heard screams in the hallway, kids running to safety, and he pulled his knees into his chest. Doors slammed shut.

Then there was silence.

Except for the metronome, ticking away the seconds, ticking out the beats of his heart. Ticking away the time they possibly had left. Ticking away the moments that he had missed in his life. The thousands of moments he had missed with Kurt and could never get back. The years he had missed with his Dad and with Cooper. The regrets ticked by as his life passed in front of his eyes. The moments he would miss if he died today.

"Are we even sure those are-" he started to ask, but everyone shushed him and he put his head down on his knees. This wasn't how it was supposed to end, alone on the floor of the choir room. This wasn't hand in hand after a lifetime of love.

"Everyone..." Mr. Schue said through ragged breath. "Guys, guys, start texting, tweeting, let everyone know what's going on. But don't tell we're here, alright? Shooters have smart phones too."

Blaine held his phone, his hands shaking so much he could barely type. But he took a breath and he steadied them. If this was the end, he had things he needed to say.

---

Amy Anderson straightened up before heading out, never wanting Blaine to come home to a messy house. She knew very well that she wasn't there for him as much as she should be and this was the one thing she

could truly do to care for him. She had so much to make up for after all, she never felt like she could do enough. Dinner was ready and in the fridge, the crockpot having gone all morning. She'd been so busy she hadn't even turned the television on to check in on her favorite soap operas. Thank goodness for DVR. She grabbed her purse, cursing once again that she was still working second shift after all this time. Someday soon her transfer would come through and then she'd have more time to spend with Blaine. She could only hope it happened before he was gone.

Her phone buzzed on the counter and she turned to grab it and her keys. She laughed at herself, nearly walking out the door without either. Some days she felt like if her head wasn't attached she would forget that too. She flipped up the phone to read the text. Blaine and Cooper were always making fun of her for not having a smart phone yet, but she just couldn't see the need to be that connected to the world all the time. The only people that ever texted her were her sons and their father. She didn't need anything else, they were her whole world.

And in the blink of an eye, her whole world changed.

***Blaine to Mom [3:38pm]: Shooting at school. I'm scared, but safe for now. Most of us are together. Never forget how much I love you.***

She grabbed the counter to steady herself as her knees went weak. She couldn't breathe. The room spun before her eyes. Her baby was in danger. Somebody was out there wanting to hurt her baby. All the times she could have done something and this time she was helpless. But she could at least be there for him. She took a breath and ran out the door. She started the car, her hands shaking almost too much to drive, but there was no way she wasn't going. She pulled out of the apartment complex parking lot and turned left instead of right, straight to McKinley High School.

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"Take this brochure," Colonel Anderson told the high school senior who had walked into the recruiting office. "Bring it home and read it over with your parents. Think about what career fields you might be interested in. Then come on back with your Mom or your Dad and we'll talk."

"Yes sir," the boy said, trying so hard to be tough and it reminded him of Blaine.

His phone buzzed under the counter, but he ignored it for the moment, coming around to shake hands with the young man and walk him to the door. "Relax, and I'll see you next week," he said.

He watched the kid go, and returned to the counter, filing the paperwork until the kid returned...if he returned. The recruiting numbers had been low lately. Finally he reached under the counter and grabbed his phone. He turned it on and went to the text message that had just come in from Blaine.

***Blaine to Dad [3:39pm]: I understand now that everything you did you did out of love. And I forgive you for every time you hurt me. I know I've said it before and I've always meant it but now I know what it truly means. I love you. And I am strong because of you.***

The phone rang while he held it in his hand and he answered. "Blaine?" he asked into the phone.

"No, John, it's me," Amy cried and her voice was shattered, barely able to speak through her tears.

The Colonel's senses peaked and he knew immediately that something was very wrong. "What's going on Amy, what is it?"

"There's been a shooting...at the school...Blaine texted..." she stammered.

"He texted me too, but I didn't know," he told her, frantically grabbing his coat, his wallet and his keys. His heart leapt into his throat but he swallowed it down. He turned the sign to closed and was out the door before he even finished his sentence. "I'm on my way," he promised.

"I'm going to the school right now," she choked out. "The news is saying to meet at the community center. Call me when you get close and I'll let you know what's going on. Call Cooper." She started sobbing again. "Oh my god, John, what if he...?"

"Don't," he demanded firmly. "He's going to be fine, Amy. He's a survivor, we made him strong."

"I'm just so scared," she cried and he worried that she might drive off the road.

"I know, I'm scared too, but you have to pull it together. You have to get there for him," he told her, and the phone beeped again. "I've got another text. I'll see you there. Drive safe."

He ended the call and swiped the screen.

***Blaine to Dad [3:44pm]: I need to know why though Dad. I need to know why you hurt me like that, before it's too late. You said someday you'd tell me the story.***

***Dad to Blaine [3:45pm]: You're going to be fine Blaine. I'll tell you when you get home.***

***Blaine to Dad [3:46pm]: Promise?***

The Colonel looked at his phone. He couldn't remember when the last time he cried was, but tears were dripping onto the screen. He imagined Blaine, his little son, scared and confused and reaching out for hope and answers, but he wouldn't make promises he couldn't keep. He couldn't truly promise he was going to be fine and that despite everything he had ever been through, that was the worst feeling in the world.

***Dad to Blaine [3:47pm]: I promise to tell you.***

---

Cooper was dressed in slickers and a Souwester rain hat, standing on the edge of a prop troller, holding a melting box of fish sticks. "Dane's Fish Sticks! That fresh from the ocean flavor!"

"Cut!" yelled the director, and Cooper dropped his famous smile. "Sorry Coop, lighting was off. Give us a moment to reset and we'll get right back to it."

"Mr. Anderson," a production assistant called, holding Cooper's phone. "Call for you."

"Perfect timing," Cooper grinned as he looked at the number and grabbed the phone. "Hey dad," Cooper greeted with surprise. "Long time no hear," he quipped.

"Where are you?" his father asked and Cooper could hear the tension in his voice. He immediately grew serious.

"I'm on set, what's wrong?" he asked, sitting down in the director's chair.

"There's been a shooting at Blaine's school. I'm driving there now from Westerville," the Colonel told him, his voice calm with practiced precision.

"Oh my god," Cooper gasped, his heart dropping to the floor.

" Mom's heading to the community center. I'm on my way to Lima. He has his phone, Coop, text him . Let him know."

"Yeah, okay," Cooper answered, his head swimming, now desperate to get off the phone. "I love you Dad," he blurted out for the first time in years.

"I love you too son," the Colonel said before hanging up.

Cooper's hands were shaking, but somehow he managed to send Blaine a message.

"Mr. Anderson, you're wanted back on set," the assistant called, and Cooper wiped away his tears, trembling. He leaned over against the wave of nausea, his hands flying immediately to his face and up through his hair. *Please be okay, please be okay*, he kept repeating to himself as he inhaled deeply and exhaled. "Mr. Anderson?"

He shook his head and sucked in a breath. "I'm gonna need a little makeup," he informed her matter-of-factly, and he got up and moved to the hair and makeup chair.

The show must go on.

---

Blaine tried to reach out to Sam, but he was beyond consoling at this point, unable to get to Brittany. Blaine curled up further in on himself, arms on his knees, head resting on his arms, wracked with grief. He thanked God that Kurt and Santana were hundreds of miles away from this madness and prayed for Tina and Brittany's safety. Not knowing was terrifying.

His phone lit up on the floor beneath him and he peered through his arms at the screen.

***Cooper to Blaine [3:55pm]: I'm starring as you in the film version of this, Squirt! ;P Mom's on her way to the Community Center. I'm guessing that's where the parents are going. Dad's on his way to Lima. I love you Blaine. Keep your head down. We need to survive to the end of this movie.***

---

"Hey Lopez?" Santana's coworker called as he cleaned the bar. She stopped stacking the napkins and straws and glanced over to him staring at the news on the big screen television. "Didn't you say you were from Lima, Ohio?"

Santana's eyes snapped to the screen and opened wide as her heart stopped.

*Breaking News: McKinley High School in Lima, Ohio in lockdown as police respond to a possible shooter.*

She saw that police cars and ambulances surrounding McKinley and for a moment she grew dizzy and thought she was going to faint. She grabbed hold of the bar to catch her breath, her coworker reaching out to steady her just in case. Lost in a panic, she shook her head and brushed him away, tearing through the bar doors and heading into the back where she had her things. She grabbed her cell phone, swiped the screen, and started to cry.

***Blaine to Santana [3:40pm]: Find Kurt and hug him for me. Rachel too. Hold them tight. Don't let them go. If anything happens be their rock Santana. I love you so much.***

She searched frantically for a text from Brittany but there was nothing. She tore through Facebook and Twitter and saw the messages from Sam and Artie and others from the new kids, but there was no word about Brittany, they didn't know where she was. Her hand flew to her head and she made herself focus.

"I have to go," she yelled to no one in particular and she grabbed her things and rushed out the door. She had to get to NYADA.

---

Kurt sat within the circle of his acting class, each of them performing a mundane task while vocalizing their inner dialogue, when he heard the buzz of his cell phone as it hid inside his bag. He peered over at it, making a mental note to check it as soon as class was done, then returned to Jacob opening an imaginary can of tuna fish.

Class seemed to drag on and on, though only thirty minutes more remained, but finally time was called and he grabbed his bag and headed out the door. He dug his phone out as he walked. As soon as he got into the hallway, two hands grabbed his arms and pulled him aside and he looked amusedly at Santana and Rachel.



"And to what do I owe this honor?" Kurt smirked, but one look at their tear stained faces made his heart stop. "What? What happened?" he asked in alarm.

Santana quickly grabbed Kurt's forgotten phone from his fingers and grasped his hand. "Come on, let's go back to the apartment first," she urged, barely holding back her own tears.

"No. Is it my Dad? Did something happen to my Dad?" he cried pulling away and reaching for his phone while he turned to Rachel. "Please, you're scaring me just tell me what the hell is going on!"

"Santana's right, Kurt," Rachel said softly and her patronizing tone just infuriated him even more. "Let's go back to the-"

"Give me my damn phone, Santana!" he screeched, finally grabbing the cell out of Santana's hand. He pulled away from them, backing himself into a corner, tears already running down his cheeks as his heart raced with terror. He braced himself for the voicemail or text from Carole or Finn turning his world upside down. But it wasn't from either of them.

***Blaine to Kurt [3:37pm] : You may hear something scary. Just know that I love you and always will. Until my dying day. For all that you are, and everything you're not. You are the perfectly imperfect love of my life. And I'm okay because of you.***

Kurt looked up. The girls were staring at him, crying, and he knew his own tears were falling though he felt completely numb. "What happened?" he tried to yell, but his voice was barely above a whisper. "What's going on?"

Santana couldn't speak and she shook her head, looking pleadingly to Rachel. Rachel stepped forward and took Kurt's hand. "There's been a shooting...at McKinley. We don't know much yet," she said delicately, but Kurt didn't hear past shooting and McKinley. His hand flew to his mouth and he fell to the ground, his chest heaving. Santana and Rachel both surrounded him, crying for Blaine and Brittany and Artie and Mr. Schuester and all of their friends and loved ones back in Lima.

Santana grabbed Kurt's phone.

***Kurt to Blaine [4:10pm]: Blaine, its Santana. We're all here. Kurt's ok. We're with you.***

She put the phone down and reached around her friends. In the hallway of NYADA they held each other tight. And they didn't let go.

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"Mom!" Blaine yelled as he ran to his mother at the community center and fell into her arms. Once the SWAT team had given them the all clear they were piled into busses where they could be picked up by their parents. Cars had to be searched by the police and could be retrieved tomorrow.

"Shhh, shhh," she whispered as he wept against her. She grabbed his cheeks and kissed them, needing to look at him, to know that he was real. "It's okay, everything's okay now."

"Tina?" he asked breathlessly.

"She's okay, sweetie," she assured him, holding him close again. "She wasn't in the building."

"Dad?" Blaine asked, unable to really talk.

"I told him to wait for us at the apartment," she said and took his hand like she had when he was a little boy. "Come on, let's go home. You can call Cooper in the car, he just got off set and he's been texting me like crazy for the past 20 minutes."

Blaine laughed through his tears and dialed the number as soon his seat belt was on.

"Hey Coop," he said as cheerfully as possible, but when his brother broke down with tears of relief, Blaine did too. "Hey, shhh, I'm okay Coop. I'm okay."

---

Blaine walked into the apartment and fell into his father's arms. The Colonel held him tight with one arm while he grabbed his wife's hand with the other. They stayed that way in the middle of the den until long after the tears stopped falling. Finally, Amy pulled away.

"Are you hungry sweetheart?" she asked him.

Blaine shook his head, wiping the tears from his eyes. "No," he told her apologetically. He glanced to his room then back to his parents. He knew he should just spend time with them, but...

"Go call him," the Colonel said, knowing precisely what Blaine was thinking. "We'll be here when you get back."

Blaine offered him a slight smile. "Thanks Dad."

Blaine went in his room and closed the door. He sat at his computer, flicking the mouse to wake it up. Kurt's skype was up and waiting. Blaine called and was immediately answered.

"Oh thank god," Kurt breathed, the tears streaming again the moment he saw Blaine's face. He was flanked by Rachel and Santana, both of their faces tear-streaked as well.

"Kurt, don't start crying because I'll start crying again," Blaine begged him, though it was too late.

"Is everyone okay?" Rachel asked. "Tina, Mr. Schuester and Artie?"

"Yeah, yeah, everyone is fine," Blaine assured her. "Scared and shook up, but we're all okay. We had each other."

"Brittany?" Santana asked brokenly. She hadn't even realize she was holding her breath.

"She's okay 'Tana," Blaine said softly.

"I would have gone to get her," she said angrily and Blaine knew who it was directed to. "I never would have left her scared and alone, I would have done anything..."

"Sam tried, 'Tana," he told her firmly. "Mr. Schuester had to physically hold him back twice from going out after her. He was desperate to get to her but it wasn't safe." Santana started crying again and Rachel reached behind Kurt to soothe her. "Finally Mr. Schue went out and found her in the girls' room and brought her back to us."

Rachel got up and took Santana by the shoulders. "Come on, let's leave them alone," she said quietly as she guided Santana out of the room.

Kurt and Blaine watched each other for a moment, unable to speak or take their eyes off each other. They'd planned for so many scenarios, so many possibilities in their lives together. This was something they never could have planned for.

"I should've been there with you," Kurt cried softly, not thinking straight.

"I'm so thankful you weren't," Blaine told him, wishing more than anything there wasn't a screen and 600 miles between them, because all he wanted to do was hold Kurt in his arms. "I had you there, okay? You were there with me. Safe in my heart, where you always are."

"I should've answered your text as soon as I got it," Kurt said, his voice brittle, looking away shamefully. "I should have known."

"Kurt stop," Blaine said and Kurt's eyes snapped back to his. "I'm glad you didn't know until it was almost over. I wish you didn't have to go through that at all." Kurt nodded, trying to stop the tears, and he sniffled, wiping them away with his sleeve. Blaine did the same, then turned to a soft knock on the door. "I have to go Kurt, my Dad's over." Their eyes met with regret, not ready to let the other go yet. "I'll call you later, I promise."

"No matter what time," Kurt said. "I love you Blaine," Kurt whispered desperately, not caring at all what they were supposed to be.

"I love you too Kurt," Blaine answered. "So much."

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They ate a silent dinner at the small kitchen table, no one knowing what to say, but knowing it was enough to just be together. Blaine helped with the dishes after, needing to do something, needing to feel normal. His fear had turned to numbness and he knew he was in shock. He also knew what was to come. Nightmares. Anger. Dissociation. This is how his mind dealt with trauma. He was already furious that he'd just gotten past all this and it was likely to return with a vengeance. But it only took a hand on his shoulder to remind him that this time was different.

He had his father. He had his mother. He had Kurt. He had Santana and Sam and Tina. He had others who had been through it with him this time and he knew there was a light at the end of the tunnel. He would get out of this, if he talked about it. This time he wasn't alone.

So he sat with his parents in the living room, curled up between them feeling like a little boy but safer than he ever had. His father's strong arms settled around his shoulder to ground him and keep his mind from floating away. His mother held his hand to remind him that he wasn't alone. And he told them the whole story. Hearing the gunshots. Helping Artie. The screaming and crying. Someone rattling at the doors. The metronome ticking down the moments. Saying what he thought might be his last words. His heart breaking as Sam tried to reach Brittany, knowing he would have done the same thing if it was Kurt out there. Kitty's confession. Artie's videos. Ryder's phone call. Their fear when Mr. Schuester left. Their relief when Brittany was found and the SWAT team yelled the all clear. He told them everything and as he did, as he watched his parents cry, his heart grew lighter and started finally beating normally. His nerves settled. He turned to his father.

"You promised," Blaine reminded him.

Amy looked up at her husband, confused. The Colonel sighed. "Maybe we've all had enough to process for one night, Blaine," he told his son.

"What did you promise him?" Amy asked, voice full of suspicion.

"He promised to tell me why," Blaine said softly, then he turned his eyes resolutely to his Dad. "You promised."

The Colonel shook his head. "Its not an easy story-"

"I need to know, Dad," Blaine demanded.

The Colonel looked at Amy. She knew how hard it would be for Blaine to hear about the horrible things that had led to his father's hatred and intolerance, and she didn't want him to go through any more pain than he had to. But something had made him ask when he thought it could be his last request, and how were they not to honor that no matter how painful? She nodded at John. "You promised him."

---

*Take out of your wasted honor  
Every little past frustration  
Take all your so called problems  
Better put them in quotations*

Santana waited until she thought she had no more tears to cry before calling, but hearing her voice choked her once again. She had to be strong though. "I'm so proud of you Britt," she said, holding the phone as tightly as she wished she was holding her. "You were so brave and I am so proud of you. I love you so much."

"I love you too Santana," Britt said quietly, still audibly shaken despite holding Lord Tubbington for the past three hours. Sam held her even closer into him. He hadn't let go since they'd gotten back to her house.

"Can I talk to Sam a minute?" Santana asked. Brittany nodded and passed the phone behind her.

"Santana wants to talk to you," she whispered.

He took the phone warily, but started with all that mattered. "She's okay, Santana," he assured her.

"Look, Blaine told me what you did in there. What you tried to do." Santana took a breath and closed her eyes. "Thank you," she exhaled.

"I love her Santana," he promised her. "With all my heart."

Santana swallowed the lump in her throat. She was here and he was there. And Brittany needed that. "I'm glad you do."

---

John took his arm from Blaine's shoulder and rubbed his face, running his fingers through his hair. He hated remembering. He knew someday he'd have to tell. He just didn't think it would be so soon. Blaine felt his discomfort and gave him his space, sliding down to sit on the floor, knees curled up in his arms, waiting patiently. His mother took his father's hand. And Blaine listened to the story that had shaped his childhood.

*Walking like a one man army  
Fighting with the shadows in your head  
Living out the same old moment  
Knowing you'd be better off instead  
If you could only say what you need to say.*

"We spent three months in a town just outside of Baghdad. We'd become friendly with the locals, as hard as that might be to believe. In many ways they were just like us. There was one man in particular, Jahmir. He was a shop owner. Had a family. A son who was your age at the time. He was an amazing informant. And he became a good friend of mine. When the enemy attacked the village though, everything changed. I changed."

*Have no fear for giving in  
Have no fear for giving over  
You'd better know that in the end  
Its better to say too much  
Then never say what you need to say again*

Blaine listened as his father told them his story of being trapped in the small back room of the shop where the family ate and slept, held at gun point. His father cried as he spoke of witnessing the cruelty of the Iraqi forces; forced to watch helpless alongside Jahmir's wife and son as the men took turns violating him until the shot that killed him rang out and brought his comrades running. And suddenly it all made sense. He understood why his father had feared who he was so much. Why it had disgusted him. He knew his father never wanted him to know, but he was so grateful now that he did.

*Even if your hands are shaking  
And your faith is broken  
Even as the eyes are closing  
Do it with a heart wide open*

He got up on his knees and took his father in his arms. The man shook with the memories, with the pain of it and also the relief of the telling and Blaine wept, for his father's pain, for his own, for all the damage that hate and war had done to them. He closed his eyes tight against the darkness and opened his heart to his father, hoping that he felt it too.

"You hear about those things happening, but..." Blaine muttered into his shoulder, shaking his head in disbelief. "You should never have had to see that."

"Awful things happen in war," John said matter-of-factly. "It doesn't excuse what I did to you. It's just...when I looked at you...I saw..."

"I love you," Blaine said, as tears fell again and he squeezed his father even tighter. Finally knowing. Finally understanding. He hadn't done anything wrong to make his father hate him. *He* was never anything wrong and there was nothing he could have done to change any of it, because it had never really been about him in the first place. "I've always loved you Dad, through everything."

"I've always loved you too," he cried and Amy started again too.

She took both of her men in her arms. Both of them were safe and in her life and her home and her arms. There was nothing left unsaid between them and maybe now, out of this unspeakably horrifying day, maybe they could once again truly become a family. "I've never been more proud of either of you," she told them.

"I'm so sorry Blaine," John told him, squeezing him as tightly as possible, Blaine's shirt soaking in his father's tears. "I'm sorry for every time I hit you. Every time I hurt you. Every time I betrayed your trust. After you came out. After Sadie Hawkins. The Christmas show. Every time you came home from Dalton."

"It's okay Dad," Blaine sobbed, afraid to let go, afraid that if he did the moment would pass and somehow they'd be back where they started. "I forgive you, Dad, I forgive you."

"I don't know what I would have done if I'd lost you today," John stammered, his heart breaking and healing at the same time.

"You didn't lose me Dad," Blaine whispered over and over again and he reached for his Mom and drew her in as well. "I love you both so much. You'll never lose me. I promise."

*Say what you need to say.*



**Chapter Twenty : *Light's Out, Sweet Dreams***

*We feel, we hear, your pain, your fear  
But we're here, to say, who you are, is okay*

Kurt startled awake from another nightmare, the third one this week, and he rolled over to grab his phone. He turned it on, squinting briefly as his eyes adjusted, then tapped into Blaine's Facebook page. He knew it was stupid. Blaine was fine and no doubt fast asleep in his bed, but it soothed him to see he had posted to Tina only a couple of hours ago. Nothing would have happened to him between then and now. He put the phone down, shaking his head at himself. Blaine was fine. He'd talk to him in the morning. Kurt took a breath in, then out, and closed his eyes, snuggling into his boyfriend pillow. Just before drifting off to a dreamless sleep he realized that just maybe it was time again for the real thing.

---

*And you don't have to go through this on your own  
You're not alone*

Blaine clung to Tina a little more tightly after the school shooting and not just because he couldn't keep track of Sam these last few days. He needed her close, needed to know she was safe, and truth was he needed a friend. Even though he'd been talking to Kurt and Santana more frequently since the scare, the calls were quick check-ins on their way into work or school or in between homework and sleep. But more than that, they didn't fully understand what everyone was going through. They weren't here. Tina was.

"You staying for supper tonight Tina?" Mrs. Anderson asked with a smile as Blaine and Tina arrived after school. As they had been every day, they went immediately to Blaine's room and emptied their homework out onto his desk and his bed, Tina curling up with a pillow and her books, Blaine switching on the computer.

"No, I can't, Mrs. A, Mom wants me home tonight," Tina said apologetically and Amy just smiled. This was the way it should be. The day after the shooting she went to work and told them in no uncertain terms that she was switching to the day shift until Blaine left for college and if they didn't like it than she could find a new job. They switched her immediately, and she was enjoying every single moment.

"Alright sweetie. Well if you two get hungry, let me know," she said, and Blaine grinned at her. He loved having her home. If nothing else, everything that had happened had made him bury the lingering anger toward her and just accept her for who she was.

"We will Mom," he promised and she closed the door behind her as she left.

Tina started in as soon as the door was shut. "What are we gonna do about Regionals Blaine? Mr. Schue is crazy if he thinks his ancient choices are gonna get us a win. Sure, the old standards are great for hanging around the choir room, for loosening us up. But they'll never win in competition."

"Yeah, but what else are we gonna do?" Blaine asked, half reading his work, half concentrating on Tina. "Mr. Schue is set on his dream theme. And now may not be the best time to argue with him," he reasoned.

"You just don't want to make waves, but sometimes the ship needs to be overturned Blaine!" Tina insisted.

"You might want to lay off the boat metaphors," Blaine smirked. "I'll talk to Kurt tonight. See what he thinks. Okay?" he asked, hoping it would appease her.

"And if he says you should rock the boat you will?" she challenged, her eyebrow raised. "Because Kurt's never let Mr. Schuester get away with telling us what to do when he's wrong."

"I promise Tina," Blaine said. "Now can we please get our homework done?"

---

*You'll have more love in your life*

*Don't let go, give it time*

*Take it slow*

*Those who love you the most, may need more time to grow*

"Here's the rent money," Santana said lazily, handing Kurt a stack of bills outside her bar. It was right near the subway stop he took home from NYADA, so it made sense to pick her up when they got out at the same time, especially when it was already dark outside.

Kurt looked around nervously as he grabbed the money and shoved it in his pocket. "Are you crazy Tana?" he hissed at her, his heart beating a mile a minute.

"What?" She asked with a shrug, starting to head down the street. "People will just think you're a drug dealer packing heat. See! I just upped your street cred tenfold. You're totally safe now."

"Oh sure." Kurt rolled his eyes. "Because drug dealers never get stabbed or shot at or killed."

But Santana stopped paying attention to him. "Oh damn, this mattress looks brand new, I should totally snag it!" Santana said, running up to a queen size mattress leaning against a dumpster.

"Don't you dare touch that thing Santana Lopez!" Kurt shouted and Santana turned, hands on her hips.

"Reduce, reuse and recycle Kurt," she told him haughtily.

"Bedbugs, Santana," he retorted with disgust, and she reluctantly kept walking. His phone buzzed and he pulled it out as they continued down the street.

**From Blaine: Skype in 5?**

**To Blaine: Walking home. Make it 10?**

"When are you just gonna admit that you still love him and want him back?" Santana asked, exasperated.

"When are you gonna learn to mind your own damn business?" Kurt snapped back.

They walked the rest of the way home in silence, and Kurt quickly retreated to his bedroom. Santana was right, of course, but it made no sense. Not now. He still needed more time. They'd figure it out over the summer. He needed to know where Blaine was going to be next year. If he was coming to NY, Kurt knew he wanted to try and make it work. But if college sent Blaine further away...well, he didn't need his heart broken twice.

His Skype rang as soon as his laptop booted up and Blaine's smiling face met his. "Hey stranger," Blaine cooed.

"Hey," Kurt said, still a little melancholy from his thoughts.

Of course, Blaine noticed. "Everything okay?" he asked, worried.

"Yeah, just tired," Kurt said and smiled for real this time. "So what's going on?"

"How do you know something's going on?" Blaine asked, his voice a little higher than usual.

Kurt chuckled. "For one, you're starting to sound like me. Two, I just know you. So what is it?"

Blaine sighed. "It's just Mr. Schuester. His set list for Regionals is awful and everyone knows it but him."

"This isn't news, Blaine, this is 'been there, done that'," Kurt said snarkily.

"So what should we do?" Blaine asked.

"Take charge," Kurt urged him. "Schue isn't always right and someone has to be the one to stand up to him. You've always been willing to stand up for what you believe in, don't stop now. You were voted the new Rachel. Figure out what she would do, then do it with all the charm and poise of Blaine Warbler."

Blaine rested his head on his hand, eyes shining through the screen at Kurt. "What on earth would I do without you?"

"Apparently you would sing terribly overdone songs from the 70's and 80's," Kurt smirked.

Blaine laughed, his eyes ducking, and Kurt's breath hitched as those lashes fluttered on Blaine's cheeks.

Summer couldn't come fast enough.

---

*Be brave, be strong,  
You are loved, you belong  
Some day soon, you will see  
You're exactly who you're supposed to be  
And you don't have to go through this on your own  
You're not alone*

Everyone had come when he texted. They gathered in the auditorium and brainstormed a new set list. Now they sat in the classroom and watched as Mr. Schuester continued to not only ignore them, but berate them as well. The others looked on stunned.

"Honestly, I don't even know what's going on in this room anymore," Mr. Schuester snapped. "What happened to you guys? Openly defying me?"

Blaine hesitated. He hated questioning authority. For Blaine, these were all too familiar words covering all too familiar ground. But the whole Glee club was counting on him and he wasn't a child anymore. He was their leader. Apparently Mr. Schuester thought so as well.

And Blaine?" his teacher called on him and he looked up, not quite sure what to expect. "I am disappointed in you for allowing this to go on."

"I'm sorry, but we're just trying to-" Blaine started, but he was cut off.

"No what you were trying to do is not rehearsing the songlist that I gave you. And that is unacceptable." Blaine stared, wanting to be the person Kurt wanted him to be, more like him or Rachel. Stand up, shout his objections, tell him off, then storm out of the room in dramatic defiance until Mr. Schuester went chasing after him. But Blaine stayed where he was, charming and poised, and none of those things happened.

"So here's what's gonna happen," Mr. Schuester said. "I'm gonna go to the teacher's lounge and get the coffee that I skipped to get here early, and when I get back here in five minutes you will be ready to rehearse. My songs."

Mr. Schuester stormed out of the room and Blaine looked around at the faces of his defeated friends. He sighed and walked heavily to the piano, stopping as he reached the side. He leaned against it, resting his head in his hands, rubbing his face with frustration. A soft hand gently touched his back.

"You okay?" Tina asked privately as the rest of their friends whispered behind him.

He nodded into his hands then turned to her, granting her a small but grateful smile. "Yeah."

"I don't know what's gotten into him," she said, glancing out the room where Mr. Schuester had left.

"I do," Blaine said though, his voice thick with emotion. "Everything affected him too. He was supposed to be the authority, able to protect us from being hurt, and he couldn't. So now he's grasping for control." She looked at him curiously, but Blaine just shrugged with defeat. He'd lived it for the past five years. "It's a very familiar scene for me." He turned around to the group and snapped out of his revelry, clapping his hands before sitting at the piano. "Ok guys, gather around. If you don't know the song stand next to someone who does. Like the set list or not, it still needs to be perfect."

---

*You have more friends than you know*

*Some who surround you*

*Some you are destined to meet*

"Which direction does the sun rise from?" Blaine asked.

"Up!" Brittany shouted, beaming as she grabbed a green piece of the pie for her trivial pursuit wheel.

"Oh...no, Britt, the answer is..." but Sam glared at him and his face slumped without finishing. He forced a smile, not wanting to break her heart. "I mean, good job!"

Now it was Tina's turn to glare at him, but he just shrugged apologetically. "What did you want me to do?" he whispered, but she grabbed the dice and rolled them.

"My turn," she announced and moved 6 spaces. "Entertainment, yes!" she cheered.

Blaine's phone rang and he quietly excused himself off of Brittany's bed into a corner of her room. "Hey," he said happily.

"Whatcha doin boyfriend?" Santana drawled lazily as she painted her nails.

"Playing trivial pursuit with Tina, Sam and Brittany," he says, a little more grumpily than he meant to.

"Ah. Brittany will win. Just because you can't say no to her," Santana said knowingly. "And everyone *knows* how much you hate to lose."

"I get it from Cooper. Who gets it from our father. Who I have heard gets it from his father," Blaine told her.

"So what you're telling me is the Anderson men are a bunch of whiny babies," she smirked.

"Yeah, okay, I'm done with you," he chuckled at Santana and then held it up. "Who else wants to talk to Santana because she's being mean to me."

"Oh, me, me!" Brittany said, raising her hand and she scrambled off the bed and grabbed the phone from Blaine. "Hi," she said coyly into the phone, then went inside her walk in closet for privacy.

Both Tina and Blaine turned to stare at Sam, who looked nonplussed by his girlfriend's actions.

"Did she just..." Blaine said slowly, pointing to the closet.

Sam looked up at him and shrugged. "Yeah, she sometimes does when she talks to Santana."

An excited scream from the closet startled them all. "Oh my god, Santana that's awesome!" she yelled and stuck her head. "Tina, come here, you have to hear this!" she called, her face beaming.

Tina smiled back and slipped into the closet as well. Blaine stared after them, realizing why he'd never really had girlfriends before. Then they giggled excitedly and he realized how much he loved having them around.

"It's your turn Blaine," Sam said, quirking an eyebrow at him as he pointed to the board.

Blaine turned back to Sam with a smile and rolled the dice. He rolled a three and landed on geography.

Sam pulled out a card and read the question. "Where is the Guggenheim Museum?"

Blaine leaned down on the bed, propping his head on his with a smile. He knew that answer like he knew the exact color of Kurt's eyes. "New York City."

*It's gonna be okay*

*It's gonna be okay*

*You're gonna be okay*  
*You have more friends than you know*

---

Blaine waited around the corner until Brittany kissed Sam with a smile at her locker and Sam took off for the choir room. "I'll meet you there in a minute," she yelled her promise, then turned back to get her books. "You can come out of hiding now Blaine Warbler, he's gone."

"I wasn't-" But he cut himself off as he walked over to her because he was, and he leaned against the lockers. "I just wanted to ask how he's doing?" Blaine admitted, a worried pout on his face. "He says he's fine, he seemed fine the other day, but I don't know."

"I think he's fine, but I miss Evan," she said with her own pout. "I wish he'd come back. His accent was sexy. And sex with two guys is better than one."

Blaine cocked his head curiously at Brittany trying to, then deliberately trying *not* to, imagine two of Sam in his bed. It was bad enough picturing one. He squeezed his eyes shut and she shook his head. "Brittany," he said, but she grabbed his hand as if frightened and he immediately opened his eyes to find nothing but darkness.

"What if it's another shooting?" she asked terrified. Her palm grew sweaty in his hand as it began to tremble.

"Britt, I don't think it's another-" She started to hyperventilate and Blaine recognized that reaction immediately. "Ok, let's get you some light and some air," he said, pulling out his flashlight app with one hand and leading her out the side door of the school with the other. They continued walking until they reached the school parking lot.

"I...can't...go back...in there," she stammered between gulps of air.

"It's ok Britt, I've got you," he said and he held both her hands in his. "Breathe in and out for me."

"I can't," she stuttered, her teeth shaking with fright.



"Yes you can," he said calmly. "In and out Britt, with my words, okay?" And he began to sing: *Come what may, Come what may...* "In on *Come what*, out on *may*," he instructed her. "You can do it Britt." And he continued on, singing the words over and over as Kurt had done many times for him before, until her breathing finally slowed.

"I can't go back in there," she repeated despite her calmness and Blaine brushed a hand to her cheek.

"No one's expecting you to darling. Do you need me to drive you home?" he asked.

Brittany shook her head. She was okay now.

"Ok, I'll talk to Principal Figgins, and let Sam now you're going to stay home until the lights come back on, okay?" Blaine asked.

She nodded. "Thanks Blaine."

Blaine smiled warmly. "No need to thank me. Text me when you get home."

He stood watching her until she drove away, then retreated back inside with a sigh, ready to deal with the mess at McKinley.

---

"Principal Figgins, we can't ask the students to come into school with no power," Blaine argued as Student Council President.

"Winter was terrible this year, Mr. Anderson," Principal Figgins answered, "and then the school was closed for a day after the shooting. Unless you all want to be coming to school until August with no air conditioning, we cannot afford to close the school. Students can stay home if they like, but school will be in session and all activities will be held. Outdoors if necessary."

Blaine relented, having another matter he'd been wanting to address with Principal Figgins though he was certain now wasn't the time. Still he was here and he might as well. "Can we talk about how Coach Roz has been treating the Cheerios?"

"Mr. Anderson," Principal Figgins drawled as he stood, his patience wearing thin. "I have a school plunged into darkness, I do not have time to be talking about what Coach Roz may or may not be doing with the Cheerios."

Blaine frowned but he'd guessed as much. "I'll come back later then," he said, backing slowly out the door.

"You do that," Principal Figgins said dismissively.

But Blaine knew there would be no later. He'd learned long ago that if you wanted anything done at McKinley High School, you needed to do it yourself.

---

Blaine left the aerobics room after talking to Sue, still out of breath and knowing his body was going to hate him in the morning. 7 months ago a workout like that would have been a cakewalk, but while he was stronger than ever, hanging with Sam in the weight room, without Kurt his flexibility had suffered. Even with his time spent on the Cheerios. Nothing compared to Kurt, he thought with a nostalgic smirk.

He stripped in the locker room and stepped into the gym shower letting the not so warm water cool him down in more ways than one. By the time he got out he felt refreshed. He dressed and gelled and grabbed his bag, heading out to the car. Maybe he'd come back another day, he thought. The work out was a good one.

"Hey," a voice stopped him in the lobby, and he turned around to see aerobics boy flashing a charming smile at him. He couldn't help but smile back and that fueled his new friend's confidence. "My name's Luke," the man, definitely an older man, said as he held out his hand.

"Blaine," he introduced himself, accepting the hand shake with an awkward unsure smile. "You come here often?" Blaine asked then laughed embarrassed, throwing his hand over his face. "I'm sorry, that's such a line."

"Yes it is," Luke laughed with him, already entranced by how adorable Blaine was. "And yes, I do. And now it's time for my line. Would you like to get some coffee?"

Blaine looked at him a moment, his mouth frozen between a yes and a no, but what came out was an apologetic shake of the head. "No, thank you, I have a..." but he didn't know how to finish the sentence.

"Girlfriend?" Luke offered, an eyebrow raised in amusement.

Blaine chuckled again, his cheeks growing redder by the minute. "No. Definitely not a girlfriend."

"A boyfriend then?" Luke asked sadly.

Blaine shuffled, shoving his hand in his pockets as he bit his lip. "No. Well, kind of. I mean..."

"I get it," Luke said kindly. "Well it was nice to meet you Blaine, maybe I'll see you around again sometime."

"Yeah maybe," Blaine said, feeling like he should apologize for something but knowing there was no need. He'd done nothing wrong. And as Luke left the gym, Blaine knew for sure that what he'd done felt totally right.

---

"Kurt, I can't believe you're going to the NYC Ballet Gala!" Blaine said in awe. "That's gonna be the most amazing experience of your life!"

"I can't believe it either Blaine," Kurt said, still reeling from the news. "I wish you were here to enjoy it too though. Rachel is ecstatic, but Santana couldn't care for anything but the dress. She doesn't even like ballet," he said wryly.

Blaine's brow furrowed with confusion. "That's ridiculous Kurt, of course she does. She and I watched the Miami City Ballet on PBS one day last summer while you were working at the Lima Bean. I remember she never stopped smiling."

Kurt snorted. Of course Santana had just been lying. "I honestly don't know how you deal with that girl," he said. "She is a thorn in my side."

Blaine smiled. "She grows on you."

"Like ivy up the cage she's stripping inside," he murmured and Blaine's smile froze.

"What?"

"Santana. She's some go-go Barbarella cage dancer," he said derisively. Blaine was quiet. He didn't know what to say, or what to think. "Blaine? Don't freak out on me here please."

"Oh don't worry, I won't freak out on you," Blaine assured him. "But I damn well plan to freak out on her!"

"Well, the more the merrier, Rachel and I already did. Maybe she'll actually listen to you though." Kurt yawned and curled up in his bed. "I need to go to sleep. My schedule these next few days is going to be crazy."

"Crazy amazing," Blaine smiled. "Night. Oh and Kurt?"

"Yeah?"

"Have fun at the ballet."

---

Ryder's confession in the choir room had weighed heavily on Blaine, but the reaction of his friends had made the walls of the room close in on him and desperately need air. As soon as they were dismissed, Blaine grabbed his bag and walked quickly out of the choir room. Realistic calculations in his head battled with his heart when he heard footsteps hustling behind him. "Hey, Blaine, wait up!" Sam yelled, breathless in trying to keep up with Blaine despite his friend's shorter legs. "Artie and I had this great idea for-"

"Sam, stop," Blaine told him and tried to keep walking, but Sam grabbed his arm and Blaine twisted around. His stomach tied in knots looking at the friend he'd relied on so much this year. "I can't talk to you right now," he said angrily.

He caught Sam's confused look, his lips pursed together to question *why*, but Blaine just turned and continued on alone where he had been headed.

Tina caught up to Sam, who was still staring after his best friend with no understanding of what had just happened. She looked at him gently and just brushed his hand lightly to bring him out of his revelry. "I'll go find him, okay?" she said softly. Sam nodded and watched her go.

It wasn't hard. They'd talked a lot since the shooting, spent a lot more time together. Blaine had been opening up to her. Not like he did with Santana or Kurt, she wasn't going to delude herself any longer on

that regard. But she was trying to be a good friend to him and she'd been rewarded with tiny tidbits of information that she'd strung together with the things she'd seen over the past two years of him being in their lives. So even when she'd lost track of where he was, she was pretty sure she knew exactly where he was going.

She turned off her cellphone flashlight before entering the auditorium, but she caught him before it went out, up in the spot tower. With a small smile she walked in the pitch dark, knowing the auditorium like the back of her hand, and made her way over to the ladder to climb up. Her eyes adjusted to the darkness quickly and she could see him well enough sitting against the wall, arms lying on his knees pulled up, head resting back with his eyes closed. "Mind if I join you?" she asked quietly. Blaine shook his head as if he'd known she was there and she sat down across from him. "I thought I'd find you here."

"Yeah, well, I considered a ten hour drive to Bushwick, but this was closer," he muttered bitterly.

"Are you okay?" she asked. She watched him. He ran his fingers through his hair and rubbed his hands over his face, as she was starting to notice he often did when he was upset. She waited though, not wanting to rush him. She had nowhere to be and he wasn't asking her to leave or moving to go himself. He opened his eyes, clasping his hands back together as he rested his arms over his knees again but he stared at the floor next to her.

"When Karofsky kissed Kurt, that day in the locker room," he started, his voice a murmur barely above a whisper, "I remember how violated Kurt felt. How hurt he was. To have something so special as a first kiss taken from you, without your consent, from someone who had no right..." he trailed off, shaking his head. "Ryder must feel..." He couldn't even put into words how Ryder must feel, but he felt it in his gut, the memories of his own father's betrayals. He lifted his eyes to meet Tina's attentive gaze. His eyes looked so wounded, even in the darkness. "And Sam and Artie just..." His balled his hands into fists, once again unable to find the words to describe how angry and disappointed he felt toward his friends, but he wasn't sure the words existed. "I guess I just know a little bit how Ryder feels," he finished meekly.

"Because of me?" she asked nervously, chewing her bottom lip between her teeth.

"What?" he asked surprised, then understood and reached out to grab her hand. "No, Tina, no," he assured her then laughed softly with a playful smirk. "Well maybe a little because of you." She smiled with embarrassment, glad for the shadows that hid her blushing cheeks. "But no, I mean because of things with my Dad."

"He didn't..." she asked him in shock.

"No," Blaine assured her squeezing her hand. "But the things he did do, and especially the things he said. About my sexuality. It all makes you distrustful of others but of yourself even more. It's hard to know what's right and wrong, what to believe about yourself and what you feel. It doesn't matter who it is that does that to you. When you're a kid, no one has the right..."

"You should talk to Sam," Tina told him. "Tell him why you're angry."

Blaine pulled back, closing his eyes and resting his head back just like she'd found him. "Yeah, I don't know," he sighed.

They sat in silence like that for a few minutes while Tina's thoughts drifted outside the room. Her heart was heavy with Blaine's words, understanding even more what it had cost Ryder to reveal what he had. And what Sam and Artie's ignorance had likely done. But still, she wasn't sure what was right. "What do you say?" she asked Blaine, and he lowered his head to look at her. "To someone who's been through that when you haven't?"

Blaine watched her a moment, her sincerity clear even now, and his voice was strong. "I'm sorry that happened to you. I'm sorry that someone took something precious from you that only you had a right to give. If you ever need someone to talk to, I'm here."

She nodded, then took his hand. "If you ever need someone to talk to Blaine, I'm here. You know that right?" she asked hopefully.

He slowly smiled and nodded his head. "Yeah. I know that."

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"Alright, the last order of business is..." Blaine looked down at the agenda items he'd put together the night before after trolling McKinley student twitter accounts. "Talking to Principal Figgins about getting the vending machines on the generator during the blackout. All agreed?" he asked looking around. Sam watched him warily as he nodded his agreement with the rest, the look having stayed fairly constant throughout their student council meeting. Blaine ignored it and smacked the gavel. "Then this meeting of the Student Council is adjourned."

Blaine silently gathered up his papers and put them away in his bag, slinging it around his neck. The others filed out, and he moved to follow them without a glance to Sam.

"Can you at least tell me why you're mad at me?"

Sam's voice stopped Blaine before he crossed the threshold. He closed his eyes, torn between wanting his friend back and wondering who he even was. "The fact that you even have to ask me that is why I'm mad." His voice dripped with disappointment.

Sam shuffled, shoving his hands in his pocket. "Come on Blaine," he pleaded. "I'm just a dumb straight guy, you're gonna have to help me out here."

Blaine turned and really looked at Sam for the first time since his comments in the choir room. The first thing he noticed was that Sam looked ready to cry and desperate to fix whatever he'd broken. The second thing he noticed was that whatever feelings he'd had for Sam were suddenly gone. But even though that was true, he still loved Sam's friendship and needed him to understand how terribly wrong he had been. Blaine placed his hands on his hips, and ducked his head, biting his lip as he figured out how to say what he needed to say. "How old are your brother and sister now?" Blaine asked, glancing up at him.

Sam was startled by the question, but crossed his arms across his chest and answered. "Stevie's 11 and Stacey's 8."

"So if you walked into your house and found their babysitter touching them in the shower you'd be all ready with the high five, right?" Blaine asked sarcastically.

"What?" Sam screeched with disgust. "No, they're just babies."

"And you think it would be totally okay for you or Artie to go fondle a cute 11 year old girl in the shower?" Blaine argued.

"No, Blaine, what the hell? Of course not," Sam spat out. Blaine watched him quietly as he let it sink in. The realization on Sam's face was visible. 'Oh my god,' he whispered as his face fell. "I'm so sorry."

Blaine pursed his lips and raised a brow. "You owe Ryder an apology, not me," he said pointedly. Sam rubbed his hands through his hair and nodded his head. Blaine offered him a tentative smile in return. "You really are a dumb straight guy, aren't you," he chuckled softly.

Sam shook his head. "The dumbest."

"Good thing you're dating such a brilliant girl," Blaine offered, finally relaxing as the tension between them eased.

"Good thing she wasn't in the room yesterday or I'd be a dead straight guy probably," Sam said as he and Blaine left the classroom and headed out to their cars.

Blaine smirked in agreement. "Yes, yes you would."

---

"So how was ballet class," Blaine asked as he slipped into bed Friday night at his Dad's house.

"It was really good," Santana answered, and she sounded almost surprised at that. "Felt a little bit like being a kid again."

"A lot better than stripping?" Blaine asked pointedly.

Santana started to respond but stopped herself from snapping at him. She took a deep breath before answering. "I'm dancing Blaine. I'm not stripping. And I love dancing."

"I know you do 'Tana," Blaine said. "New York is full of opportunities for dancers, why do you have to do it in a cage?"

"Because it's hot Blaine," she tried to explain. "I like being sexy. I like showing my body off. No one touches and I feel really good about myself, doing something I love. And the money is fantastic."

"I don't like it," Blaine frowned.

"Well you're gay, I wouldn't expect you to," she smirked.

Blaine scoffed. "You know what I mean."



"Look boyfriend. I love you," Santana said. "And I appreciate your concern for my propriety, far more than Lady Lips and Yentl. But I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself, and I know the meaning of the word consent. Capiche?"

Blaine sighed, knowing that she was right and hating it. "Capiche. I just worry."

"Well worry about someone else Anderson, because Santana Lopez was made for New York City," she said proudly. "And it's made for you too," she added quietly.

"Well, we'll just have to see what NYADA says about that," Blaine said sadly.

Blaine's father knocked quietly and stuck his head in the door. "It's getting late Blaine, lights out," John said before retreating again out of the room.

"Talk to you tomorrow Tana?"

"Sweet Dreams Blaine," she answered.

## ***Chapter Twenty-One: Wonder-Ful***

"So are you terrified of your Pretty Pony coming home?" Santana smirked through the laptop screen as she lounged on Kurt's bed, the bed her aching back would happily call home until he returned. "I could give you some cage-dancing lessons over Skype," she offered happily.

"I'm not terrified, Santana," Blaine snarled playfully back, though his whole body was humming with nervous excitement. "This visit isn't about us anyway. It's about Kurt and his father and I will be there to support them both in any way that I can."

"I bet you will," she teased, her eyebrows wiggling suggestively.

"Santana I'm serious," Blaine admonished, but he couldn't help but let a sly smile slip. Kurt was coming home. He was going to be in Lima for a whole week and though Blaine had every intention of respecting Kurt's clear wishes of not hooking up, he also had every intention of reminding Kurt as often as possible exactly how much he was loved. "It will just be nice having him home. Here, I mean," he quickly corrected himself. He knew New York was home now. "And I'm just praying that everything Burt's done and been through in the past 6 months has done its job. If anything terrifies me, it's that."

Santana's face softened as she looked at her best friend. "Burt's gonna be fine. That man's a fighter. And though Kurt is freaking out and going all Miss Pillsbury on us, he'll be fine too."

Blaine looked at her confused. "What do you mean?"

Santana shrugged, not wanting Blaine to worry. "He's trying to put order to the world. Control what he can because things are out of control right now. So he's become a little obsessive about...well, everything."

Blaine frowned. Now he was even gladder Kurt was going to be there in only a few hours. He wanted more than anything to hold him tightly and never let go until everything was okay in the world again. But he kept those thoughts to himself and played it close to the cuff. "Thanks for the heads up," he said, looking at the time. "I have to get to school. Kurt's gonna meet us there this afternoon so last thing I need is detention for being late."

"Go get 'em tiger," Santana grinned with a growl.

Blaine just shook his head as a blush grew on his cheeks and he switched the computer off without a goodbye. He took a breath and reminded himself, *this week is about Kurt and his Dad, not us*. But his heart fluttered with excitement, the blush did not disappear and all he could think about was the feel of Kurt's hand in his again.

It was going to be a wonderful week.

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Kurt walked the halls of McKinley High School feeling like he was 16 years old again and back in a time when he was scared and confused and counting the minutes to return back to his father's hospital bedside. He'd been alone then, after his father's heart attack, wishing he'd had just one person who could hold him and make everything feel like it was all going to be okay. Things were different now. He turned the corner and there Blaine stood, looking dashinglly handsome as ever as he talked to Jake, Marley and Mr. Schuester. Before Kurt could grab his attention, Mike and Mercedes slid to his side and grinned happily hugging them both.

"Ready to go to the choir room?" Mercedes asked, but she soon followed his gaze and patted him on the shoulder. "We'll just say hi to Miss Pillsbury and give you a minute. Meet us in her office when you two are done?"

Kurt nodded. Then Blaine's head turned and his smile lit up the hallways as if the sun just fell to earth. Kurt smiled back. He wasn't alone anymore. Not this time.

In his mind he ran over, pulling Blaine into his arms as Kurt buried himself in the crook of his neck letting all his tears of worry out against the pulse of the heart that he still held close.

But he didn't because he knew that would lead down to a rabbit hole he wasn't prepared to travel. Not this trip. So instead he walked over and leaned against the locker. "Hi," Kurt greeted softly.

"Hi," Blaine responded awkwardly, his nerves and uncertainty somewhat strange for Kurt to see and yet it was not entirely unwelcome, because then his own wouldn't seem so out of place. Then Blaine's eyes locked into Kurt's and the flutter in his chest returned. "I'm so glad you're home Kurt. Here," Blaine quickly corrected himself. "I mean here, not-"

"No Blaine," Kurt said, quickly grabbing Blaine's hand and squeezing it, but letting go just as quickly. The image of Blaine singing in the jazz club flashed before his eyes. "You're right. I know what I said before, but I was just angry." Kurt glanced around the hallway. The familiar sights, sounds and smells filled his senses and then his eyes fell back on Blaine. "This will always be home."

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**To Blaine: HE'S IN REMISSION! OMG, I CAN BARELY BREATHE.**

**To Kurt: THAT'S AMAZING! Kurt, I'm so happy for you both. Give him my best.**

**To Blaine: Give him your best yourself. Tell Mr. Schue that I'm taking the floor today in Glee. I've got a performance for my Dad all planned.**

**To Kurt: I can't wait! See you both soon!**

---

"How are you doing?" Blaine asked as he sat on the couch beside Kurt. He'd been more than thrilled when Burt had invited him back to the house after Kurt's rousing performance in Glee and was absolutely ecstatic when Kurt smiled and nodded in agreement. Blaine wasn't sure why his hands had been shaking on the steering wheel as he took the short drive over to the Hudmel's house, but within minutes of actually be there again with Kurt it was as if nothing had changed.

The week had been so up and down, so hot and cold for him that it was nearly dizzying. He knew what they'd promised, he knew that Kurt's focus was entirely on his father and god how he regretted his ridiculous "*dirty cute*" remark in the Lima Bean. True or not, and it was totally true, Blaine should have known that nothing else mattered at the time but Kurt's Dad. But now, Burt was well and Kurt could relax. At least Blaine hoped so.

"I'm okay," Kurt told him, snuggling in slightly. "Relieved more than anything. Almost losing him once was hard enough, but twice? I don't know if I can take anymore Blaine, I really don't."

Blaine took his hand, worried that Kurt would pull away but he didn't. "I saw how hard it was for you," he said carefully. "Especially at the Lima Bean. Santana warned me, but I've never seen you so-"

"Superstitious?" Kurt finished with a raised eyebrow. "I even yelled at my dad at the doctor's office for wearing a dark blue shirt instead of a light blue one." Kurt shook his head at his own behavior. "I mean, who does that?"

Blaine could tell that Kurt still felt incredibly guilty about it no matter how many times he'd already apologized. "I'm sure your dad understands," Blaine assured him.

Kurt gave a slight scoff. "I'm not even sure I understand it myself. I've never been like that, never believed in that sort of stuff. It's silly."

"It's not silly," Blaine argued. "Everybody deals with things differently, Kurt. I run away. You confront things head on. It's one of the things I admire most about you. So if you need a little ritual to get you through the hardest times, then so long as it doesn't become a habit I say it's fine. Ritual is just trying to make sense out of things that are nonsense."

Burt stuck his head into the living room and smiled at the boys. "Carol and I are going to head upstairs," he said. "Blaine you're welcome to stay but make sure your Mom or your Dad knows where you are."

"Thanks," Blaine said.

The boys sat in the silence, staring at their hands as Burt and Carole went upstairs. The light went out in the hallway and their eyes slowly drifted back to one another. It would be so easy right now, in the dim light of the moon shining through the windows, for Blaine to lean over and kiss him, taste him on his tongue, feel Kurt's lips against his. But he knew it wasn't right, not here, not right now. It was clear when Kurt, feeling it too, leaned back slightly and chased away the electricity in the air with conversation. "So you're really planning to move to New York?" he asked.

Blaine blinked, returning to reality and surprised by the question itself. "Well, I hope so," he said, suddenly his heart dropping with worry. "That's okay, right? I mean, you said it was so..."

"Of course it's okay, I just don't want you making decisions because of me," Kurt told him gently.

"Kurt, you're my best friend. You're there, Santana's there, Rachel, now Artie. Cooper's there more than he's in Ohio. Why wouldn't I want to go?" Blaine asked, his face scrunched with confusion.

"Cooper's in California more than NY. Mike's in LA, I know you were close to him last year," Kurt reasoned.

"Kurt." Blaine reached over and brushed Kurt's cheek, and their eyes met. "I belong in New York. Just like I belonged at McKinley. Whatever happens between us..." Blaine lowered his eyes and shrugged nervously.

"I broke up with Adam," Kurt suddenly said and Blaine's head shot back up, eyes wide with renewed energy. Kurt couldn't help but laugh. "We just couldn't find a movie that seemed romantically us."

"I'm sorry," Blaine said, fighting back a grin that was just longing to escape.

Kurt chuckled. Blaine's lips may not have betrayed his happiness, but his eyes shined with joy. "No you're not," Kurt smirked, then acquiesced. "But thank you."

Blaine ducked his head to hide a blush he couldn't hide. "I am sorry, Kurt. If it hurt you."

"It didn't," Kurt promised, squeezing the hand he still held firm in his grasp. They hadn't let go of one another since they'd sat down and though it stayed unspoken, it wasn't lost on either of them. "I learned a lot. About myself. But it was never right between us." Blaine nodded, understanding. "Have you dated anyone? I know you haven't mentioned it but-" Kurt shrugged.

"You mean besides Tina?" Blaine joked and Kurt snickered. But Blaine grew serious. If he was going to make this work he needed to be completely honest with Kurt about everything. "No, I haven't dated anyone. Though...I did have feelings for Sam...for a little while," he said nervously.

Kurt's eyes seemed to bore into Blaine's, but then he nodded with reassurance. "Totally understandable. I mean no one can resist those lips," he quipped and Blaine breathed a sigh of relief that seemed to break the little bit of tension that had remained.

"There was this guy who asked me out for coffee the other day at the gym," Blaine smirked with a bit of pride. "But I turned him down. It wasn't right either," he said. Kurt smiled softly and rested his head on Blaine's shoulder. Blaine brushed his lips across Kurt's hair, breathing in his scent, but using all his willpower to resist the urge to kiss him. This is what it was all about. The feeling of home, family, safety. This is what he wanted forever. "I'm really glad your dad's okay Kurt," Blaine whispered, and he meant it as much for himself as he did Kurt.

And Kurt understood that and so much before, because Kurt understood Blaine better than anyone. "Yeah," he whispered back. "Me too."

Friday morning, Blaine rushed from his car, hating to turn the news off but needing to find Sam and make sure he was okay. He pushed through the front doors of the school and spied him across the hallway at his locker, tense and staring at his phone. Blaine checked his own once more before heading over, but there seemed to be nothing new. "Hey," he said softly.

Sam's response was muted and his eyes never shifted up as he fidgeted nervously. "I don't think I can be here today."

"Have you heard from her this morning?" Blaine asked, trying to appear calm amidst his own nerves. He reminded himself to call Santana and make sure she was holding it together as well.

"Yeah, she actually texted me this morning. Her interview was supposed to be at 10, but they rescheduled it to next week. They're in lockdown in the hotel. Police are asking everyone not to go outside for now."

Blaine leaned on the lockers and reached a hand out to Sam's arm. "She's gonna be fine," he assured Sam though he had absolutely no way of being certain.

Sam looked up at him, his eyes almost as terrified as they had been during the school shooting. "They've shut down Boston, Cambridge, Watertown, Waltham. The shooting was *at* MIT Blaine, she could have been there, it could have been her!"

"But it wasn't Sam," Blaine told him and took him in his arms. "It wasn't Brittany. She's safe in her hotel room and nothing is going to happen. She'll spend the day driving her parents crazy watching whatever it is she watches on television and on Monday all of this will be over and she'll go and kick ass at her interview."

"What if there's another bombing," Sam stammered. "What if-"

"There won't be," Blaine promised.

"I don't know how many times I can worry about losing her." Sam shuddered in his arms and Blaine held him closer as Kurt's words yesterday echoed in his head. Twice Kurt feared losing Burt. Twice Sam feared losing Brittany. Life was way too short not to take chances every day.

"False alarms, Sam. That's all they are, false alarms," Blaine said soothingly. "Reminders about what's really important in life. Holding on to the people you love and not letting them go."

"I don't ever want to let go of her," he said and Blaine nodded, understanding completely. "But you, um, you can let go of me though Blaine, people are starting to stare," Sam quipped as he looked over Blaine's shoulder and Blaine startled out of the moment and remembered they were in the halls of McKinley.

"Oh, right, sorry Dude," he said and took a step back, but Sam smiled and threw an arm around him.

"It's okay," Sam chuckled and they headed to Blaine's locker for him to grab his things. "How did things go with Kurt last night?" Sam asked, wagging his eyebrows.

"It wasn't like that Sam." Blaine blushed and hid his face in his locker. "But it was great. We had a really nice talk."

"Is that what the kids are calling it these days," Sam teased and Blaine pushed him playfully. "Alright, alright. I'm just glad things are going well. He isn't going to come after me like he did Tina is he? Because you sang to me and all?"

Blaine closed his locker and stared at him. "You're an idiot," he chimed just as the bell rang.

"Kurt can be scary!" Sam grinned as he headed off in the other direction. "See you in Glee."

Blaine waved after him and he started to class but the beating in his heart started to drum with ideas and nerves and he slipped into a corner to send a quick text to Burt before he lost his nerve. He'd been thinking about it since last night and with the news today, something was telling him it was time for Blaine to take his own chance.

---

"He's making googly eyes at you," Mercedes smirked at Kurt as the two of them headed out of the choir room.

"He's always making googly eyes at me Mercedes, from the first day I met him on the stairs and he sang Teenage Dream." Kurt easily minimized Blaine's gaze at him, but Kurt knew she was right. And now that he could put all the worries about his dad aside, he found that he even welcomed it. Still Mercedes didn't



need to know that. A boy could play coy and hard to get too. "They're the same eyes he made to Jeremiah and to Sebastian and to Tina and to Sam-"

"Those aren't the same eyes he gives to anyone else, someone needs to hit you upside the head with a clue-by-four," Mercedes snapped. "Why isn't he coming with us anyway?"

"He said he had something important he needed to do and we should go on without him," Kurt said, glancing back with a bit of uncertainty. "You think he's okay?"

"Oh my god, you have it so bad Hummel and the worst part is you won't even admit it," Mercedes said. "You gonna say anything before you leave? I said not to run from passion and I meant it," she added pointedly.

Kurt groaned. "Oh 'Cedes, I don't even want to go now. I feel like we're just starting to turn things around and if I go away again so soon...do you know some guy hit on him at the gym the other day?"

Mercedes chuckled. "What about NYADA?"

"My professors all let me do my midterms early since I was leaving to see Dad. And since everyone else is doing theirs now, I'm not really missing much." He turned and looked at her. "What about you?"

She shrugged. "I don't have much to get back for now. I was thinking of staying for Regionals." She glanced at him expectantly. "Wanna stay with me?"

Kurt chewed his lip. He really wanted to. It would mean Santana sleeping in his bed for longer, but he was certain there was really nothing left of his room she could ransack. And it would mean more time with Blaine to maybe figure things out. He already loved him. Always would. But maybe it would be nice to date again. Start over. Take things slowly and find a new groove. One that really worked for them this time. "Tempting Ms. Jones," Kurt answered linking his arm with hers. "Very tempting."

---

Blaine waited for Burt to leave the auditorium before he raced out into the parking lot to drive home. His petulance turned quickly into despondence as he hit the highway for Westerville. A nice long drive to think was exactly what he needed. When Mercedes had said not to run from passion, no matter how scary, he was certain the universe was giving him a sign. But instead his passion had ended up blowing up in his

face. He didn't know what he had been thinking, believing that Burt would embrace the idea of him and Kurt marrying, but he *had* believed it. He thought Burt would understand that time is not forever and that some things were worth fighting for with everything he had. He thought at least he would understand that he loved Kurt and wanted to marry him and knew how precarious that right was and that Blaine would want to grab hold of it and not let go while he could. Instead, Burt thought he was just a silly child and now Blaine was more afraid than determined. Because Kurt and his father were sometimes more alike than they cared to admit, and what if Kurt thought the same?

Blaine pushed his keys in the door and opened it. His father glanced up from the couch with a smile.

"Hey there," John greeted him. "Your mom's coming over and we're gonna order in and do a dinner and a movie night."

"Great," Blaine mumbled sarcastically, ignoring his Dad and heading up the stairs to his room.

"Freeze!" His father's voice was commanding and Blaine squeezed his eyes shut with frustration then did exactly as he was told. "Turn." Blaine placed a hand on the handrail and turned to face his Dad who was now standing sternly in the middle of the living room. "March," the Colonel said, pointing to the floor at his feet.

Blaine sighed, though not too much, and did as he was told, already too defeated to resist.

"Talk," the Colonel ordered.

Blaine looked at his father's unwavering eyes and knew that evasion would get him nowhere, the Colonel would not yield. Blaine's eyes dropped to the floor and he shuffled his feet, but he spoke. "It just gets tiring, that's all."

"What does?" John asked.

"Having no one believe in you. Support you," Blaine answered quietly.

John's eyes narrowed. "Is this about Kurt?" his father asked knowingly and Blaine's eyes shot up without his consent.

"Yes. And no," he offered without any real clarification. Because if Burt hadn't been supportive of him there was a very real chance that his father would tear his head off for even thinking about getting married. Literally.

John watched him for a moment, waiting for Blaine to elaborate, but he merely saw his son once again avert his gaze. "Look Blaine, you have tons of people who believe in you and support you," he said, and his voice would have been warm and comforting if Blaine had believed him. "Your mother and I have been trying our best. You have Burt and-

"No," Blaine cut him off firmly, his face flashing with anger and hurt. "I don't have Burt."

John scoffed. "Well that is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard you say. I know you don't talk about it with me, but Burt Hummel has been there for you through thick and thin these last two years."

"Yeah, well, not anymore," Blaine snapped, the petulance returning as he glared at his father.

"You want to tell me what happened?" he offered.

"No, Sir," Blaine answered brusquely.

John Anderson studied his son. He recognized so much of himself in Blaine's eyes. "Let me tell you something Blaine. Burt and I talk more than you think we do," he said. "And as much as I've hated to admit it, the times when he's made me feel like you feel now are the times he's been the most right and I didn't want to believe him." He reached a hand out to Blaine and squeezed his shoulder, forcing Blaine's eyes to meet his. "I'm sorry you inherited the Anderson stubbornness and pride. It's the best and worst thing about us."

Blaine took a breath at his father's touch, tears coming to his eyes but not wanting them to fall. "I just love Kurt. And I want the whole world to know."

John chuckled. "Anyone who knows you knows that. And most importantly, Kurt knows that. And I don't know exactly what we're talking about here, but you know more than anyone that love isn't even close to enough." Blaine bit his lip and looked away. "You know what I learned most from Burt Hummel?" John asked. Blaine shook his head. "The world doesn't work too well if everything is all or nothing."

Blaine looked up. The hope mixed with despair in his eyes was overwhelming. "What if all or nothing are the only choices you've got left?" He waited for his father's answer, but John didn't know what to say. "Can I please go to my room now?"

John sighed and nodded. "Yes, you may."

He watched Blaine go upstairs and heard the door snap shut. Within seconds the guitar started to play, as he knew it would. In fact he knew it would play all night as Blaine worked out the feelings and thoughts twisting and turning in his heart and head.

*Please don't go, no no no;  
If you go I'll be sad and blue,  
So I say no no no, don't go away.*

*Oh no please don't leave, baby please;  
If you should leave my poor heart would grieve  
So I say nay nay nay, baby please stay.*

John smiled fondly with a glance up the stairs as he picked up the phone and called Blaine's mother. "Change of plans, our son is being a teenager. How about we do dinner and a movie out instead? Just the two of us?" He waited for a reply, then broke out into a grin. "Great. It's a date."

---

"Tell me something kid," Burt said while he and Kurt did the dishes together that evening. He forced himself to be as casual as he possibly could given his conversation with Blaine earlier that day. "What's been going on with you and Blaine this week?"

Kurt looked up at him with surprise, his eyes wide with innocence. "Nothing," he assured his Dad.

"That's what I mean," Burt said, putting the dish towel down and leaning against the counter. He crossed his arms on his chest. "Why not? I mean, believe me, I'm certainly not telling you to rush into anything. But when love is staring you in the eye, you should at least look back." Kurt dropped his hands, and his eyes, from the sink and shrugged noncommittally. "You still scared?"

"Of Blaine? No," Kurt answered with certainty.

"You still don't trust him then?" Burt wondered, understanding if it were true.

But Kurt shook his head. "He made a mistake, but I know he's sorry and he loves me," he said, his voice low.

"Do you love him back?" Burt asked slowly. He'd told Blaine that he did and he believed with all his heart that Kurt did. But he'd been known to read his son wrong before. He truly hoped this wasn't one of those times, but he'd support Kurt in whatever he felt.

"You know I do," Kurt said quietly.

"Then what's stopping you?"

Kurt stared up at his dad. He'd been asking himself the same question all week. He kept coming up with different answers, but it all came down to one thing. "The risk," Kurt answered, his eyes wide and hopeful that his father would understand. Because he still wasn't sure that he did himself.

Burt was taken aback by Kurt's answer though. "Risk's never held you back before from anything you've wanted. You've put yourself on the line a hundred times Kurt. Little things, big things, solos, bullies, New York, college. Risk's never stopped you before."

"But this is the biggest thing Dad," Kurt answered before he even knew the words were out of his mouth.

"Love?" Burt asked.

"No," Kurt answered, shaking his head. "Forever."

Burt started to answer but didn't. Only the quiet whirr of the dishwasher filled the silence. Burt was certain that Blaine hadn't proposed yet, and though he wasn't so arrogant as to think he'd change the mind of a determined teenager, especially an Anderson, he certainly hoped that he'd at least put him off for a while. "It's dating Kurt, it's not forever," Burt told him.

"But it is," Kurt explained. "For him it is. He reads those soulmate romance novels and thinks it's us. He thinks we're destined to be together. "

"And you don't?" Burt asked him honestly.

Kurt paused, his eyes dropping. "I know forever sometimes isn't that long," Kurt whispered.

"Oh Kurt," Burt said as he pulled his son into a hug. Kurt clung to him, though he didn't cry.

"I just...I don't know if I can do it. I've had to deal with losing Mom and almost losing you twice now..." Kurt took a breath and pulled away. "But then I wonder, what the hell am I doing? If forever isn't long at all, why am I wasting the moments that I have alone and not with him. And then I worry that maybe there are other things I'm supposed to do, people I'm supposed to meet in the middle so I learn what I need to to make it to forever with Blaine. I thought with Adam it would be like that, but the truth is I just couldn't let Blaine go enough to really be there for him in any way." He sighed and sat down at the table running his fingers through his hair. "Why am I such a mess?" he asked, his eyes pleading up to his Dad.

"Because you're a teenager," Burt laughed and he sat down next to him. "And these are all the questions you're supposed to be asking and they are *good* questions, Kurt, they really are. And I know how Blaine feels about soulmates and destiny and all that, but you're the one who doesn't believe in that stuff so why get all flustered about it now?"

Kurt closed his eyes and shook his head. "I don't know. It's like wearing the right color, or putting the sugars in order or tapping my nose the right number of times at the right time of day. If I do it all right then things are okay and if I don't..."

"If you don't, then what?" Burt prompted.

"Then I lose the people I love. Maybe forever. And *that* forever is a really long time."

Burt reached over and grasped Kurt's hand. "You know what I learned when your Mom died? And when you brought Carol into my life? And when I woke from the coma and when the doctor said my cancer was in remission?" Kurt shook his head. "I learned that we really need to just live for the things we want in the world. Don't try to figure it all out like a puzzle, because maybe it's not one. Maybe the right thing is just to know what you want and go for it. Every day, choose what's right for today...and stop worrying about forever."

Kurt smiled softly, remembering the line from a song from a musical his mother used to play. "*I chose and my world was shaken. So what? The choice may have been mistaken, the choosing was not,*" he sang.

*"You have to move on," Burt continued, a softness falling to his face as they remembered Kurt's mom. "Look at what you want, not at where you are, not at what you'll be..."*

Kurt's smile broadened and he felt more at peace with everything than he had all week. He knew what he wanted and he wasn't afraid, because even if the choice ended up being wrong in the end, he knew that if he followed his heart than the choosing would be right. "Thanks Dad," he beamed, getting up then kissing him on the cheek.

"Oh, and Kurt," Burt called after him as he started up the stairs and he stopped to turn. "Maybe all that learning you're supposed to do? Maybe you and he are supposed to do it together?" he suggested, a brow raised perceptively.

Kurt smiled softly, a blush rushing to his cheeks though he wasn't even sure why. "Maybe," he answered quietly then ran up to his room. He changed into comfy clothes and curled up on his bed with his music and a good book.

He couldn't wait to see Blaine tomorrow.

## ***Chapter Twenty-Two : All or Nothing***

Kurt took Blaine's arm and walked down the McKinley hallway, a smile on his face, but disappointment in his heart. He'd been so sure that Blaine was going to ask him out that he was having a hard time even enjoying the request to stay for Regionals, which he'd been planning to do anyway.

"You had to know I was going to say yes," Kurt had said, urging him on, trying to give him the courage to ask. "It's going to be a wonderful week."

"With you in it, a wonderful life," Blaine had said.

But then nothing. Just a return to the choir room with more rehearsal of the Regionals set.

As the week went on, he knew Blaine was holding out something, and it was more than just the duet with Marley that Blaine had begged him not to sit it on. He couldn't put his finger on what exactly it was, which very likely meant a grand gesture on the scale of the Gap Attack, god help him. The sly little side eyes, the obvious silent conversations between Blaine, Tina and Sam, and the secret outings were starting to get Kurt on edge. But Kurt would wait for it, anxiously, and play it cool until it came.

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"What do you think of this one?" Blaine asked as he clicked on the Navy Titanium engagement ring with a princess cut blue sapphire and a strip of blue titanium. The first place he had looked for Kurt's ring was the Love and Pride website and though he searched all over, even at Tiffany's, he kept going back to that one ring.

Tina though seemed less than sold. "I don't know Blaine, don't you want to go to a real jewelry store and look through them in person?" she said doubtfully. "I mean, sure it looks great on the computer, but once it gets here it could be the worst ring ever and then where would you be?"

Blaine looked at her out of the corner of his eye and smirked. "You just want to come with me and try on rings yourself."

She shrugged with feigned innocence. "Probably the closest I'll ever get to an engagement ring for a very long time." She grabbed the mouse from his hand and closed out of the window. "Come on, I didn't come over just for you to stare at a computer full of rings for someone who is not me."



"Then what did you come over for?" Blaine teased, with a wiggle of his eyebrows.

"Cuddles and a movie," she said, pulling him on the bed. They sat against the headboard and he opened his arms for her. She cuddled into his side, feeling warm and loved. He reached for the remote and turned on the blue-ray, squeezing her tight. "You know I think you're crazy, right?" she teased him.

"Takes one to know one," he retorted with a smile and kissed her head. "That's why I love you."

---

Brittany fiddled with her iPod the whole flight home from Boston. Security had been extra tight at Logan Airport and everyone seemed on edge after the events of the weekend. The nervous energy matched her mood, though for a completely different reason. She had assumed that once the admissions team at MIT met her they would realize their mistake and laugh her out of the building. She had no idea that the numbers that had swam in her head since she was a little girl actually meant something, and now she wondered. Did everything that made sense to her and her alone really mean something? All these years that others had looked at her like she was simple or even crazy, was it really them who were simple? Were Santana and Sam really right all along? Was she really the smartest girl in the world?

The people at MIT scared her. After her interview she toured the campus and the other kids were so smart she felt really small. Her mind wandered to Kurt, the one person she knew that had likely felt that way before. She understood now what it must have been like for him, walking amongst a crowd of people who looked down on you as different. She loved him because he'd never let it bring him down. He'd built a wall around himself and fought hard and rose above it until he was accepted and loved. She'd have to do the same if she was going to do this.

If she was going to do this. She couldn't not. This was her chance to make a difference in the world, to be the unicorn Santana thought she was. This mattered, and she wanted to matter in the world.

If only she didn't have to leave her friends so soon. That part terrified her. But if she was going to do this, she'd need to grow a thick skin and be who MIT wanted her to be and let go of the friends she had because they wouldn't be going with her. As she got off the airplane and drove out of the airport she left the old Brittany behind. She was going to be alone in Boston, and it would be easier the sooner she started.

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*Kurt [7:05pm]: So how was your audition?!*

*Rachel [7:06pm]: I think it went great, but I wish you were here to sit with me. I'm freaking out waiting.*

*Kurt [7:08pm]: I'm sorry. I just wanted to spend more time with my Dad while I could.*

*Rachel [7:09pm]: That's not why you stayed and you know it.*

*Rachel [7:10pm]: Kurt?*

*Rachel [7:12pm]: Don't run away from this.*

*Kurt [7:13pm]: Is that what I'm doing?*

*Rachel [7:14pm]: I don't know Kurt, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!*

*Kurt [7:18pm]: Keeping my distance.*

*Rachel [7:19pm]: Look, you need to be honest with him. If you don't want to be with him...*

*Kurt [7:20pm]: ...?*

*Rachel [7:21pm]: ...!*

*Kurt [7:25pm]: Maybe I'm just playing hard to get?*

*Rachel [7:27pm]: To what end Kurt? He's already madly in love with you.*

*Rachel [7:27pm]: Don't be cruel.*

*Kurt [7:30pm]: I don't mean to be.*

*Kurt [7:33pm]: Am I being cruel?*

*Rachel [7:34pm]: I don't know, ARE YOU?*

*Kurt [7:37pm]: Honestly I don't know what I'm doing. I feel like I'm walking a tight rope and any way I turn I fall.*

*Rachel [7:40pm]: Well then I guess the only question is, do you want Blaine to be the one to catch you or not?*

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"I don't know what to do," Sam frowned, running his fingers through his hair. He'd tried talking to Brittany but she' been ignoring his calls and avoiding him at school. He glanced over at her, laughing at a lunch table with the other cheerios.

"You know what to do, dude, you just don't want to do it," Blaine pointed out, french fry in hand before popping it into his mouth.

"No. I don't need Santana coming to my rescue," Sam insisted.

"Well Brittany needs someone coming to her rescue," Tina smirked, chuckling under her breath. "Girl's gone crey crey."

"You would know all about that," Sam retorted. Tina stuck out her tongue at him.

"I thought you and Santana made up," Blaine said, stopping his friends before they went overboard. Though he was pretty sure Sam and "Tana hadn't talked since the shooting, the snarky comments from both of them about the other had stopped.

"Doesn't mean I need her help in my relationship," Sam argued. "I don't see you telling her anything about your plans with Kurt."

Blaine bit his lip, nervously fumbling with his phone. "There's nothing to tell."

"Buying him a ring and asking him out on a double date isn't something to tell?" Sam questioned with a brow raised.

"I didn't ask him out," Blaine mumbled with embarrassment. He couldn't even look at Tina. She was going to kill him for chickening out. "I just told him there was someone I wanted him to meet at Breadstix."

Tina stared gapingly at him. "How are you going to ask him to marry you if you can't even ask him on a date Blaine?" Tina snapped.

"How did we get on the subject of me and Kurt, I thought we were talking about Brittany," he quickly deflected and pocketed his phone before grabbing his lunch tray and standing. "Look Sam, this thing with Brittany, it isn't about your relationship. She went through a lot in Boston, and you know how you were after the shooting here, imagine going through it twice."

"I don't know," Sam said softly, staring at her across the room. "I don't think it's about that."

"I'm not saying you shouldn't try to talk to her yourself," Blaine said. "But if she won't talk to you, maybe she will talk to her best friend."

Sam looked at Blaine who shrugged knowingly before walking away. He knew Blaine wasn't telling him what to do. He also knew Blaine was absolutely right.

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Santana passed her money to the cashier and grabbed her coffee to go. Her conversation with Brittany was still rolling over in her mind. She wasn't at all surprised that Brittany had gone to such extremes with her friends. Losing the only people that had ever believed she was special to go to a place that wanted her for a gift she didn't understand was enough to drive anyway to the edge. Sometimes pushing friends away was easier than holding on. She turned to leave but her eye was pulled to the corner of the shop where a familiar head of gelled hair sat staring out the window.

And sometimes holding on for dear life was easier.

She made her way over, unnoticed by Blaine until she spoke. "So how did your date with twinkle toes and the grannies go?"

Blaine looked up and blinked. His face was worn and cheerless. "It wasn't a date," he clarified, his voice full of disappointment and a hint of anger. "We're not even a couple don't you know."

Santana scoffed and rolled her eyes. "Clearly."

"How did you know about it anyway?" he challenged, shuffling uncomfortably in his chair.

"You were at Breadstix Blaine. Not exactly the most clandestine of locations for a secret rendezvous in Lima," she said sitting down in the chair opposite him. "Besides, Sam told me where you were when I asked him," she shrugged.

"Remind me to stop telling Sam and Tina things," he grumbled, but there was a hint of a smile.

Santana took a sip of her latte, watching him for a moment as he simply traced his own lid with his finger. She sat back and crossed her arms. "Wanna tell me why I had to find out from Sam instead of you? You avoiding me?"

"I'm not avoiding you, you've been busy with Brittany," he lied, a fact that was not lost on Santana. She just stared him down and pointed to the imaginary third eye on her forehead. He rolled his eyes. "Fine, I've been avoiding you." She didn't need his admission though and she continued to suffer his silence waiting for the why. Finally he gave in. "I'm just sick of the naysayers Santana, and I can't take it from you too," he confessed with a sigh.

"See, now I'm confused. Because if you know Auntie Tana would say no to something, why on earth would you even consider doing it." He ignored the question and looked away, gazing distantly out the window again. "Blaine?"

"Because I'm passed caring what anyone thinks, okay?" Blaine shouted, eyes snapping back to her. "I don't even care what Kurt says at this point. If I don't take this chance I'll hate myself for the rest of my life. Even if he says no..." his voice trailed off knowing he had said too much.

Santana listened carefully and suddenly put what he'd said together with everything she knew about him. "Oh for the love of god, you're going to propose," she realized aloud.

"Please, Santana, get up and walk away if you're going to tell me not to," he said firmly.

He expected her to get up, but she simply took another sip of her latte then cradled it in her hands. "Tell me why," she said calmly.

Blaine looked at her. Her face was earnest, her eyes were inviting and he relaxed a bit for the first time since she'd sat down. "It's just...I just need to lay it all down on the table. I need him to know where I stand. That this...that *he* is it for me. There is no one else. Not Sebastian, not Eli, or Tina or Sam. It's only Kurt and will only ever be him...for as long as he'll have me.

"And if he says no?" Santana asked delicately.

"Then...I don't know." He looked down at the table then out the window again. "At least then I'll know I guess. I just know I can't keep going on like this. Wondering. Wishing. Hoping for a next time he'll let his walls down just for a moment."

Santana listened and nodded. "I can understand that."

He turned back to her, golden eyes full of emotion. "Do you think he'll say no?" he asked mournfully.

Santana smiled softly and grasped his hands in hers. She brought them to her lips and kissed them gently. "This is where I get up and walk away."

Blaine nodded, knowing her answer as he watched her leave. It didn't matter though. The ring was in his pocket and there was no turning back now. All or nothing was the Anderson way.

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Show circle done, Brittany had apologized, to everyone except for one. "Hey," Brittany called out to Kurt, stopping him in the choir room before he made his way back to the audience. He motioned for Santana to go ahead and glanced back at Brittany curiously. She clasped her hands together in front of her coyly. "I didn't forget you ya know. In the show circle I mean."

"Oh I didn't think that..." He waved his hand dismissively, smiling with fondness.

"I just didn't want anyone else to get a complex. I mean, I can't let Santana and Sam think they aren't as special as you," she smirked, then smiled warmly. "But you've been one of my best friends. And I know that when I'm at MIT and I'm scared because I'm so different, I can always call you and you'll make me feel magical again. You've been my unicorn for three years now, since the day you let me kiss you, and I've loved being your only girl."

"I love that you're my girl too, Britt," he said with a crooked grin.

"But you're not mine Kurt," she said seriously. "Not really. You belong to someone else." Kurt's eyes immediately flashed to Blaine, jumping up and down in the corner stretching his neck back and forth. "Did you know that when unicorns find their one true love, they mate for life?"

He heard her words and let them sink in, his heart tightening his chest. He let his gaze fall back on her.

"But he cheated..." Kurt started until Brittany cut him off.

"Never with his heart," Brittany told him. "And it's the heart of the unicorn that matters."

He looked back at Blaine who was watching him out of the corner of his eye. He wanted desperately to believe that was true. He was so sick of the doubt. "How do you know for sure when you've found them, Britt?" he whispered, trying to find the answers he'd been looking for in her eyes. They lit up and twinkled at him.

"Everyone knows you have, Kurt," she said, leaning in to kiss his cheek. "Everyone but you."

---

Kurt met his Dad in the lobby during intermission before New Directions took the stage. Mr. Anderson stood by Burt's side. "Good to see you Sir," Kurt greeted Blaine's father with a firm handshake. The two still were only cordial at best. Kurt wondered if they would ever truly come to terms with one another. "Blaine must be so pleased that you've come."

"It's about time," Burt teased, his eyes twinkling at the man.

Mr. Anderson nodded back at both Hummel men. "It is long overdue indeed," he agreed as the lights blinked. "We best get back to our seats. Good seeing you again Kurt," he said and he and Burt headed back to their seats.

Kurt made his own way back to where he'd been sitting early with Santana, Will and Emma. He took a seat behind Santana and leaned over. "Blaine's Dad is here," he whispered as the choir took the stage.

"Wow," Santana whispered back.

They said no more, the performance starting and Kurt watched, his eye always wandering to Blaine when he was on stage. It wasn't fair really. He'd been trying so hard to keep his heart safe, but it was Blaine the performer he'd fallen in love with in the first place and seeing him up there, so free and sure and *himself*, the walls he'd built around his heart that night so long ago in Battery Park started to break. And when Marley began their duet, they crumbled.

*I can't stay here  
I am not the girl who runs and hides  
Afraid of what could be*

What on earth was he doing? Playing games and hiding himself and his heart? That wasn't Kurt. He didn't run. Blaine and his father had both tried to tell him, but he hadn't been ready to listen, too frightened, too hurt. But now this song, sung by a girl he barely knew as if it were written for just for him, allowed him to accept what they couldn't. He couldn't play this game anymore.

*And, I will go there  
I need time, but know that things are always closer  
Than they seem  
Now I'll do more than dream.*

He knew what Blaine wanted and he wasn't ready yet. He needed more time. But if he closed his eyes and let all the fear and doubts go, he could see a forever with Blaine by his side. He opened his eyes and they fell on the boy he just could not deny that he loved. The boy that was ready to fly...with him.

*I'm gonna fly  
Gonna crash right through the sky  
Gonna touch the sun  
Show everyone  
That it's All or nothing  
All or nothing*

Blaine jumped off the platform, his eyes knowing exactly where Kurt was in the crowd. This was it, his moment to make him see. The theater may have been standing room only, but Blaine saw only one person in the audience. This was all or nothing.

*This is my life  
I'm not gonna live it twice  
There's no in-between  
Take it to extremes  
'Cause it's All or nothing*



*All or nothing  
Or nothing at all*

There would be no more waiting for others to be ready, for him to be older, for the world to decide that it was okay for him to love another boy. There wasn't time. The shooting had proven that. Burt had proven that. The Boston bombing had proven that. He had one life, one chance, and it was time to take it, no matter what happened.

*I can't give up  
Can't just let it burn  
And watch the fire  
A star that turned to dust*

A few rows back and to the right of Kurt, his father sat for the first time at one of his performances, next to Burt. It meant the world to him that he'd come to a competition, and it should have been enough but it wasn't. Because what would be the point if he had his father today but lost him tomorrow for the choices he'd made? Not to mention gaining Kurt's love at the expense of Burt's respect. No, he needed them both on his side. So he sang straight to them.

*And now, please don't judge me  
Take my hand and say  
You'll always wish me well  
And send me luck  
'Cause that would be enough,*

"Oh my god he's gonna do it," Burt exclaimed in hushed tones without thinking.

John Anderson turned to him. "What? He's gonna do what?"

Burt turned to John who was watching him, and he knew that Blaine hadn't shared his intentions with his father. He wouldn't tell Blaine's secrets, but neither would he stay silent. "Are you a poker player John?" he asked cryptically.

"I've been known to play, yes," John answered warily.

Burt shifted his eyes back to the stage, back to the remarkably stubborn boy who loved his son more than was probably good for him. He shook his head, let out a small chuckle and smiled with affection and a respect he just couldn't deny. "Well your son's about to go all in."

*I'm gonna fly  
Gonna crash right through the sky  
Gonna touch the sun  
Show everyone  
That it's  
All or nothing  
All or nothing*

John heard Burt's words and his gaze turned back to and never left his son. Blaine's mother had told him quite frequently just how talented a performer Blaine was, but seeing it in person was extraordinarily different, especially tonight. Blaine's charisma flowed from him into the audience, but the bright eyes that were full of life were full of hope tonight and aimed directly at one boy, whose gaze was firmly locked on Blaine despite himself.

*'Cause this is my life  
I'm not gonna live it twice  
There's no in-between  
Take it to extremes  
'Cause it's All or nothing  
All or nothing at all!*

*Nothing can stop us now  
There was never a shadow of doubt  
That I'm gonna fly  
Gonna crash right through the sky*

Kurt's heart ached with desire and fear and pride. No matter how he had ever felt about Blaine, even in the days when he had been so hurt and betrayed by him that it had been all he could do not to fight back, he'd never doubted that Blaine would fly. He wiped a tear from his eye knowing that there was ever a moment when he'd thought Blaine wouldn't be a part of his life. Watching him now, he couldn't imagine it. He was

beautiful and smart, incredibly talented and hopelessly romantic, and he loved Kurt with all his heart and Kurt refused to lose him again. He was ready to start over again. Life was too short not to.

*Gonna touch the sun*

*Show everyone*

*That it's all or nothing*

*All or nothing*

*'Cause this is my life*

*I'm not gonna live it twice*

*There's no in-between*

*Take it to extremes*

*'Cause it's all or nothing*

*All or nothing at all*

Blaine sang with all his heart, determination growing with every breath. Come what may, he was going to ask Kurt to marry him tonight.

*Cause it's all or nothing at all!*

---

Blaine high fived Sam one more time and swung Tina around before they all went to find their friends and family. When he'd learned his dad was coming, the nervous excitement he'd felt with Kurt in the audience and a ring in his pocket had increased tenfold. He stood on his toes, looking over the gathered crowd in the theater to find his father, a few feet from Kurt and Burt. He shoved his hands in his pockets and walked over, smiling the whole way.

"Hey, thanks for coming Dad," he beamed. "It really means a lot to me."

John grinned proudly. "I'm glad I did son, you were really incredible up there."

Blaine blushed modestly. "Well, I was only a little part of it. Everyone else did a lot more than me."

"Blaine, we're all headed back to the choir room," Sam called from the stage and Blaine could see him next to Artie holding the trophy in his lap.

Blaine smiled apologetically to his father. "I have to go Dad," he gestured behind him, "there's this thing..."

Before he could get away, John reached a hand out and grasped Blaine's. "Good luck son," he said, but his words seemed to carry a great weight.

Blaine squinted with uncertainty and gave a half smile. "Thanks, but Nationals is a long shot."

"I'm not talking about Nationals," his dad said and the stolen glance to Kurt told Blaine that his father somehow knew. He rolled the velvet box in his pocket absentmindedly over his fingers as the racing of his heart accelerated.

"You're..." he swallowed and took his hand away, wiping the sudden sweat on his pants. "You're not mad?" Blaine stammered, the fear of his father's disapproval and anger crystal clear on his face.

John's lips twitched and he shrugged. "You're an Anderson," John declared. "The Hummels can try to change us all they want, but we have to learn on our own. When we're ready."

Blaine nodded slowly, understanding that somehow, against all odds, his father had just given him his blessing to propose. "Thank you," Blaine whispered, choking up a bit. His father's support in this, after everything they had been through, meant more to him than anything.

Blaine caught Kurt's eye and they smiled at one another, small hesitant smiles that hid beneath them a flood of emotions, hopes and anticipation. Kurt walked over and placed a hand gently on Blaine's arm. "You ready?" he asked, indicating the choir room.

Blaine glanced back at his father. John nodded his approval before walking away. Blaine took a breath and turned back to Kurt with determination. "Ready as I'll ever be."

## ***Chapter Twenty-Three: Love, Love, Love***

Kurt watched the wedding ceremony, feeling Blaine's energy pouring off of him, but he didn't look, he couldn't. The forever he saw only minutes ago when Marley sang was right in front of his eyes and his heart beat furiously in his chest. He couldn't deny anymore that he loved Blaine and he couldn't deny anymore that he wanted *this*. His mind raced with excitement and fear as Ms. Pillsbury's vows rang in his ears to remain a permanent reminder of Blaine's unending belief in their love.

*And you make me feel whole again.*

*Just as I know that the sky is blue, I know that you and I are meant to be together.*

*You are my hero, you are my one true love, you are my inspiration.*

Blaine had told him to take his time. That he'd be there when he was ready. He hoped it was true, because he was ready now. He was through trying to put the puzzle together because when he was with Blaine the pieces all just fell into place. His father had urged him to choose what was right today and stop worrying about forever. So that's exactly what he was going to do.

*I remember and notice everything about you.*

*You only get one true love of your life, and you are mine.*

*And I promise you that, as long as you just keep being you, and let me love you,*

*I will be the happiest man alive*

Blaine held the box firmly in his hand throughout the wedding ceremony, imagining just how perfect his own could be. He understood that this was perfect for Ms. Pillsbury and Mr. Schue, but once upon a time he and Kurt had had much more magnificent plans, and he hoped that very soon they would again. As the couple kissed he slipped the ring out of his pocket and held it behind his back, watching Kurt watch them, blue eyes shining with delight.

But Kurt did not turn to him and he knew that now was not the time or place. This was their teachers' moment, not theirs, and Kurt deserved so much more for a proposal than to play second fiddle to a wedding. He deserved romance and nostalgia and an unbelievable performance, but most of all he deserved a proposal from his boyfriend, not just a friend.

He slipped the ring back in his pocket as thoughts and ideas flooded his head. First he had to get Kurt back for certain. After that, he would plan a proposal worthy of a fairy tale.

"Are you sure you don't want to come to the carnival with us tonight?" Blaine asked hopefully for the tenth time. "I didn't go last year and you didn't go this year-"

"You'll just have to win *me* a British stuffed animal this time," Kurt said, his eyes twinkling. "I'm thinking maybe a J.K Rowling rat or a little Prince George puppy." He sipped his Lima Bean coffee and realized he was out. "I'm sorry, but Dad and I can't change the tickets for tonight and I've been dying to see this show for ages with him. You want another for the road?" Kurt asked indicating Blaine's coffee.

Blaine nodded and Kurt took both their cups, trashing them and heading into the line. Blaine just smiled. He'd been right to wait. Things were so perfect this weekend. Flirty looks, quick plans for coffee in the morning or dinner before cuddling around the television at night watching their favorite reality show. Reminders of what had been and what could be again.

Kurt's phone rattled and rang at the table and he turned in line. "Blaine can you grab that?" Kurt called absentmindedly as the barrister asked for his order. "If it's my Dad tell him I'm leaving in a minute."

Blaine grabbed it quickly from the table but it wasn't Burt. He stared, mesmerized by the picture, wondering for a moment if he'd think the guy was attractive were circumstances different. He looked tall, like Sebastian, but innocent with floppy blonde hair, and a doe-eyed little pout. His hand flew to his own hair. *Maybe he really should stop gelling*, he thought fleetingly, before Kurt put two coffees down and took the now silent phone from Blaine's hand.

"It was Adam," Blaine said softly, a monotone of unsurety to his voice. He looked at Kurt, trying not to give into his falling heart. "I thought you broke up with him."

"What?" Kurt said, watching him curiously. He didn't like that look in Blaine's eye. "I did, Blaine, we're just friends."

"Friends like you and I are friends, or friends like..." Blaine forced a casual smile, his eyebrow raised in question.

Kurt opened his mouth then closed it, his forehead creased. He tilted his head. He'd thought he'd been making things pretty clear this weekend. "Seriously Blaine?"

"Seriously Kurt." Blaine tried not to accuse, he didn't want to be out of line, but he also knew Kurt very well. "Did you really break up with him? Because you didn't really break up with me," he carefully reminded him.

Kurt's face fell as he thought back to his and Adam's last conversation and realized that Blaine might have a point. "Shit," he swore and he looked apologetically at Blaine. Blaine shook his head and couldn't help but laugh. The two of them would fumble through romance the rest of their lives. He just hoped they would do it together. He grabbed his keys and his coffee and got up. Kurt slung his bag over his shoulder and followed him out, heading for their cars. "I'll call him on my drive home, I promise. I'll meet you for lunch tomorrow, okay? In the courtyard? Ask me again then."

They stopped at their cars and Blaine shook his head and opened the door for him, feeling like a jealous boyfriend. "Kurt, you don't have to-" Kurt's hand on his shut him up.

"Ask me again tomorrow," Kurt insisted, the door between him and Blaine. "Please?"

"Okay," Blaine nodded his agreement, his eyes closing until he felt a soft kiss on his cheek. His lids fluttered open and he smiled. "You sure you don't want to come to Glee this afternoon? I'm sure everyone would love to have you."

"No, I have something else I need to do." Kurt was grinning at him, eyes shining bright in the sunlight. "I'll see you tomorrow." Kurt promised and he got into the car.

Blaine closed the door. "It's a date," he whispered.

---

The credits to *Moulin Rouge* played in the background and both boys sniffled, pretending not to wipe away their tears. Blaine snuggled into Kurt's chest, breathing in his scent because he knew all too soon he would be gone again. Kurt squeezed him tight, not wanting the day to be over.

"I don't want to go," Blaine pouted, circling his finger on Kurt's chest.

"Then stay," Kurt breathed.

They lay there in silence, soaking it in for as long as they could. "Today was perfect, Kurt." Blaine smiled softly as he remembered. "The picnic, the band, the song,-"

"The kiss," Kurt smirked.

"Definitely the kiss," Blaine agreed as he looked up at Kurt. "Being boyfriends again," he grinned. *Boyfriends*, he repeated in his head. "And this. I don't ever want to move from this spot."

"You might need to use the bathroom eventually, boyfriend." Kurt's brow arched playfully. "And if you don't, I will. Or food. We'll need food."

Blaine shook his head, eyes shining. "I don't need anything but you."

Kurt leaned down and kissed him, soft at first, his hand running through Blaine's hair, then deeper, pressing Blaine's lips into his. He tasted him on his tongue and realized Blaine was right, he did not need food or even air, all he truly needed was this. He reached a hand down, playing at the top of Blaine's mustard pants, pulling his shirt out and running a finger along the skin beneath the waistband. At the loosening of his belt, Blaine's kiss grew heated and needy before pulling away, breathless and panting.

"Kurt, we can't...it's a school night," he protested.

Kurt bit his lip impishly, watching Blaine as he pulled the belt free and expertly flicked the button open. Blaine's eyes rolled back in his head before they closed, groaning desperately above him. The sound was like music to Kurt's ears and he flipped Blaine over, staring down at him wickedly. "Then I guess I'll have to teach you something new."

---

"You coming Blaine?" Sam asked as the rest of New Directions headed out the doors of Dalton. Everything had been arranged and planned, Trent assuring him the head master was on board.

"No, I'm gonna hang out here for a bit before I meet my dad for dinner," Blaine answered. "I'll see you tomorrow." Sam nodded and started up the stairs when Blaine called out. "Oh and Sam?" Sam turned and Blaine smiled. "Thank you. For everything."

"That's what a Best Man is for, right?" Sam said with a grin.



Blaine chuckled and lowered his eyes with gratitude. He was so lucky to have Sam. "Yes it is."

Most of the Warblers had gone about their business, back to dorms or the cafeterias or the library. Nostalgia washed over him as he looked around, his eyes falling on the chapel gardens where he'd spent so much time while he was here. Despite everything he'd been through with Dalton the last two years, there was nowhere else he'd rather propose to Kurt. Their love had begun here, held close to his heart at first, too afraid of the consequences to admit the truth until he could no longer deny it. And no matter what the Warblers had done, they had been the ones to make him see that truth. Well, one at least.

"Best Man, huh?" Nick said softly, coming up to stand beside Blaine, both staring out onto the grounds where they had shared so many memories. "Sam's gonna be a good one I think. I just always imagined it would be me." Blaine looked at him, but Nick kept his eyes out the window. "I guess I blew that one."

"You didn't blow it, Nick," Blaine assured him but Nick's scoff said he thought otherwise. "We grew apart. That's all. I left, our teams were rivals. It's only natural. Nothing could change the fact that you were still one of the most important people in my life and I can't imagine getting married without you there. I wouldn't even be where I am today without you."

Nick turned to him, sad and happy all at once. "So you're really gonna take the plunge, huh?" he asked. "Not that I'm surprised, but you think Kurt's going to say yes?"

"Won't know unless I ask, right?" Blaine said. He turned around and his eyes fell on Sebastian, talking to John quietly in the corner. "I'm really surprised *he* said yes though."

Nick followed Blaine's gaze. "He's really changed Blaine. We all have. What happened with Hunter, it was out of control. I think we all wish we could go back and undo it, but life doesn't work that way." Blaine nodded, understanding that better than anyone. Sebastian glanced over and caught Blaine's eye. It was only a second before he turned away, but he could not hide the flood of regret. Nick sighed. "He really did love you, ya know. Had a horrible way of showing it, but he did. Still does probably."

"Excuse me," Blaine said. He knew Nick's words were true. It was clear as day in Sebastian's eyes. As he drew closer, John placed a hand on Sebastian's shoulder and walked away, leaving him in the corner, a bit like a lost puppy. Blaine rested his back against the wall next to him, avoiding his gaze. "I just wanted to thank you Seb." Blaine's voice was soft and sincere. "For agreeing to do this. I know it can't be easy."

Sebastian shrugged, his arms crossed across his chest, studying the ground. "Yeah well, it's the least I could do. Besides, how could I pass up the chance of being front and center if Hummel says no?" Blaine chuckled, knowing too well how Sebastian hid his pain, but they grew quiet again quickly, more emotion between them than either cared to admit at times. Sebastian could still feel Blaine's arms around him, the warmth of that first and probably last hug still humming on his skin. "Do you ever think maybe...in another time...another place...?" He risked a glance to see Blaine's eyes fill with compassion.

"Sebastian," Blaine started gently, withholding his urge to take Sebastian's hand. "I think no matter the time or the place, even if you and I were together for a time, my story always ends with Kurt."

"Yeah I suppose," Sebastian muttered, rolling his eyes. "You two will be very happy together."

"He's out there Sebastian," Blaine told him and this time he did take his hand. "I think he's just as lost and confused as you but he's out there looking for you. And when he finds you, he is going to love you so damn much."

Sebastian looked down to their hands, then back at Blaine. "You really think so?"

"I know so," Blaine nodded and squeezed his hand. "When you least expect it, Sebastian, you'll turn around and there he will be. And suddenly the pieces of your life will fall into place and everything will finally make sense."

---

"Do you remember when Dad asked you to marry him?" Blaine's mother's hand stopped in his hair and he turned to look up at her. "You don't have to answer that."

"Do you really think I'm so old that I would forget that?" she teased.

"No I don't think you're old at all," Blaine laughed and turned to face her, crossing his legs beneath him on the couch. The show they were watching was forgotten in the background. "So what was it like?"

Amy lowered her eyes, a shy smile crossing her lips. "Your father had gotten back from Lebanon about two months before. We were just settling in to some sense of normalcy for us. I was in college while he was away, keeping busy more than anything. But I came home late one night after a really bad day. He was already in bed. I felt so tired and defeated and I hadn't done a really good job at making friends at school. I

curled up into bed and starting crying that no one loved me." Blaine watched his Mom carefully. It was hard to imagine her just a kid, before even Cooper had been born. "He gave me a hug and told me to wait there and then he slipped out of bed. He opened one of his dresser drawers and pulled out a box. Before I could even really panic he told me that he loved me and asked me to marry him."

"Wow. That's so...anti-climatic," Blaine frowned.

"Your father isn't the showman that you are Blaine," she reminded him. "He'd bought the ring about a week earlier. He'd been planning a romantic dinner or something, but he just thought I was feeling so down and unloved, he wanted me to know that no matter what he'd always be there to love me. Sure it lacked romance, but it was really a very sweet thing to do. He didn't even get to ask my father for permission before he did it. We called the next morning. He pretended he hadn't asked yet. I had to stop myself from laughing."

"And Dad always claims to be such a traditionalist," Blaine smirked and shook his head. Then he suddenly grew serious. "Do you ever regret saying yes?"

"Never," she said and took Blaine back in her arms. "I have two amazing sons I never would have had without him. And I have been blessed to watch your father grow into a man I can be proud of. Marriage isn't easy Blaine. It may not even always be good. Your father and I went through really bad years together, as you are way more aware than I wish you were. But we did it together because no matter what I always loved him." He pulled back and she brushed the hair from his eyes. "You're gonna do it, aren't you? Ask Kurt to marry you?" Blaine nodded. "He's the one?"

"You know he is," Blaine smiled.

"Then whatever you do, whatever you say, it's going to be perfect. Because it comes from your heart."

He looked at her surprised. "You don't think I'm too young?" he asked.

"I think you have one of the biggest hearts I know, you respect other people, you know what it's like to be hurt and to hurt someone else and you don't ever want to do that again." Blaine bit his lip, his eyes watering at his mother's words. "I think you're going to make an incredible husband. And Kurt will be a very lucky man."

"No. I would be the lucky one," Blaine corrected her and kissed her on the cheek. "Thanks Mom."

"Goodnight sweetheart. And good luck."

---

Blaine shoved his hands in his pockets walking into Hummel Tires and Lube. A brief appraisal of the shop found Burt in his office and Kurt nowhere to be seen, but that didn't mean he wasn't around. He walked quickly to the office and snuck his head in. "Um, Burt?"

Burt looked up surprised. "See Kid, now I get nervous when you call me Burt instead of Sir," he teased.

"Is Kurt here?" Blaine whispered, his eyes darting.

"No, he's out shopping with Carole before he goes back to NY. For her, not him. He wouldn't be caught dead in Ohio clothes in New York City." Blaine chuckled and relaxed. Then he remembered why he was here and his shoulders tightened again. Burt's eyebrow quirked. "So what can I do for you Blaine?"

"I um..." Now that he was here the plan seemed utterly ridiculous and nothing that Burt would agree to. But it was too late now to back out. The worst Burt could say was no and then he'd just have to figure something else out. "I was wondering if Kurt's flight tomorrow could be changed? To later, or even the next day?"

Burt smirked and sat back in his chair, arms folded. "Dare I ask why?"

Blaine squared his shoulders. Whatever Burt thought, this was his life. His decision. He didn't truly need Burt's permission. After all, his father hadn't really gotten his grandfather's. "I know you don't think it's a good idea, but I am going to ask Kurt to marry me."

Burt nodded, silent and pensive. He let Blaine sweat for a good two minutes at least before he said, "And you need Kurt's flight changed for this?"

Blaine blushed. He averted his eyes. Burt would think he was crazy for everything he had planned. "I just think it would be great if you could pretend you're bringing him to the airport but bring him to Dalton instead."

"Dalton, huh?"

"Yes Sir." Blaine chanced a glance. He almost thought Burt was hiding a smile. "Back to the start."

Burt nodded and stood up, turning away from Blaine in thought. Blaine's heart would not stop racing and his hands were sweaty. He quickly wiped them on his pants. He hoped Burt would help despite his misgivings.

"His flight was scheduled for 5," Burt finally said. "So we'll be at Dalton around 3."

Blaine blinked and took a breath in. "You're not going to try and stop me?"

"I don't play games I know I'm going to lose. I told you what I thought, but in the end it's not my decision to make," Burt said. He walked over to Blaine and reached a hand out. Blaine shook it gratefully. "I wish you luck kid, I really do."

"Thank you," Blaine breathed and he didn't just mean for this. "Thank you for being the father I didn't have. For Kurt and for me."

Burt smiled and pulled him in for a hug. "You're welcome son."

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*Blaine to Rachel [4:21pm]: I'm going to propose to Kurt tomorrow and I know its last minute but I think he'd never forgive me if his best friend wasn't here to see it. So please tell me you can come? 2pm at Dalton.*

*Rachel to Blaine [5:03pm]: SQUEEEEE! Sorry that was delayed, Santana and I were singing to a couple of Broadway bigwigs at work and my career was on the line. Oh, and she's pissed you didn't text her.*

*Blaine to Rachel [5:05pm]: Damn. How pissed? I wanted to know if you were coming first.*

*Rachel to Blaine [5:07pm]: Of course I am you idiot, I wouldn't miss Kurt's engagement for the world! Santana says she's not coming though.*

*Rachel to Blaine [5:08pm]: Because you didn't text her. Not because she doesn't approve. Which she doesn't, but that's not the point she says.*

*Santana to Blaine [5:09pm]: That is NOT what I said, but I don't even know why I'm texting you because you clearly don't want me there.*

*Blaine to Santana [5:10pm]: It's not that I don't want you here, you know I do.*

*Blaine to Santana [5:12pm]: I was just afraid of what you'd say, so I wanted to hear what Rachel had to say first.*

*Santana to Blaine [5:13pm]: Since when are you afraid of me?*

*Blaine to Santana [5:14pm]: Since ALWAYS!*

*Blaine to Santana [5:15pm]: So...*

*Santana to Blaine [5:18pm]: Rachel's getting me a ticket.*

*Santana to Blaine [5:19pm]: If you seriously think I would let you propose to Kurt without me there than you don't know me at all. Since when have I ever needed an invitation to anything?*

*Blaine to Santana [5:20pm]: I love you.*

*Santana to Blaine [5:21pm]: I love you too, Boyfriend.*

*Santana to Blaine [5:22pm]: But next time you text me first, or I will give you something to be afraid of.*

*Blaine to Santana [5:23pm]: Yes Ma'am.*

---

Kurt packed his bags with a heavy heart. It was always bittersweet leaving, but the last few times had been tempered with a sense of relief. This time there was none of that. He had only a sense of longing, a wish that he didn't have to go so soon after they had only just begun again.

"What do you think you're gonna wear on the plane?"

Blaine sat on his bed, cross legged and adorable as ever, and how exactly had he gone so long trying not to love him?

Kurt shrugged as he folded his summer clothes carefully. "I hadn't really thought about it. Probably just jeans and a hoodie."

"Remember the first time you went?" Blaine asked excitedly. "Dressed to impress? *Never know who you might meet on a flight to the city that never sleeps*, you told me. *There must be at least one hot shot producer or director who fled the banality of Ohio.*"

"I remember," he said slowly, tilting his head with suspicion. Blaine should be crying. Clinging. Waxing poetic about being soulmates and one true loves and promising to stay faithful and planning daily phone calls. But instead he was worried about Kurt's outfit. "But I kind of got over that once I realized that greatness rarely travels in coach. "

"But *you* travel in coach," Blaine said sliding off the bed and approaching with a playful grin. Kurt smiled back as Blaine's arms enveloped him. Blaine's voice dropped to a whisper. A very seductive whisper. "And you are the greatest person I know."

Blaine kissed him, warm and full of passion but while it was absolutely everything Kurt could want there was something in it missing. Something he couldn't quite put his finger on.

"Are you sure you can't come to the airport with us tomorrow?" Kurt asked, holding him close. "I know Dad wouldn't mind."

Blaine frowned. "I'm sorry Kurt, I wish I could. But Glee club's doing this performance and I'm singing lead and I just can't let them down. I promise I'll make it up to you though next time I see you."

"I'll make sure you do," Kurt smirked and kissed him again, hoping this time he could figure out what was missing but it continued to elude him.

"I can't wait," Blaine sighed and his eyes sparkled with mischief and it felt like one more puzzle piece and...Kurt shook his head. He was looking for something where there was nothing.

Blaine looked at the time. "I should be going," he said with a pout. "Walk me out?"

They made their way to the front door, hand in hand where their hands belonged. Outside it was a beautiful night, the stars shining bright in the sky. It was the one thing Kurt missed in NY. Well, one of the things he missed.

Blaine followed Kurt's gaze. "Wish on a star while you can Kurt. You never know when your dreams might come true."

"Ah but does wishing make it so?" Kurt challenged.

"No," Blaine answered. "Wishing makes it magical."

They closed their eyes, their thoughts their own, and when Kurt opened his eyes Blaine was staring at him, lips turned up in a smirk. "What?" Kurt asked self consciously.

"You are absolutely beautiful." Blaine's voice was hushed, a purr on the whisper of the wind and he stepped in close. "And I'm just so grateful that you're mine again."

Kurt blushed beneath the shadow of darkness and ducked his head. "And you say you're not a romantic."

"Well maybe I'm learning." Blaine's eye danced in the moonlight and Kurt couldn't help but kiss him.

"I hate going back to missing you," Kurt whispered against his lips.

"You never stopped missing me," Blaine accused and Kurt had to concede that he was right. "But don't miss me too much. I'll see you sooner than you know."

Blaine kissed him again quickly then bounded away to the car leaving Kurt dumbfounded. He continued to stare as Blaine pulled away, the headlights disappearing down the street and it suddenly hit him.

Desperation. Goodbye. That's what was missing from each kiss. Because this wasn't goodbye. Not yet.

The whole week there had been no grand gesture. Just little things. A door held open here. A hand on his back there. He'd stolen Blaine's thunder in the courtyard and that would never do.

Blaine hated when Kurt won.



And he'd said it before, he'd always known, that saying yes to being boyfriends led to the question of forever.

He'd just been hoping that Blaine would give him at least a little time to settle in first. But he should have known better. Blaine had warned him in his own way. It was all or nothing.

Kurt ran back inside, his heart racing, and grabbed his phone, texting the one person he could always count on to spill a well kept secret.

*Kurt to Tina [10:21pm]: Tell me what Blaine is planning now Tina Cohen-Chang.*

*Tina to Kurt [10:25pm] I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about. ;-)*

He flopped on his bed in a huff. Then ran for his closet. *Dress for greatness*, Blaine had said. But what did he possibly have that was great enough for the most wonderful, exhilarating, terrifying moment of his entire life? The moment that he'd dreamt about forever. The moment he had absolutely no idea if he was ready for. Nothing but Tom Ford would do and he pulled it out of the back of his closet to steam.

He crossed the room to his mother's jewelry box and opened it, her scent wafting out at him even after all these years, filling him with a sense of peace as it always did. He knew exactly what he wanted and he pulled out her vintage sterling silver lily flower heart. He pinned it to the pocket of his blazer.

If he was right, if Blaine planned to propose, she would be with him. And she would help him choose.

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"Sam, you need to make sure that the Warblers don't side step at the wrong time. Artie, the deaf choir is standing in the wrong spot at the end and Vocal Adrenaline is trying to steal the spotlight." Blaine had been running around driving everyone crazy for the past hour trying to get everything exactly right. He forced them to run through the number over and over to make it nothing short of perfect. "Everything needs to be precise!"

Sam and Artie were both about to jump down Blaine's throat when the doors flung open and a voice rang out saving them all. "Santana Lopez has arrived, let the proposal begin!"

"Oh thank god you're here!" Blaine and Sam both yelled at the sight of her. Blaine rushed toward her falling into her arms while Sam embraced her from behind.

"He's driving us nuts please take him away," Sam whispered in her ear. Santana shrugged him off with a look of disgust, but Rachel overheard and took charge immediately.

"Alright. Sam, Artie and I have got this covered. Santana, you deal with Blaine," she barked before grabbing Sam by the hand and leading him out to do the job he'd been doing all afternoon. Sam rolled his eyes at Artie. They were trading one dictator for another.

As the rest left the pair alone, Santana took a step back, eyeing him up and down. "Well aren't you just a giant ball of sunshine," she sneered. "I should have brought my shades for this thing."

Blaine's eyes grew wide with panic. "Oh my god is it too much?" He fussed with his jacket and his bowtie. "It's too much. I need to go home and change." He started to bolt for the nearest exit but Santana grabbed his hand.

"Okay, down boy," she said dragging him to a small room just off the entryway. "Just because I wouldn't be caught dead marrying someone with a closet inspired by condiments doesn't mean that Kurt will say no." She closed the door behind them and sat him on a small bench by the wall. "Sit. Stay. Good boy," she said with a grin, patting his head.

Blaine glared up at her. "I'm not a dog 'Tana."

"Well then take a breath and stop acting like an excited little puppy before you pee on the rug."

Blaine shot her one last glower before doing exactly what he was told and taking a breath. His hands still shook but his racing heart slowed a bit. "I just want everything to be perfect."

"Well it's not going to be," Santana said and sat down next to him. Blaine went to protest but she took his hand before he could speak. "You're not perfect and Kurt's not perfect and all those people who've agreed to help you are not perfect. Marriage isn't perfect and life isn't perfect and all of that is okay. Because all the imperfections just prove that you can make mistakes, big ones and small ones, and he will always forgive you just like you will always forgive him and life will go on. The song says all you need is love, not all you need is perfect."

Blaine met her eyes, so full of warmth, and all his fears drifted away. "You're right."

"Well of course I'm right, I'm as close to perfect as it gets," she shrugged. "Now sit here and relax and I will go make sure that Berry and Trouty Mouth don't screw up your big day. We'll come get you when Kurt arrives."

"Thanks Santana," Blaine said.

"Anything for you," she winked and headed for the door before turning around again. "Oh and Blaine?" He looked back up at her. She smiled softly. "He'd be a fool to say no."

---

The noise around them was deafening and Blaine didn't care, he was so lost in Kurt's kiss, in Kurt's arms, in the desire for Kurt's, *his fiancé's*, everything, that he didn't even notice the Colonel step to the bottom of the stairs. Kurt saw him first over Blaine's shoulder, and pulled back slightly. Blaine turned to find his father staring up at them. He smiled down, nervous but hopeful. Kurt's grip slid down into his hand.

"I didn't know you were coming," Blaine said cautiously.

"Well thankfully Burt didn't think I'd want to miss my son's proposal. I think Cooper's gonna have a very hard time topping you on this one Blaine," he teased.

Blaine laughed. "Well hopefully someone recorded it so he can see it in all its glory."

"I'm sure it'll be up on YouTube within the hour." He reached a hand to the railing, but pulled away quickly as though it burned him. His eyes fell on Kurt, then dipped to the stairs. "Kurt." Kurt looked to his Dad who nodded encouragingly for him to listen. Like it or not the man would be his future father-in-law. The Colonel raised his eyes and Kurt studied them. It had been a long time since they'd truly looked at one another. His eyes looked different. Softer. They looked like Blaine's.

"Kurt, we met on a staircase too," the Colonel began, bringing them both back to that fateful evening when everything changed. "You stood beneath me then. At least I thought you did. But you knocked me to the floor that night. You were stronger in that moment than I ever was."

Kurt's breath hitched at the words and Blaine squeezed his hand tight, swallowing his own emotions that rose in his chest.

The Colonel took a breath and continued. "When you reached out for my son's hand that day, I was so angry at you for leading him away from me. I blamed you for losing him. But I know now that losing him was no one's fault but mine, and that you were the one who led him back to me." He took one step up, tentative at first, and then another. Blaine's eyes gleamed with happy tears, his father's words more than anything he could have imagined. "And now I can stand side by side with him and he does not flinch or pull away. Kurt, you taught us both so much. You have loved him so much more than I could show. You have given him everything I..." he paused and looked to Amy, who smiled and nodded and encouragingly. "...we didn't. Kurt, I am truly sorry for everything I said or did to hurt you. If you can forgive me, I would be so proud to call you an Anderson and even more so a son." He reached out for Amy's hand and she stepped proudly to his side. "We both would."

Kurt wiped away his tears, emotions flooding him. He heard Blaine sniffle beside him and his heart swelled even more.

"What do you say, Kurt?" Blaine whispered, his voice choked with emotion. "I understand if you don't-"

"Yes," Kurt said, nodding his head. "If I taught Blaine how to love, than he has taught me how to forgive. And if Blaine is my family, than you are too. I'd be proud to be an Anderson." Kurt wiped the tears from Blaine's eyes and cupped his cheek. "I love you so very much," he said softly.

"I love you too," Blaine breathed. "For all eternity."

## ***Chapter Twenty-Four: Tina in the Sky***

It had been a long night of celebration at the Anderson house. His parents had invited both New Directions and the Warblers back to the house, managing to put together an impromptu catered engagement party with less than an hour's notice. Blaine had to stop and pinch himself numerous times throughout the evening, unable to believe that any of it was true. Kurt saying yes. His father accepting Kurt. It was all like a dream that he felt certain he was going to wake up from and find himself still waiting for Kurt to forgive him, still waiting for his father to change.

"It's not a dream," Kurt whispered in his ear, his hand sliding into his grasp. They turned quietly in the corner of the room and just watched. Almost everyone they loved was there. Carole and Amy were in the kitchen making sure that all the guests had everything they needed and then some. Burt and the Colonel were arguing about football and beer. Santana and Rachel were catching up with their friends and making new ones of the Warblers they hadn't met before. It was absolutely beautiful.

"Well if it is a dream then I don't want to wake up," Blaine said. Kurt smiled his agreement and rested his head on Blaine's shoulder.

The guests started making their way out around 11, Kurt making plans to meet Rachel and Santana at the gate bright and early the next day. They offered him a bed in their airport motel, but there was no shock he declined. Kurt would stay the night here and Blaine would drive him to the airport in the morning.

"Make sure you get on that plane," Burt warned him with a knowing glance and a hug goodbye. "I'm not sure I can change the flight again."

"I will Dad," Kurt promised. "Love you."

They said goodbye to everyone else and made their way hand in hand upstairs. "I'm going to admit, it feels very weird being here like this. All that history with your Dad, and now here we are. With his blessing? Is it bad that I'm kind of waiting for the next shoe to drop?"

"No, I think it's natural. It's still weird for me too, and I've had more time to get used to it," Blaine said. "But I think it's real, Kurt. And I wouldn't change it for the world." They went to the guest room to make the bed up for Kurt. Together they slipped new fitted sheets on the mattress and cases onto the pillows. They threw flirty smiles and winks across the bed mixed in with shy glances. Kurt's ring gleamed every

once in a while when it hit the light right. Once the blanket was laid out and ready, Blaine knelt up on the bed, Kurt following suit, and they scooted toward one another to meet in the middle. Blaine's arms linked around Kurt's waist. Kurt draped his arms over Blaine's shoulders.

"Hello, fiancé," Blaine giggled, giddy with exhaustion and the excitement of the day.

"Well hello there," Kurt smirked, his eyes dancing along with Blaine's. "Fancy meeting you here."

"I wish I could stay," Blaine pouted, pulling him even closer toward him.

"I think that would be pushing our luck for sure," Kurt said and Blaine knew he was right. "Besides, we both have brothers to call back no doubt."

"No doubt," Blaine said and his lips turned back up into grin. He leaned in and kissed Kurt, taking it slow, no rush to leave. Cooper could wait. The only thing that mattered now were Kurt's lips, deliciously soft, Kurt's hands, expertly roaming, and Kurt's body pressed against him with a warmth that would forever make him feel like he belonged somewhere and nowhere else mattered.

When his heart raced with an all too familiar quickness, he pulled back. "We better stop," Blaine muttered, not wanting to at all but knowing if they stayed together another moment it would be too late.

Kurt sighed and pulled away. "Maybe we should have gone to the motel with the girls," he complained breathing heavily.

"They may be our best friends, but I'm no more comfortable having sex in the same room as them as I am here at my father's house." Blaine kissed him once more quickly, then reluctantly retreated to the door. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Maybe we can manage a farewell quickie in the car?" Kurt asked with a quirk of his brow. "Or a nearby field of lilacs?"

Blaine laughed and fell in love all over again. He hoped it would be like that his entire life. "I'll be sure to reset my alarm."

They got to the airport with time to spare, grateful that Santana was meeting Kurt inside and not outside because with the flush of their cheeks and the smiles that would not fade, Kurt was pretty certain their detour was obvious.

They parked outside the gate, sitting in silence a moment. Joy turned to sadness as the clock ticked forward. Kurt hated the feeling, but in a way it felt far more right than how it had two nights ago. Blaine leaned over to kiss him and this time it was full, so full of passion and love and longing and the ache of loneliness but the joy of forever. The flutter of damp eyelashes on his skin made Kurt shiver as his heart filled to capacity and then some. Kurt pulled away but barely, resting his forehead on Blaine's, his face cupped in strong fingers as their breath still mingled as one.

"This is why I shouldn't let you drive me to the airport," Kurt breathed, his eyes still closed not wanting to see the truth. "I don't think I can go."

"Of course you can," Blaine said and they both knew he was right. Kurt's heart may be here but his life was in New York and soon enough Blaine would join him. "I'll see you soon. I promise."

Blaine took Kurt's hand and twirled the ring around his finger for a minute, both smiling down. "Maybe I should get you one too," Kurt smiled and looked up. His eyes twinkled with delight.

"I would wear it proudly," Blaine said. And kissed him once more. "Now go, or you're gonna miss your flight."

Kurt got out of the car and grabbed his bags from the trunk. Blaine rolled down his window and Kurt leaned inside. "Don't have too much fun without me," he grinned and gave Blaine one last kiss before heading inside the airport.

He made it through airport security without too much hassle, grateful the scary woman at the gate did not decide she needed to spice up her life by patting him down. Rachel and Santana waved as soon as they spotted him and he jogged over. Santana eyed him up and down.

"Well at least you're late for good reason," she smirked. Kurt balked immediately but it only took her reaching a hand out to pluck a lilac from his vest for him to close his mouth. "Good for you guys," she grinned.

Kurt blushed but shrugged it away. "I'm coffee-less though," he frowned and Rachel immediately reached over to the table beside her and handed over a to-go mug. "Bless you," he sighed and took a sip. It was perfect. "I knew there was a reason I kept you around."

"It's certainly not for all the fashionable accessories she adds to your wardrobe," Santana sneered. Her phone buzzed in her pocket and she took it out. She let a quiet chuckle escape, glancing at Kurt, then typed an answer.

"What?" he asked, eyeing her suspiciously.

"Nothing," Santana said airily. "Blaine just wanted to make sure you were okay."

His eyes narrowed. "And what did you tell him?"

"I told him you were fine now that you were drowning your sorrows making out with the smokin' hot flight attendant," she said innocently.

Kurt reached over Rachel and nearly clawed at her phone to get it. It buzzed in his hand.

*To Santana from Blaine [8:37am]: How is Kurt? Is he okay?*

*To Blaine from Santana [8:38am]: He's better than you I'm sure, you blubbering fool. I'm fine too, thanks for asking. And make sure you pick the lilacs off of your clothes before you go home. ;-)*

*To Santana from Blaine [8:40]: I am not a blubbering fool. I just miss him already. Take care of him okay?*

Kurt smiled and typed his own response.

*To Blaine from Santana [8:44am]: I miss you already too. And you're not a fool. Just sentimental. And romantic. And adorable. And I love you. ~ Kurt*

"Am I going to throw up from the sickening sweetness in my phone," Santana groaned.

*To Santana and Kurt from Blaine [8:45]: And I love you. And you too 'Tana. And Rachel. Have a safe flight.*



"Blaine loves you Rachel," Kurt shared as he handed the phone back to Santana. "But you still can't have him. Either of you. He's still all mine." Kurt's heart skipped a beat and he froze. Reality sunk in for the first time since yesterday and he looked down at the ring on his finger. "Oh my god, he's all mine."

Santana raised her coffee in a toast with a devilish smile on her face. "May God have mercy on your soul, Hummel."

---

Blaine arrived in the choir room a few minutes early, his fingers itching to play. Not The Beatles. Something romantic and classical, maybe a little melancholy. Something that sounded the way his heart felt.

He sat down on the bench and ran his hands along the keys. As the other sauntered in, his fingers danced, his music filling the air. The others chattered in the background. He closed his eyes for a moment, letting it fill that tiny place of emptiness he felt now that Kurt was back in New York.

"So now that you're engaged I guess you can't imagine doing me on top of a piano anymore," Sam said, jumping up and lying down atop it to stare at the ceiling. "So just pretend I'm Kurt."

Blaine's heart fluttered and he opened his eyes. He paused his fingers on the keys, the moment gone now, and he stared up at Sam. "I never imagined...I mean...never mind." Blaine shook his head. He had imagined it of course. Well mostly Kurt.

"That was pretty cool of your Dad," Sam continued nonplussed at Blaine's fumbling and Blaine was grateful he'd moved on. He started playing again. "I don't know everything that happened with you guys but I know it wasn't always good, so it's awesome he welcomed Kurt into the family. With the way Burt is I forget everyone's Dad isn't like that all the time."

"Yeah, it was pretty great," Blaine grinned. Aside from Kurt saying yes, that was still the most amazing part of the day. "Thank you for everything. And I'm sorry I got a little bit crazy."

Sam shrugged. "No biggie. I can imagine the wedding day will be even worse."

Blaine sniffed. "That's probably an understatement. I don't even want to think about the wedding yet. That's all Kurt's doing anyway. I'm not touching a thing unless he asks, he's been planning his wedding since he was three."

"So how does it work with gay marriage?" Sam asked. "Do you take his last name, or does he take yours? Or do you both hyphenate, cause..."

"Right now I'm honestly just excited that Kurt said yes," Blaine said, shutting him down. He and Kurt had agreed they'd decide about their names later and he didn't really want to talk about it until then. "Hey are you looking forward to prom?" he asked, changing the subject. "I fell asleep last night when Tina was texting me about her prom dress." She'd been going on and on and he'd tried really hard to be excited, but she'd gotten to designer and feathers and was detailing each stitch but she just didn't have the expertise that Kurt had. He felt a little bit guilty. "It's really nice that you're going with her, by the way."

"Yeah, I guess so," Sam said, with very little enthusiasm. "I don't know, I just, you know, it's my senior prom so I kind of wished I was going with someone I really cared about."

Blaine understood completely. He wanted to go with Kurt. And he knew how much Sam was missing Brittany. He tried to cover it up, be all cool and collected, but Blaine recognized a touch of depression when he saw it. He was actually really glad that all the work for the engagement had given Sam something to keep busy with instead of moping around alone. Since getting to MIT, Britt had seemed to forget about the people she'd left behind. It was all too reminiscent, and not at all surprising, and she and Sam had been smart about it. They'd known enough to officially break up before she left. Still it wasn't easy and Sam sat up, frustration no doubt coursing through him. "Damn I have seriously been unlucky in love."

Mr. Schue interrupted them and Blaine headed to his seat. Another day at McKinley High School. One day closer to graduation.

---

"I wish you were going to prom with me," Blaine pouted as he stared into his computer screen. "I was fine until Sam started talking about wishing he was going with someone he cared about and then I just kept thinking about it."

"Blaine, can I be completely honest with you?" Kurt bit his lip with hesitation.

Blaine's eyes opened wide at the look on Kurt's face and he sat up straight with attention. Honesty was the most important thing while they were apart. "Yeah, of course," he said.

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Blaine, honey, I would rather clean the floors of the loft with a toothbrush than go to another McKinley High School prom," Kurt admitted.

Blaine laughed and dipped his eyes. "The lack of gel was that traumatic for you?" Blaine teased.

"No, I love your frizzy curls," Kurt said with perhaps just a touch of heat in his voice. "What I hate are the cat fights and the popularity contests and the inevitable ignorance and hate of Lima high school kids. Present company excluded of course," he added quickly.

"Of course," Blaine nodded with a smile. "Unfortunately I can't get out of it even if I wanted to. Mr. Schue would kill me for not performing and I *am* nominated for Prom King." He wiggled proudly in his seat.

"If you win we'll get to tell our children someday that their parents were voted Prom King and Queen," Kurt smirked.

Blaine's smile grew and he rested his chin on his hand. "Aw...you're thinking about children already."

"I'm thinking about Prom," Kurt deflected, a blush rising in his cheeks. "And how I'm glad I'm not going. Twice was enough, thank you very much. Next year we'll go to the NYADA Ball together and it will be exquisite."

"I can't imagine a NYADA anything without catfights and popularity contests," Blaine quipped.

"True," Kurt sighed. "But at least we'll be there together. Out. Engaged. Dressed to kill, hair how we like...no vote for King or Queen..."

"Not providing the entertainment," Blaine added. "Just you and me with not a care in the world."

Kurt hummed at the thought. "Graduation can seriously not come fast enough Blaine. I have so much I want to share with you here. There's this little coffee shop down the street from NYADA, oh and this perfect fabric store-"

"And the jazz club Santana keeps talking about," Blaine piped in. "And Karaoke with Rachel."

"Karaoke with Rachel is brutal Blaine, I don't know if you want to subject yourself to that," Kurt warned.

"Doesn't matter. We'll knock her out of the park and you know it." Blaine grinned and Kurt smiled as well. They sat quietly a moment, lost in the dreams of the future. Blaine's eyes fell to the clock. "It's late," he said sadly.

"I have class at 8am," Kurt said.

"I have to meet Sam before school to help him with this woman he's trying to woo." Kurt smiled fondly. Only Blaine would still use the word *woo*. "Sweet dreams Kurt. I love you."

"Love you too," Kurt said and signed off.

He brushed his teeth and climbed into bed, his thoughts turning to everything their life would be once they were back together again. His eyes fell on the picture of him and Blaine, crown on his head after being named Prom Queen. They looked so young. They'd been through so much since then. It had been quite the journey so far. And he couldn't wait to see where it went from here.

---

He found himself waking early and he watched the sun rise outside the apartment before getting ready for his day.

From the moment Kurt had landed at the airport he'd noticed it but now, in the city, taking in every sight, every scent as he made his way to NYADA, it was clear as day. The sun was warmer. The air was lighter. The colors were brighter, especially the lights of Time Square and the Broadway billboards. It almost seemed like the people of New York were moving in slow motion, making a path for him. Like the ring on his finger created a magic so great that everyone and everything around him took note.

He felt different. Older. Wiser. And far more settled in his skin than he had the entire time he'd been here before. Like knowing what this piece of his future was going to look like allowed him the freedom to just let the rest of the pieces fall into place. His missing puzzle piece. He was complete.

The engagement wasn't everything. Blaine wasn't everything. Kurt Hummel would never allow himself to be defined by the amazing, wonderful fact that someone loved him enough to want to spend the rest of his life with him. Or by the fact that he loved and trusted someone else enough to allow them to sleep beside

him at night and wake beside him each morning and hopefully make love with abandon in between until they grew old and gray and had no privacy in the nursing home. No, he was so much more than that. He was a fashion editor and designer and actor and singer and god there were so many things, so many possibilities he saw in his life now that he wasn't weighed down by the pain of hurt and regret.

He felt like dancing down the street, singing from the rooftops, sneaking into another Broadway theater with Rachel and kicking up their heels as they celebrated life and everything, *everything*, they could make New York. They would star in these theaters, they would book commercials bigger and greater than Santana's, they would make the world know them and love them and they would do it with their hearts full because what was truly important in the end was not that someone loved them, but that they loved and trusted their own hearts enough to love someone else. To let someone in. To show the world their greatness. To be everything they had inside them to be.

As he swung open the NYADA doors and climbed the stairs, he stood tall and proud with a grin on his face so large he was sure that everyone must have thought he'd booked the biggest role of his life. Well let them think that, he smirked, because he absolutely had. He'd booked the role of Kurt Hummel, and there was absolutely nothing better than that.

---

She paced the living room. Her heart was racing. "Rachel told you. I'm going to kill that girl, I told her not to tell anyone. And she knows that anyone means you," Santana yelled into the phone, knowing her voice was frantic. Her mind was swimming. Her palms were sweating and oh my god that was so pathetic. She could dance a pole, yet she couldn't do this.

"Um...Santana, what's going on?" Blaine asked, his voice wary. "Rachel didn't tell me anything, I'm just staring at my tuxedo for prom and missing Kurt, but he's in the middle of class so I thought I'd call you."

She hadn't wanted him to know but now that he was there sounding so concerned she couldn't help but let it all pour out. "I'm freaking out, Blaine, can't you hear that?" she shouted angrily into the phone. "I'm freaking out because what if I'm not enough, what if I've been cheating this whole time, what if instead of being the Latina goddess everyone thinks I am, I really am just the poser, a Lima loser trying to make it in the big city."

"Woah, woah, woah, "Tana," Blaine tried to calm her. "What are we even talking about here?"

Santana was silent. She stopped in the middle of the floor. "She really didn't tell you?"

"No, she really didn't tell me anything," Blaine answered confused. "Come on, what's going on?"

She collapsed onto the couch and curled in on herself, cuddling a blanket close to her chest. "There's this girl..."

She heard Blaine laugh. She heard him breathe a sigh of relief and actually laugh and part of her wanted to reach into the phone and smack him and the other part wanted to laugh along with him, but she did neither. She just snapped.

"Get it out now, boyfriend," Santana spat. "That's right, it's so funny that Santana Lopez is freaking out about a girl. I already got it from Berry, I'm sure Hummel would be rolling around the floor literally kicking up his heels, but while you all are laughing at my insecurities, trust me, I am planning your demise."

"Oh 'Tana," he breathed and forced his laugh to a halt. "It's just reassuring when the most badass girl we know is as scared and vulnerable as the rest of us. It's what we love the most about you." Santana scowled and blushed at the same time as she twirled a string from the blanket around her finger. "It makes you human. And it's what that girl is going to love best about you. Now what's her name?"

"Dani," Santana said quietly. "She works at the diner and Blaine, she is gorgeous. And talented. And she is so confident in herself."

"Wow, you really are smitten." Santana could hear his grin and she couldn't help but grin back, shaking her head at his choice of words.

"I am not *smitten*, Blaine, I just...really, really like her." Well she'd started strong, but she ended lamely.

"So what are you going to do about it then?" Blaine asked and she froze. She had no idea what to do about it. Brittany had been her best friend and in the end had pretty much pursued her. She'd been drunk with Quinn. The girls in college had been rebounds and conquests and just fun to tide herself over. But Dani was different. She was experienced. Older. She was out of Santana's league.

"What if I don't actually know what I'm doing?" she asked quietly. It was different asking Blaine than Berry. He understood her. "What if things only worked with Brittany and Quinn and the girls in college because they knew what they were doing less than I did? What if I'm not lesbian enough for her?"

She thought he would laugh, but he didn't. Instead, he spoke from the heart. "Don't stand against the wall again, Santana, afraid to be who you are." Her mind went back to the first real conversation they'd had. The one that had changed her life for good. "You're not that girl anymore. You're strong, and brilliant, and you're not afraid to shine. Any girl would be lucky to be allowed to love you."

Santana's heart beat fast and she wanted to believe him but she rolled her eyes defensively. "Boy's engaged less than a week and he thinks he's an expert on love," she muttered sarcastically.

"No, I don't," Blaine assured her. "It's just that somebody once told me that all you need is love, not perfect. And since you have a heart of gold and I hear you're as close to perfect as they come, it seems to me that you're pretty much a lock." She couldn't help but smile at her own words coming back to bite her, and a little surge of confidence went through her body. "She'd be a fool to say no, 'Tana."

"You really think?" she asked shyly.

"I really know Santana," Blaine said. "I am your boyfriend after all."

"Yeah...I think I'll leave that part out when I talk to Dani," Santana said.

Blaine laughed. "That might be smart," he said and she wished they were Skyping and she could see the glowing smile she knew was on his face. "Call me after you see her, I want to hear everything."

"I will," she said and smiled softly. "I promise."

---

Blaine stood on the stage, his hands folded dapperly in front of him and nerves running like fire through his veins. Waiting for the announcement for Prom King was excruciating. He wanted it. He couldn't deny that. The prestige and attention were things he craved, whether he liked that about himself or not. But most of all, he wanted the fun of telling his children one day that both their dads were High School royalty.

But it was never that easy at McKinley. Waiting for the announcement was like waiting for the other shoe to drop. And losing, as he did, came with as much relief as disappointment. Because staring up at Tina, her eyes shining with glee, he couldn't help but hold his breath while he smiled and clapped. Though he hoped. Maybe, just maybe, this time...

And with the bucket of slush, his heart fell as well, as he saw history repeat itself right before his eyes. He ran after her, just like before, and *déjà vu* flooded him. Only this time, he wasn't alone. This time others ran after her too.

Last time with Kurt he had been so scared. If Kurt had said he'd wanted leave, to run, he would have followed him out, grateful to not have to face the hate again. This time it was different. He didn't believe in running anymore. And no matter how much she was crying, no matter how much she said she wanted to go home, he wouldn't let Tina do it. Definitely not alone. And certainly not without a fight.

"Tina stop," Blaine demanded and he held his breath as she took another step forward then one step back. "You have two choices and whichever one you pick we will be supportive, but we can either drive you home, or, we can clean you up, and you can go back out there, and own that prom. This is *your* prom, Queen T."

"I can't go back in there," Tina sobbed. "I don't even have a dress to wear."

As all the girls offered their gowns, Blaine's heart swelled with pride, the same kind of pride that he'd felt two years ago when Kurt refused to give in to the bullies. The kind of pride that only came when the people you loved refused to stand by and chose to stand up.

"Come on Tina," Blaine said, stepping toward her. He knew she wasn't always as strong as Kurt. She never would have done it on her own. But together, they could show her the strength she had inside to fight. "We're all with you. You want to be that girl? Then go *be* that girl!"

He sat down at the piano and played for her. The best gift he could give her was music as the girls cleaned her up and helped her change. And he stood by her side, as he had once before, while she returned to claim her crown. This time surrounded by friends. And when she stepped down for her dance, she reached out and he took her hand. And he held her in his arms and danced, a smile on both their faces. Kurt had been right about prom. But he was so glad he had come.



Kurt finished up at the diner, texting Blaine to see where he was while Rachel squealed on the phone with Finn in the corner. He knew that Mr. Schue had called an evening Glee rehearsal that night and he hoped they were all still there.

"Is he answering?" Santana asked, sidling over to him with a huge grin.

He checked his phone again and the text had just come in. "Yup, they're all still there," he grinned.

"Come on Fanny," Santana yelled across the room. "You have an announcement to make."

---

"Now guys, I know that Prom was crazy, but I wasn't thrilled with the performances. The energy level was low most of the night and the harmony was struggling. So we need to work extra hard until Nationals," Mr. Schuester said. Everyone groaned. They were still exhausted from a weekend of after prom parties, especially the seniors, and the last thing they wanted to be doing as the sun set was sit in school, even if it was the choir room. "*Let it Be*. I think it's a possibility for competition, so let's run through it a few times then we'll head to the stage."

Blaine got up with the others, sitting at the piano to play through the harmonies with everyone then left it to the band. His back pocket vibrated and he discreetly pulled out his phone.

*Kurt to Blaine [8:11pm]: You guys still rehearsing?*

He turned his back to Mr. Schuester and quickly typed an answer.

*Blaine to Kurt [8:13pm]: I think we're trapped here all night.*

He slipped his phone back in his pocket and turned back to finish the song. The effort and enthusiasm was lackluster and Mr. Schue didn't hesitate to go around the room to give individual notes.

"Dude, how long is this rehearsal going to go, I don't think I can stand another moment," Sam complained.

Blaine just laughed and rolled his eyes, patting him on the shoulder. His phone rang and he quickly answered.

"No phones during rehearsal Blaine," Mr. Schue yelled over his shoulder.

"Hey Kurt," Blaine said happily, scooting into the corner and ignoring his teacher.

"Rehearsal hasn't ended yet has it?" Kurt asked breathlessly.

"No," His brow furrowed in worry. Kurt didn't sound right. "Is everything okay?"

"Put me on speaker," he said excitedly.

"What?" Blaine's brow furrowed with confusion.

"Put me on speaker with everybody, Blaine," Kurt insisted.

"Okay," he said warily and walked back to the group. "Guys, Kurt wants to talk with everyone." He put the phone down on the piano as everyone gathered around, more than grateful for the interruption. Blaine hit the button. "Alright you're on speaker."

"Alright guys, we have a little news here in New York, are you ready?" Kurt said, his voice high pitched with anticipation. Everyone in the choir room talked into the phone at once then held their breath waiting for Kurt's news.

But it wasn't Kurt, it was Rachel and her voice filled the choir room. "I got the part!" she screeched into the phone and everyone held their breath, staring at one another in shock, hoping that it was what they all thought it was. "I'm going to be on Broadway!"

Suddenly everyone yelled and shouted into the phone. They hugged each other, jumping up and down with joy and possibility, because if Rachel could do it then it meant that any one of them could do it. Blaine gave them all their turn and he couldn't help but smile at the satisfaction and pride on their teacher's face. The teacher without which he knew Rachel never would have made it so far. When everyone was finally done with their congratulations and Rachel was done with her thank yous, Blaine took the phone back and turned it off speaker, walking out into the quiet of the empty hallway.

"Kurt?" he said softly.

He could hear the phone shuffling as Rachel passed it over and Kurt took it off speaker. "Hey. Exciting news huh?"

Blaine heard the pride in Kurt's voice. But he also heard, deep down, the hurt. And he understood it all too well. "You okay?" he asked gently.

"Yeah of course I am," Kurt said, but his defense was so evident to Blaine.

"Your time is coming, Kurt. I know it. It's just around the corner and it will be even better than Santana's commercial," he promised.

"Yeah I'll be the new, young face for erectile dysfunction," he murmured then breathed a sigh. "I'm happy for her. I mean she's my best friend. I just can't help but go back to West Side Story and I wonder-"

"Stop wondering Kurt and listen to me," Blaine insisted. "There are a ton of parts out there for you. Revivals and new shows and just look what's happening on television with gay characters on every channel. Your part, is out there. You just have to..." he searched for the right words as Sam tapped him on the shoulder to join them in the auditorium. It seemed Rachel's news had brought new found energy to them all. "You just have to let it be Kurt."

"Like the song?" Kurt smirked.

Blaine grinned. "Like the song. And when the night is cloudy there is still a light that shines on me. Shine on until tomorrow. Let it be." He could hear Kurt's smile in a small laugh as he made his way to the stage. The music started and he had to make his entrance. "I've gotta go. Just remember Kurt, never stop shining, and before you know it, your moment will be here."

## ***Chapter Twenty-Five: The Quarterback***

The call came at midnight and it rocked their world to the very core.

"Finn's dead."

---

Blaine stayed on the phone for hours until Kurt had finally sobbed himself to exhaustion and fallen asleep. Blaine couldn't sleep though. His heart was broken, for Burt, for Carole, for Rachel, but most of all for Kurt. Hearing him like that, so soon after everything was just starting to fall into place, knowing that unlike the breakup there was absolutely nothing he could do to fix it, was the most helpless feeling in the world. It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair that Finn had to die and it sure as hell wasn't fair that his beautiful Kurt, who would never hurt a fly, who had already lost his mother and nearly lost his father twice would have to go through this much pain one more time. He was 19 years old for God's sake. 19. No one should have to go through so much at such a young age. No one should lose a brother...

He sat up against the headboard and reached for the phone. There was one person whose voice he needed to hear right now more than anyone else.

His fingers shook as he dialed the number and a mumbled hello answered. "Cooper?" His voice was small and broken.

"Blaine?" Cooper's voice was suddenly bright and awake. "It's 4am where you are, what are you doing up so late?"

A sob escaped before he could stop himself. He shut his eyes tight against the surge. "Finn...Kurt's brother...he's..." Blaine swallowed, unable to say the words and yet there was nothing else he could do. "He's dead."

"Oh my God, Blaine I'm so sorry," Cooper breathed into the phone. "Are you okay? Is Kurt okay?"

The tears rolled down Blaine's face now, no longer needing to hold it in for Kurt, and he shook his head. "No," he choked. He grabbed Margaret Thatcher dog, won by Finn, given to him by Kurt, and he held her close letting her fur soak up his tears. If only he had Kurt in his arms. "He's not. I'm not. And I just don't

know what to do. He's so far away. And he's with Rachel, god, Rachel..." He lost it, his own grief and exhaustion colliding.

"I'll be on the next flight out Blaine," Cooper said, a bit frantically. Blaine could hear him shuffling around in the background.

"No," Blaine snapped, then took a breath. "No, don't. I just...I needed to hear your voice. Know that you're okay."

"I'm here Blaine," Cooper soothed. "I'm here and I'm not going anywhere."

"Can you call Dad in the morning? Let him know so he knows when I wake up? I don't think I can tell him..."

"Yes, of course, I'll call him and Mom," Cooper agreed. "Whatever you need Squirt."

"If I lost you-" Blaine sobbed.

"You're not going to lose me Blaine, you are stuck with me for a very long time," Cooper swore.

Blaine sniffled and wiped his eyes. He settled back down into bed, resting his head on the pillow, the phone on speaker beside him. "Will you sing to me?" Blaine whispered. "Like you did when I was little."

"I'll sing to you all night Blaine. I promise."

---

He drove home after the funeral, needing some time, and Kurt needing some space from his constant hovering. But as he pulled up and didn't see his father's car he continued on, heading into the center of Westerville.

His father had not only come to the service and the cemetery, but he'd come in Class A military dress. Finn didn't qualify for military honors, but when the Colonel stood by the grave and saluted, emotions flooded Blaine, for more reasons than one. He'd clung to Tina, not wanting Kurt to have to comfort him, despite that fact that she didn't understand how that one simple gesture tore him up inside.

He pulled up to the recruiting office and parked next to his father's car. The office was closed but the light was on and the door was unlocked. His father stood behind the counter still in uniform, not really working, just keeping his mind occupied. The bell rang as Blaine entered and his father looked up, his face drawn. Blaine took him in as he hung back, leaning against the door that shut behind him. They were silent for a moment, the swirl of thoughts and emotions weighing heavily. Always so much in the air between them.

Finally Blaine broke the silence. "That was nice, what you did," he said quietly and he could tell his father understood what he meant. "I think it meant a lot to Carole."

"It was the least I could do," the Colonel said.

Blaine nodded. His eyes dropped to the floor. His heart clenched in his chest at what was so clear to him. "I'm sorry," he whispered, trying to get the words that had been racing in his head since the salute, though the truth of them broke his heart. "I know he was the son you always wanted. The son you always wanted me to be."

John came around the desk and closed the distance between them. He lifted Blaine's chin with a finger and forced their eyes to meet. John's were full of disbelief and remorse. "Blaine. What I *wanted* never mattered. *You* are the son I always needed. Without you I would be a bitter, stubborn, hateful old man right now, and any other son I would have raised to be the same. But you..." He paused, catching his breath, taking him in. The doubt and pain and unbelievable desire for love in warm golden eyes filled him with pride. "You are a brave, sensitive, caring, honest man who knows, has always known, that love is more important than anything else in the world." His father's words rushed at Blaine with relief and he let the tears fall, too overwhelmed by everything to keep them held inside. Every new day with this man he grew to love and respect him more and more. His father gripped his shoulders and pulled him in to his arms. "There is no one in this world who is a bigger hero to me than you. And I wouldn't change you or the fact that you're my son for the world."

Blaine laughed and cried at the same time and he clutched at his father's uniform. "Finn came to me, about his Dad. And you. And I told him then that you must have been someone's hero even if you weren't mine. But now you're absolutely mine and I wish I had told Finn that before he was gone. I wish I could tell him that now, but I'm just glad I can tell you. I love you Dad."

"I love you too Blaine." John kissed his son on the head and slowly pulled away, wiping away his own tears. "Hey, how about you and I go for some ice cream. That's something we never did when you were a kid and I think I'm feeling a little bit like a double chocolate sundae. What do you think, are you in?"

Blaine smiled and nodded, brushing his tears away with his sleeve. "Yeah. I think I'd really like that."

---

Blaine was quiet, the next three weeks. He and Sam would get together but there were large gaps of silence where they felt that the words they wanted to speak were either too heavy or too light. Fun felt like a betrayal to Finn's memory. To Kurt's pain. So they just spent time together, strumming chords on the guitar, playing slow sad tunes on the piano. Wordless melodies filling the air with their sadness.

Kurt was distant. The apartment was stifling and yet as much as he sometimes needed air he couldn't leave Rachel alone. Santana took extra shifts, drowning herself in work and rarely coming home but to sleep. Sometimes she didn't come home at all and they had to assume she was spending her nights with Dani. Kurt imagined it was easier there. No reminders. No grief.

They all moved through life in a fog of memories and dreams unfulfilled, regrets plaguing them. Fear and loss weighing them down like stones on their heart. School. Work. Home. Kurt tried to avoid the memories of Finn but they were everywhere. In the things he did and said. In Rachel's face every morning. And a part of him that he tried so hard to ignore couldn't help but wonder who was next and when.

Talking to Blaine was hard. He wanted desperately to be with him and not waste a moment. But every time they talked, every time they saw each other on the screen, the guilt rushed in, thinking of how Rachel would never see Finn again. Never hear his voice again. He didn't know if she could survive without Finn. He didn't know how he would survive without Blaine.

It tore him apart inside.

"How's she doing?" Blaine asked quietly one night, not long before the scheduled memorial.

"She's the strongest person I know," Kurt answered, his voice quiet so she could not hear. "But there are times, when she thinks no one is listening that I can hear her cry. She talks to him. At night. During the day. It breaks my heart."

"She'll be okay, Kurt." Blaine tried to assure him, but maybe he was just trying to assure himself.

"What do you do when you lose your soulmate Blaine?"

Blaine shrugged on the other end of the phone. He'd thought about it a lot, in the last three weeks. "I don't know," he admitted. "I think you just go on living. Until it's time to try again in the next life." Kurt was quiet. Blaine could hear him breathing, sniffing. "You're still coming, right? I know Santana is."

"I wouldn't miss it," Kurt said, his voice broken.

"Do you think she'll come?" Blaine asked.

Kurt sighed. "I don't want to push her. Neither of us do. She knows about it. If she wants to come we're here for her a hundred percent. But everyone needs to understand if it's too much. The funeral was hard enough." Blaine nodded. It was hard for everyone. It was brutal for Rachel. "Blaine...I love you, you know that right?"

Kurt's voice was ominous and Blaine felt a flutter of panic in his veins before he could tame it. "Of course I know, what's wrong?"

Kurt took a breath. He needed to be honest this time. He needed to explain so Blaine wouldn't think he was drifting like before. "When I come home...I need..." he didn't know how to say it right.

But Blaine knew. "Space," he finished for him. "Kurt, I know. I understand." The rest of them had had a break from mourning. Kurt hadn't. He couldn't, even if he wanted to. Even in moments where just for a second life seemed normal he'd turn around and Rachel would be there or Carole would call just to talk or a certain smell would overtake him, a certain song on the radio. He'd cried himself out a week ago and now...well, he was just exhausted. "Take whatever space you want. I'll be there when you need me but I promise I won't push. I won't hover."

"Just you being in the room, knowing you're there..." Kurt swallowed the tears that still managed to form when he thought about losing Blaine. He pushed it away. He couldn't think about that. Not now. "That's all I need. Just to know you're there." Because he dreamed too many nights of what it would be like if Blaine were gone.

"Always," Blaine whispered. "I am always wherever you need me to be."



As she sat between Blaine and Tina, *Fire and Rain* ringing heavily in her ears Santana wondered what in hell she was doing in this room. Puck and Kurt and Mercedes were outside and these people, they didn't know him like she did. They hadn't grown up with him, not like she had. Tina and Artie had never been wrapped in his arms, so vulnerable and yet so strong. And these newbies had never even gone to school with him.

They didn't have the memories that she had.

*"Okay Finn, all you have to do is go in the store, grab one and get out without anyone seeing you," Santana said.*

*Finn slumped by her side. "Come on guys, if I get caught my Mom is going to kill me," he whined.*

*"Oh please, you'd get in the least amount of trouble of all of us," Puck argued, pushing him forward. "Now stop being such a wus."*

*Finn turned to plead his case one last time, but Santana simply grabbed his hand, staring him down, too seductive for a 13 year old. "Would you do it for a kiss?" she teased.*

*Puck slapped Finn on the back. "Dude, you've got to say yes to that, her kisses are like gold," Puck urged.*

*Finn eyed his best friend's girl up and down as she licked her beautiful full lips and thrust out her chest, hugged unfairly tight by the sweater of her junior high school cheerleading uniform. He knew he shouldn't do it, stealing was wrong, but there wasn't a chance that he could say no to that. "Okay," he breathed. He took off his Letterman jacket and handed it to her, not looking back as he went inside.*

*The next day in school Santana cornered him and pulled him into an empty supply closet. "So did you get in a lot of trouble?" she frowned.*

*"I'm grounded for a week," he said. "I don't know why I ever listen to you and Puck."*

*She bit her lip and arched her eyebrows. "Does that mean you don't want a kiss anymore?" He fumbled, unable to answer and she just smiled. The power she had over boys was intoxicating. She leaned in slowly until her lips met his, lips that were rough like Puck's, not soft like Brittany's. She teased his lips and then his*

*tongue with her tongue, trying to remember what the magazines said a boy would like. When she pulled away, his eyes were still closed. "So was it worth it?" she asked with a smirk.*

*His eyes opened slowly and he blushed in answer. "It was definitely better than the first time."*

*She couldn't hide her surprise at his words. "You remember?"*

*Finn smiled now, eyes glowing at the memory they shared. "Of course. We were in first grade and you pulled me behind the swingset and kissed me on the cheek. How could I forget my first kiss?"*

As she came back from her memory and looked around, her body flooded with anger. Santana prided herself on being his first. What did any of the rest of them know about that? The room grew suffocating. She felt like her head was going to explode. She needed Puck or Kurt or Finn, god she needed Finn, and as soon as the song ended she got up and left them all behind as fast as she could.

---

Santana wasn't where Blaine thought she would be. The choir room was empty. The girls in the bathroom told him she wasn't there. Then he heard her raised voice and he chased it. He arrived just in time to see her shove Coach Sylvester and she backed away, taking off down the hall towards the front doors of the school.

"Santana wait," Blaine called. He ran after her when she didn't stop. He didn't know what else to do.

She didn't turn, she just kept walking until her hand reached the metal bar of the door and he grabbed her other hand, stopping her from leaving. She pulled back like he had burned her. "Go away Blaine," she snapped, her eyes full of tearful fury. "I don't want to hurt you too."

Blaine put his hands up, but he didn't leave. "Santana you don't have to do this alone-"

"I *am* alone Blaine!" she yelled. "I don't have anyone here. Brittany is in Massachusetts, Quinn is in Connecticut-"

"I'm here," Blaine said, full of hurt.

She squared her shoulders, building a wall between them that hadn't been there in more than a year. "I'm sorry, but it's not the same," she said, her voice like ice. "You didn't know him like I did. Like we did. You didn't chase him around the playground at school or cheer for him on the sidelines of games, you didn't know him back when we became a family!"

Blaine's breath stopped. He felt like he'd just been punched in the gut. He thought for just a second he saw her eyes thaw with sorrow, but then she slammed out the door while he could only stare after her.

A hand on his shoulder broke him out of his daze. "Blaine just let her go." The ring shined, and he turned to Kurt. He took in the jacket he wore, Finn's letterman jacket, and he wondered just how far back Kurt's memories of Finn went.

"Is that how you feel too?" Blaine asked. Kurt swallowed and his eyes drifted to the floor. Blaine snapped. "He was going to be my brother too!"

"And Rachel was going to be my sister," Kurt said softly and he blinked away the tears he refused to let fall. He lifted his chin, strong and steady. "But all that's gone now. I understand why she's angry. It's a lot easier than feeling what I feel."

Blaine's anger disappeared immediately at Kurt's clouded gaze that looked right through everything. It broke him, over and over again. "And what's that?" Blaine asked, reaching for Kurt's hand. Kurt took it.

"Just emptiness," Kurt answered. "Like a whole part of my life has just suddenly disappeared." His blue eyes focused, warming slightly. "And I know you love me but no matter how much, your love can't bring that back. Not for me. Not for Santana."

"You're right, I can't." Blaine gathered Kurt in his arms and held him while Kurt breathed through it, but did not cry. Blaine's heart clenched in his chest. Seeing everyone else in pain and being unable to help no matter how much he wanted to was a grief he could not shake. He would do anything to make this all better, but it was impossible. "I can't."

---

Blaine watched from the back of the room as Santana broke down in the middle of her song. His whole body ached for her, but he dared not move. Mr. Schue and Mike's attempts at comfort had her literally

screaming as she fled the room. Eyes turned to him, knowing that in the past it would have been him to go after her. But though it killed him he knew that this time it couldn't be.

"Let me go," Kurt said softly. Blaine simply nodded, brokenhearted, and watched his fiancé leave. As the jacket disappeared down the hallway and others began to gather their things to go, Blaine's emotions got the best of him and he launched himself out of the chair and into the corner of the room. He slammed the wall with his hand in frustration. His world, the world of his friends, was falling apart around him and there was absolutely nothing he could do. He tried to block it out, squeezing his eyes shut. He slid down the wall until he reached the floor, pulling his knees up tight to his chest. He tried to get lost in the darkness, but his eyes fluttered open when a gentle hand rested on his leg. Sam didn't say a word. He just sat there, across from him, ready to listen or just to stay by his side for as long as Blaine needed.

Blaine tiredly ran his hand down his neck and sighed. His voice was quiet when he spoke. "I just hate that they're both so distant. I mean seeing Kurt in so much pain with absolutely nothing I can do to fix it. And Santana." The song she had chosen, the words, they made him shiver. "What if she's not strong enough to handle this."

"Of course she's strong enough Blaine, Santana is one of the strongest people I know." Sam frowned, his brow drawing tight as he watched his friend. "The one I'm really worried about is you."

Blaine blinked. "What do you mean?"

"Have you even cried for Finn yet," Sam asked.

"What? Of course..."

But Sam knew that wasn't true. "No. You've cried for Kurt and Rachel. For Burt and Carole. For their loss. But what about you and your loss? What did Finn mean to you?" Sam challenged.

But Blaine shook his head, echoing Santana's words. "I didn't know him like they did." He didn't have the right to mourn as they did.

"Do you know what I remember most?" Sam gazed off, as if staring through the wall beside Blaine and a small smile graced his lips. Blaine's eyes were fixed on him, unable to look away even if he wanted to. "After I'd come to live with them. Playing video games with Finn into the middle of the night when Burt and Carole thought we were sleeping. Kurt would have gone to bed hours earlier, but I would sneak into

his room and we would play until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, talking smack, eating junk he hid underneath his bed. We'd be dragging in the morning, but it never mattered to us. Those were some of the best nights of my life."

Blaine bowed his head, his eyes falling to the stains in the choir room carpet. "Finn was the only one that knew what it meant to lose a father to the aftermath of war," Blaine said, his voice breaking. "He stood by me after Kurt and I broke up. He had every right to hate me but he didn't. Even when I tried to leave, to go back to the Warblers, he told me...*you belong here with us.*"

"It doesn't matter that we didn't know him as long as the rest. He mattered to us and he made sure we knew that we mattered to him," Sam told him. "He cared about *you* Blaine, like a brother. He believed, like you did, that someday you really would be."

Blaine looked up out the window as he wiped away a tear that he hadn't even realized had fallen. "Kurt is right. From now on a whole part of our future will always be missing. I pictured Thanksgiving dinner, years from now. Burt and Finn and me watching the game. Kurt and Rachel and Carole singing as they cooked. We were family..."

"Blaine." Kurt's voice, only a step away, whispered and Blaine turned to look up at him. He wondered how much he'd heard, but the look on Kurt's face told him he'd heard enough. He quickly brushed at his wet cheeks. He didn't even notice Sam slip away to give them privacy.

"Where's the jacket?" Blaine asked.

"I gave it to Santana," Kurt explained and shrugged. "She needed him more than I do right now. She um...she wanted to be alone."

Blaine stood up but he stayed against the wall, uncertain. "Is that what you want too? Do you want to be alone?"

"No." Since the moment she'd spoken them, Santana's words had sat heavily in Kurt's mind. *When we had sex Finn never stopped asking if I was okay the whole time.* Blaine had been the same way, from the very first night that Blaine had walked away from his father to their first true time together and every time since. No, the last thing Kurt wanted right now was to be alone. "I want to go back to your house."

Wordlessly they closed the distance between them and took each other's hands. Blaine slowly smiled, his eyes still glistening with tears. "Okay."

---

They moved together like a symphony, making love in near silence broken only by brief whispers of *I love you*. They breathed each other's breath, felt their hearts beat together as one, small reminders that though death surrounded them they were still alive and in love. Their life, together and separately, didn't end because Finn's had. They had to go on and keep living. They had to hold onto what they still had. They had to remember, but a part of them, in time when they were ready, also had to let go of what was gone.

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*To Kurt from Rachel [12:34am]: Are you awake? I can't sleep.*

*To Rachel from Kurt [12:36am]: No, I'm texting you between snores.*

*To Kurt from Rachel [12:38am]: How is everyone?*

*To Rachel from Kurt [12:40am]: Handling things in their own way.*

*To Rachel from Kurt [12:41am]: Everyone keeps asking about you. They miss you.*

*To Kurt from Rachel [12:44am]: I miss them. The city is lonely on my own.*

*To Kurt from Rachel [12:45am]: How is the memorial?*

*To Rachel from Kurt [12:46am]: It's beautiful. I could send you a picture of it if you want. I just wasn't sure...*

*To Kurt from Rachel [12:48am]: No. Don't.*

*To Kurt from Rachel [12:50am]: I think I want to see it for myself.*

*To Rachel from Kurt [12:52am]: Are you sure? You don't have to Rach.*

*To Kurt from Rachel [12:55am]: I know I don't have to. But I think I want to.*

*To Rachel from Kurt [12:56am]: Finn would be proud of you.*

*To Kurt from Rachel [1:01am]: Pick me up at the airport tomorrow? I'll book a flight. Let you know when I get in.*

*To Rachel from Kurt [1:03am]: Of course. I love you.*

*To Kurt from Rachel [1:05am]: Love you too. See you tomorrow.*

---

Kurt waited for her as close to the gate as he was allowed. She rolled her carry-on behind her, her eyes lost in memory, until they fell on him. She sped up and dropped into his arms. Halfway through the flight she'd started panicking. "I don't know if I can do this," she said. Her breathing was quick and the tears started falling before she could stop them.

Kurt cupped her cheeks and brushed the wetness away with his thumbs. "He never liked it when you cried," Kurt remembered quietly. "He always knew you were stronger than you ever thought you were."

She looked up at him, her usual determination broken, adrift without her anchor. "I feel like there is a hole in my heart."

He gathered her in his arms again, and rested his chin on her head. "I know sweetie. It's in mine too."

"You're the only one who understands. The only one who loved him like I do." She pulled away and found her strength now in him. "You're my best friend Kurt."

"You're my *sister* Rachel," he corrected her. "Always have been. Always will be. Nothing will ever change that."

A weak smile flit across her face and she picked up the handle of her bag, grasping his hand in hers. "Let's go home."

---

Blaine knelt by Finn's memorial and placed the drumsticks down. He looked up at the little McKinley football players wearing number 5, at the teddy bears and the flowers and the notes from everyone whose lives Finn had touched. He read the one left by Kurt – *Who will have our back now?* – and the flood of tears came without warning. He ran, to the auditorium, to the spot tower where he always ran, to a place there were no memories of Finn chasing him and he found himself weeping for his loss and no one else's. Because Cooper was thousands of miles away and he needed a brother here and who would he call when Kurt was being stubborn or Rachel was driving them crazy or when his children needed an Uncle that would be able to protect them from the bullies on the playground? Who would have their back now that Finn was gone?

The tears didn't stop but they slowed and Kurt's text buzzed in his pocket.

*To Blaine from Kurt [2:03pm]: We're here.*

He wiped his eyes and stood up, making his way down from the tower and to the choir room. The chair next to Kurt's was empty and Kurt looked up with a sad smile and reached a hand out to Blaine. He glanced at Rachel, whispering with Brad, and to Santana, in the corner with Sam beside her. And he took the seat where he belonged.

"Is she okay?" he whispered softly, nodding to Rachel. Her bravery astounded him. Because no matter what Finn or Rachel had ever done, everyone knew that they were meant to be together in the end.

"She will be," Kurt answered. He looked at Blaine's red and puffy eyes and knew without having to be told. "Are you okay?"

Blaine took a shaky breath, the tears threatening again and he nodded. "I will be."

"Nobody treat me with kid gloves okay?" The boys turned from one another and looked up at her. Rachel spoke softly between her tears, fingering the necklace that bore the name of the boy they all loved. "I don't know what to say either. I loved Finn, and he loved me and he loved all you guys. I know he did. I liked to sing in the car and before Finn I used to sing alone and this was the first song I would sing with him when we would drive around together, so this is for him."

Santana couldn't take her eyes from her. She'd spent four weeks avoiding this, avoiding the pain of losing him, of Rachel losing him. She'd escaped to work and school and Dani's house and into her anger and now,



Rachel here before her, she couldn't escape it any longer. This was real. Finn was gone and it hurt, to the very core, and each and every one of them would spend the rest of their lives, their futures, without him in the place where he belonged.

Rachel's voice hung in the air and Sam's arm grasped at her shoulder and she put hers around him as well, holding him, embracing him. She felt his grief in the heat of his skin and the tears that wet her blouse as he fell into her arms and wept. She cradled him and she closed her eyes, breathing him in. Breathing Finn in.

She opened her eyes and gazed upon the rest. Tina gripping Mike and Artie, the two boys who had loved her once, who she had loved and dreamed of lives together. Marley's head on Jake's shoulder, hoping for a future.

And Blaine. Gripping Kurt's hand on his lap like a lifeline, the only lifeline he had because she had abandoned him, denied him his right to grieve. Blaine turned to Kurt and his face, in so much pain, so scared of losing the one thing that mattered most in the world to him, losing his Finn, his soulmate. Kurt, unable to even go there, to let himself feel that anguish because as much as he wasn't afraid to live without Blaine in his life, to live without Blaine in the world would be like trying to breathe in a world with no air.

She'd been so wrong. She owed more than just Sue an apology.

Rachel finished singing and the room was silent. Kurt got up first gathering her in his arms and whispering in her ear. Others followed, Blaine and Mike, Tina and Mercedes. Rachel, Kurt's touch never straying, stood in the center of a circle filled with love and support. Santana reached for Blaine's hand. He turned to find her eyes soft with apology and when she led him away he followed.

"I'm sorry," she said.

He looked down at her hand in his where it belonged and he smiled faintly, having already forgiven her. "Don't be."

"No, Blaine, I was wrong. You have every right to feel what you feel and I should never have denied you that. I have a lifetime of memories with Finn. Your chance at that was taken from you and maybe," she paused swallowing the lump in her throat. "Maybe that's even harder."

Blaine shrugged, his gaze falling to the floor. It wouldn't do, to try and weigh and measure grief. "I told my father that I knew that Finn was the son he always wanted and not me," he told her instead.

Santana's eyes opened wide in shock. "What did he say?"

Blaine's lips curled in a soft smile up at her, carefully humbling his pride. "He called me his hero."

"Blaine, that's...amazing," she beamed.

Blaine nodded but his eyes watered with unshed tears. "I never got to tell Finn. I never got to tell him that he would have been a hero to his father. He never got a chance to be one to his children. To Kurt's and mine."

She squeezed his hand hard before letting go. "He was already a hero. To me, to Kurt. To Rachel and Quinn and Mr. Schuester. And he knew that," she said with complete confidence. "Before he was gone he knew that."

"The world should know it," Blaine whispered.

Kurt's hand slipped into his as he came up beside him. "I'm going to bring Rachel home, she wants to spend some time alone with Carole. Meet you after school?"

Blaine caught Santana's eye and raised a brow. She looked back, knowing, and nodded her head in agreement. She may have already decided that she was done with Lima, but she could manage one last goodbye. Blaine looked at them both and smiled. "I know just the place," he said.

---

Blaine, Santana, Kurt and Sam slid into a booth at the Jazz club that night. They ordered appetizers and a drink and toasted to Finn. Santana caught the eye of the pianist who waved at her and Blaine. He finished his song, then turned to the mic.

"Everyone please welcome an old friend who we miss dearly, Miss Santana Lopez," he announced.

Santana smiled and approached the microphone, feeling more like herself than she had in a month. She looked over the crowd and her friends at the table. Too many were missing, but they were all here in spirit. "Hi everyone. I see a lot of familiar faces out there tonight so some of you know me pretty well. I've been coming here a few years now, sneaking out my bedroom window just to sing for you until I grew old enough to go out the front door," she laughed and the patrons laughed with her. "About a year ago my

friend Blaine started coming as well and he and I have shared a lot of the highs and lows of our lives with you in this club. Both of us tend to express ourselves better in song and this place has let us sing the things we could not speak. Tonight's no different. My friends and I lost an amazing person last month. Finn was a friend, a brother, and a hero to us all. And tonight we just wanted to share that with you and toast to him. Blaine will you come play for me?"

Blaine kissed Kurt quickly before joining Santana on stage, settling into the piano. He closed his eyes and let the feel of the ivory beneath his fingers give him strength as he started the introduction. Thunder clapped in the distance and Blaine looked up, smiling at Finn's accompaniment. Santana smiled too as she began.

*Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes  
Five hundred twenty-five thousand moments so dear  
Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes  
How do you measure, measure a year?*

Blaine joined in with her, remembering the times that he'd had with Finn. The Rachel Berry House Party Trainwreck Extravaganza, the proms, the competitions, the fights and the music. He loved Finn with all his heart. And he would miss him, everyday.

*In daylights, in sunsets  
In midnights, in cups of coffee  
In inches, in miles, in laughter and in strife  
In five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes  
How do you measure, a year in the life?*

*How about love?  
How about love?  
How about love?  
Measure in love*

*Seasons of love  
Seasons of love*

Sam came up and shared the microphone with Santana. She smiled at him and let all their history slip away. With death came new life. And it was time for her and Sam to start over.

*Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes  
Five hundred twenty-five thousand journeys to plan  
Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes  
How do you measure the life of a woman or a man?*

Kurt watched them, knowing that this was his life. With Rachel and his Dad, this was his family now. He stepped up on the stage. Blaine slid over and Kurt sat beside him. They all silenced and Kurt's voice rang out alone.

*In truths that she learned  
Or in times that he cried  
In bridges he burned  
Or the way that she died*

They all joined in, Sam and Santana moving to lean against the piano. In just a few short months they would be together in New York, living together, loving together, relying on one another for everything. Finn would forever hold his place in their hearts, but their story wouldn't end without him. Together as friends, they would always remember and the show would go on.

*It's time now, to sing out  
Though the story never ends  
Let's celebrate  
Remember a year in the life of friends*

*Remember the love  
Oh, you got to, you got to remember the love  
Remember the love  
You know that love is a gift from up above  
Remember the love  
Share love, give love, spread love  
Measure in love  
Measure, measure your life in love*

*Seasons of love*

*Seasons of love*

*Measure your life, measure you life in love*

## ***Chapter Twenty-Six: A Katy or a Gaga***

Mr. Schuester was right about one thing. Having everybody home and memorializing Finn in the best way they all knew how, through song, was the best thing they could have done. It didn't change how much they missed him. It didn't change how Blaine's heart clenched whenever he saw Carole. But it helped to banish the ghosts in the room. It helped them to realize that Finn would want them to have fun, and not spend the rest of their lives mourning him.

Which was a very good thing, because Blaine didn't think he could contain his excitement for a Katy vs. Gaga week even if he tried. That was until he learned he had to be a Gaga.

---

"Come on Kurt, you have to help me," Blaine begged into the phone. "Tina won't do anything because she's on the Katy team, and how am I supposed to make a costume without either of my two best designers?"

Kurt finally reached the entrance to the NYADA building and pulled the door open, ducking inside from the rain. "What am I supposed to do Blaine, sew all night and overnight ship it to you?" He'd walked to school so fast he was out of breath by the time he reached the top of the stairs.

"I don't know," Blaine pouted and dropped onto his bed. "Magically send me your superior sewing skills?"

Kurt smiled fondly and leaned against the wall, giving himself a moment of respite. Blaine was truly lost without him when it came to stuff like this, the least he could do was help. "Look, get in the car and go to the fabric store. I'll text you exactly what you need to buy and where to find it and when I get home from class I'll sketch the pattern real quick and email it to you. I should have taught you enough to be able to make a decent costume from that."

Blaine sighed happily, his body settling with relief. "I love you."

"You better," Kurt smirked. "I got kicked out of the Apples for you."

"What? Why?" Blaine gasped.

Kurt shrugged. "I guess Adam could only handle being friends before you put a ring on it." He checked his watch, five more minutes. He hitched up his bag and headed down the hall. "Doesn't matter. I'm going to make my own way. I'm going to start a band," he beamed proudly.

If he'd been drinking Blaine would have spit it all over the floor. "A band? You?"

Now it was Kurt's turn to pout. "What's wrong with a band?" he asked. Blaine was always in his corner. "You told me my time was coming. Maybe this is it."

"Nothing's wrong with a band," Blaine quickly assured him. "I just never thought that was your thing. But if it's what you want to do then you should. You know I will always believe in you. You can do anything you put your mind to, Kurt."

Kurt rounded the corner to his classroom. "Well, right now I have to put my mind to theater history and Dionysus. A perfect time for me to make you a supply list. So go to the store and I'll Skype you later."

"Have a good class Kurt, don't get in trouble for texting me," Blaine said.

"Please, this professor is as old as dirt he probably doesn't even know what a cell phone is," he said wryly. "Love you."

"I love you too," Blaine smiled.

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**From Santana to Blaine [8:03pm]: So this very interesting thing happened today.**

**From Blaine to Santana [8:05pm]: Do tell.**

**From Santana to Blaine [8:06pm]: Oh no, no, no, Mi Amore, this is a something that cannot be told, it needs to be seen with ones very own eye.**

It was only seconds before a video was sent to his phone with a message from Santana. **Sit Down. Alone.**

Well he was already alone in his bedroom so he curled up in the chair beside his bed and hit play. His mouth dropped almost immediately. On his screen was this goliath of a voice in the body of a god dressed

from head to toe in black and sequins rocking on stage with Dani. The man drew closer and closer and the phone nearly slipped out of Blaine's hand he was sweating so much from the pure sex dripping off of this man. Then suddenly it stopped with no warning.

Blaine was dialing faster than he ever had before. It didn't even ring before Santana picked it up. "Do you like what you see?" she teased.

"Who the hell is that Santana?" Blaine wiped the sweat off his hands and, oh god, why was he sweating?

"That, boyfriend, is the newest member of Kurt's band if I have anything to say about it," Santana gushed.

But Blaine choked. "Kurt's...no..No Santana. No. You can't..." He got up and paced the room, running his hand through his hair with no regard for looks or mess. "He's...he's gorgeous, Santana. He's tall and dark and handsome and that voice, Santana he can run circles around me vocally. You cannot introduce him to Kurt!"

"Well you are about two hours too late for that, sweet cheeks. Starchild showed up for auditions and I have every intention of making your idiot fiancé see that the band needs him," Santana said.

Blaine stopped mid step. "Wait. Kurt didn't want him in the band?" His brow crinkled in disbelief. "Why?"

"His reason or the truth?" Santana asked.

"Um...both?" Blaine sat back down in the chair. It was easy to tell that this guy, this...Starchild...was an incredible talent even from the thirty seconds he'd seen. It made no sense that Kurt wouldn't want him. Unless...

"Kurt says," she drawled, "that he's too *outré*, whatever the hell that means. But what Kurt really means is that he thinks Starchild is so insanely talented that he will overshadow him in his own band. And he's probably right."

"So, it's not that he's..."

"Drooling over him like you are? No. I think he was too overwhelmed with his own sense of inferiority to even think about him like that." Blaine let out a breath of relief. "Well, except maybe when he was



practically fucking on the floor, he made sure not to miss that." she added. "Sorry I didn't get that part on video, but it probably would have driven you over the edge anyway."

Blaine blushed bright red. "It would not have...I'm engaged Santana," he snapped, flustered. "Please make sure Kurt remembers that too."

"Starchild in the band, not in Kurt's pants. Got it," she said with gentle teasing. Her voice softened. "It's my job in life to make sure you're married off," Santana promised. "I won't let sex on a stick screw it up."

Blaine pouted. "I thought I was sex on a stick," he whined.

"You are," she placated him. "It's just his stick is...taller...and hotter...and more...*outré*."

Blaine said goodnight and hung up the phone. He looked at the Gaga costume he was working on, silver pants, green sparkling shirt, and he knew, more than ever before, that he had to rock this thing.

He could be *outré* too.

---

"Hey Marley, wait up?" Blaine called, jogging a bit after her with the *Applause* sheet music in hand. "You wanna practice a bit before heading home? I could really use a partner, I hate learning music alone."

She looked at him strangely; they'd never really done this kind of thing before. "Who do you usually learn music with?"

Blaine fidgeted uneasily. "Oh well, Kurt mostly, when he was still here. Sam but he's off doing..." Blaine waved his hand in the direction Sam had headed, "something I think we all should be afraid of. And Tina, but she's on the other team, so..."

"Why don't you just call Kurt?" she asked. "Tina said he's like the biggest Gaga New Directions had, I'm sure he could help."

"I'm..." Blaine frowned. He'd been avoiding calling Kurt. He wasn't ready yet. "Trying to work some things out in my head. And it seemed like you were having a tough time with this assignment, so I thought I'd ask. But you don't have to, if you don't want to."

"No." She shook her head and smiled. "No, I'd like to. You're such a Katy fan, this assignment can't be much easier for you."

They walked down the hallway to the choir room. "I like both, but yeah, Katy's songs are more my thing. But it's fun too, to get out of your comfort zone once in a while. And Mr. Schuester's right, if we want to win against Throat Explosion then we need to be versatile." Blaine sat down at the piano, placing the music and starting to run his fingers over the keys.

"I don't think I'm very versatile," Marley admitted quietly. She looked up at Blaine, her eyes sad. "I try, to be who everyone wants me to be. But it's exhausting sometimes. And Jake," she bowed her head, fiddling with her nails. "How do you do it Blaine? How does a Katy like you make it with a Gaga like Kurt?"

Blaine pursed his lips and looked away. Ever since seeing Starchild perform, he'd been asking himself the same question.

---

Kurt sat in his chair, Rachel leaving him to his thoughts. Why did everything have to be so hard for him when it felt like opportunity just fell into the laps of his friends? He got up and ran a hand over the lapel of his red blazer, placing one more pin before turning to his computer. He clicked it on and logged into Skype, but Blaine wasn't logged in. His heart dropped a bit. It had been two days since they'd Skyped. Two days since they'd really talked at all. He grabbed his phone and sent a quick text.

**From Kurt to Blaine [10:14pm]: Skype?**

**From Blaine to Kurt [10:20pm]: Sorry. Was in the shower. Give me 5 minutes.**

Kurt bit his lip nervously, not even quite sure why, but he knew as if he were right next to Blaine that something was wrong. The text was terse. No teasing, no heart filled emoticons. The last two days had been that way. Well he'd get to the bottom of it tonight. He distracted himself with sewing, finishing the touches on the left side until his computer chimed with Blaine's call. He slipped the pin cushion off his wrist and settled into his chair.

"Hey you," Kurt said, his eyes brightening immediately. Blaine was fresh from the shower, curls tight with droplets of water occasionally falling. But he looked...off.

"Hey." Blaine tried to make it sound like everything was normal and okay but Kurt knew him far better than that by now.

"You wanna tell me what's going on?" Kurt gently urged and Blaine smiled shyly. Somehow just the fact that Kurt realized there was something wrong made him feel a bit better. "I haven't really heard much from you in two days."

"I haven't really heard much from you in two days either," Blaine pointed back.

"I know," Kurt frowned, his shoulders sagging. "We can't do this again Blaine. If things are going on, if you're worried about something or I'm worried about something we need to talk about it, not disappear on each other again."

Blaine sighed, knowing full well that Kurt was right. He was just, well embarrassed was probably as good a word as any. "It's just..." he started and he pinched the bridge of his nose. "It's just that I'm here and you're there and...I look absolutely ridiculous in that Gaga outfit Kurt and that Starchild guy is right there and hot as hell and-"

"Wait," Kurt startled, not expecting that at all. "This is about Starchild?" His face twisted, confused. "How do you even know about him?"

"Santana showed me the video," Blaine admitted.

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Of course she did." He took a breath and smiled at Blaine, a warm, loving smile at the most adorable man in the world. "Blaine, I would never, ever, look at him like I look at you."

Blaine scoffed. "Of course not, I'm no comparison, he's like Adam Lambert incarnate-"

Kurt laughed and shook his head. "No, he's not." Blaine flashed an incredulous look and Kurt conceded. "Ok, maybe he is, but that changes nothing."

Blaine wanted to argue, wanted to remind Kurt how many times they'd talked about Kurt's celebrity crushes, but he knew this wasn't really about that. "It's just, you and me, we're polar opposites Kurt, you are the biggest Gaga glee club has ever seen and I'm the biggest Katy and-"

"And that's what makes us perfect together," Kurt interrupted. "Do you really think I want to spend the rest of my life trying to out-Gaga my husband? Blaine, you are sweet and you're kind and you're sometimes bubble gum pop and sometimes soulful and honest. I would never want you to change that for me because those are the things I love about you."

Blaine visibly relaxed, his heart bursting with that heady sense of being overcome with love. "And you are one of a kind, Kurt. You are snarky and edgy and over the top and you challenge everyone around you. You challenge *me* every day. And that's what I love about you."

Kurt smiled and bowed his head. "Mr. Schuester really needs to stop trying to make us all something we're not."

"He's trying to expand our horizons," Blaine defended. "As artists."

"But what's wrong with knowing who you are and not compromising?" Kurt argued. "He and the rest of society tell us all the time we're not good enough, we're too different, we're not different enough. But look at Rachel. She never gave in, never tried to be anyone else. She is who she is and now she's Fanny Brice on Broadway. She's right and believe me, I hate when she is," he muttered. "But if I really want success I'm going to need to forge my own path."

"You're going to Kurt and I will be right by your side doing whatever I need to in order to help you make it happen," he vowed. Which brought him back to the matter at hand. "And Kurt? Starchild's voice may be incredible and his look may be over the top, but he'll never overshadow you. So don't give into that little voice in the back of your head. If he's going to make your band better, then he's just going to make you shine even more. So give him a shot."

"I will," Kurt smiled, then quirked a brow. "Going days without talking is a pretty stupid thing we do, huh?"

Blaine chuckled. "The dumbest. Have a good night Kurt. Sweet dreams."

"I will dream of you," Kurt promised.

---

"Why do I feel right now like I am a complete substitute for Kurt?" Sam asked as they walked up the sidewalk in front of the Lima Limelight.

"Because despite being the biggest Gaga McKinley has ever seen, the very first person in line for this Julie Andrews night has always been Kurt Hummel. And he may not be able to be here tonight, but we will come in his stead and be proud," Blaine announced, his chin held high.

"But did we really have to wear sailor suits?" Sam asked, looking down at his light blue pants and shirt with a handkerchief tie draped around his neck.

Blaine rolled his eyes in disapproval. "These are not sailor suits Sam, they are the uniforms from the Sound of Music and you look very handsome," he said appreciatively.

Sam grinned. "Thanks, man!" He patted Blaine on the back. "So do you, I guess."

Blaine paid, he was the one who asked Sam out after all, and they bought their refreshments before finding seats in the theater.

**From Blaine to Kurt [4:30pm]: We're here. Miss you.**

**From Kurt to Blaine [4:33pm]: Miss you too. And Julie Andrews.**

**From Santana to Sam [4:35pm]: I am so glad I am not you right now. Please send me a pic of you in your sailor suit.**

**From Sam to Santana [4:37pm]: It's a uniform, not a sailor suit, and no way in hell. But I'll send you Blaine.**

"Say cheese," Sam said quickly and snapped a picture of a grinning Blaine. He sent it to Santana.

**From Kurt to Blaine [4:40pm]: Nice suit. You are like sex on a rainbow lollipop stick right now ;)**

**From Blaine to Kurt [4:42pm]: God Kurt you cannot just say things like that while I'm at the movies with Sam. The images in my head right now are going to kill me. Thank goodness for the bucket of popcorn on my lap!**

**From Santana to Sam [4:43pm]: Is Anderson blushing right now? Cuz Hummel here is bright red on the couch.**

Sam looked over and didn't know whether to laugh or cringe.

**From Sam to Santana [4:45pm]: Do you think Julie Andrews turns them on?**

**From Santana to Sam [4:46pm]: I would not in any way put it past them. The gays are weird like that.**

**From Blaine to Kurt [4:48pm]: I need to put my phone away before the movie starts. And before I have to run to the bathroom to avoid a very unfortunate incident.**

**From Kurt to Blaine [4:50pm]: Skype you later?**

**From Blaine to Kurt [4:51pm]: You can count on it. xoxox**

---

"Hey, you want to join us all for dinner?" Kurt asked Elliot before returning to work. "The girls and I are gonna meet our roommate Rachel at the restaurant down the street after our shift. Which will be over in about," he glanced at his phone, "an hour. What do you say?"

Elliot smiled and nodded. "Sure. I'll just hang out here until you're done."

"Great," Kurt beamed and went back to work. Elliot tried not to appear creepy, keeping one eye on his phone and the other on Kurt, Santana and Dani, the folks he hoped he'd be spending a fair amount of time with in the foreseeable future. The three of them all got up to sing at one point and Elliot could not help but be the loudest with applause. He couldn't wait to sing with them.

Finally their shift was over and they hung up their aprons and headed out. They'd decided as soon as they'd started working at the Spotlight Diner that they wouldn't eat there unless they had to. Instead they headed down the street to an inexpensive but classy piano bar with good food and decent music.

"So what are things like for you at NYU?" Kurt asked Elliot as they walked. Santana and Dani were three steps behind lost in one another, giggling over something Kurt could probably never understand.

"It's good," Elliot answered, noncommittally. "You know, it's competitive and full of divas who don't just want to do well themselves, but want you to fail. That's why I wanted to go outside of NYU to find a place to perform. But I'm sure it's the same at NYADA."

"Pretty much," Kurt agreed. "Such is the business I guess, we better get used to it now. And speaking of business, there's Rachel." Kurt smiled as she approached and he quickly pulled her into his arms for a hug. He knew she was trying to put on a brave face, but rehearsals were hard for her. Funny Girl was something she'd always dreamed of. And Finn had always been a part of that picture. "How did today go?" he asked sympathetically.

"Eh, you know," she shrugged with a half-smile. "It's all so bittersweet. I'm learning so much and I think to call him and then I remember." She took Kurt's hand and looked past him for a minute, her smile broadening as soon as she saw the man in front of them. "And who's this?"

"Rachel, this is Elliot, aka Starchild." He bounced with excitement. "Elliot, this is my roommate and very best friend, Rachel Berry."

Elliot's eyes opened wide. "The Rachel Berry who was just cast as Fanny Brice in Funny Girl?"

"The very one!" Kurt responded proudly.

"Wow. You are just the talk of NYU, there's not a student there who's not jealous of you right now," Elliot told her.

Rachel's smile faltered for just a second, unseen by Elliot but of course not missed by Kurt. Apparently not everything about Rachel had made its way across Manhattan.

"Well thank you Elliot," she answered politely. "Fanny's been my dream since I was a little girl, so it's amazing to actually being doing it." She glanced up at Dani and Santana finally making their way over to them. "Nice of you two to join us," she teased. "Let's go inside, I'm starving. And as much as I love it, I could use some music other than Funny Girl in my life right now."

They went inside and ordered food and drinks. The music played on the piano and Kurt couldn't help but lose himself in it for a bit, imagining it was Blaine playing. They laughed and teased and generally got to know one another. Kurt had been wary at first, but now he thought that Elliot was going to fit in just fine.

---

Blaine had walked to school that morning, the breeze just right to make the distance disappear while the music on his iPod filled his thoughts. Now walking back after the student council meeting, cutting through the back fields of the school, he dodged the few runners still circling the track and the Cheerios loitering on the grass. He slipped his earbuds in and turned on his music, letting Katy wash over him. He'd leave the *outré* Starchild. It was fun sometimes, but he was who he was and he didn't need to pretend to be anyone else.

A flash of green and red pulled his focus out of the corner of his eye and he took another step closer to one of the equipment sheds on the outskirts of the fields. He knew kids came out here all the time to makeout or more and he was never one to make a fuss, but something made him stop until he could see who it was. Then he realized exactly what was going on.

"Jake?" He pulled the buds out of his ears, staring at the now startled Jake and Bree with complete confusion on his face.

Bree smirked, straightening her skirt and leaning up on her elbows. Jake scrambled away from the cheerleader, embarrassment and fear washing over him. "Dude please..."

The words were on the tip of Blaine's tongue before he bit them back, too familiar, too reminiscent of a day in the choir room when Finn had spoken the very same words that had almost slipped. Instead he glanced angrily back at Bree and took Jake by the arm, hoping he wasn't too late. "Come on." He offered Jake no opportunity to resist.

They walked until they were out of earshot of the girl then Blaine turned on him. "Jake, please, think about what you're doing."

"I know what I'm doing," Jake snapped, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"No you don't, Jake. Not if you care at all about Marley. Because this," he gestured in Bree's direction, "it changes things. It changes you. I know it seems like it's the only solution to whatever is going on between you two but once you do it you will never be the same. You can't take it back. Kurt and I may have our happy ending but we will never get back what we had before. What I did is with us forever."

"And what did you have before?" Jake asked.



Blaine's eyes saddened, considering the question. "Innocence," he sighed.

Jake shuffled, looking back to Bree then back to Blaine. "Yeah, well, maybe I don't want innocence," Jake said. "I may not be a Katy but I can still hear her words. Cloud nine doesn't exist. Not for guys like me."

Blaine couldn't get in another word before Jake stormed off back to Bree. He took her hand and led her off in the other direction. Blaine let out a breath. Falling was the easy part. Picking up the pieces, that took a lifetime.

---

Kurt was exhausted by the time he returned home, a long day of dance and voice and the most boring theater history class in the history of theater history. He was still the first one home though, Rachel at rehearsal and Santana no doubt spending the evening with Dani. The package by the door cheered him up a little. It was always fun to come home to a surprise. He picked it up and shoved the thin rectangular bubble insulated parcel beneath his arm while he slid open the door. Throwing his bag on the chair and settling on the couch he looked at it and squealed. It was for him. And it was from Blaine.

He ran to get a scissor to open it carefully in case it was fragile or delicate and he quickly did the job and reached in for what was inside. His hand touched glass and he pulled out a frame. A grin so big he probably lit up the room spread across his face. It was simple, black on white lettering, but it was completely perfect.

*You have to be  
Unique & Different & Shine  
In your own way.*

*~ Lady Gaga*

He reached for his phone, dialing quickly, Blaine answering immediately.

"Hi!" Blaine greeted happily. "I was just about to call you."

"Well I got your gift and I just wanted to tell you how much it means to me," Kurt said, wiping his eyes. "It's absolutely perfect and now when I forget, I can just look at it and I have you and Gaga to remind me every day to be myself."

"You're very welcome Kurt," Blaine said sincerely. "And I have someone to thank too," he added with a very playful tone. "Because I got a little gift in the mail today too."

Kurt smiled mischievously and tilted his head. "Oh did you?" he feigned innocence. "Tell me what you got, maybe I can help you figure out who sent it."

"Oh, well it says it's from a secret admirer. But I'm pretty sure there's only one person who would send me a bubblegum scented rainbow lollipop necklace."

"Oh?" Kurt giggled. "And who might that be?"

"Well, you wouldn't know him," Blaine teased. "It's just the love of my life."

"Oh well he must be a very lucky man," Kurt grinned.

"No," Blaine answered, shaking his head. "I'm the lucky one."

## ***Chapter Twenty-Seven: End of Twerk***

Kurt yawned. He didn't mean to, he tried to hold it back but it just came out.

Blaine's excitement deflated. And he'd really thought that maybe tonight...

Kurt didn't miss it. "I'm so sorry Blaine," he said while he yawned again, snuggling even more deeply into his sheets. He was lying on his side, the laptop next to his pillow. His so very comfortable pillow.

Blaine was trying to be patient. He really was. He knew how hard it was with classes all day and working all night. But his fiancé was killing him and not in a good way. "Kurt," he whined. "I love you and I need you and after the Julie Andrews night and your texts I was so SO ready and you just fell asleep."

"It was late by the time you got home," Kurt frowned.

"And then the other night you looked ridiculously hot in that scarf and I just wanted to," he bit his lip, trying not to get himself worked up just thinking about the things he'd wanted it but it wasn't really working, "and we were so close Kurt, and you fell asleep-"

"Blaine-"

"And I know New York is demanding," Blaine continued. "And I'm completely embarrassed that it even exists, but you haven't even said a word about that twerking video and don't tell me you haven't seen it because I know how our friends work you probably have 2 or 3 copies of it in your text messages-"

"Four," Kurt corrected.

"So please Kurt tell me," Blaine paused, his stomach clenching, not sure what he wanted the answer to be. "Am I doing something wrong?"

That woke Kurt up just a little bit and he leaned on his arm. "No Blaine, no, I promise." He wished he could reach out and hug him and reassure him. "I mean I know it's so cliché to say *it's not you it's me* but really...it's not you it's me." Kurt hoped that Blaine would believe him.

Blaine felt his shoulders relax and his heart ached for whatever Kurt was going through. "Then tell me what it is so I can help you. It's bad enough we're so far apart but I miss you so much."

"I don't know Blaine." Kurt lowered his head back down. His eyes grew sad. He wanted to be with Blaine. That time they were together during the week of the memorial was so special to him and if Blaine were with him he was certain it would be the same but this...this was very different. "It's just that since Finn...it's hard to, you know. Feel like doing...it."

Blaine suddenly felt like the worst fiancé in the world. "I'm sorry."

"No, don't be," Kurt assured him.

But Blaine didn't hear. "No I shouldn't have pushed. I understand, Kurt. Completely. I should have realized that."

Kurt smiled softly. Blaine always took the blame but Kurt was coming to realize that their issues were a two way street. "And I should be more...sensitive...to your...needs." He blushed. After all this time he hated that he still blushed.

But Blaine loved it and every time he fell in love with Kurt a little more. "No Kurt, Really. I'm fine. And we're fine. And I love you."

"I love you too," Kurt said. "Oh and um, feel free to send me more twerking videos. Just maybe keep it in the privacy of your own home next time."

Now it was Blaine's turn to blush but his face also lit up in a grin. "I'll do one better. I'll twerk for you right now."

"Oh my god Blaine, don't," Kurt urged but he was too late. Without waiting for approval he'd gotten up to put on some music, aimed his laptop and gave Kurt a show. Kurt broke out laughing, biting his lip as his fiancé shook his ass at him. The red on his cheeks blossomed.

Blaine turned for a minute to see Kurt grinning and flush and he sent a seductive wink over his shoulder. Kurt squeezed his eyes shut in mutual embarrassment. Blaine turned back around and finished the song, practicing for Nationals, he told himself and laughed. When the song ended he turned back around hopefully, only to find Kurt fast asleep on his pillow. With a sigh he turned the music off and climbed back in bed himself. He traced his finger on the screen, wishing he could reach out and touch Kurt, kiss his forehead, kiss his lips, and tuck the covers in tightly around him.

"Goodnight sweet prince," he whispered softly before disconnecting the call and placing the laptop on his nightstand. He curled up in his blankets, hugged his pillow, and went to sleep.

---

Kurt awoke the next morning with the black screen of his laptop open next to him and he rolled over and groaned. He'd done it to Blaine again and this time while the boy was literally shaking his ass at him.

He didn't know exactly what was wrong with him but he was certain that something had to change.

He sent a quick good morning apology to Blaine, one that was getting to be redundant after all these nights. He stumbled out into the living room and into the bathroom, thankful that he'd woken before the girls. Or Rachel. He hadn't seen Santana all week except at work. Clearly she wasn't having the same problem with Dani that he was having with Blaine, he thought with a roll of his eyes. He trudged into the bathroom, showered and readied himself for the day, got dressed, grabbed some snacks to go and headed out to his favorite coffee shop before taking the subway to school.

It would be another long day of classes, work, and a date with his television and ice cream tonight to wind down.

Stifling a yawn, he listed out the things he had to do today in his head. He'd worry about change tomorrow.

---

It was funny how his father had started making a place for himself in the little apartment that Blaine and his mom shared. What was even funnier, to Blaine at least, was how natural it felt. They'd taken to eating dinner as a family after work and school then sitting on the couch together at night to watch a show, the news or a movie. Blaine would excuse himself to Skype with Kurt and go to bed and in the morning his father would be gone. It felt right. It felt good. It felt like home.

"This vulgar, sexually explicit excuse for a dance craze has brought American culture to a new low. And that's why tonight, Western Ohio, I solemnly pledge to end the pandemic of twerking once and for all. Not only will I outlaw twerking at McKinley High, but I have submitted a bill to the Ohio State legislature banning twerking in Ohio public schools." Blaine slowly lowered his head in his hands, wishing the couch would open him up and swallow him whole. "And that's how Sue C's it," Coach Sylvester finished, her voice filling the living room and seeming to hang in the air.

The Colonel muted the television and turned slowly to Blaine. Blaine felt his father's eyes on him but he couldn't meet them instead staring at the fingers he lowered onto his lap. He bit his lip. He could feel his heart beating in his chest. "Why do I think you and your Glee club have something to do with this?" the Colonel finally asked.

There was no use in lying. He tried to remind himself there was no *need* to lie anymore. "I was in the choir room by myself listening to music and I may have been...twerking...while I cleaned things up at the end of the day. I thought I was completely alone but Tina snuck in and took video of it. I told her to go away, but then she showed it to the rest of the club. So then Mr. Schuester decided the whole glee club should learn how to twerk so we could do it for Nationals." He'd kept his eyes down telling the story but he nervously looked up to his father now.

John's eyes were shut. He was breathing slowly, in and out, then he opened his eyes. "Do you know how lucky you are that Sue Sylvester did not play that video for all of Western Ohio?" His father had hated Sue ever since the credit issues she'd caused their family. He'd threatened to go to the school board when she'd become principal, but Blaine had stopped him, not wanting his Dad to make a scene and cause trouble for him.

"Yes sir, I am," Blaine assured him. He'd been holding his breath the whole segment just praying that Sue hadn't somehow gotten her hands on it. "I'm pretty sure I know everyone who has it, I made them all swear they wouldn't send it outside of Glee Club or post it on the internet." He'd actually gone so far as to corner Jake in private to make sure it wasn't on his phone. He didn't know where things were with Bree right now, but if she got to the video Sue most definitely would and no doubt the video would go worldwide. "Truth be told Dad, it's completely embarrassing and I'd be more than happy if everyone just deleted it."

John sighed and sat back in the couch. "I honestly don't know how I feel about all of you twerking at Nationals," John said.

"I honestly don't know how I feel about the fact that you even know what twerking is," Blaine muttered.

"Then I probably shouldn't ask you to teach me how to do it?" John smirked.

"Oh my god," Blaine cringed at the thought.

His mother hid her face behind her hand trying not to laugh. Blaine saw and found himself chuckling as well. It must have been contagious because suddenly John was laughing too which just made all of them burst out in hysterics.

There were still moments, too many maybe, that the old worries and feelings came back like unwanted thoughts that haunted him when he least expected it. But he was always surprised to find that his father was indeed a changed man. And the fact that he had done that would never cease to amaze him.

---

She was curled up warm and sated in Dani's arms beneath the red down blankets of the full size bed. Dani's hand stroked the skin of her hips and Santana let out a contented hum. "I could stay here forever," she purred and kissed Dani's neck.

Dani smiled and squeezed her tight, kissing her temple. "Your roommates might miss you," she hinted.

Santana pouted. "You don't want me to stay?"

"I want you to be happy," Dani said and raised a brow. "So why are you avoiding Kurt and Rachel?"

It hadn't been on purpose anymore than Rachel and Kurt moping around the apartment had been on purpose. But she'd needed air and sex and the comfort she'd found with Dani. "They're just so depressing," she admitted.

"Maybe they just need your beautiful smile and powerful spirit?" Dani smirked and kissed her softly. "I know it does wonders for me."

Santana grinned and climbed on top of Dani, letting the blanket slip from her shoulders. "I don't think either of them want what I have to offer."

Dani pulled her down and kissed her again. "You have to go back sometime," she whispered against her lips.

"Not tonight," Santana whispered back and reached a hand down to tease.

Dani closed her eyes and hissed in a breath. "No, definitely not tonight," she agreed.

"No Tina, seriously, you have to squat down further like you're gonna sit, then pop, pop, pop, like this." Kitty demonstrated by nearly sitting on Artie's lap then flicking her ass in his face. The room filled with groans and aside from Artie who raised his hands in the air with praise and shouted "Amen and Hallelujah," pretty much the entire room looked away, most especially Tina and Blaine.

The sound of the door snapping shut broke through the chaos though, commanding their attention. Quiet filled the room, everyone turning to look. Unique stood motionless just inside the door, her wig gone, her arms hugging herself in an attempt to protect, and tears flowing from her eyes.

Blaine was the first one up and was across the room in a flash. "What happened?" he asked gently, though he had a very good idea of what happened. Her eyes were scared, far away. He knew that look. He knew it all too well.

"They took my hair," was the first thing she thought of to say and it sounded silly in her ears, but Blaine's hands on her arms felt so good she remembered how she must look.

"Who did?" he whispered.

She looked him in the eye, golden warmth full of worry and understanding and she thought she could actually get lost in those eyes so she looked away and shrugged. "Just some guys in the bathroom."

"What the hell?" Ryder snapped and Jake stood up by his side.

"We're going out there now," Sam said. He was out of the risers and halfway across the room when Blaine's hand against his chest stopped him. A pointed glare, a slight shake of the head, and Sam stepped back.

Blaine turned back to Unique. "What do you need right now?"

"I just need to sing," she said and Blaine understood completely. He made sure all the doors were closed and dimmed the lights while Unique talked to Brad and the boys returned to their seats. Then he sat down.

It was rare, with everything he'd been through, for him to think on the days that seemed so long ago now. The pain he'd been through with his father had been overshadowing the other for years. Even the Sadie



Hawkins dance hadn't really brought it back. He wasn't scared any more, especially with his friends by his side. But now, as Unique sang she faded before his eyes and the memories returned; the taunts that had broken his spirit, the words that had cut like a knife, the stripping of his bowtie that night before the fists broke his bones. He got lost in them, the pain in Unique's voice a clear reminder of how much he'd hurt staring out the window of that hospital bed knowing he was completely alone.

But with Kurt and Santana and Sam he was not alone anymore and neither was Unique and the boys stood up for her and had her back. But they didn't understand how fighting back could hurt so much more than standing still. He did though.

When Glee was over the guys offered Unique a ride home, an offer she politely declined. Blaine hitched his bag on his shoulder and started to follow the boys but changed his mind at the last minute.

"I'll catch up with you guys tomorrow," he said and stepped back inside. He turned in the doorway and closed the door behind him. Unique looked up at him from across the room.

"Sometimes going home can be the hardest part." She was quiet and he crossed the room, straddling a seat near her. He rested his chin on his hands. "It always was for me."

"Every morning my dad leaves for work before I get up. It's not that he doesn't support me and my choices. But he knows that when I walk out the door stuff like this is gonna happen." Unique lowered her head, then looked back at Blaine's caring gaze. "I talk about the good parts of my day. Everyone in Glee Club has been wonderful. I don't tell them about this stuff."

"You keep it secret to protect them," Blaine said.

"It's my fa-" She swallowed her words hoping Blaine wouldn't notice "-fight, not theirs."

But it was a slip he knew too well. "It's not your fault." He reached out a hand, resting it gently on hers.

"I know that," Unique said.

"I knew it too. It still sometimes felt like it was." He remembered those days like it was yesterday. "I thought it was just the price I had to pay for being what I was. That's what my father always told me."

"He was wrong," Unique said quietly.

"I know that now," Blaine said, and he was glad she knew it too. "I also know that it's better to have people by your side and to ask for help. It seems like it might get worse if you do, hell sometimes it might. But in my experience, the more friends around you the better."

"So...you're saying I should let the guys beat up the jocks?" Unique asked.

Blaine shook his head. "No. Violence isn't the answer. But I am saying that you should let them be the friends they want to be."

Unique smiled softly. "It's just nice to have someone to talk to about it who understands. Who's been there too."

Blaine smiled and nodded. With Kurt and Santana and Brittany gone it was just him and Unique against the prejudiced in this school. "Yes it is." He swung off the chair and held out his hand. "Now, can I drive you home?"

Unique laughed softly and took his hand. "Yes, Mr. Anderson, you may."

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Blaine's computer rang with the Skype call and he pulled it onto his lap with that ever present swoop in his belly he always felt just before he got to lay eyes on Kurt. He was greeted though not by his fiancé but by a white poster board with a message sprawled across it.

*I have a surprise for you!*

Blaine's heart started to flutter and his grin was enormous before he even saw what it was. Then suddenly the poster board was lowered and he was staring at the beautiful back he knew so well except...

The swoop in his belly immediately grew hot. "Oh my god Kurt, is that tattoo real?"

Kurt turned with his own grin and nodded vigorously, but instead of saying a word he held up another sign.

*But that's not all!*

Kurt nervously lowered the sign to the floor and Blaine was staring at him, expectant and adorable and nearly begging for the next surprise. Kurt blushed, embarrassed and worried and maybe just a little bit excited, and he delicately stuck out his tongue.

The glint of the silver stud on Kurt's tongue sent a shiver up Blaine's spine and the blood straight down. "Fuck," he breathed.

Kurt's nerves rattled and his face scrunched with worry. "Is that a good fuck or a bad fuck?" Blaine stared at him without answer and Kurt grew even more anxious. "Blaine?"

Blaine swallowed and took a breath. "Give me a minute here Kurt, I don't think there's any blood left in my brain."

Kurt giggled and relaxed. "Tho you're not mad at me?" he lisped.

"Mad? I..." Blaine shook his head out of his daze and laughed. "No, I am on the other side of the universe from mad. God, Kurt, that is the craziest, sexiest thing you have ever done and remind me again why they haven't invented teleportation yet because I need you so badly right now."

Kurt laughed. "I think it hath to heal first before we can do any of that in perthon anyway."

"Well good that will give me time to get a plane ticket," Blaine said.

"You think your father's gonna give you frequent flyer miles to try out my new tongue wing?" Kurt asked amused.

"I'll think of something," Blaine promised desperately and he lowered his voice. "I need to feel it on my skin, taste it. I need to see that tattoo, touch it, kiss it..."

"You don't think I've ruined my skin?" Kurt bit his lip, again second guessing.

"I think your skin is beautiful, and whatever you wear is beautiful, and so wearing something on your skin is insanely beautiful Kurt and you are so fucking sexy Kurt you're killing me," Blaine whined.

Kurt threw Blaine a seductive smile and reached over beside his bed. "Then let me add a little more sexy to the mix," he winked.

*Put your hands, all over, put your hands all over me  
Put your hands, all over, put your hands all over me*

*I can't seem to find the pretty little face I left behind  
Wandered out on the open road  
Looking for a better place to call home*

The sound of Adam Levine drove him over the edge. "Fuck Kurt, I want your hands all over me now," Blaine whispered, losing himself in the music and the images, closing his eyes and feeling Kurt's hands on his skin.

*Put your hands all over me please talk to me, talk to me  
Tell me everything, it's gonna be alright  
Put your hands all over me*

"Next time I see you I'm gonna do so much better than my hands, Blaine," Kurt tried to croon.

"Kurt baby," he breathed, his eyes closed, sweat beading on his forehead.

"Yeah?"

Blaine opened his eyes, heavy lidded, pupils dark and blown, and he smiled that soft, goofy smile that sent waves of arousal through Kurt's skin. "I love you, but please just let me do the talking this time," he suggested.

*So come down off your cloud  
Say it now say it loud  
Get up in my face  
Pretty little girl come make my day*

Kurt blushed and laid back on his bed. "Okay," he whispered.

"No sleeping," Blaine teased, his breathing ragged.

"Not a chance," Kurt promised, his voice wrecked.

Blaine's pulse pounded in his ears and he met Kurt's eyes with a grin. "Okay..."

*Love is a game you say play me and put me away*

*Love is a game you say play me and put me away*

*Put your hands all over me*

## ***Chapter Twenty-Eight: Movin' Out***

"You have the cash I gave you? And the credit card for emergencies?" the Colonel asked, standing at the foot of Blaine's bed as he packed.

Blaine rolled his eyes. "Yes Dad, I have it all," he assured him for the tenth time. "It's not like I haven't been to New York before."

"The first time you snuck away without permission I never would have given you and the second time you were with Burt," the Colonel reminded him. "I feel like I should be going with you. I know you're 18, but don't most kids do college tours with their parents? The idea of you and Sam making your way around New York City on your own..."

Blaine gripped his father's shoulders softly and smiled. "We will be fine. I promise. We have Kurt and Rachel and Santana and you have a weekend drill you can't get out of and Mom has a deadline to reach and we will be fine," he assured his Dad. Better than fine. Going to New York with Sam was going to be amazing. Being there with Kurt, Santana and Rachel was even better. "Besides, it's only a few months before we'll be living there anyway."

His father's eyes grew stern and he pointed a finger. "I want to hear about NYU and Columbia when you get back, not just your NYADA audition. That's important and I know it's your number one choice but I won't have you hanging around here or getting some internship in New York while you figure out what to do if you don't get in." Blaine bristled at the slight digs at Kurt but he let it go. "I know you want to perform like your brother but he's single and if he goes months without a job it's no big deal. You will have a family to support and you need to make sure you can provide for you and Kurt. There are other things you can do with your life beside theater and at NYU or Columbia you can even double major if you still want to do it. NYADA is not the be all and end all, understood?"

"Yes Sir," Blaine mumbled and he backed away and returned to his bag. He knew his father had a point, he'd applied to those schools on his own accord for exactly that reason. But he didn't need his father's doubts in his head, his stomach was fluttering enough with his own. Truth be told he was terrified of this audition and he'd never been scared of one before which just terrified him even more. And as it often did with Blaine fear turned to anger and avoidance and he pulled his duffle over his head, settling it on his hip. "I need to get to school," he muttered.

The Colonel grabbed his wrist before he could get out the door. Blaine turned with a glare, but softened at the look in his father's eyes. "I'm not trying to discourage you Blaine. I want you to go out there and wow them with your audition. And if you get in I will be behind you 100%. I just want to make sure you have a backup plan for college if you don't, and NYU and Columbia are amazing schools for both the arts and whatever else you might want to do."

Blaine chewed at his lips. He understood his father meant well and wanted nothing but the best for him. "I know Dad," he said softly and wrapped an arm around to hug him. "I'll call you when I get there."

"And after your audition," the Colonel said pointedly.

Blaine grinned and chuckled faintly. "I will."

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There was something about the noise that always sent a shiver down Blaine's spine and he could never quite tell if it was good or bad. Ohio was quiet and green and the air was fresh with the scent of flowers in the summer and snow in the winter. It was full of reminders of love everywhere, rolling in a field of lilacs or snuggling by the fire or driving down the old country roads in fall watching the leaves turn to dark, seductive reds and yellows. It was laying beneath a world of stars that held the wishes that lay secret in the heart.

New York on the other hand was loud and smelled of trash and smog. All that could be seen for miles were buildings and yet it was also full of excitement and energy and people reaching for dreams that were only shadows of hope in Ohio. The noise of New York was the sound of people actually making their dreams come true.

Horns honked around them as Blaine and Sam boarded the bus to Bushwick and their excitement thrummed through them.

"I can't believe I let you talk me into keeping this a surprise," Blaine said as they got off the bus and headed up the street toward the apartment. Obviously the trio knew he was coming for the NYADA audition, but he was a full two days early and they had no idea Sam was coming too. Keeping the secret had been excruciating. "Santana is going to kill me."

"Not Kurt?" Sam eyed with a smirk.

Blaine's lips curled in a sly, private smile and his eyes twinkled. "I have other plans for Kurt," he purred, realizing too late he'd actually said that out loud.

Sam draped an arm around his shoulders and patted him proudly on the back. "That's my boy! Gonna kick it off with *your* very own take on a classic bj?"

Blaine blushed at Sam's words and then grew bright red with the anticipation of Kurt's tongue stud rushing through his veins. He was going for anything but classic.

Sam laughed and they opened the front door to the apartment building. Blaine let Sam try to find it but his patience was nearly gone and he pointed out the door. Sam threw it open in surprise, Blaine taking note to make sure he had a talk with Kurt about locking it, and Kurt and Rachel looked up at them in shock.

"What are you doing here?" Kurt screeched excitedly getting up from his card game. Blaine beamed as suddenly Rachel was hugging him and then Kurt. He kissed Kurt's cheek and fell into his arms and there was nothing more right in the world than exactly where he was in that moment. Kurt pulled back but kept his hand in Blaine's, not wanting to let go just yet. "I can't believe you didn't tell us you were coming early."

"And bringing Sam with you, how fabulous," Santana added flatly, fresh from the shower, her hair wrapped in a towel. "You better be planning a threesome in that bed Anderson, because the couch ain't big enough for trouty mouth and me."

"I'll sleep on the floor Santana, I promise," Sam said, sending a wink to Blaine. "Think Blaine's got some plans of his own that don't require a third party."

"Wonderful," Santana moaned, rolling her eyes. Blaine threw Sam and glare and Kurt just blushed. "Got some earplugs in that bag Boyfriend? I've had my evenings full of peace and quiet with these two boring singles up 'til now."

"We know how to be quiet," Blaine said, throwing her a smile, before leading Kurt to the couch to talk. "You're not mad are you?" Blaine asked curling his legs beneath him. "That I came early without telling you? It was Sam's idea to keep it a surprise."

"Why would I be mad?" Kurt wondered and hugged him once more. "I just can't quite believe you're here."



"You don't have plans tonight, do you?" Blaine whispered, tracing a path with his fingertips up Kurt's thigh. "Because you haven't kissed me yet," Blaine hinted, his eyes already shining with desire. "And all I could think about the whole trip here was that barbell in my mouth and on my-"

Kurt kissed him to shut him up, quick and not at all enough, not at all what Blaine wanted or needed, but it did the trick. "I definitely have plans for tonight," Kurt whispered against his lips. "Very big plans."

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"If you turn around, now you'll see Dodge Hall." Blaine and Sam turned to see a large brick building with arched windows all along the first floor. "This is the hub of the School of the Arts." The tour guide brought them inside the building and they looked around the vast lobby and the small coffee shop inside. "I myself have often come inside to get a cup of coffee to keep me going throughout the day. The arts thrive at Columbia, and Dodge Hall is home to our world famous school of the arts. Our music department is housed here as well as the Miller Theater, art galleries and several libraries. In addition to Dodge Hall's resources, Columbia offers undergraduates committed to the arts tremendous opportunities in dance, drama and theater arts and architecture," the tour guide recited her script.

"It's not so bad here," Blaine whispered to Sam as they continued the tour through the Hall and onto the remaining stops. "I'd have plenty of opportunity to sing and act, even while I major in something else. Maybe philosophy or psychology," he shrugged.

"I suppose," Sam said, less than enthusiastic. "I mean I don't know how good a school it really is if it can't even spell 'Colombia' right."

Blaine chuckled and shook his head. Sometimes the similarities between Sam and Brittany were striking. "It's an Ivy League School, Sam, I think it's pretty good."

After the tour they headed back to the Visitor's Center for their class visitation tickets. They arrived at the intro to psychology class a few minutes before it was set to begin and handed the tickets to the professor. The lecture hall was large and Sam wanted to sit in the back but Blaine was instantly mesmerized and shuffled into the fourth row.

"Let's talk about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," the professor announced, starting the class. "Who can tell me the significance of it being shaped as a pyramid?"

The discussion and lecture was like a breath of fresh air to Blaine who had been starved for real debate and dialogue since leaving Dalton and going to McKinley. He didn't say anything, though he knew a significant amount about Maslow from his own counseling sessions. It didn't matter though, he learned more in that hour than he had in a semester of High School. Maybe his Dad was right.

Sam though was exhausted by the time class was over and he was thankful to be done with the campus tours and to get to the real excitement of exploring the streets of New York City. They took the subway to the East Village and the historic site on St. Mark's Place of the deconstructed bathhouse Kurt wanted him to see.

"This place was closed the end of 1985 because of the AIDS epidemic," Blaine told Sam sadly, staring up at the building from the curb. "Since the 15th century, baths like this were sometimes the only safe places where gay men could go to be themselves. Outside they'd be arrested or publicly humiliated just for loving who they love. But inside..." He walked to the building and touched the brick as if he could feel the history and the hope that was once upon a time housed within its walls. "Inside they were free."

Sam walked up to Blaine and leaned against the wall of the stairwell that once led inside. "Things are different now though. Or at least they're starting to be," Sam said with a small smile. "No one has to hide away anymore. You and Kurt are going to have one of the biggest gay weddings in all of New York and someday you will be the power couple to beat, I just know it."

Blaine glanced up at him through his lashes, a humble shyness coloring his cheeks. "You really think so?"

"I really know so," Sam said and grabbed Blaine's hand. "Now come on, there's a comic book store a few doors down and I need to get the latest issue of Green Lantern."

---

Dani was eyeing him from the minute she saw him at the restaurant and Blaine felt like he was being weighed, measured and judged under her piercing gaze. "So this is the boyfriend, huh?"

He tried to smile. He wished she'd been at the diner earlier, then she could have seen him at his best, performing. And even though he'd been the one to ask Santana if he could meet her girlfriend, he currently felt unnaturally on display. Still, he was a gentleman and he knew how to behave like one. "It's a pleasure to meet you Dani, I've heard such wonderful things about you from Santana" he said.

Santana smirked and smacked Dani playfully on the arm. "Quit staring him down, if he shrinks anymore he'll disappear altogether."

"Oh please Santana, if he can't withstand a little scrutiny from your trying to be tougher than she is girlfriend, then being under the soul crushing eye of Carmen Tibedeaux would be an impossibility, and we all know that Blaine is going to kill that audition," Kurt beamed proudly.

"Like Elliot killed his audition?" Dani said sarcastically and cocked a brow.

Blaine startled and looked to Kurt. "Wait, what?"

"I know crazy, right?" Kurt laughed and gave Blaine a squeeze. "NYADA turning down a voice like his? Though I can kind of understand it if he was as over the top at that as he was with us. Their loss is our gain though. Our band is going to be amazing."

Blaine tried not to instantly panic as they went on talking about plans for music and locations and costumes for the band. He joined in and found that he and Dani actually had a lot in common with their not so approving parents and their love of music. He thought they could talk for hours about musical influences and technique and he could not wait to get side by side with her playing guitar, him playing piano and both their voices ringing out into a crowd. Santana was almost giddy with how well the two were getting along and Kurt just loved watching how excited and animated Blaine became in his element. Overall the evening was perfect and just one more thing for them all to look forward to being able to do once Blaine moved to New York permanently.

But as he and Kurt walked home in the cool breeze of the spring air, Blaine looked up into a sky with no stars. And with the stars went his hope and that nagging thought that had been plaguing him for the past two hours leaped to the forefront of his mind. Rachel hadn't gotten in to NYADA. Kurt hadn't gotten in. Even Elliot hadn't gotten in.

What on earth had made him think that he would be any different?

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"I can't stop you from failing, but I can promise to make it safe if you do."

The words played over and over in his mind, calming him every time his heart jumped. Safe. Kurt knew him better than anyone in the world. He knew when he was scared or angry and he knew when he was starting to run. Most of all, he knew that the word "safe" meant absolutely everything to him. Never in Blaine's life was failing ever safe. Until Kurt.

Kurt was the first person to ever make him safe and he would be the last. Blaine had never been and would never be safer than when he was with Kurt. Sometimes though he just needed the reminder.

He paced backstage, trying to keep up his energy and his confidence as each of the other auditioners took the stage. He was last, which was both a blessing and a curse. He listened to the Broadway tunes and the pop melodies and the level of talent was overwhelming but there were a few that were obviously not up to par. His vocals were not as strong as many. He accepted his weaknesses, understanding that knowledge was power in this business. But he was also keenly aware that there was something in him, in his performances, that made people stand up and listen. He had no idea really what it was or how he did it. He could only imagine that it was his love of the music and his love of performing that resonated with the crowd. He sang to share his heart with the world.

It's why he had chosen *Piano Man* and as he introduced himself and took his seat at the piano, he closed his eyes and imagined the scene, like at the diner only better. He imagined a haze filled room, his friends and family in the audience, the ones who had always believed in him throughout the years and the ones who had always doubted him. His fingers danced on the keys, his voice filled the air and his heart and soul reached out to the friends he loved and those he hadn't met yet. He was the piano man, put on this earth to make music and help people, whether it was just for a moment or for a lifetime. And when he finished the song he heard the rousing cheers of his fiancé and best friend and the slow, thoughtful clap of Carmen Tibideaux.

"I've heard a lot of good things about you Mr. Anderson," she said in a level voice and he stood up, wiping his hands nervously on his slacks. He ducked his head and blushed, with a faint smile of embarrassment.

"Well Kurt is obviously biased, but I like to think he has good taste," Blaine answered with a timid laugh.

"He is biased," Carmen agreed and Blaine's face fell. He didn't dare meet Kurt's eyes, instead staying focused on the woman who would decide his future. He tried to remember it didn't matter if he got in. His heart was beating out of his chest and all he could see was this dream vanishing before his eyes. "But Mr. Hummel was not who I was talking about. You have fans in high places, Mr. Anderson, and though I don't

care what others think..." Her eyes bore into his, searching, for what he did not know. He held his breath, unable to breathe until she nodded with an apparent decision. "I happen to agree with them. Well done, young man."

It took a moment for her words to sink in but when they did his face erupted in a grin and he finally exhaled and sought Kurt's eyes. Kurt was crying with happiness, Santana was smiling as wide as a fool and Blaine had this horrible urge to jump on the piano bench and scream at the top of his lungs.

"You can leave my stage now Mr. Anderson," Carmen ordered, a playful smile teasing at her lips.

"Thank you," Blaine managed to choke out and he ran off the stage and into the hallway. Kurt and Santana came running and they both attacked him, Santana with a hug and Kurt with a kiss that made it obvious neither one of them was thinking clearly. The kiss though calmed him and Blaine pulled back, trying to come back to his senses. "Guys, calm down, I haven't been accepted yet. There's still a lot of factors, the audition's only part of it."

They all knew it to be true but it didn't matter, not right now. "Who do you think she was talking about?" Kurt asked, barely able to catch his breath.

Blaine shook his head. "I honestly have no idea."

"We have to celebrate," Santana said and she grabbed the boys hands and started leading them out into the city.

"Hang on a minute, I have a call I have to make." Blaine stepped aside and pulled out his phone, dialing the number. It answered on the second ring. "Hey Dad. Yeah, I just finished. I think it went really well. Thanks Dad. I hope I get in too."

---

Santana was right, of course and Blaine was more than happy that she was. After Just the Way You Are, the night predictably devolved into a Billy Joel sing along until the fear of voices straining overcame the desire for fun.

"As amazing as this is, if I don't get to bed now I will be a disaster in rehearsal tomorrow and it would not be pretty. Blaine? Sam?" She opened her arms and they both easily went to her embrace. "Have a safe trip

back tomorrow, give Mr. Schue a hug for me, and I will see you both soon." They both kissed her cheek and she grinned with delight. "Goodnight everyone," she called once more with a small wave of her shoulder before disappearing into her bedroom.

Kurt stretched his arms and yawned noisily. "Well I am exhausted," he said, his words obviously a mere exit strategy. He stood up and peered down at Blaine. "Coming?" he asked.

"Wanky," Santana smirked until a pillow flew out of Blaine's hands and wiped it off her face with a direct hit. "Goodnight boys!" she crooned.

They all readied for bed in their respective places, Rachel in her room, Kurt and Blaine in theirs, Santana on the couch and Sam on the floor. The lights were off but it was never truly dark in the city that never sleeps and Sam lay on his back, the covers pulled up to his shoulders, the pillow Blaine had thrown from the couch beneath his head. He stared up at the ceiling, trying to will his thoughts to slow but he couldn't get one thing off his mind.

"Santana," he whispered into the shadowed room. "You awake?"

"I am now," she moaned and rolled over onto her side. "What do you want?"

"Nothing, nevermind," Sam said, shying away from the topic, but her face refused to disappear from before his eyes. "Do you think she's okay? Brittany I mean."

Santana sat up and curled against the arm of the couch, glancing over to him. She was thankful this wasn't about Rachel. Whatever was going on there, she was not getting involved. "Why, you think she's not?" she asked.

"Sitting in that class at Columbia with Blaine? He ate it up, every word. It was like they were speaking some foreign tongue that made no sense to me but he hung on their every word. I felt completely out of my element; confused, lost, alone." He sat up and pulled his knees in tight, resting his arms on top and looking at Santana. "Do you think she feels that way? At MIT?"

"I don't know," she said softly after a moment of reflection. "When she talks to me she says that she loves it there. She says she has friends, she's thinking of auditioning for the MIT Dance Troupe and she's trying to get into the city to see shows." She closed her eyes and remembered their last conversation. "But there's always a sadness there too, in her voice. She doesn't say it, but I know it's there."

"That's the thing that scares me." Sam hated that it was true, but he knew it was. "She'd never tell us if she was hurting."

"Do you miss her?" Santana asked, her voice soft with affection.

He laid back down and stared back up at the ceiling. "Every day," he answered honestly.

Santana curled back up on the couch and wrapped herself in her blanket. "Me too," she sighed and closed her eyes. She missed her more than she ever wanted to admit.

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They grabbed the bathroom before the rest, brushing their teeth and getting ready for bed. In the light streaming in through the bedroom window, they locked eyes, breathing in how perfect, how grown up the whole week had felt. It was a tease of so many nights to come, of living together and loving together for the rest of their lives. And now it was almost over.

"I'm gonna miss this," Kurt said sadly, climbing on to the bed. "It's crazy. The first morning waking up with you next to me I thought I was still dreaming. Now I can't imagine it without you."

Blaine lifted the covers and crawled in next to him, wrapping Kurt lovingly in his arms. "Well we still have one more morning," he said, kissing Kurt softly on his hair.

Kurt looked up at him, the devilish smirk on his lips that Blaine loved so much. "And one more night," he teased before surging up to meet Blaine's lips. He'd taken the piercing out after that first night. It was an incredible thing to experience and try, but it wasn't him and Blaine never wanted him to do anything he wasn't comfortable with. Tonight his kiss was passionate yet sweet and just so very much more Kurt. Blaine soaked every second of it in so it would last him for all their time apart. Kurt pulled away too soon and Blaine tried to chase his lips. But instead of letting him, Kurt pulled him in to rest on his chest. Blaine understood and he laid his head above Kurt's heart, listening to the rhythm of their love.

"I was so proud of you today," Kurt said softly, stroking Blaine's hair tenderly. "And I don't mean for your performance, though it was of course incredible. I mean for going out there in the first place even though you were afraid."

Blaine played with the soft hairs on Kurt's chest. "I knew I was safe," he whispered before looking up at Kurt. "You were out there and with you by my side nothing can ever hurt me. You're home for me Kurt. You always have been. The rest doesn't matter."

They fell into a silence, that wonderful quiet that came from needing no more words to say how they felt. And when that wasn't enough, when neither of them could let their time together slip away into the darkness of slumber, they made love in the silence until their energy was fully spent and there was no more they could do than to fall into beautiful dreams of their future soon to come.



## ***Chapter Twenty-Nine: Puppet Master***

*"I'm sorry Blaine. But I've waited long enough for you, I can't wait another 4 years." Kurt stood with his arms crossed in the middle of the choir room.*

*Voices from behind made him turn. "If you'd stayed with us you would have won Nationals and gotten into the schools of your choice," Sebastian and Nick stared him down, holding a Dalton blazer in their hands.*

*Blaine glanced down and suddenly he was in his bedroom. Denial letters from NYADA, NYU and Columbia lay spread out on his bed in front of him.*

*"You'll find someone else in California," Kurt said from the doorway. "I'm sure Berkeley is full of guys who will catch your eye."*

*Blaine couldn't breathe. He felt his heart breaking in his chest and took a step, reaching out. "Kurt No! I just won't go to college. I'll come to New York anyway and perform on the street if I have to!"*

*"Like hell you will," the Colonel growled, stepping up behind Kurt standing a hundred feet tall. "I will stand outside your dorm room door all year myself. You are not giving up college."*

*Kurt backed away and Blaine ran after him, but his father held him back. "No please!"*

*"I promise Blaine, I'll be okay," Kurt said walking out the door. "Elliot and I will be very happy together." Church bells started ringing outside the apartment, pounding in his ears. "Goodbye Blaine."*

*"Kurt!" Blaine screamed before he awoke with a start, the alarm on his phone ringing to wake him for school. He turned it off and fell back on his pillow in a cold sweat. Though it was just a nightmare, the reality of it played on his nerves the entire rest of his day. If one thing was clear from the dream, it was that losing Nationals would be the start of his whole life falling apart. He couldn't let that happen.*

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*"Can I just say, Glee Club sucks," Blaine raved into the phone. "Mr. Schue asked for some ideas for Nationals, and when I gave some genius ones..." They were genius and he knew it... "everyone got all mad and started...dissing me." He went to his locker and retreated into the safety of his own little world. "Maybe I came on to strong, but since when was that a bad thing?" He checked the postcards on the inside*

of his locker to make sure they were exactly in position, each book to make sure it was precisely where it belonged, his hair ensure that not a strand was out of place, and his bowtie to make sure it was perfectly straight.

"It's not," Kurt told him, looking in the cabinet for something good to eat. Leading a band was ravenous work. "But you gotta remember at McKinley everyone has an equal vote and if you come on too aggressively they might think that you're a control freak or, a puppet master."

Blaine stopped and pulled the phone away from his ear. Did his fiancé just call him a puppet master?

Kurt paused. The silence was deafening. Maybe puppet master wasn't exactly the biggest help right now? "Anyway..." Kurt deflected. "I was going to call you. Pamela Lansbury booked its first gig and I know you were just here..."

Blaine pulled the phone away again and stared at it. Was he talking to himself? Did Kurt not just hear that all of his friends were mad at him and no one wanted to listen to a word he said?

"...hoping you would come cheer us on in the audience? So what do you say, can I send you the deets and a Jet Blue voucher?"

Blaine closed his eyes and shook his head. It wasn't like he had just missed a week of school or had Nationals to prepare for or 23 clubs to participate in or tests to pass to make sure he didn't screw up what little chance he had of getting into college. "Of course, I wouldn't miss it." No obviously he could just drop everything to be by Kurt's side whenever his fiancé wanted, he thought sarcastically. "I can't believe anyone would see *me* as controlling!"

"Great, I'll see you then! Love you!" Kurt shouted excitedly before hanging up.

Blaine stopped outside the door of his next class, leaning back against the lockers to catch his bearings. He loved Kurt, he really did, but if anyone thought he was more controlling than Kurt than they had completely lost their collective minds.

What he wouldn't do right now to have friends that just listened to him for once.

"Did you really just call your fiancé, *my* boyfriend, a puppet master?"

Kurt froze, wondering if it was better to pretend he hadn't heard Santana or better to tell her to mind her own business. She didn't give him the chance to decide though, instead storming around to face him, hands placed firmly on her hips. He winced and bit his lip. "I might have," he hedged but found his strength again quickly. "Blaine's a big boy, he can take a little truth telling every once in a while. Besides there was no bigger puppet master in Glee club than Rachel Berry, it can't be that bad."

"I heard that!" Rachel yelled from the kitchen.

"You're an idiot, Hummel," Santana said, grabbing his phone and typing an apology to Blaine in his texts. "He's probably having a panic attack. He's probably hyperventilating. He's probably squirting gobs of gel into his tiny little hand and gluing his hair into place as we speak."

"Give me my phone back, Satan," he said swiping it and erasing what she'd written. "Blaine is fine, you are as overdramatic as he is. It's no wonder you two are best friends."

"Hey I just tell it like it is. Don't believe me? Good luck with the consequences," she snapped before walking away and back into Dani's arms.

Kurt looked up to see Rachel watching him intently from the kitchen, a knowing look on her face. "What?" he snapped with a pout.

"He's coming to the show, isn't he?" she smirked before turning to put the salad bowl back into the fridge.

"Yes, of course," Kurt said. "He said he wouldn't miss it."

He heard her snort as she pulled out the dressing and closed the fridge. "Who's the puppet master now?" she mused.

---

Blaine's father had been in the army for over a decade. He'd faced the Iraqi insurgency and the Taliban in Afghanistan. He'd planned and executed missions that were matters of life and death. Over the years, Blaine had heard many stories and he knew that a pre-dawn strike was the most strategic battle plan. So

Blaine set his alarm, snuck out of his house, and at O'Dark 30 he was pulling into the parking lot of McKinley High School under the cover of darkness.

Sneaking in was no problem. Everyone knew that Figgins left the rear door by the gym unlocked every night so he could reclaim the Principal's chair he still believed was rightfully his. But it was 0400 hours, Figgins should be gone, Sue shouldn't be there yet and Blaine should be free and clear to break into the office to steal back Puppet Kurt.

Hiding in the shadows outside the door he slipped on his mask and made his way silently into the office. The filing cabinet didn't budge so he pulled out the lockpick he and Sam had bought when they'd broken into Dalton, and quickly clicked the lock on the file cabinet. He pulled Kurt puppet out, held him up to make sure he was okay and carefully slid his hand inside. Freedom was theirs!

Until the light clapped on and he turned to face an enraged Principal Sylvester.

He should have worn his Nightbird costume. Without it he was doomed.

Leaving Kurt puppet on the desk was painful.

Learning he was going to have to miss Kurt's show broke his heart in two.

"Get out of here. Go feel shame," Sue ordered him.

He returned to his car to watch the sun rise and wait for school to start. Shame was exactly what he felt then and throughout the day. Every time he even considered calling Kurt, he just felt sick with guilt for how much he would be disappointing his fiancé. *I wouldn't miss it*, he had promised. And no matter how annoyed at Kurt he'd been at the time, he knew that being with Kurt, being in his arms, would have made it all better. His fingers brushed the screen to text or call, but he couldn't do it. He couldn't let Kurt go through the whole day knowing he wasn't coming. He couldn't bear the thought of how angry and disappointed at him Kurt would be. But most of all, he couldn't hurt Kurt like that, not today when everything was supposed to be so special. He would tell him later.

He returned to Sue's office in the afternoon, begging for a reprieve, agreeing to serve detention all the following week if she would just let him off the next two days. If she let him go now and traffic behaved he could just make his flight. He thought she would be swayed by how much of a blow to Glee Club his absence for a full week would be, but she would hear nothing of it. Truth was, as soon as she had known

he was missing school to be with Kurt his fate was sealed. And as he walked into detention instead of an airport Thursday afternoon with no one but Stoner Brett for company, he closed his eyes and let the darkness take him over.

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Blaine arrived home to both his mother and father in the kitchen and his heart sank. He felt bad enough that he had let Kurt down. Now he had his father to face as well.

"Hey sweetie, what are you doing here?" his mother asked, looking up from chopping vegetables for what seemed to be, now that he looked at it, a romantic dinner for two. "I thought you'd be in New York by now. Weren't you flying out right after school for Kurt's show."

"Yeah, about that," he muttered, rubbing his hands nervously on his pants. He tried to avoid his father's gaze now trained on him curiously. The last thing he needed right now was his father yelling or even worse telling him how much of a disappointment he was. "Um, can I talk to you for a minute Mom? In private?"

She glanced at the Colonel, whose eyes narrowed and brows arched, then back to Blaine. "Sure," she said and followed Blaine into his bedroom.

The door closed behind them, he put his bag on the bed, taking out a paper. He held it out for his Mom. She took it, read it, and looked up at him. "A detention slip?"

Blaine shuffled his feet and bit his lip. "I um, I kind of broke into the school this morning and Principal Sylvester caught me." He looked at her, his eyes a bit wild as he tried to explain. "I mean, she locked away my Kurt puppet in her filing cabinet yesterday and I just wanted it back, he's mine she can't just take it-"

She held up a hand for him to stop. "You broke into the school?" she asked incredulous.

Blaine lowered his head. "Not just the school. The Principal's office. And her filing cabinet." He raised his eyes and they were pleading. "Please, I just need you to sign the detention slip, I already can't go to New York for the weekend, since I missed my flight and Kurt's show starts in like, sixty minutes, and I have to go back to detention again tomorrow, please don't tell Dad."

"I'm not keeping secrets from your father," she told him. Blaine sunk onto the trunk at the foot of his bed in defeat as she walked out the door with the paper.

He took out his phone and scrolled through Kurt's excited texts from the day and Blaine didn't think anything could make him feel worse than he did right now. He knew he needed to call and he tried to think what he could say to make it better but there was nothing. He'd screwed up too badly. Kurt had needed him there in the front row to cheer him on and Blaine had thought rescuing a stupid puppet was more important than that. What his father decided didn't even really matter, nothing was worse than letting Kurt down.

The Colonel came in and handed him the signed detention slip. "You're grounded for the weekend," he said, but Blaine didn't even care. He didn't argue that he was 18 and his father couldn't do that anymore. He didn't argue that he'd already been punished enough by missing Kurt's show because the truth was, he'd already grounded himself.

---

Over 100 performances he'd done in his lifetime. Twelve at least with crowds far bigger than could fit in a tiny New York bar like Callbacks. And yet, Kurt was more nervous for this than he had been for any other in his life.

He was completely out of his comfort zone. Show tunes and Glee club were one thing but fronting his own band? Blaine was right, he was crazy. And yet Kurt loved what he and his friends had put together and he couldn't wait for Blaine to see it. It was one thing for his fiancé to offer him lip service about supporting him in whatever he chose to do. It was quite another for Blaine to truly stand beside him because of the quality of the work. Having him in the audience tonight would be one of those things they would remember forever.

And just for that, Kurt may have had an agenda in mind when he swayed the costume conversation the night before in the direction of gold, silver and black. Not that anyone had disagreed, but as Kurt pulled out the gold pants from his NYADA audition, he couldn't help but remember the conversation from that day...

*"New York has no idea how lucky it is, having Kurt Hummel begin his life there," Blaine said.*

*"Our life, Blaine," Kurt replied with a loving smile. "Our life."*

*Blaine eyed him mischievously. "Can the gold pants go too?"*

*Kurt laughed, kissing him quickly and nodding. "Yes, the pants can come too."*

He smiled with anticipation while he yanked and twisted the more than skin tight pants on. He grabbed a flawless top and vest to match, styled his hair to perfection and headed out the door to get to Callbacks before the rest.

As leader of the band, he arrived shortly before the bar was officially open for the night. He glanced at his phone while he waited patiently for the staff to acknowledge him. There wasn't a word from Blaine, but that was to be expected if he'd rushed straight from school to the airport. His flight should have landed only five minutes ago, and he would take the subway straight to the bar.

"Kurt Hummel?" A tall gentleman with a beard approached and Kurt recognized him as the bar manager.

"Yes, hi," he greeted professionally. They discussed the details of the evening, how long the set was, when they wanted to take a break, the equipment they would need. Even though Kurt had already gone over it all when he'd booked the club, he was glad to review, feeling better for being in control of every aspect of the evening. The manager showed him to the dressing room in the back where they could keep their belongings and Kurt put his things down. A quick check of his phone showed still no call from Blaine.

The others arrived as he was meeting with the sound engineer and he had to stop and squeal at how perfect they all looked, even Rachel. They stepped up onto the stage for sound check and Santana sidled up next to him. "Pay up Hummel," she whispered in his ear.

"I have it in the back," he muttered, grateful to have lost that bet honestly. Rachel had insisted on pulling her own outfit together and not letting anyone help. Apparently Santana's faith in her had paid off.

"I have no idea how you and your hubby are going to survive marriage when both of you constantly fight so hard for control," Santana mused.

"Marriage is a partnership, not a competition," Kurt recited back and Santana was pretty sure he'd read that somewhere in a wedding prep book. She hoped he'd made Blaine a copy.

"Okay, ready whenever you are," the engineer called and they got down to business.

When they were done with sound check they all went in the back for a while to chat and warm up for real. Kurt handed Santana her twenty while Rachel stood in the corner trilling and oooing and aahing. They reviewed their set, making notes until the musicians arrived and Santana dragged the others out to meet with them and to order themselves some drinks at the bar.

Alone in the room though his anxiety came back with a vengeance and though he tried to be patient and wait for Blaine to text him he was there, he couldn't wait anymore. Rubbing his hand absentmindedly on his pants, he dialed Blaine's number.

"Hi," Blaine answered.

"Hey!" Kurt said happily, trying very hard to calm his nervous energy and be the confident performer that his fiancé always was. He didn't need Blaine knowing just how much tonight terrified him. "Did you get your ticket that I reserved for you, house left?"

"Kurt, I was gonna call you," Blaine said and the guilt in his voice was immediately obvious to Kurt. "Um, please don't be mad, but, I'm not in New York, I'm in Lima."

Kurt immediately grew concerned and he shot out of his seat. "Are you kidding? What happened? Did you miss your flight?"

"No I'm fine, I'm just" Blaine sputtered anxiously. "I'm trying to explain..."

Blaine went silent on the other end of the phone though and Kurt's concern turned to impatience. "Blaine, please tell me what's going on."

"Well, Principal Sylvester gave me detention. And she said if I tried to skip it she was gonna suspend me and put it on my permanent record," he explained defensively.

Kurt's mouth dropped in shock. In all the time he had known Blaine, the boy had never gotten into any real trouble once and he was pretty certain that in 13 years of schooling this was his first detention. "Wait a minute, *you* got detention? For what? Why didn't you call me?"



"I was trying my best not to hurt you," Blaine answered. Kurt shook his head in frustration. There it was again; running from him, always running, always too afraid to be honest, too afraid of being hurt himself. "I was just trying to steal back the Kurt puppet I made in crafts class," Blaine argued.

Kurt did a double take. "Excuse me? The what puppet?" He couldn't possibly have heard him right. If his emotions weren't so heated right now he would probably have laughed.

"I know, it's kind of a weird story," Blaine stammered, "but basically I was missing you-"

Kurt paced the floor. Blaine was making no sense. "So you made a puppet of me? Like, with felt and cloth and button eyes?" Two weeks ago he was calling for help with a simple Gaga costume and now he was suddenly a puppet designer? "Blaine what were you thinking? Are you there?" Blaine's silence spoke louder than words. He had no good answer for missing the chance to see the real him on one of the most important nights of his life because he was too busy rescuing a puppet version of him. But this time he wasn't going to let him hide and he most certainly wasn't going to do it himself. "Blaine, this was a really big night for me and I wanted you here to see it." He heard Blaine searching for words, but still his fiancé said nothing. It had been a long time since he'd heard Blaine that worked up and he knew he should be more sympathetic and find out what was really going on with him, but right now he had a show to do and he needed to end this before either one of them got more upset or said something they'd regret. "Blaine, I have to go, I'll call you later." He hung up the phone and threw it down on the dressing table in frustration.

"Hey," Rachel called, parting the curtain.

Angry and disappointed, Kurt turned with a sigh. "You can release Blaine's seat," he said.

"I don't think that's going to be necessary," she said hesitantly. Kurt had no idea why but he followed her out to the bar to find only one person in the seats. One person, he was told, who had thought the real Angela Lansbury had been performing that night.

Kurt had always liked roller coasters, but this day had been way too big a drop from top to bottom way too fast and his stomach turned. But as the others started to walk away, Kurt realized he couldn't let it end this way. "No, come on guys, this is actually a good thing." Kurt hoped that in the process of convincing them, he could convince himself. At least now he was actually somewhat glad that Blaine hadn't come. "This will give us the chance to rehearse in a real venue, full out with real sound and the acoustics of a bar and not our apartment. Consider it a dress rehearsal for our next booking. Come on, it's perfect."

"Kurt's right," Rachel jumped in looping her arm in Kurt's with a smile. He was always grateful to have her by his side. "This'll be great, come on. We've got the space, we might as well use it."

Dani took a step toward them and shrugged. "It would be good to hear how it sounds in this kind of space."

"And to see how we move in a crowd of tables," Elliot pointed out, joining the other three. They all turned to Santana and waited for her answer.

"Oh fine," she relented with a huff and Dani reached a hand out to drag her on stage. "But when we get home I'm giving your fiancé a piece of my mind about why he's not here!" she snapped at Kurt.

"It sounds like maybe he could use it," Kurt muttered under his breath. "He wouldn't talk to me, so if you can get something out of him I would be forever grateful."

"Okay less talk, more singing," Dani directed and strummed her guitar with the chords of their first song. The drums started in and the beat took them over. "A five, six, seven, eight..."

---

Blaine struggled from his car up the stairs to his apartment Friday afternoon with a box full of supplies to spend his weekend making a dozen puppets. On top, mercifully, laid Kurt puppet, hard earned by promising Principal Sylvester something horrid he didn't even want to think about until Monday morning.

He ignored his phone all day.

He got the texts from Kurt promising he wasn't mad he just wanted to talk. He got the voicemail from Santana barking, "It's one thing to ignore your fiancé because you feel guilty you missed his first performance, which ended up not being a performance because there was no one in the audience, but not calling me back? Inexcusable."

But he'd just wanted to get through the day, another day of Sam and Tina barely talking to him. Detention with Jake and Becky had given him the idea and he was grateful his crafts teacher had been there so late in the day. And now he was finally home where he could relax and think.

This was just what he needed, a weekend of nothing but him and crafting and surrounding himself with friends that would listen and not judge. A weekend of figuring out exactly what was going on with him.

Kurt puppet sat on the trunk at the foot of the bed, watching as Blaine's floor became more and more covered in material. Blaine worked for a couple hours before putting the finishing touches on Santana puppet. He sat her in his office chair, pulled out his phone and took a picture with a smile. Then he scrolled through to the video she'd sent him of Elliot.

"If anyone should be worried about their fiancé running off with Elliot, it should be Kurt." Blaine's eyes opened wide as his head snapped up. Santana puppet was staring right back at him with an exasperated toss of her head. "How many times exactly have you watched that video, Boyfriend? A billion?"

"Not that often," he defended himself with a frown. "And I'm not watching the video I'm just looking for a good shot as a model for Puppet Elliot."

"How about the one of him thrusting his cocky self into the air?" Santana puppet smirked. "That's just your style isn't it?"

Blaine looked at her and the video in his hand and tossed it to the ground. "Santana can I ask you a question? Do you think I have intimacy issues?" he asked her earnestly.

She stared at him blankly for a second. "Is this a trick question because I thought that was common knowledge."

"I'm serious Santana. I was talking about it earlier with Jake-"

"Oh, of course! The perfect person to talk to about intimacy, after he cheated on Marley with the head bitch in charge and banged the whole cheerleading squad," she said dripping with sarcasm.

Blaine huffed and grabbed the green fabric and head for the Elliot Puppet. "Nevermind, forget I said anything."

"Oh chillax Boyfriend, what has gotten your panties all twisted in some horrible Emo experiment. Let's see... you run to some random when you think Kurt's left you behind, you soak in the attention you get from Tina, you love that Sam loves that you're gay and enjoys the attention you give him, and you have a

lesbian for a BFF who would totally do you if either of you were straight. We won't even mention Rachel and Jeremiah and Sebastian. Nope. No intimacy issues there."

"Santana," Blaine whined.

"Blaine," she drawled then settled down with a deep breath. "Bottom line? You want people to love you but you don't want to be vulnerable. So you do what you can to get what you need without it being scary."

"So what about Kurt?" he asked.

"What about me?" barked a voice behind him. Blaine turned to find Kurt puppet scowling at him. "You make a puppet of me that you can manipulate to your every desire. You're afraid I'll be mad at you so you avoid calling me and then when I'm just trying to make sure you're okay you refuse to call me back because once again I didn't listen to what you needed in the first place and deep down you're still really mad at me. I know you love me Blaine, but forgiving a puppet isn't the same thing as forgiving the real me."

"Oh god, I know," Blaine's head fell into his hands. "I know."

"Honey, are you okay?"

His mother's voice pulled him out of his daydream and Blaine looked up at her in the doorway. He looked back at the Kurt and Santana puppet, both now quiet and still. He shook his head and rested against the trunk. "I don't know Mom. I haven't really felt well all week."

"Do you want to talk about it?" She walked over to the chair and picked up Santana, sitting down and putting the puppet on the floor. "Have you joined a puppet club or something Blaine?" she chuckled, scanning the room.

Blaine shook his head. "No, that would actually make sense." He looked up at his mother through troubled eyes. "Sam and Tina got mad at me because I tried to take charge in Glee club and Kurt called me a puppet master and well..." He looked around the room. "I kind of felt like I didn't have a friend in the world."

"So you decided to make your own?" she asked, picking up a plain piece of foam for a head. "I remember when you were little and struggling in school and with Cooper, you did everything with your superhero action figures. But they didn't really fill the void, did they?"

Blaine remembered those days clearly. "They were my best friends. They were never mean because I was too small or too smart. They told me whatever I wanted. They were strong, like Dad. But they protected me too." But his mother was right. Nothing filled that void until he made real friends at Dalton.

"They were who you wanted them to be Blaine, because they weren't real. Telling you what you want to hear doesn't make someone a friend. Telling you what you need to hear does," she said.

Blaine took a deep breath. He knew it was true. That's why even when Kurt and Santana were puppets they hadn't coddled him like the rest. They were the best friends that he had.

"Look, sweetie, I know things aren't easy for you right now," Amy said. "You're growing up, getting ready to move out on your own, go to college, get married. It's probably the most terrifying time of your life and it's okay to fall apart a little bit." She pulled out an envelope, one he hadn't even noticed her bring in to the room. "But maybe this will make you feel a little better?"

He reached a tentative hand and took it from her. Berkeley. And he was certain what it said.

*Dear Mr. Anderson,*

*We are pleased to inform you...*

He didn't even need to read the rest, lowering it down to his lap. His stomach curled in knots. "I got in," he whispered near tears.

"Well sweetheart, that's wonderful!" His mother's eyes sparkled with joy at his first college acceptance letter. But she frowned at his own lack of excitement. "What's wrong?"

"What if I don't get in anywhere in New York?" Blaine tried hard to push down the thoughts in his head. But he knew what this meant. If nothing else came through for him, he had no excuse not to go to California. Alone.

"Then you will cross that bridge if it happens," Amy told her son sensibly.

Blaine nodded, knowing she was right and still hating that it was even a possibility. "I know I'm grounded Mom, but do you mind if I sneak out in the morning to FedEx? I need to send a box to Kurt."

She smiled softly and chuckled under her breath. "You know, you're not the only one finding it hard that you're growing up. Your father forgets you're not a kid anymore. You're 18 years old Blaine. You can go out if you want to."

"I just want to finish Dani, Elliot's and Rachel's puppets tonight so I can send them in the morning. Then I'm gonna spend the weekend making the rest of the Glee club. I want them to know how much I appreciate all of them."

She picked up the pink fabric off the floor and draped it over the foam. "You know I've always been pretty fond of Rachel Berry," she grinned at him. "Mind if I help you? Might go a lot quicker that way and I've got no important plans this weekend."

For the first time in a week, Blaine felt both his muscles and his mind settle down and he smiled. Spending a weekend talking to his Mom instead of a room full of puppets was exactly what he needed. "I would really love that," he said.

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*Blaine to Santana [11:13pm]: Thank you for always being honest with me. Even in puppet form.*

*Santana to Blaine [11:15pm]: Your wel... What?!*

*Santana to Blaine [11:17pm]: What on earth are you smoking Anderson?*

*Blaine to Kurt [11:20pm]: I'm sorry I haven't called. And I'm so sorry I missed your first show even if I would have been the only one in the audience. Especially because I would have been the only one in the audience.*

*Kurt to Blaine [11:23pm]: You should be sorry. You missed the gold pants too. I'd brought them out special and now I shall withhold them from you next time you visit as punishment.*

*Blaine to Kurt [11:25pm]: Now I'm REALLY sorry!*

*Kurt to Blaine [11:26pm]: I love you. Even at your most stubborn and controlling. You know that, right?*

*Blaine to Kurt [11:28pm]: I do. I love you too. Even at your most stubborn and controlling.*

*Kurt to Blaine [11:30pm]: Call me whenever you're ready. Okay? I miss you. I don't know what's going on, but whatever it is, I'm here.*

*Blaine to Kurt [11:33pm]: You're the best friend that I ever had. I've been with you such a long time. You're my sunshine and I want you to know that my feelings are true. I really love you. You're my best friend.*

*Kurt to Blaine [11:37pm]: I've been wandering round, but I still come back to you. In rain or shine you've stood by me. I'm happy, happy at home. You're my best friend.*

---

"Kurt what would you do if I didn't get into any of the schools in New York?" Blaine asked. His room showed the evidence of his marathon spree of puppet making that weekend, even in the narrow view Kurt had of it through Skype. And if Kurt was honest, he loved his fiancé just a little bit more for how absolutely adorable he was.

"Well you could always go into puppetry," Kurt smirked, but at Blaine's roll of the eyes, he tempered his expression. "Blaine, you're getting in, don't worry."

"But imagine I don't," Blaine insisted and Kurt could very obviously see the desperation in his eyes. "Imagine I just get into Berkeley. What would you do?"

Kurt frowned. It was something he had been avoiding thinking about, but obviously it was weighing heavily on Blaine so he didn't want to ignore it. "I don't know," he said honestly, but if he really thought about it he was pretty certain of the answer. "I guess I'd look into seeing if I can transfer."

Blaine's looked at Kurt like the sun and moon rose with him. "You'd really move to California for me?"

Kurt melted at the hearts in Blaine's eyes. "Well what did you expect silly?" he giggled.

Blaine blushed and shrugged. "I don't know. In my dream you ran off with Elliot."

Kurt's jaw dropped with surprise. "I did what?" he gasped.

Blaine shrugged and the sadness in his eyes twisted Kurt's heart. "You said you couldn't wait for me anymore."

"Well that part was right, I can't wait for you anymore," Kurt said softly. "I can't wait to wake up with you every morning, and go to sleep with you every night and I can't wait to marry you, and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you." Kurt glanced at the puppet, sitting in the corner of his room and back at Blaine, his brow drawn. "Is that what this was all about? You were afraid of losing me again so you built a puppet version of me?"

"No," Blaine said quickly, shaking his head. "I mean, I don't think so. Maybe. It was just...everything. Nationals and college and being engaged...it's just a lot."

Kurt thought back to his conversation with Rachel before they'd decided to get tattoos. He remembered how High School had seemed so much pressure. Sometimes he forgot that Blaine was still there.

"I made an appointment with my therapist," Blaine told him. "I think I might go back regularly until I leave Ohio. Just to help with the stress."

Kurt smiled warmly. "That sounds like a good idea," he said. He wished he could reach out and hold him, reassure him. Touch was so much easier than words. In truth he struggled with both, keeping people at a distance for so long. They both did. But they were trying to do better. "Blaine?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm not running off with Elliot. Or anyone. When I said we would give this another try Blaine, I knew it was forever. For better or for worse."

"Is fighting with a puppet version of you better or worse?" Blaine asked, and Kurt knew he was only half joking.

"Fighting is good Blaine, but only if you fight back," Kurt said. Blaine lowered his eyes and Kurt continued. "Sweetie, I know you're scared, but you can't be afraid to fight with me. You don't need a puppet to tell me what you think, or what you want, or how you feel. I won't hurt you and I won't leave."

Blaine was quiet and Kurt waited him out, hoping he'd said the right thing. When Blaine spoke again, his voice was small, almost trembling. "I told Puppet Kurt I forgave you."



Kurt's forehead creased with uncertainty. "Forgave me for what," he asked hesitantly. Blaine looked away and Kurt instantly saw retreat and fought it. "Blaine, whatever it was, whatever it is, it's okay," he assured him. "I just...I just want to know."

Blaine's gaze didn't return and Kurt had to strain to hear, but the words out of Blaine's mouth hit him like a shout. "For the way you treated me when you first left. And again when I called you about Glee club. For not listening to me. For making me feel like..."

"A puppet?" Blaine frowned. He hadn't thought of that way before, not until Rachel had mentioned it the other day. But there was a certain truth to it. Kurt sighed. "I'm sorry."

"All my life Kurt. I did what my father said. I said what he told me to. I tried to be the kid he wanted just so I'd be okay that day." Blaine pressed at his eyes to keep the tears from escaping. "And then I went to Dalton and I was freer than I ever was. The guys craved order and structure and leadership and I craved control. People listened to me there and they loved me. I was their hero Kurt, in the Warblers I couldn't do anything wrong. I didn't think I was a Puppet Master there at the time but you obviously did."

"Oh Blaine, I didn't mean it-"

"But you did, Kurt," Blaine maintained. "You were the one person to call me on it, even back then. And then I got to McKinley and with you I was safe and I didn't need to control so much. But then you were gone, and the year has gone so slowly and now my only shot at being back with you is completely out of my control, but winning Nationals Kurt, *that* I can do, I know I can."

"Blaine," Kurt breathed and god how he wished they were in the same room having this conversation instead of through a computer screen. "Being together is completely within our control and I promise you, *wewill* be together. Nationals or no Nationals. New York or no New York."

He let Kurt's words settle in his skin. He let himself believe them. "I love you," Blaine smiled and he felt like the air was fresh and he could breathe again for the first time since his dream.

"I love you too," Kurt smiled back. The knot he'd barely noticed in his stomach untangled and his eyes twinkled with mischief. "And now that we have that over with, I think I need to hear about exactly everything that happened between you and puppet Kurt. I mean, Tina did tell me you liked that you could control him," he smirked with an intrigued gaze.

"Oh god," Blaine murmured, his face falling into his hands with an embarrassed smile.

"She also said she caught you with your hand up her skirt? I thought we were over that phase Blaine," he teased.

"See how desperate I get without you around," Blaine teased back, but his eyes grew dark quickly and Kurt's heart skipped a beat. "I don't want Tina though. I don't want anyone but you," Blaine whispered. "You're my only one. And I love the things that you do. You're my best friend." He swallowed and his stomach clenched with desire. "I need you, Kurt, so badly."

Kurt carried his laptop over to the bed and thanked the universe his roommates weren't home. "Tell me exactly what to do Blaine," he begged and watched Blaine's breath hitch. "Tell me everything you want."

## ***Chapter Thirty: Frenemies***

"It's just so weird Blaine." The air whished by him as Kurt raced from the diner to the subway before either of the girls could catch up. "It's like they're suddenly best friends and honestly it sends a chill up my spine. I mean, I certainly don't want them at each other's throats, but apparently Rachel's invited Santana to a photo shoot and it's just not right," Kurt mused.

"I think maybe you shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth Kurt," Blaine pointed out. "Would you prefer they couldn't stand each other?"

"I'd prefer for order to be restored," Kurt said. "Happily putting up with one another with a jab thrown here and a barb thrown there. This is eerie. It's like rainbows have washed over them and they've forgotten all of the hell that they put each other through."

Blaine frowned softly. He still hated bringing it up. But he knew that they had to get used to it, it would be with them forever. "Maybe Finn's death has made them realize that it's not worth it? Maybe they're both trying for his sake."

"Maybe." Kurt had considered it. Hell he'd even believed it. But he actually hoped Blaine was wrong. Because something like that was very unlikely to last. "I'm just waiting for the shoe to fall because you know it will."

"You're always so cynical Kurt," Blaine teased with a smile. "But maybe we're all just growing up and we'll be together in New York and everything will just fall into place?"

"And you are always so idealistic," Kurt said then added quickly, "Which is one thing I love so much about you. You never cease to amaze me. No matter what happens no one can ever take that from you, can they?"

"Whatever life throws at you Kurt, things always turn out okay in the end," Blaine marveled. His father, the bullies, the Warblers...Kurt. They were all proof to him. "Because love always wins."

Tina didn't even need to turn to know his eyes were on her, she could feel it as if golden rays were burning her skin. But when she did turn, the disappointment sitting stagnant inside them made her stomach twist with guilt more than it already was.

"Don't look at me like that Blaine." Tina gathered her things at her chair. Everyone else had already gone, following Artie out of the choir room, leaving her and Blaine alone.

"Like what?" His voice was heavy, almost tired, in a way that Tina hated hearing.

She looked out into the hallway where Artie had left and her eyes dropped to the ground. "Like I'm the most horrible person in the world."

Blaine's face softened, and suddenly he wanted nothing more than to gather Tina up in his arms, so he did. He laughed and kissed her head and rolled her eyes and understood why Kurt continued to put up with Rachel all these years. "Oh sweetie." He guided her to sit down with him and she snuggled into his side. "You're not a horrible person, no one thinks that."

"Everyone thinks that Blaine," Tina protested, sniffing softly. "And maybe they're right, I don't know."

"Look at me," he said, letting her go so she could truly see him. "You are not horrible," he assured her. "But Artie *is* one of your best friends and you two shouldn't be fighting like that. You've told me before about all the things you guys have been through, since way before McKinley. I know what it's like to lose friends like that." Blaine's thoughts turned to Nick and the Warblers and the sadness that sometimes snuck up washed over him. "Way more than I wish I did."

"I know," Tina said. "It's just that...being Valedictorian is important."

"It is," Blaine nodded. "I agree." He tilted his head and looked at her. "It's just that Artie is important too."

She bit her lip and nodded. "Yeah. He really is." She grabbed her things and stood up, knowing what she had to do. She leaned over and returned his kiss on his cheek. "Thank you. I'm going to go find him. I have to make this right."

Blaine smiled after her, gathering his own things to leave. He loved the best and worst of her, and he would miss Tina tremendously.

Rachel slipped on the sunglasses that she was considering making her signature once she became famous. "It's really hard being a star."

Santana would have rolled her eyes if Rachel's unintended announcement wasn't causing plans to form in her mind.

Kurt twirled and fluttered muttering, "And the insufferability begins" but Santana barely even registered it because suddenly she had tunnel vision with only one goal in mind. Rachel Berry needed an understudy. And who knew Rachel Berry better than Santana?

"Excuse me," she mumbled with a dismissive wave of her hand. She went to the closet where her things were stored and rummaged through her bags, grabbing her audition folder with her headshots and resume and shoving it into her purse. She grabbed a dress she looked hot in and quickly changed in the bathroom. She would have preferred something sexier, newer, but time was of the essence. Making sure she had all she needed she yelled out to Kurt "Later Porcelain" and hit the streets.

Having been forced to go to the Colony Music Center one too many times with the Bobbsey Twins, Santana knew exactly where to head. She took the subway to Broadway, and stormed into the store as if she owned the place, bypassing the jazz and blues section she usually browsed and following Kurt and Rachel's path straight to musical theater. Rifling through as quickly as possible for the right music for her audition her fingers stopped at the perfect song. *Don't Rain On My Parade* stared back at her and immediately Rachel's performance at Sectionals sophomore year appeared in her mind. The entrance from back of house, the flirting in the aisles, the power on stage, the utter essence of everything that made Rachel Berry who she was and Santana knew without a doubt that was what she needed to do. If she wanted the role of Rachel Berry she needed to play her and that song was quintessential Rachel.

If someone had told Santana a year ago she would be preparing to audition to be Rachel Berry's understudy in the role of Fanny Brice, she would have laughed in their face. But this was the real world and she needed to make a name for herself. She needed a job that was going to take her somewhere. She needed a union contract and friends in the industry. She needed more than to be the girl with the yeast infection. She needed to be the girl with the voice.

She bought the music and raced out the door toward the theater, when a blue dress hanging in the window of a small boutique shouted out to her. Going inside, she quickly tried it on. The price tag was \$300 but today was not the day to worry about things like that, she was going to do whatever it took to get that role and she could just return it on her way home. Pulling out her credit card she bought the dress and a pair of shoes to match, strung the bag on her arm and walked the last two blocks to the theater.

Her phone rang. She pulled it out. Blaine. Her thumb hovered over the screen. But what did he know about having to fight for a place in the world? Success came easy to Blaine while everything good that ever happened to Santana she'd had to fight for. She trusted nothing that was handed to her. Those things always had a way of betraying her.

She let the call go to voicemail, feeling guilty but knowing it was better. If she told him what she was doing it would get back to Rachel within seconds and Santana couldn't lose focus with the stress of an argument. Besides, maybe, just maybe, this new friendship with Rachel was real. Maybe she would go in there and Rachel would beam with pride and they could take this leg of their incredibly frightening journey together. Maybe she could finally trust this city and trust that the family she created for herself here would stand by her. And if she couldn't, well, it was better to know that now rather than later.

She entered the building and ducked into the bathroom to change, tucking the tags inside, before following the signs to the cattle call auditions. She knew this was a long shot, but it was a shot she had to take. She filled out the paperwork, handed her music to the audition monitor and took a seat on a bench outside the doors.

*Everybody's been there, everybody's been  
Stared down by the enemy*

Her foot bounced nervously. Her heart raced.

*Fallen for the fear and done some disappearing  
Bow down to the mighty*

It would be so easy to turn around now, head back to the loft, run away from the consequences of chasing her dreams.

*Don't run, stop holding your tongue  
Maybe there's a way out of the cage where you live  
Maybe one of these days you can let the light in  
Show me how big your brave is*

"Santana Lopez!"

*I just want to see you  
I want to see you be brave*

She stood up. She brushed the wrinkles out of her dress and stood tall and proud. One hand on the door she took a deep breath. She deserved this chance.

It was time to be brave.

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"Blaine, she's a raving lunatic. I can't do this anymore." Santana paced the apartment, now thankfully empty, because Santana has no desire to be around either of her roommates right now.

"I know she can be a challenge," Blaine agreed, closing his homework and heading to his bed. He didn't think this conversation would be a short one. "But this thing between you and her needs to stop. Kurt and I will be in New York together in just a few weeks. Are we not supposed to hang out together with our best friends?"

"Let Sam be your 'outings with Rachel' best friend," she snapped. "If I had to sit at a restaurant with Berry I'd lose my appetite anyway."

"You're being ridiculous," Blaine scolded.

"I'm being ridiculous?" Santana shrieked. "She's the one that..."

"Okay, fine, you're both being ridiculous. So much more ridiculous than the Santana and Rachel I know, that Santana and Rachel that have matured way beyond this. It's just like you're back in high school; Rachel storming out of Glee Club because she doesn't get her way, you setting fire to the piano to hide behind all the things you're really feeling." Blaine sighed, rubbing his neck. Kurt had warned him it

wouldn't last, that someday soon Santana and Rachel would come to a head. Living together with anyone could do that, he was sure that someday it would be him and Kurt no matter how much they loved each other. And the girls' relationship had never really been a good one. But he'd hoped that he'd been right, that after losing Finn everyone would learn to put their petty differences aside. "So why don't you tell me what's really going on?"

Santana stopped and stared out the window. The lights of New York weren't as visible here in Bushwick, but the graffiti was, even in the darkness. The beautiful art that both littered and brightened the sometimes dank city. "What if I don't belong here?" Sometimes she felt as out of place and discordant in this apartment as the art on the bricks. "What if I'm really meant to be in LA or New Orleans or Montreal, singing in some dark dank jazz club with little hope of ever truly making it big."

Blaine smiled fondly to himself. "Okay, first of all, you are a thousand times better than a dark and dingy jazz club and you know it. Second of all, you're as good as Rachel. Maybe even better."

"Well you're right about that boyfriend," she smirked. She turned from the window, leaning against the cold. Somehow without her ever intending it, the apartment had become home. Rachel and Kurt had become family. "But what if it's not here?" she asked quietly.

Blaine furrowed his brow, not understanding. "So what if it's not? You'll go wherever life takes you."

Santana scoffed. She walked over to the couch, pulling the blanket up around her. It was cold, but she didn't know if it was from outside or her own fears. "You ever feel like even though there are thousands of people around you that you're all alone in the world and no one understands you?"

"Uh, I built myself an entire circle of puppets Santana," Blaine quipped. "I'm pretty sure I know *exactly* what it feels like."

"Brittany once said we were family," she said softly. "She said we love each other no matter what. Accept each other for who we are." She picked at a loose thread on the blanket. "I'm not sure Berry got the memo."

"She's hurting 'Tana." Neither of them wanted to say it, but they knew that it was true. "Funny Girl is all she has now. She's doing it for *him*. And you stole him from her once before."



The sounds of cars honking and people yelling outside the apartment filled the silence. She felt her heart beating in her chest and tears come to her eyes. "That was a long time ago."

"You can't take it back though," Blaine said. "Things like that you can't take back."

She thought about it. And she knew that at least in part he was right. "So what do I do?"

"I don't know," he admitted. He heard Skype pop up across his room and he logged in to see Tina calling. He sent her a quick message to let her know he'd be just a minute. Homework was going have to wait until morning, he realized with a sigh. "Just give her a chance, okay? See if she comes around?"

"I'll try and meet in her dressing room tomorrow before rehearsal. But if she's a bitch to me-" she warned.

"Should I be asking Cooper to find you another friend to stay with?" he teased.

"I'll let you know," she frowned. "Night boyfriend."

"Love ya 'Tana."

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"So it looks like you took my advice to keep your enemies closer to heart," Blaine smirked into the phone walking out to the courtyard.

The tension in his voice was just a little too obvious though to his fiancé and Kurt knew immediately that Blaine had seen the picture. "Okay, was it Santana or Tina?"

"Actually it was Becky Jackson," Blaine said, finding a shaded spot beneath a large oak to sit. "And now I'm pretty sure she thinks you're marrying Elliot instead of me."

Kurt laughed. "You're not jealous are you? It was just a little kiss on the cheek."

"Jealous that he gets to cuddle with you and kiss you? Definitely! Jealous that something's gonna happen between you two?" He crossed his legs and pulled a sandwich out of his bag, unwrapping it. "I trust you Kurt."

Kurt pouted. "I miss you so much." His stomach growled and he made his way over to the kitchen, pulling out a day old slice of pizza. "So tell me what's going on at McKinley. I need a distraction from Santana and Rachel who have both lost their minds. Has the Tina and Artie battle finally been resolved?"

"Well," Blaine said with an awkward grin. "Actually it has. Sue made me Valedictorian instead."

"Okay that makes absolutely no sense," Kurt said. "But honestly it's the way it should be. I didn't understand how you weren't Valedictorian anyway. I thought Dalton classes were a thousand times harder than McKinley and you were top of your class last year."

"Well they are Kurt and I was." Blaine frowned and picked at the grass beneath him. "But...I've been a little distracted this year."

"Right. Of course." Kurt closed his eyes. Of course everything that had happened between them would have affected his grades. "Well I feel a little bad. I'd been pulling for Tina. She had a hard year too, what with vapo-raping my fiancé and all."

That got a chuckle out of Blaine. "Oh my god, you guys have got to let it go."

"Oh no Blaine," Kurt shook his head with a mouthful of pizza. "That's the kind of thing that we can hold over her head forever, it's way too good to let go."

"You're very bad Kurt Hummel," Blaine chastised.

Kurt stopped chewing and raised a brow. "I can be," he teased suggestively.

A shiver went up Blaine's spine and he was certain it wasn't the wind. "Kurt, I'm in school," Blaine reminded him under his breath, looking around nervously.

"Well Skype me when you get home," Kurt purred. "I'm not working until tonight and the girls will be at rehearsal all day. We can talk about *exactly* how bad I've been."

Blaine groaned with frustration as the bell rang. "I can't believe you would do that to me just before I have to go class." He put his things away in his bag and threw it strategically across his body. "You're a jerk."

"I love you too," Kurt smirked. "Hurry home."

Blaine walked in the door to his apartment to find his Mom and Dad sitting at the kitchen table together. Clearly waiting for him. Which was never a good sign.

"What's going on?" Blaine asked. He walked past and dropped his bag in his bedroom, then leaned in the door frame. "Am I in trouble or are you in trouble?" he teased nervously.

The Colonel knew better now than to ask Blaine to sit. The distance was both instinctive and helpful and Blaine had a need to be on his feet when he felt confronted, which he was pretty certain he would. "Your mother and I were talking about your plans to move in with Kurt when you go to New York." The Colonel looked at him sharply, his eyes narrowing. "I don't like them."

"Ah." Blaine's jaw tensed and his eyes closed. He'd known for a long time this conversation was coming and he hadn't been looking forward to it. No matter how far his father had come, he was certain that living with his boyfriend, even if he was his fiancé, was not in his father's Rules of Order. He tried to cool his temper but when his eyes opened they were hard with determination. "I'm eighteen. I'm engaged to be married. You have no say in this."

"Blaine, darling, hear your father out," Amy tried to soothe and mediate.

"No mom, I'm sorry but whether I live with Kurt or not is none of his business," Blaine snapped.

The Colonel sometimes wondered why even after all this time, all their forgiveness, the two of them had to be so stubborn as to attack before they thought. But old habits die hard and there were times when neither could escape it. "I have a say in what I do or do not pay for," John told his son firmly. "And it is my business whether you and your fiancé live in a dangerous neighborhood like Bushwick."

Blaine blinked, his brow furrowing. "Wait, this is about Bushwick?"

"We didn't change things at home just to have you run off to New York to be right back in the middle of danger. Bushwick is known for robberies and it's not like you and Kurt aren't targets already," the Colonel argued.

Blaine couldn't believe what he was hearing. He scoffed and rolled his eyes, letting a bitter laugh escape.

"Believe me son, the irony isn't lost on me or your mother at all, but when we realized you deserved better that meant once you left too. A good neighborhood in Manhattan-"

"Is too expensive for Kurt," Blaine finished. "And bad things can happen in Manhattan too. His apartment is in Bushwick Dad. I'm moving in. End of story." He started back to his bedroom but his father's voice stopped him.

"This discussion is not over," the Colonel called.

"Yes, it is," Blaine insisted. He turned back and looked at his Mom, the tension in her face making her look older than she was. His father was rubbing his face in his hands, frustration more than evident. Blaine sighed, knowing he overreacted. He drew closer, resting his hands on the back of one of the kitchen chairs. "Dad, I appreciate what you're saying and feeling. But the world you're so afraid of is exactly what you prepared me for. And I'm done running from the fight just because it might be hard. I'm a soldier's son." The Colonel looked up at him and Blaine couldn't help but smile softly. "It's about time I acted like one." He watched as his father's eyes shifted from hard to soft then glowed with pride. Blaine couldn't help but add to it. "I've been named Valedictorian."

"But how?" his Mom said, eyes wide with surprise. "I thought Tina and Artie were tied for first."

Blaine shrugged. "Because Principal Sue is a raving lunatic," Blaine smirked, but he knew it wasn't that simple an answer. "And because outside of this house, things just seem to get handed to me on a silver platter while my friends have to claw their way to the top. And honestly..." His thoughts drifted to Santana and Kurt, Artie and Tina, even Rachel, all fighting tooth and nail to have just a little bit of their dreams come true. Bushwick was exactly what he needed. "I think it's time I start having to claw a little bit too."

"It's not true son," John said. "You've worked very hard for the things you've gotten." He reached over and grasped Amy's hand. "And your Mom and I very proud of you."

Blaine offered a small smile. "Thanks."

He went back to his room, closing the door behind him. He took out his iPod and scrolled to the song that he and Artie and Tina had decided on. Given everything they'd been through, everything *he'd* been through, it just felt perfect. The music started and he took a seat by his window, staring out. It was raining

softly and the drops shimmered in the trees and hung on the bricks of the apartments across the way. He smiled, the words so perfect for his life up until now, and he couldn't help but start singing.

*Trying hard to reach out  
But when I tried to speak out  
Felt like no one could hear me  
Wanted to belong here  
But something felt so wrong here  
So I prayed I could break away*

"He's just so stubborn," the Colonel was saying in the kitchen.

Amy smirked at him from the counter where she'd begun preparing dinner. "Gee, I wonder where he gets that from." She put the water on for noodles, then leaned back against the counter. Blaine's voice filled the air. "It's time to let him go John." She came over and rubbed his back, massaging out the knots. "He's a good man. A strong man. He's going to be fine."

*I'll spread my wings and I'll learn how to fly  
I'll do what it takes til' I touch the sky  
And I'll make a wish  
Take a chance  
Make a change  
And breakaway*

"It's so hard," John admitted with a sigh. "In one part of my head he's still this tiny little overactive headstrong boy. In the other I know that after everything I've done he should want to leave and never come back."

*Out of the darkness and into the sun  
But I won't forget all the ones that I love*

"You let him go once and look what happened. Look how far you two have come," she reminded him. She sat down and grasped his hands, their eyes meeting. "I know for 18 years you've held on too tightly. For good and for bad your whole world has been him. But it's time. Listen to him sing. Listen to his words."

*I'll take a risk  
Take a chance  
Make a change  
And breakaway*

"Watch him fly."

---

The door slammed closed behind Rachel and silence filled the apartment. The air was heavy with sadness and regret and more than just a little bit of anger. Kurt looked at the girl left with him, the girl who his fiancé loved as much as he loved Rachel and his heart broke just a little bit for her. Slowly he walked over and bent down to gather the shreds of the photo Rachel had scattered.

"You don't have to do that." Santana's voice was little more than a murmur. She cared much more than she would ever let on. And Kurt knew that.

"Santana," he protested gently.

"If Rachel wants to act like a spoiled little bitch," Santana spat, "that's fine, but don't expect me to pick up the pieces of our broken friendship."

"Santana," he repeated, this time much firmer.

She turned to him, biting her lower lip to fight back the tears. "Sure, I may have said horrible things, but I didn't do anything wrong by auditioning," she cried.

"I know you didn't." Kurt opened his arms to her and she fell into his embrace, unfamiliar and not quite the comfort that she felt in Blaine's arms, but in the moment it was what she needed. "Why can't she just be happy for me?" she sniffed.

"You can't set yourself up as a threat to her your whole high school existence and then complain when she sees you that way," Kurt reminded her. "She's always lived in fear of you taking what's hers, and rightfully so." And he knew that Santana had always lived in fear of Rachel succeeding where she would fail. But now wasn't the time to bring that up. "Maybe she'll get over it," he said instead.

"When was the last time you knew Rachel to get over anything?" She pulled away, hands flying straight to her hips. But then silence filled the room. They both knew the answer. Finn. But he wasn't here now for any of them to turn to anymore.

"Come on," Kurt said softly. "Let's watch a movie."

She looked away and shook her head. "Thanks, but I think I'll just go study my lines."

She disappeared into what was no longer Rachel's room, closing the curtain behind her. He cleaned up the living room, taking dishes to the sink then headed back to his bedroom to call Blaine. But the sound of Santana's voice, made him hang back.

"She left." He could hear her snuffle, hear the sound of a tissue stripped of its box.

"It doesn't matter. No matter what I do, Blaine, or how hard I try, everyone walks away. Brittany, my Abuela, Quinn..." Her voice was broken. Her crying was obvious. Kurt wished he could hear the wisdom in Blaine's words on the other end as he clearly tried to soothe her.

"I don't know how," she wept and blew her nose. "Pushing people away is what I do best."

Kurt frowned and went into his room. He closed the curtain behind him and settled on his bed, restless without Blaine or Rachel to talk to. He picked up his phone and went through his contacts, suddenly knowing what he needed to do.

*From Kurt to Brittany [8:46pm]: Hey love. Are you busy? We need to talk.*

## ***Chapter Thirty-One: Trio***

*From Santana to Blaine [8:05]: What are you doing?*

*From Santana to Blaine [8:07]: I can see Lady Hummel in his room sewing some bedazzled jacket on his mannequin, so I know you two aren't playing the five knuckle shuffle.*

*From Santana to Blaine [8:09]: Unless you're playing by yourself ;P*

*From Santana to Blaine [8:10]: Wanky.*

*From Blaine to Santana [8:12]: Don't get your knickers in a twist Santana, I just pulled up to my dad's after dinner with Sam and Tina. I swear that girl cried so much I think she turned her breadsticks into oatmeal.*

Blaine pocketed his phone and got out of the car. It was a beautiful night, the stars were shining, the air was warm, and despite Tina's dramatics he was happy for graduation. Because graduation meant that seeing his fiancé and his best friends every day was just one day closer.

He opened the door, tossed his keys on the table and kicked off his shoes. His phone buzzed and he took it back out and swiped the screen, texting while he walked into the living room where his father was flipping through channels waiting up for him.

*From Santana to Blaine [8:13]: That girl cries like Rachel creates drama.*

*From Blaine to Santana [8:13]: I don't think Rachel's alone in the drama department girlfriend.*

*From Santana to Blaine [8:14]: I thought you weren't taking sides?*

*From Blaine to Santana [8:14]: Thinking you're both wrong isn't taking sides.*

"Kurt?" his father asked, nodding to the phone.

*From Santana to Blaine [8:15]: Well if she can't be happy for me, why should I be happy for her?*

"Santana," he said with a sigh, falling into the couch across from him. "She and Rachel are in this feud and there's just absolutely no point to it."



*From Blaine to Santana [8:16]: To prove that you're better than that.*

*From Santana to Blaine [8:17]: Well maybe I'm not better than that. Maybe I'm just a mean bitch from Lima Heights Adjacent and that's all I was ever meant to be.*

Blaine looked up when his father cleared his throat. He hadn't noticed his father turn the TV off and the silence in the room was suddenly apparent. "Look, Blaine, can we talk about last week?"

Blaine was exhausted, his focus was split and he'd thought they'd put that argument behind them. "It's no big deal Dad. We're both hotheaded. It's fine," he said dismissively.

"You *thought* I was going to have a problem with you living with Kurt." John raised a knowing brow.

Blaine shrugged slightly. "Well is it really that far of a stretch?"

"No," John admitted. "I just want you to know I don't. Have a problem with it. I mean, any more than I would have had a problem with Cooper living with a girl he was engaged to. When he was 18 years old and barely out of high school and knowing nothing of the world. I mean..."

"It's not that we're gay, it's that we're young" Blaine finished for him. "I got it." His phone buzzed again. "I'm gonna head to my room," he said, getting up.

"Since I know you're just gonna do whatever you want, can I least give you some advice? About living together?" the Colonel asked.

Blaine stopped. He scoffed slightly before he could prevent himself from being so rude. "No offense Dad, but if I wanted relationship advice I'm pretty sure you would not be the first one I would go to."

His father ignored the insult. "When he's being as stubborn and opinionated and self-righteous as he can be that he's got you so maddeningly frustrated and upset that you want to kill him..." Blaine rolled his eyes and his father smiled. "Love him anyway."

Blaine let the words hang in the air. They were smart advice. Good advice. He wished his father had taken it earlier.

"You know where I learned that?" John asked.

"Mom," Blaine guessed.

His father shook his head. "You."

Blaine couldn't help the smile that slipped from his lips, nor the love that filled his heart. "Night Dad."

"Night son."

*From Santana to Blaine [8:18]: Your silence is deafening boyfriend.*

*From Blaine to Santana [8:25]: Or my father could have been lecturing me on the trials and tribulations of living with my fiancé.*

*From Blaine to Santana [8:25]: You know I think you are so much more than just a bitch from Lima Heights.*

*From Santana to Blaine [8:26]: I see you not denying it.*

*From Blaine to Santana [8:26]: Can't deny the truth ;P But it's also true that you are more.*

Blaine sat down at his desk and turned on his computer. Kurt was logged in to Skype and though dealing with Tina, Santana and his father had taken every ounce of emotional energy out of him that night, they could at least talk for a bit before he completely crashed for the night.

*From Santana to Blaine [8:27]: Yeah well, Rachel certainly seems to think that's all I am.*

*From Blaine to Santana [8:28]: Prove her wrong.*

*From Santana to Blaine [8:28]: How? She's at her absolute worst right now and all I want to do is hang her from her hair and drop her over the side of the Long Island Ferry.*

Blaine pressed the call button and waited for Kurt.

*From Blaine to Santana [8:30]: Love her anyway.*

"Okay guys, as soon as the girls get here we can start." Kurt was flitting around the apartment happily, gathering refreshments from the kitchen for Elliot and Dani. He willfully ignored the elephant in the room. After his conversation with Blaine last night he was thinking positively. *Give Santana a chance*, Blaine had said. *She's trying*, Blaine had said. *She's just trying to find her place in New York, same as the rest of you*, he had said. And Kurt knew it to be true, they all did. He just wished she could do it without the claws. And razor blades.

"You really think they can pull it together for the sake of the band?" Elliot asked, sipping his coffee. Living with Rachel required extra bolts of caffeine because she was thoroughly exhausting. Lovable, but exhausting. Sleeping on the couch wasn't helping. "Rachel doesn't seem to be getting over this very quickly." It was an understatement if her ranting and raving after rehearsal last night about Santana trying desperately to upstage her was any indication, but the last thing he wanted to do was fuel the fire.

"Neither does Santana," Dani shared regretfully. "It's like it's not even about Funny Girl anymore they just have this constant need to one up each other."

Kurt sighed with resignation. He was used to it. It had been going on for years and he had really hoped it would change in New York but he supposed he should have known better. "Welcome to my world," he muttered.

The door slid open and for a second and just for a moment the saccharinely sweet smiles plastered on both of their faces fooled them into thinking that just maybe they had made up.

Then Rachel spoke. "Shalom all," Rachel called loudly, putting her bag down by the door. Even though the apartment wasn't hers anymore and she would never call it Santana's, she still acted like she owned the place. "Shalom means *hello*, Santana." Her voice was sickeningly condescending. "It's Jewish. Like Fanny Brice. Something you would know absolutely nothing about since you're *not Jewish*," she glared.

Santana had been heading to her room to drop off her things but she spun back around. "Actually it's Hebrew, Fruma Sarah," Santana snapped. "And for your information, though I wouldn't expect you to know this being as close-minded as you are, Sephardic Jews, you know Latin Jews, from *Spain*, made up most of the early Jewish settlers in North America. In fact," she crooned, drawing closer to Rachel arrogantly, "the first Jewish congregation in North America was founded in New York in 1684 and was Spanish and Portuguese. You can go look it up. Or better yet, you can take a walk down to Shearith Israel on West 70th Street, because it's still there and they welcomed *me* with open arms."

Rachel wasn't the only one staring dumbfounded at Santana.

"Um, ladies," Kurt called carefully, breaking the silence, "if I can still even call you that," he mumbled under his breath. "Can we put the torah study aside? We have a rehearsal to get to?"

Kurt waited hopefully. Rachel could put it all behind them right now. She could admire the amount of research Santana had done, her attempts to understand and embrace the role in the way that Rachel had her whole life. She could accept that for Santana at least in the beginning, none of this had been about trying to be better than Rachel but just about trying to work, trying to make it in a city where there were hundreds of thousands trying to shine brighter than the light next to them.

But Rachel couldn't. Fanny Brice was her role. Her dream from the moment she had ever even known what a stage was. She was the character that Rachel had spent her whole life preparing for, that she had been willing to give up Finn for, had *chosen* to give up Finn for, and if Santana took that from her what else would she possibly have left. If Santana took it, then everything would have been for nothing.

She had told Kurt years ago. *"I don't have to choose between my career and love, because this stage, Broadway, New York. That's my True Love."*

The words had unknowingly been prophetic.

Why couldn't Santana understand that?

"I'm sorry." Rachel covered her mouth, biting back the tears that she would not let them see. "I can't do this."

They watched her grab her things and leave out the door. Kurt considered following her but knew she needed to be alone. Santana stared after her, the lump in her throat so thick she could barely breathe. "I think I'll sit this one out too," she snapped before disappearing into her room.

Once the air cleared, Kurt, Elliot and Dani whispered between themselves. Things couldn't go on like this. Something needed to change.

Dani slipped into Santana's room. Her girlfriend was lying on the bed, earphones in her ear, eyes closed. She looked content and Dani almost hated to interrupt her. But she put a gentle hand on Santana's knee and the beautiful face she could not resist looked up at her. "Hey you," she purred.

Santana pulled the plugs from ears and sat up with a smile. "Hey. Did everyone leave us here all alone in the apartment?" she smirked.

"Kurt and Elliot went out for some new sheet music, yes," Dani grinned.

Santana leaned in, biting her lip coyly before pressing her lips to Dani's almost desperately, losing herself in the touch and feel of her girlfriend, the taste of her on her tongue, the warmth of her hands on her skin as they slipped beneath her clothing and caressed her. She pulled Dani down on top of her, begging for more with her mouth, with her hips, wrapping an arm around Dani's waist to pull her down into her.

Dani stilled her hips though and pulled away, still snuggling in close though. She tucked a hair behind Santana's ear. "You okay?"

Santana let out a breath and shrugged, her face growing harder just with the question. It was easier before Dani knew her too well. "Can't do anything right with her, doesn't matter what I try."

"Maybe it's not the what, but the how," Dani gently chided.

Santana was growing sick of this. Everyone thought that she was the one that needed to keep trying, to be the better person while Rachel could continue to be the selfish spoiled little brat she was. "I'm a bitch and she's known it for a long time," Santana snapped, pulling away from Dani and sitting up angrily. "Blaine and Kurt know it too but they seem to be able to handle themselves just fine. They see right through it. Just like Britt always did."

Dani blinked at the name. She always did. She knew Santana still loved her old girlfriend. Probably always would. She didn't understand what it was about where these friends grew up that first loves were forever, but it sure seemed to be the case. "What is this thing between us?" she suddenly asked.

Santana's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

Dani took her hand. She didn't want Santana to think she was upset, she just wanted to understand. "I mean is it real? Or is it an escape?"

Santana frowned. "Escape from what?"

One of the things that Santana liked best about Dani was her honesty. And her bluntness. "First Finn? Now Rachel?"

And the truth that Dani saw from being on the outside, having not grown up with them and not being intimately involved in any of their drama. "I swear those two were put on this earth to torture me," Santana grumbled.

"Or maybe they were put here to make you better?" she suggested, then smirked mischievously. "I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason."

"Oh my god, don't you dare turn into Hummelberry," Santana groaned. "If I am escaping at all it is precisely that kind of disgusting, sickeningly sweet bunch of bullcrap that they spew that I'm escaping from."

Dani laughed and pulled her into her arms. "Alright." She kissed Santana softly on the head. "All I'm saying is that you can use the things that have driven you nuts about them to make you better or worse. It's your choice. But the Santana that I know and love would choose better."

Santana turned to her sharply and arched a brow. "Love?"

Dani's hand dipped into the small of her back and she traced small circles on her skin. Her eyes shifted, darkened with the passion that her girlfriend brought to everything that mattered to her. "I do love you Santana," she whispered. Dani leaned in, their brows drawn together as Dani cupped her face and traced her lips. "One way or another you have nestled your bitchy little self into my heart."

"Did I come into your life for a reason?" Santana smirked.

"Good sex," Dani winked. "Deliciously good sex." She surged forward and captured Santana's lips, so full and soft that it was like falling into a cloud and she had to be careful not to let herself float away. Because she knew that whether this was real or an escape it was not forever. She just decided that she would love it, love her, for what it was while she had her. "That's not all though. You have made me a better musician, a better performer, and a better person. And for that I will always love you."

Santana found herself blushing and grinning stupidly. "Lucky me," she said.

Dani nodded and grinned back. "Lucky you."

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"Oh my god Blaine, what have I done to deserve this?" Kurt asked. "I'm a good person, right?" He'd finished his shift and set out to find Elliot, leaving the girls behind to cat fight all they wanted without him around. He seriously couldn't take it anymore. "I've never sent anyone to a crack house or stolen anybody's boyfriend or drowned kittens in a lake!"

"You think you have it bad. I walked in on Sam and Tina kissing. Sam and Tina!" He paced his bedroom, his Nightbird costume thrown haphazardly on the floor in his distress. He'd worn it knowing that last time he'd broken into the school without it he'd gotten caught. It was supposed to be his good luck charm. Clearly it hadn't worked. "And I don't mean a peck on the lips we're gonna be friends forever kiss. I mean a down and dirty tonsil hockey, licking each other and boob touching and ugh, it was the most disgusting thing I've ever seen. I don't think I will ever recover. We may have to move to some deserted tropical island where it's just the two of us and a sun so bright that it burns away the horrible image imbedded in my retinas."

"They'd follow us there. I know they would." Kurt ranted, racing up and down the streets of New York. "Santana would steal some private yacht and be taken captive by Somali pirates that she would bend and twist to do her every bidding and Rachel would be singing on some cruise ship and she'd make them port on our island, they would find us Blaine. They would find us!"

"Boobs Kurt. It's all they can talk about! Sam loves Tina's boobs. Tina loves that Sam loves her boobs. I mean, when did Tina suddenly get boobs Kurt? I don't remember ever seeing them before and certainly no one has talked about them and suddenly it's the only topic of conversation and every time I look at her it's all I can see!"

"It's like no matter how hard I try there's no escape from High School, there's no escape from McKinley, the pettiness and the fights just follow me and haunt me and we're all so used to it we don't even notice how much we are drowning in it until someone who has never been there throws out a raft we didn't even know we needed." Kurt was out of breath when he got to the corner joining the crowd of people waiting for the walk sign. And after a minute he realized there was silence on the other end. "Blaine?"

"I'm here," came the quiet voice that Kurt knew all too well.

"Oh come on sweetheart, I didn't mean you," Kurt promised him, starting on the move again when the signal lit. "You're the only good thing about high school and McKinley but that's because you're not from Lima like the rest of us. It's like there's something in the water we all drank as babies that made us stubborn and insufferable and willing to put up with crap just for the sake of friendship."

"I'm willing to put up with crap for friendship," Blaine pouted. As if to prove his point Facebook beeped at him and messages from Sam and Tina both suddenly appeared. He turned the computer off.

"But you're not stubborn and insufferable," Kurt reminded him, then hedged. "Well, you're not insufferable," he smirked. "Not like me."

"I'd suffer with you any day Kurt," Blaine told him. He collapsed on his bed staring at the ceiling. "What am I going to do about Tina and Sam? I had just wanted a night to remember with them, ya know? A story we could tell at every reunion and party and wedding."

"I'm pretty sure it's still a story you can tell," Kurt mused. He reached the door of Elliot's apartment building and settled on a bench inside the lobby. "But now it will only be embarrassing for them and not for you," he teased. But he knew his fiancé needed more than that. "You'll have those memories Blaine, I promise. You have so many already, and honestly I'm not sure what can top the vapo-rape incident of 2013." Blaine rolled his eyes as Kurt continued, "But you still have Nationals and graduation. This year has been filled with a lifetime of memories. You don't need some senior lock-in to make more."

"Becky forced me to play twister and she was staring at me like I was a piece of meat," Blaine pouted.

"Well who can really blame her," Kurt mused. "At least she didn't drag you on stage and put you in the middle of the most ridiculous feud in the history of feuds."

"Oh no," Blaine groaned. "I hope they didn't beat you up too bad."

"Oh it wasn't me," Kurt explained quickly. "It was Elliot. Apparently he's their new wanna-be best gay."

"Excuse me, what?" Blaine shrieked.

"Yes, it's terribly sad, you and I are being replaced. Sam and Tina are starting to look a little bit better now, aren't they?" Kurt laughed.



Blaine whimpered loudly. He had just forgotten about them and now the image was back in his mind bright as day. "Let's go back to that idea about the deserted island."

---

Kurt knocked on the door, hoping Elliot had in fact gone home. What he hadn't expected to find was Dani there as well. "Kurt, come in," Elliot said with an apologetic smile, opening the door for him. Kurt smiled his thanks and looked around. It became quickly apparent that Rachel had taken over the apartment. "Kurt, I didn't meant to snap at you like that at the diner-"

"No, please, don't apologize," Kurt said, taking a seat besides Dani heavily. "I'm the one that should be apologizing Elliot, getting you into this mess in the first place."

"You didn't do anything Kurt," Dani assured him. "This is Santana and Rachel's problem and none of us should be put in the middle of it."

Elliot sat hesitantly in front of Kurt and bit his lip. He didn't want to hurt Kurt's feelings, but he and Dani had agreed. "Which is why-"

"You don't want to be in the band anymore," Kurt finished for him nodding. He was sad but he knew it was coming. After all, why should either one of them have to withstand the torture he'd grown accustom to. "I understand."

"Well, yes, and no," Elliot said and Kurt cocked his head curiously. "*We* want to be in the band. We just don't want *them* in it."

"Not forever," Dani added quickly, making sure Kurt understood. "If they can get their shit together then we'd definitely want it to be the five of us again. But...we just want it to be fun. And working with them right now is not fun."

"No," Kurt agreed. "No it's not." He stood up and paced for a bit. It was his decision. It was his band. If they were going to kick Santana and Rachel out, he was the one that had to do it. "I'll talk to them. If they can't put their animosity aside, then they're out."

"What about the gig on Friday?" Dani asked. "We already paid for the space, the flyers are out. Cancelling will ruin our reputation."

Kurt collapsed in the chair again, but Elliot stood up. "I think I have an idea."

---

"Are you sure Kurt?" Blaine had stayed in the choir room after rehearsal for Nationals Thursday afternoon, working on some harmonies and runs he would talk to Brad and Mr. Schue about adding. He'd been playing around on the piano when Kurt had called. "I mean, I know what you're trying to do and I don't disagree at all with your motives, but...do you think either of them are really ready to hear that?"

"Honestly? I don't know," Kurt admitted. He sat at his computer scrolling over the lyrics once more. He was dressed and ready to go but he'd been having second thoughts and had hoped talking to Blaine would help him work them out. "But if Finn's the only one who's ever been able to talk sense into Rachel than this is the only way I know how to do it." His gaze fell on his picture of Finn. He kept it out all the time now that Rachel was gone. And he'd stared at it for a long time trying to figure out what his brother would do. The only thing he could think of was to sing. "Someone needs to remind them Blaine. Life's too short to lose friends over pettiness and fear and wishful thinking."

*Hey life look at me, I can see the reality  
Cause when you shook me, took me out of my world  
I woke up, suddenly I just woke up to the happening.*

Blaine swung around and leaned back against the piano keys. The sound of laughter broke through Kurt's words and he knew the sound of his two best friends in Ohio without even seeing them. Walking down the hallway and out the front door, Sam had his arm around Tina, whispering what he could only guess were impressions in her ear in an effort to make her stop crying again. It was working and Tina was giggling and shaking her head.

*When you find that you left the future behind  
Cause when you got a tender love you don't  
Take care of, then you better beware of the happening.*

"Yeah," Blaine said quietly watching them. It had only been a day. But he missed them already. "It really is."

*One day you're up, then you turn around  
You find your world is tumbling down  
It happened to me and it can happen to you.*

"I wish I could be there, for your performance tonight." Blaine grabbed his music and his books and put them in his bag, stringing it around his shoulder. He walked out to his car. "I hate missing them. I can't wait until I can always be there for you. And for Santana and Rachel too."

"You have your own fences to mend there," Kurt reminded him gently. "Don't run from them, Blaine, you're past that. Rachel, Santana, you...I guess we all fall back on old habits when the world is tumbling down. But it's time to grow up."

Blaine slipped into the driver's seat and went to put his bag on the chair beside him when a flash of red caught his eye. He pulled out the graduation cap. He let his fingers slip through the silk on the tassel and the charm on the end.

2013.

It was the year that everything fell apart and came back together at the same time. He'd lost Kurt. He'd fought for him. He earned him back and they promised each other forever. He'd lost a brother and gained back his father. The year had felt like forever but now that it was almost over part of him felt like it was gone in a blink of an eye.

Life was one long and windy road. And you're never sure what might happen.

*I was sure, I felt secure, until love took a detour  
Yeah, riding high on top of the world  
It happened, suddenly it just happened.*

### *The Happening*

Rachel sat beside Santana, the words playing over in her mind but she refused to dwell on them. This wasn't about Finn, she wouldn't let it be. This was just the same old game that she and Santana had been playing for years, only now they were playing on Rachel's turf and she had the upper hand.

*I saw my dreams fall apart, when love walked away from my heart  
And when you lose that precious love you need to guide you  
Something happens inside you, the happening.*

And suddenly her guide, Finn's words, came rushing back to her all at once, a muddle in her mind but she heard him as if he was sitting beside her:

*"Wait, is this one of those chick things where you're pissed about one thing, but you're just pretending that you're pissed about something else?"*

*"I knew you were a lot of things, Rachel, and I loved you because of and in spite of all of them, but I never thought you were mean."*

*"I am sure you're something special. That this is just the beginning for you. That you're going to do amazing things."*

*"I'm setting you free."*

*Now I see life for what it is  
It's not all dreams, it's not all bliss  
It happened to me and it can happen to you  
Once!*

*"You don't have a choice. I can't come with you."*

*Is it real, is it fake, is this game of life a mistake  
Cause when I lost the love I thought was mine  
For certain, suddenly I started hurting.*

*"You're gonna be a star...without me. That's how much I love you. You know what we're gonna do? Surrender. I know how hard that is for you because of how hard you hold on to stuff...But we're gonna let go and let the universe do its thing..."*

*I saw the light too late, when that fickle finger of fate  
Yeah came and broke my pretty balloon  
I woke up, suddenly I just walked up to the happening.*

*"Relationships are a lot like flowers. If you find the right seed, put it in good soil, give it water and sunlight, bam. Perfect bud. And then comes winter and the flower dies. But if you tend that garden, spring will come along and that flower will bloom again."*

*So sure, I felt secure, until love took a detour  
Cause when you got a tender love you don't  
Take care of, then you better beware of the happening.*

The applause surrounding her woke her up and she glanced to her right. Santana not Finn sat beside her. And she wished just for a moment that Santana was the kind of girl she could talk with, cry with, mourn with. Because then maybe she could move on, maybe she could go on, not be terrified of losing the only thing she had left. Maybe she would understand why Fanny meant so much to her.

Maybe Kurt was right. Maybe she could at least give it a try.

---

With Mr. Schue giving them the night off from rehearsal, the seniors, Artie included this time, took off Friday night for Breadstix.

"This trip to L.A. is going to be epic!" Sam beamed. "A tour of the city, a tour of Paramount studios! I'm going to find every celebrity I can and do my impressions for them."

Blaine bit his lip and shook his head while Tina and Artie just laughed. "You ain't gonna do shit son," Artie teased.

"It's gonna be fun, but winning Nationals is what it's about," Blaine reminded them. "There'll be important people there who can change our futures, you never know."

"I could use one of those people," Tina frowned. "Right now I am going nowhere very fast."

Blaine's phone rang in his pocket and he glanced at the screen. With a grin he excused himself to the lobby. "Coop! We were just talking about L.A. I can't wait to see you! Did you get the itinerary I sent you?"

"Bad news little brother," Cooper said. "Well, bad news for you but good news for me. I got a part in a movie. I have to fly out to Vancouver on Wednesday."

Blaine felt his stomach drop. He'd been really looking forward to seeing his brother again after all this time. "For how long," he asked sadly.

"Three months," Cooper said.

"So you're gonna miss graduation too." Of course he was. He wasn't sure why he'd let himself get excited to see Cooper so much anyway, something always went wrong.

"You know I wouldn't miss it for anything but this Squirt, but I can't turn down a role like this."

"I know I get it." And he did, he understood. If he was lucky he'd have those hard choices in life himself someday. "It's okay. Congratulations, I'm really proud of you."

"Thanks Squirt, I'm really proud of you too. Valedictorian! I'll have Mom and Dad send me video. And send me whatever someone takes of Nationals too, okay?" Cooper asked. "I want to see your solo."

"I will Coop. Talk to you soon."

"Bye Blaine."

Blaine took a moment before he headed back to the table. From where he stood he could see his friends. Sam and Tina were feeding each other spaghetti. Artie was pretending to use his breadstick as a microphone. The three of them were laughing and Blaine just soaked in the moment. Kurt had been right. He didn't need the memories of some epic senior lock-in, because these were the memories that mattered. The little moments that were barely a blip on the radar but made their friendship exactly what it was.

Forever.

## ***Chapter Thrity-Two: Glee 100***

"Hey," Kurt greeted, juggling the phone in one hand and a tray of dirty dishes in the other. He was hungry, he was tired, he was sick of the girls constantly fighting and he just wanted this shift to be over. "How are you guys doing?"

"We've been better," Blaine answered truthfully.

"I know winning Nationals meant a lot to all of you, but what you did for Finn? For Carole?" Kurt smiled, at the tribute his Dad had shared with him and in memory of the words he was about to speak. "Sure beats a lousy trophy, don't you think?"

Blaine smiled too. Kurt always knew the right thing to say, and ordinarily his words would have made him feel a million times better. But looking out at the devastated faces in the choir room, he knew it wasn't enough this time. "It would Kurt, definitely," he agreed, but Marley and Tina were both crying, and the boys were trying to calm them. "But now Glee is over."

"Well of course it's over Blaine, graduation's in a week, but the new kids have a pretty good year under their belt and I'm sure next year they're gonna take the whole thing. We'll all try to go and cheer them on if we can next spring," Kurt reasoned.

"No, Kurt, that's what I mean. It's being disbanded. There are no more chances. Glee is over for good at McKinley High."

---

Blaine's hand was on the door a moment before Kurt even knocked. He opened it and immediately pulled Kurt inside, throwing his arms around his fiancé and falling into a kiss. Kurt giggled against his lips, deepening the kiss, until a throat cleared behind them. Blaine groaned and Kurt jumped back, hitting himself against the door.

"Ow, damn it," Kurt swore under his breath, closing the door behind him. He awkwardly rubbed his now throbbing shoulder.

"Dad," Blaine greeted with an overdramatic smile, hoping to give Kurt time to recover. "I didn't realize you were still here, don't you have to work this morning?"

"Yes son, I do, thank you for paying such close attention to my schedule," the Colonel smirked as he went to the kitchen to get his morning coffee. "And don't you have school this morning?" he raised a brow.

"Yeah of course, Burt just dropped Kurt off so I can drive him in with me," Blaine explained. "Kurt doesn't have a car here right now.

"Mhmm," the Colonel hummed lightly. "It's good to see you Kurt," he said with a teasing smile.

Kurt hoped his face had dulled from a bright red to a dull pink at least. "You too Sir, I um...I mean...Blaine we should be going," he muttered.

"Yeah, sure." Blaine's brow furrowed at Kurt in a mix of confusion and amusement but he grabbed his bag and threw it over his shoulder. "Are you coming back tonight Dad?" Blaine asked.

"I'm not sure yet, but probably," the Colonel answered.

"Okay." He looked back and forth between his Dad and Kurt one more time. His Dad just shrugged and Kurt looked like he wanted nothing more than to escape. "Well, Kurt and I are heading to Dalton after school for their graduation, so don't wait up."

"You still have school tomorrow," his Dad reminded him.

Blaine rolled his eyes and grabbed an apple from the basket at the kitchen table before pressing a gentle hand to the small of Kurt's back and steering him out the door. "Bye," he called behind him before the door clicked shut.

"Well that was absolutely mortifying," Kurt muttered crossing his arms protectively across his chest. "Since when is your Dad at your Mom's apartment in the mornings?"

"It's been a few weeks now," Blaine shrugged, slipping his hand into Kurt's. "Guess we're all feeling a bit like life's too short these days." Blaine looked at Kurt as he opened the car door for him and squeezed his hand. "You okay?"

"Yeah." Kurt bit his lip, but then let a smile slip. He may have still been uncomfortable around Blaine's dad, but he also knew he was overacting. "Yeah, I'm fine. I'm sorry, your Dad just still freaks me out a bit sometimes. Let's just get to school."



He slid into the car and Blaine closed the door behind him. He came around and got in himself. "My dad still freaks me out sometimes too, but he's better Kurt. He didn't seem bothered by us kissing at all."

"I'd still be more comfortable not giving him a show," Kurt said, and Blaine nodded his agreement. He could understand that. He still felt weird kissing in front of Burt and he'd been accepting all along.

"How was your flight?" Blaine asked, changing the subject.

"Mercifully quiet thanks to Rachel and Santana's last minute rehearsal," Kurt said. "Prayer circle for LaGuardia that it survived the two of them in the building at the same time."

"Things are still that bad?" Blaine frowned.

Bad was understatement. "They wouldn't even go on the same plane." Kurt's voice was laced with frustration. "I have hopes that being back will show them just how immature they're acting, but honestly it's likely to do the opposite."

Blaine shook his head. Kurt absentmindedly traced lazy circles against Blaine's palm. Their friends were insufferable, but at least they would soon be able to suffer them together.

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The flowers were in full bloom, the gardens bursting with vegetation. The grass was perfectly manicured and the Dalton campus was bursting with activity after the graduation ceremonies of 2013. Families were milling about. Somewhere in the crowd his friends were in their black gowns, showing their parents around one last time before loading their trunks into cars. There would be one last party, then friends would spread across the world, pursuing dreams beyond the insulated walls of Dalton Academy.

But to Kurt and Blaine there was no one else in the world. They walked hand in hand throughout the campus, a place that was no longer the refuge it once was but still held for both of them beautiful memories.

"I knew Dalton loved their pomp and circumstance, but I think that ceremony outdid any graduation this side of the Pond," Kurt mused, caught between amused and impressed.

"Well they do fashion it off of Eton," Blaine explained with a twinkle in his eye. "Only what's good enough for the Princes of Wales is good enough for Dalton men."

Kurt smiled secretively, keeping his thoughts to himself, but Blaine saw right through his attempt at decorum and squeezed his hand teasingly. Kurt's love of the royal family was far from his best kept secret. Kurt let a light laugh slip and looked over to Blaine, squinting slightly in the bright sunlight. "Do you wish that you had been there? Graduating with your friends?"

"I am graduating with my friends," Blaine assured him. "In a few days I'll stand in a cheap polyester red cap and gown beside Sam and Tina and Artie and I'll look out on the crowd. Your dad will be there, Santana, Britt, Rachel, Mercedes..." He looked across the way at the campus he and the Warblers had crossed hundreds of times during his two years there. "I love that we were able to be here to see Nick and Jeff and Trent and Sebastian graduate. But I love even more that I'm graduating where I am."

Kurt looked at him adoringly and bumped his shoulder. "Me too," he grinned.

Blaine smiled and pulled his hand, leading him past the koi pond and the recessed lighting beside the stone walkways, up the white stairway and into the Dalton chapel. He was pleased to find it empty and he let go of Kurt's hand, walking to the front.

He turned to Kurt with a sparkling smile. "I, Blaine Anderson, take thee, Kurt Hummel-"

"*The* Kurt Hummel," Kurt repeated with a smirk, drawing closer to his fiancé. "I think I like the sound of that."

"You would," Blaine rolled his eyes fondly, then continued, capturing Kurt's hand in his. "To be my lawfully wedded husband-"

Kurt arched a cynical brow. "Not here in this chapel in Ohio," he scoffed.

"But would you want to if we could?" Blaine asked and he couldn't hide the tiny bit of hope in his voice.

Kurt closed his eyes. He let out a small sigh and brushed his thumb gently over Blaine's knuckles. "I don't want to fight about this now," he answered softly.

Blaine offered a reassuring smile. "I don't want to fight about this at all," he promised.

Kurt took a step closer and wrapped his arms around Blaine's neck. "All I need is you, and me, and our family and friends-"

"And the best flowers, tuxedos, food and New York venue that money can buy," Blaine finished for him with a wink.

Kurt shrugged with an impish grin. "Well I have been planning my wedding since I was three."

"And who exactly were you planning to marry when you were three?" Blaine teased.

"Prince Charming," Kurt answered. He brought his hand up to Blaine's face, cupping it softly and running a thumb along his lips. He leaned in slowly so that their brows touched and whispered, "I think I got pretty close."

Blaine closed his eyes, falling into the depths of Kurt's breath, of his love, into the words that he would never ever grow tired of hearing. His stomach fluttered, and his heart beat quickly in his chest, when Kurt's lips grazed across his own and heat crept up his spine. He wondered if in twenty years when they were older and grayer if the scent of Kurt's skin and the taste of Kurt's lips would always make him feel this way, or if familiarity would breed contentment and it would only be a quiet hum in the background of their busy lives. He wondered if he really had a preference.

"We should get back," Kurt whispered against Blaine's lips when he pulled away just slightly. "The Warblers graduation party will be starting any minute and I'm pretty sure if they heard about April Rhodes doing Raise Your Glass you're gonna find yourself leading it one last time."

"The Warblers can wait." Blaine muttered, lost in the moment. "I'd rather kiss you"

Not wanting to disappoint, Kurt smiled and offered him one more loving kiss before caressing down Blaine's arm to link their hands together once more to lead him back. "Don't worry sweetheart. We have a lifetime for that."

---

"So Boston's not that far from New York," Nick said, the festivities coming to a close. The night had been a raucous one. They all had sung, somehow Kurt and Sebastian had even danced together, and Trent finally got himself a kiss on the lips from Blaine, with Kurt's permission of course. But the time had come that the

now Warbler alums needed to head home with their families. And as his father had so politely reminded him, Blaine had school in the morning. "I hope we'll see each other more than just once every few years at reunions."

"There's a very special table with your name on it at our wedding," Blaine told him, but he knew it wasn't enough when Nick wiped a tear away. "But I'm sure we'll see each other before that. After all, you and Jeff have to come down from Harvard and BU for a few Broadway shows. I mean, Huntington's good and all, but they don't have Rachel Berry," he grinned.

Nick laughed. "Well you just let me know when Quinn's coming to see the show and I'll be on the next Acela."

"Will do," Blaine promised and took Nick in his arms. "No matter what's happened, you're one of my best friends Nick," he said quietly. "You and Kurt, you saved my life. Nothing can ever change that."

"You saved yourself Blaine," Nick said, pulling back to look Blaine in the eye. "We just gave you a little push."

Blaine's throat tightened and his eyes welled up, his chest bursting with feelings he'd allowed himself to forget. But as if he could sense it from across the room, Kurt was by his side in an instant, a steadying arm slipped around his waist. "You about ready to go?" Kurt asked, squeezing him gently.

"Yeah," Blaine's voice cracked. "Ready to go," he said softly then smiled at Nick. "Ready to fly."

---

*Here we when I say, when I say I believe  
Nothing's gonna change, nothing's gonna change destiny  
Whatever's meant to be will work out perfectly.*

The words of the song played over in Rachel's head as she sang them. The first time she'd sung them, her hand on Finn's heart, wrapped in Finn's arms, she thought she'd known what her destiny was. Now she wasn't sure she even believed in it anymore.

*Keep holding on  
Because we'll make it through, we'll make it through.*

She'd tried to hold the tears back, but the words, the dance, looking over for him and him not being there, it was too much. She covered her mouth and started off the stage, but Kurt was right there to catch her.

"I thought this would be easier," she choked, forgetting completely that she was mad at him, that he hadn't been on her side, that he wasn't supposed to be her best guy anymore.

And he let it all be forgotten, because he'd never let go of her in the first place. Family never let go. "No you didn't," he said gently, leading her to sit on the risers.

"Well then, I thought I'd be stronger," she admitted softly.

"It's okay," Kurt told her, hoping his warmth would be enough to ease her pain because he could not give her the one thing she truly needed. "It's okay for moments and songs to remind you of him. It's how he lives on inside you. Inside of us. I know I can't listen to Bad Romance without thinking of him," Kurt smirked.

Rachel laughed wetly, wiping away her tears. "I don't know if he'd be happy or appalled by that."

Kurt laughed quietly too and shrugged. "I don't know either."

They fell silent for a moment. They never talked about him for too long. Maybe someday they'd be able to, but it was still too soon, for both of them. "How's Carole doing?" She'd tried to stay in touch with her. But that too could hurt too much.

Kurt sighed. There were moments where Carole would be fine, just like her old self, but then there were times he'd see her watching him, her eyes dark and distant, and he knew how much pain she was still trying to hide away. "She's ok," he answered honestly. "I think it's harder for her with me at home."

Rachel nodded, understanding. She loved him with all her heart but there was no closer she could get to Finn than Kurt. Sometimes, like now, it was exactly what she needed. Sometimes it wasn't. She hoped Kurt understood that. She imagined he did. "Gives you an excuse to stay at Blaine's, right?" she said lightly.

Kurt's eyes flitted across the stage to his fiancé before turning back to the ring on his finger he twisted absentmindedly. "No. The Colonel is apparently there almost all the time now. He caught us kissing yesterday morning and I nearly had a heart attack."

Rachel frowned, reaching a hand to his. He stopped twirling and looked up at her. "You know he's going to be your father-in-law Kurt."

"Plenty of marriages survive perfectly fine without getting along with their in-laws," he answered wryly.

"Yes, but I bet they do even better when they do get along," she said. "Besides, I thought you forgave him. At the proposal."

"I did." And he had. But forgiveness and wanting to be around him all the time, especially when it came to sleeping arrangements, were two entirely different things. "Doesn't mean I want to live with him."

"Live with who?" Blaine sat next to Rachel, a smile on his face having caught only the last bit of the conversation. "I promise I don't snore, I'm a neat freak as you know, and I'll only take over your side of the bed if you want me to," he teased Kurt.

"Well, with an offer like that," Kurt grinned, "how can I refuse?"

---

Listening to Santana go at Rachel in the choir room made Blaine's blood boil. He thought he'd understood how bad it had been, but clearly he'd had absolutely no idea what Kurt had been dealing with the past few weeks.

"I can't even..." he trailed off, shaking his head, and grabbed his bag from beneath his seat. "I need to go for a walk."

"You want me to come?" Kurt asked gently.

"No, if you come I'll just rant at you and you've been dealing with this enough," he muttered. "Spend some time with Britt, I know you've barely gotten a chance."

"Okay," Kurt agreed reluctantly. "Text me if you need me."

"Of course." He gave Kurt a quick kiss on the cheek and headed out to the track. He made it only to the empty hallway outside the locker rooms before she caught up with him, but he kept walking and slammed out the doors.

"Hey Anderson," Santana yelled, pacing herself next to him. "You, me and the jazz club after school today."

"No," he refused. He didn't stop walking and he didn't turn to look at her.

"Oh come on, you can't possibly be on Berry's side," Santana sneered.

Blaine stopped, swiveling sharply, trying but failing to contain his temper. "She lost her soulmate Santana!" he yelled.

Santana rolled her eyes. "Oh please, boyfriend, this fight has nothing to do with Finn," she said.

"This fight has everything to do with Finn and if you two can't see that it's just because you don't want to!" Blaine yelled. He took a step away. He had to before he said or did something he'd regret. He ran his hands tiredly over his face and exhaled. Finally he met her eyes again, dark orbs that he could not read. "I have no problem with you going after your dreams, Santana. With auditioning to be her understudy. I think you had every right to do that and yes, she overreacted. But this is *her* dream Santana, not yours. Broadway, *that* role, this is all she has left of a future she and Finn planned together, and I promise you, they did plan this. And standing on that stage, knowing that wherever he is in the universe that he is applauding for her? *That's* the last moment she will have with him. *That's* where their destiny ends. So the moment that you even thought about trying to take that away from her Santana?" He looked at her and it broke his heart because he loved Santana, but this time he couldn't stand by her. "That's when I took her side."

Santana's chest filled with a pain she couldn't name and she bowed her head against the tears in her own eyes and the awful look of disappointment in Blaine's. "Okay," she whispered, her voice caught in her throat. She swallowed hard, burying the pain, burying the betrayal, burying the fact that Rachel Berry could steal away everything from her including her best friend. Anger replaced the pain and with her gaze hardened she raised her chin high and looked at Blaine. "Okay," she repeated, this time with the strength of a girl who needed no one to love her but herself. "I hope you're happy with your choice."

Blaine sighed and took a step toward her but she turned and walked away and all he could do was stare after her. It didn't have to be like this. He didn't even truly understand how it had gotten this bad. He wondered just how exactly he'd managed to surround himself with some of the most stubborn people on the planet.

They were just lucky he loved them all so much.

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Only a moment after Santana left, Brittany's phone buzzed. She sighed and walked out of the choir room without a word. Kurt followed her to the library where she immediately sat down at a computer and pulled up an MIT website, logging in. He took a seat beside her. He'd realized something was wrong when he called her from New York but watching her go through the hallways like a ghost of her formal self was heartbreaking. Everything that made her who she was seemed to be gone except when she was dancing.

"Do you like doing math Britt?" he asked gently.

She startled a minute, not even realizing he'd been sitting there watching her, then went back to her equations with a shrug. "Sometimes. I like that people think I'm smart. I mean, I always knew I was but other people acknowledging that feels good. You know what I mean," she said with a soft smile.

"We all live for the applause," Kurt quipped.

"What's Dani like?" Brittany blurted out quickly, and Kurt sputtered, not expecting the question at all.

"Oh, I don't-

"Please." She bit her lip but kept her eyes on the screen. "I need to know."

"Ok," Kurt sighed and sat back. He liked Dani a lot, she was a great addition to the band and her vocals were insanely good. And she was always there when Santana needed her. He chose his words very carefully. "Well, she's nice. And talented. And she treats Santana well. But she's down to earth and not at all innocent. She's seen the world and she's street smart." Brittany's hands slid from the keyboard into her lap and her eyes dropped, following them. Kurt believed seeing Brittany frown was one of the most tragic sights in the world. "She's not a unicorn Britt. She's just an escape."

Brittany nodded, taking it all in. "I'd forgotten, at MIT. The way she makes me feel."

Kurt took her hand. He understood, maybe better than anyone. "Distance is hard. Santana knew that, she could see it with Blaine and me. She got scared and she ran. But she never stopped loving you. Just like I never stopped loving him."



"But you and Blaine are okay now," Brittany said, raising her eyes in hope. "Engaged."

"Yeah," he smiled gently. "We are."

"And you're okay with that?" she asked, her voice laced with concern. "You used to want to wait."

She was right, he *had* wanted to wait. He'd told Blaine over and over he wanted to graduate college and have a career before they got married. But things change. "Life's too short to ask too many questions. If I didn't know that before Finn, I sure do now."

Brittany's gaze was full of love as she pressed his hand between hers. "I just don't want to see you make a mistake."

He shook his head. "It's not a mistake Britt. Sure he drives me nuts at times and do I think it will be perfect? Not a chance. But he makes me feel everything I've always wanted to feel." His eyes twinkled and his lips curled up in a smirk. "And what would Kurt Hummel's life be without a little bit of drama now and then?"

Brittany's phone rang and with a sigh of regret she remembered the screen in front of her. "It would be like this," she said bleakly, returning to her calculations.

Kurt wanted to pull her away, to make her dance like Santana, to make her laugh and play and forget that she had any cares in the world. "You're not gonna come back for the vote?"

"I have to finish this." She turned and kissed him on the cheek, offering him a sly smile. "I would just vote for you anyway."

---

"I do not understand why everything is *always* a tie," Blaine complained while they walked to his locker. "I mean, it's great when you're little for everyone to win, but that's not the real world. In the real world someone wins and someone loses."

"I'm not sure we've really fully established that McKinley is the real world Blaine," Kurt smirked. "And you can only blame yourself. If you hadn't voted for me you could have broken the tie."

"Well, asking me to choose between Rachel and Mercedes is just cruel." He unlocked the door and opened it, grabbing his homework for the night. "Besides, you're always the winner in my book," he grinned.

"Good save there Mr. Anderson," Kurt teased.

Blaine laughed when his phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out and leaned back against the lockers to read it.

*From Santana to Blaine [3:45]: Brittany wants to get back together.*

Kurt raised a brow.

"It's Santana," Blaine explained.

"Alrighty then," Kurt smiled. "I'll catch you after Mr. Schue's meeting."

Blaine watched him go before returning to his phone.

*From Blaine to Santana [3:47]: And what do you want?*

*From Santana to Blaine [3:48]: For everything to just be easy.*

*From Blaine to Santana [3:49]: Well, does it get any easier than Brittany?*

*From Santana to Blaine [3:50]: What about Dani?*

*From Blaine to Santana [3:50]: You said she knows you're not over Britt.*

*From Santana to Blaine [3:51]: I know, but Dani doesn't deserve to be hurt. I'm not heartless, boyfriend.*

Blaine sighed. He grabbed his bag. He tried not to say what he desperately wanted to say. But in the end he couldn't really stop himself.

*From Blaine to Santana [3:52]: Maybe you should think about that the next time you talk to Rachel.*

Blaine stared down at them in the darkness backstage from the top step leading up to the spot tower. Below were his friends, his family; Kurt, Rachel, Santana. Finn. He watched Rachel cling to Kurt, wiping her tears from her eyes. They didn't cry for Glee, not really, but for all it had stood for. For the family it had created. For the soulmates it had brought together, and cruelly ripped apart. He hoped Puck and Quinn could find their way. He hoped Santana and Brittany could find their courage. He hoped Rachel would find the destiny that Finn had left behind for her. And Kurt...

Kurt felt a pull as he walked off with Rachel and he looked up. His Prince Charming stared down at him and he reached a hand for Mercedes. "Take care of Rachel, okay?" he whispered. Mercedes glanced up to Blaine and back to Kurt and nodded. He stayed behind as the crowd dispersed, climbing the steps that were now empty, Blaine having slipped around the corner. Kurt followed and quickly found himself in the warmth and comfort of Blaine's arms, a feeling that sometimes was better than any other in the world.

"You okay?" Blaine whispered, holding him as close as he could.

Kurt nodded against him, then pulled away, settling himself on the floor. He leaned back against the wall as he'd done so many times and pulled his knees up. It was likely this would be their last time up here and it held so many memories. Memories of picnics and stolen kisses and making love. Memories that he hoped would last forever.

"What will you miss most?" Kurt asked as Blaine snuggled into his chest.

Blaine closed his eyes and listened to the hum of the electrics in the theater and the sound of Kurt's heart beating. He felt the warm gaze of Kurt's eyes on him and the rise and fall of his chest and he smiled softly. "Feeling safe." Blaine let out a timid chuckle. "I know it sounds crazy after everything I've been through here, but I feel like things are just starting to be comfortable here. And New York feels scary. Like starting all over again."

"Well, it is starting over again," Kurt agreed, trailing his fingers soothingly up and down Blaine's arm. "But at least this time we get to do it together. And you're always safe with me."

Blaine turned, his lids heavy with want. He licked his lips and his eyes flitted to Kurt's before being drawn back to a swirling blue gaze that never strayed. "I've been looking for you forever," Blaine whispered, his hand slowly rising to cup Kurt's face.

"Well you found me." Kurt's voice was thick with need. "And I am never letting you go."

***Chapter Thirty-Three: New Directions***

The feel of Kurt's knee pressing expertly between his legs would have been perfect except for the racing thoughts in his head. Thoughts that were so overwhelming that he was apparently forgetting to even kiss Kurt back which, of course, was very much unappreciated. With a not quite contained huff, Kurt pressed up on his hands, his face inches from Blaine's and stared down at him. "Is there a problem?" he asked with mock irritation. "Because I'm pretty sure this is the last time that you and I will have this apartment to ourselves and I think your exact words were *one last hurrah*. And this is not making me go hurrah."

"I'm sorry." The last thing Blaine wanted was to ruin this evening and he reached a reassuring hand to Kurt's chest. "I swear you're not doing anything wrong, I guess I'm just distracted."

Kurt heaved an exaggerated sigh and swung a leg over to curl up beside Blaine instead. His lips curled into a playful smile. "What is it this time? Can't decide whether to take or leave your purple bowtie?" he teased, running a finger beneath Blaine's shirt to tickle gently at his skin. "Or is it your Valedictorian speech that you've written and rewritten ten times?" He frowned a little more seriously when Blaine didn't answer. "Is it your Mom leaving the apartment and moving back to Westerville after you leave?"

"No, it's none of that. It's just college," Blaine said with that sound of defeat that Kurt hated hearing in his voice. "The NYADA blogs were blowing up this morning with people getting their acceptance letters and my mailbox was empty and I'm just so afraid I won't get in."

Kurt sat up, grabbing Blaine's hand to guide him up as well. "Sweetheart, we talked about this, it's not like Columbia is far if you don't get into NYADA. Whatever's meant to be will work out perfectly, right?" he grinned, trying and succeeding to coax a smile out of Blaine.

Blaine nodded and laughed softly. "Right."

"Good," Kurt said. "Now kiss me."

Blaine couldn't help but laugh again and he cupped Kurt's face, their lips meeting halfway. This time Blaine melted into it and got lost in it, savoring the closeness and the love that he adored.

They didn't hear the door close, but they did hear Blaine's father calling. "Blaine!"

Both boys groaned in frustration, pulling apart with enormous reluctance. Kurt sprung from the bed, making it as far as the wall before the Colonel hesitantly peeked his head in. "Hey guys, um...sorry to interrupt," the Colonel said awkwardly, knowing without a doubt exactly what he'd interrupted.

"I thought you and Mom were going out to eat tonight," Blaine frowned.

"Oh we are, she's in the car," he said pointing toward the door with an envelope in his hand. "But this came in the mail and we both thought you might want it sooner rather than later. I guess you'd put my address on the application instead of your Mom's."

Blaine jumped off the bed to grab it and his heart immediately started racing. "Oh my god, Kurt it's NYADA. It's thick too," he said, pacing the room. "What do I do?"

"Well, I might start with opening it," Kurt said with a cockeyed grin.

"Right," Blaine said pausing his step. "Okay." He slipped his finger in and gently ripped open the envelope pulling the letter out to read. His eyes raked over the page, up and down again, as if making sure he hadn't read it wrong. But the print was pretty clear. "I got in," he whispered at first, his eyes slowly lifting to Kurt's. Kurt's eyes danced, his whole face lighting up and that adorable smile Blaine loved so much just grew and grew. "I got in!" he screeched.

Kurt flew to him, grabbing him in a hug that left Blaine gasping for breath. They pulled apart just slightly their eyes never leaving one another.

"Okay. Well, congratulations Blaine." The Colonel would have said the boys had even forgotten he was in the room except they were clearly just waiting for him to leave. He shook his head fondly. "I'll just, um, leave you two alone to celebrate," he said before walking out. This time they listened for the front door to click shut.

Kurt flashed a stupid grin. "He left us alone to celebrate," he said.

"Well the last thing we'd ever want to do is disobey the Colonel," Blaine smirked.

Kurt surged forward and kissed Blaine with all the pride and love he had always felt for him. "Congratulations Blaine," he hummed lowly. "I'm always knew you would do it."

"I think Ms. Holiday is right, it's a great idea to try and get music into other clubs," Blaine grinned, his arm linked with Kurt walking down the hallway. "I mean, music isn't just for the choir room or a stage, it's in everything."

"NYADA has no idea what they've gotten into accepting you," Kurt teased, turning the corner near the girls' bathroom.

"I think-" but Blaine stopped when Rachel came fuming out the door of the girl's room, her arms folded angrily across her chest. As soon as she saw them she stormed over.

"I offered her ten shows," she shouted, pointing down the hallway. "Ten shows! And that witch just said she wanted them all. She couldn't just be happy being my understudy, she said she wouldn't be happy until she took the part from me!"

Blaine's vision and hearing tunneled. He didn't hear Kurt calling after him, he didn't see either of them trying to reach for his hand to stop him or feel them running after him. He barreled forward, searching for Santana amongst the crowd of McKinley students going to their classes and he didn't stop until he found her outside the computer lab.

He grabbed her arm and pulled her sharply around to see her face. Her eyes narrowed on him but his own were blazing. "How could you do that?" Blaine seethed. "After everything we talked about! She offers an olive branch and you-"

"Back off Benedict Arnold before one of us does something we regret," Santana snapped, pulling her hand back.

"You've already done something you'll regret, Santana," Blaine hissed, and the only thing that stopped him from lashing out further was Kurt's gentle hand on his shoulder. Tears of anger welled in his eyes and he swallowed hard against the vicious words on the tip of his tongue. *Love her anyway*, he heard his father's voice echo in his head.

"Come on," Kurt whispered gently in his ear, slipping his hand down Blaine's arm, threading their fingers together, grounding him.

"I love you Santana," Blaine said softly, his eyes on her full of disappointment. "But I don't like you very much right now."

He felt Kurt pull his hand and he turned away letting himself be led away. Rachel stayed by their side.

None of them saw the tear that slid down Santana's cheek. But tucked away behind a computer full of algorithms, Brittany did. And she knew what she had to do.

---

The lights in the building were out. Brittany had left after their talk with a promise that they'd meet later that night. Now the hallways were empty and silent, only the steady hum of the school's heartbeat could be heard and though it might have been eerie, Santana found it peaceful. She found it perfect.

She slipped in the side door backstage, one of the white calla lilies Brittany had filled the choir room with held tightly in her hand. The blue gelled safety lights illuminated the space softly. Illuminated *him* softly. She grabbed a stool and placed it across from his picture and she watched him, feeling her breath flowing in and out, something she was far more conscious of right now in this moment. She knew it was only her guilt-fueled imagination but his eyes began to look like they did whenever Santana would step over the line and she couldn't look anymore. Her head dipped to the floor.

"I'm sorry I've been such a bitch to your pygmy soulmate." Her voice was soft, like a whisper on the wind to heaven, but her defensive bite was never truly gone. "Blaine and Brittany see me as this nice person who can be a bitch, but you always knew me as I was. You always knew I truly was a bitch at heart, but sometimes you believed there was good in me."

She lifted her eyes, meeting his and wishing they would turn and look back at her. "I've always been jealous of her you know. She's just so goddamn talented and hardworking and *marketable* and she got everything that she ever wanted in this Glee club and now she has everything she wants in this business."

She sighed, looking away, off into the blackness. "Brittney's right. I never wanted to be a Broadway star. I just wanted to beat her for once instead of having to work my ass off just to come in second."

"And it sucks you're not here to yell at me," she said and her tear-glistened eyes darted back accusingly. "You're up there watching all this go down but I have no way of knowing if you'd forgive me if I fixed it." She blinked but the tears fell anyway and she closed her eyes, her head dropping once again. "It hurts. You



being gone. It shouldn't, but it does." She shook her head and wiped her eyes. "You never know how much someone matters to you until they're gone." She looked at the lily in her hand and met his eyes one last time. "I can't make that mistake again."

Santana got up and put the stool back. She placed the flower carefully on the table beneath his picture. She knew exactly what she had to do. "We'll take care of her you know," she told him. "I promise you she'll be okay." She started to leave but then turned back for a moment, her eyes sparkling. "And Finn, when you find her in the next life please tell her to calm her ass down a bit. She doesn't need to be a star to be loved."

---

*Right from the start  
You were a thief  
You stole my heart  
And I your willing victim*

The moment Quinn started singing, Blaine's heart clenched, as it always did since he'd first heard the song a few weeks after Valentine's Day. It had spoken to him then and it still did, helping him always believe they were meant to be together, that Kurt would always love him, that what he had done wouldn't change that.

He couldn't help but glance over to Kurt now, the boy who had stolen his heart from their very first glance.

*I let you see the parts of me  
That weren't all that pretty  
And with every touch you fixed them*

The boy who had seen him in his worst moments, the boy that had held him when his father kicked him out, when he'd thought he'd lost everyone and everything, and sang *nothing's gonna harm you, not while I'm around*. The boy who that night traced every scar and healed them, and every night since had slowly kissed away all the pain and heartache and made him strong enough to over and over again piece his broken heart back together. The boy who fixed him.

*Now you've been talking in your sleep, oh, oh  
Things you never say to me, oh, oh*

*Tell me that you've had enough  
Of our love, our love*

Kurt glanced over at Blaine and offered him a small smile. They'd never talked about it but he knew what this song meant to Blaine because it meant the same thing to him. It meant forgiveness. It meant understanding. It meant that no matter what life would send their way that they could overcome. Blaine believed they were soulmates and though Kurt didn't believe in such things, who he was he to deny Blaine that. Their love certainly was written in the scars on their hearts.

*Just give me a reason  
Just a little bit's enough  
Just a second we're not broken just bent  
And we can learn to love again  
It's in the stars  
It's been written in the scars on our hearts  
We're not broken just bent  
And we can learn to love again*

Santana felt his eyes on her before she turned and looked. Her hand in Brittany's she risked a glance in Blaine's direction. He was staring right at her as Puck sang.

*I'm sorry I don't understand  
Where all of this is coming from  
I thought that we were fine*

They hadn't spoken since their fight, since she and Rachel had reconciled. She knew he was happy, she'd seen him while they'd sung *Be Okay*. He was hesitant at first but then he relaxed. But she also knew he was mad at her for the decisions she'd made, and when she didn't even fully understand her reasons herself, she couldn't truly expect him to.

*Just give me a reason  
Just a little bit's enough  
Just a second we're not broken just bent  
And we can learn to love again  
I never stopped*

*You're still written in the scars on my heart  
You're not broken just bent  
And we can learn to love again*

But now he watched her and smiled softly and she smiled back, knowing all was forgiven. They were hot-headed and stubborn but their friendship wasn't broken, just bent, and it could be fixed.

*Oh, tear ducts and rust  
I'll fix it for us  
We're collecting dust  
But our love's enough  
You're holding it in  
You're pouring a drink  
No nothing is as bad as it seems  
We'll come clean*

Glee might be over but now began a new chapter, a new story in all of their lives. New friendships would emerge, new relationships would grow, but the loves they developed in these halls of McKinley High School, in this choir room that witnessed their laughter and pain, tears and triumphs, between these walls where the songs in their hearts still lived on, these loves were written in the stars. They might bend but they would never break.

*Just give me a reason  
Just a little bit's enough  
Just a second we're not broken just bent  
And we can learn to love again  
It's in the stars  
It's been written in the scars on our hearts  
That we're not broken just bent  
And we can learn to love again*

Rachel watched them sing and she saw it in them. The things that could have been. The things that should have been. Glee club was officially over. Ending in such a nice, neat package and yet she knew it would never be that easy. Someday she would learn to love again.

But the love she had found in this room would live on forever.

---

She declined an invitation to join Kurt and Blaine and some of the others at Breadstix. She needed to be alone for a bit.

Well, not really alone.

Slipping in the door backstage, Rachel closed her eyes, breathing him in, hearing his voice. When she opened them her eyes first fell on his, then on the lone calla lily lying lonely beneath his picture. It made her smile and she picked it up, twirling the flower she knew Santana had left behind delicately in her fingers.

"Of course you're still looking out for me." Her voice was soft with affection, her smile timid. She lowered her eyes, the words of the song coming back to her, the strange disoriented feeling she sometimes felt when she remembered she was being forced to take the wrong road in life. "'I thought someday you and I would come back and sing that song. *I never stopped. You're still written in the scars of my heart.* But I know we wouldn't have had to learn to love again. Because we never stopped loving one another in the first place."

She walked over to the curtain, clinging to it, the soft velvet brushing against her cheek like a caress. She stared off onto the stage that had made her who she was today. "Mr. Schue says Glee club is officially over, but you know what?" she mused. "I don't believe it. After all if you could bring Santana and me together you can surely bring back Glee club." She turned around, chuckling softly, then stared earnestly back into his eyes. "It's endgame."

She drew close, gently placing Santana's flower back down for him, then kissed her fingers. She pressed them gently to his lips. She wouldn't let herself cry, not this time. "I love you," she whispered. "I'll see you on Broadway."

---

Santana drove around for a while before going home. The plane tickets sat on her front seat. She knew what she wanted, she just needed some time to process everything, to truly make sure she was making the right decision. But she knew she was. So she knew what she had to do.

Santana pulled into the driveway of her parents' house as the sun set in the sky. It seemed only fitting that what began with the sunrise would end with the sunset. She dialed her number and her heart clenched at the sound of Dani's voice when she answered.

"Hey babe," Dani said, her voice eager. "I'm so glad you called."

"Hi," Santana greeted softly. Guilt turned her stomach and made her throat dry. "Do you have a minute? I was hoping we could talk."

"Sure, yeah, I was hoping we could talk too," Dani answered. "How's Ohio?"

"Oh, um, it's good, I guess. Everyone's all broken up about the end of Glee club, which is both annoying and oddly heartbreaking at the same time," she muttered with an eye roll. "I quit Funny Girl and Rachel and I have made up for however long it lasts. It's-"

"How's Brittney?" Dani interrupted.

Santana paused, taken aback slightly. But she supposed they both knew there was no need to beat around the bush. "She's good," she said carefully. "She's really hating MIT, so I think she's going to move to New York in a few weeks. Listen-"

"I'm going to Chicago," Dani blurted out.

Santana's eyes opened wide with surprise. "What?"

"Yeah," Dani said. "I didn't want to tell you in case I didn't get the gig, but I answered an ad for a band out there that's opening for some big acts. It could be my big break."

"Wow," Santana sputtered her mind racing. "That's amazing."

"I'm sorry. To leave Pamela Lansbury in the lurch. And that I won't get to see you everyday anymore." Dani's voice was tight, almost strangled, but Santana could barely hear it through the noise in her own head. "But I'm glad Brittney's gonna be there for you. Really glad."

Suddenly sadness and regret washed over Santana. "When do you leave?" she asked softly.

"Day after tomorrow," Dani said. "They want me to start rehearsing right away."

"I won't get to see you before you go then." Santana's heart ached. Maybe she and Brittney were meant to be together, but Dani had been good to her. A great girlfriend when she really needed one. She would miss her dearly.

"Maybe it's better that way," Dani said softly. "You're going to be amazing, Santana. Just...don't run from fear. Don't fight things that aren't foes. Love with all your heart."

"I do love you Dani," Santana whispered. "I hope you find everything you're looking for."

"I love you too babe. But you already have everything you're looking for. I hope you and Britt go the distance. I really do."

They said goodbye and hung up. Dani wiped away her tears and turned to her computer. The email sat open, her reply blank, but she'd known what going back to Ohio had meant this time. She'd learned exactly what McKinley meant to the New Directions. For better or for worse, those loves were forever.

With a sigh, her fingers typed her answer. She read it over once more before pressing send.

*Thank you very much for your offer and I would love to accept the job. I'll see you in two days.*

She'd known when she had said goodbye to Santana the morning of her flight that it would be the last time she'd see her for a long time. She'd known that Santana and Brittany were meant for each other, and that nothing would get in the way.

---

Blaine knocked on Mr. Schue's door softly, just to get his attention. "Mr. Schue, do you have a minute?"

Will looked up from where he was cleaning out his desk, packing his things up in boxes as he did every year. Only this year it was far more bittersweet than in the past. There really wasn't anything to look forward to coming back to next year. "Of course, come on in." He waved Blaine and held a hand out to the chair at the desk. "You want a seat?"

But Blaine just tucked his hands in the pocket of his jeans. "No thank you, I just..." he hesitated. He didn't know why he was finding it so hard to say what he wanted to. He hadn't been able to express himself in the video Artie shot, but hearing how important Mr. Schue was to everyone, hearing Kurt again from backstage, he knew he had to say the words that had been playing over and over in his mind. "I just wanted to say thank you," he said, soft but sure. "For everything."

"I didn't do anything," Will told him fondly. "You were a star before you even came into our choir room."

"No," Blaine shook his head. "You saved Kurt's life, and so you saved mine too. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for you." He eyes dipped. He knew the way things would have played out for him without Kurt in his life and he hated that future. "I never would have been safe. My father would have never stopped hurting me. Sebastian would have destroyed me." He looked up, his eyes a soft golden glow. "Before I ever even knew you, you saved me. It's those ripples that I hope your kids can know about."

Tears were in Will's eyes and his emotions were so strong he couldn't even find the words. So instead he gathered Blaine in his arms and whispered the only thing you could say. "Thank you."

---

"So make sure you don't trip up the stairs or over your gown or forget your speech right in the middle of it," Cooper was telling him over the phone and Blaine both rolled his eyes and took mental notes because those were most definitely things he wanted to avoid. "Oh I wish I could be there Squirt."

"I wish you could be here too Coop, but I know you can't just pick up from set and fly to Ohio, and I'm really proud of you," Blaine told him. His parents were already in the auditorium as were most of his friends but he'd been caught on the phone with his brother for the last ten minutes. He and Kurt were the last ones in the classroom set aside for them to get ready. "This could be the start of really big things for you."

"Graduation is the start of really big things for *you*, and I'm proud of *you*." Blaine smiled at Cooper and Kurt reached a hand in to fix his bowtie and for a moment it was nice for everyone to just be futzing over him. "Now Mom and Dad are recording the ceremony so if you do pull a Jennifer Lawrence I can show all of the cast and crew on set."

"Nice Coop, I love you too," Blaine smirked. Kurt raised a brow at Blaine and he winked back. Kurt smiled and draped his gown over Blaine's shoulders. The three of them were all looking forward to hopefully being able to spend more time together once Blaine was in New York for good.

"Hey, I'm comparing you to the biggest star in Hollywood today, I think you'd be happy by the comparison," Cooper complained.

Kurt zipped him up and kissed him quickly on the lips. Tina rushed in to urge them along. "I need to go Coop, I'll talk to you soon."

They said their goodbyes and Kurt and Blaine walked hand in hand to the back of the auditorium where the graduates were lining up. "Save me a seat," Blaine whispered.

"Always," Kurt smiled.

---

His mother fussed and his father fretted and how was it that two people who had spent most of their lives not paying any attention to his needs now felt a need to smother him just as he was about to leave?

"Why don't you go get me some books for the plane Mom," Blaine asked, kissing her gently on the cheek. "I think I forgot to pack anything and you always know what I like."

It wasn't true but he needed to talk to his father alone before he left and his Mom needed to feel like she was doing something. She quickly agreed and headed to one of the nearby bookstands.

But now that they were alone, Blaine's heart beat a little wildly in his chest. He shoved his hands in the pockets of his coat and shuffled on the floor. His carry on was beside him, his bags were checked. Most of his things had been shipped ahead of him or had already been brought back to Westerville.

Well his parents weren't the only ones that could fret and fuss and worry now that he would be apart from them. "Don't hurt her," Blaine whispered, but it was strong, commanding. He had his own fears about his mother moving back in with his father and he looked the man clear in his eyes, searching for any hint that he would not heed his warning.



But there was none. "I promise you I won't," the Colonel vowed. He placed a hand on his son's shoulder. He'd held on for so long, so tightly that letting go was maybe the toughest thing he'd ever had to do. Because no one would blame Blaine if he chose never to return. And that terrified him. "Don't be a stranger, okay? Burt and I need you two."

"We won't Dad," Blaine assured him. "You two are too important to us."

John smiled softly. Those words were like music to his ears now. "You nervous?"

Blaine shook his head. "Nah. I've got everyone there and NYADA doesn't scare me."

"Don't think you're going to be the best there Blaine, because you're not. You may have lead Dalton and McKinley but every other person at NYADA was a leader in their school and every single one of them is as talented as you, and maybe even more so. You're going to have to work hard." Blaine bit his lip at his father's stern gaze. He'd known the lecture had been coming. "Just because it's a performing arts school doesn't mean I won't insist you do well. This was your choice and I'm accepting that but it doesn't change my expectations. Don't let me hear of you drinking or using drugs, or partying because I don't care what anyone else is doing, you're an Anderson and you'll treat your education with the respect it deserves. And if I hear differently you can be certain I will be on the first plane to New York to straighten you out, is that understood?"

Blaine's skin bristled and his heart jump and he hated how his father could still manage to put the fear of God in him even though he knew perfectly well he was safe. "Yes Sir," Blaine answered and the Colonel smiled.

"Good."

"Your father thinks he's Polonius," Amy teased, handing Blaine a stack of books to put in his bag. "Just do your best Blaine, that's all that matters."

"Thank you Mom," he said sweetly, zipping them up inside. "I need to go or I'm going to miss my flight."

He hugged his Mom, who was completely unsuccessful at holding back her tears. He tried hard not to let himself get choked up by her. He wasn't leaving them, he was following his dreams, and there was nothing to be sad about. His father held out a hand, but Blaine took it and pulled him into his arms. So much had

changed over the last two years, but his father would always be his father and he really loved the man he had become. "I'll make you proud," Blaine whispered in his ear.

The Colonel gave him a quick pat on the back. "You already have."

Blaine pulled away and grabbed his things. With one last look behind him, one last wave, he made his way through security and onto the plane. He sat in the window seat, gazing out.

This was it. He wasn't coming back this time, not to live. This was the start of his new life.

And he was more than ready to fly.

## **SPREADING MY WINGS**

*Part 7 of the Ready to Fly Series: Blaine has finally graduated and moved to New York with his fiancé and best friends. He doesn't know what life in the city will bring, but he quickly learns he needs to spread his wings to fly.*

\*\*\*Season 5/6 Glee: New York companion series\*\*\*

### ***Chapter One: New New York***

It was perfect.

From the first moment he stepped off the plane and Kurt took his hand at baggage claim and led him down into the subway, across the city, and up the street to their Bushwick apartment, it was nothing but perfect. Most especially the way Kurt's hand gripped his loosely, with lazy familiarity, as if every day of their lives they had walked hand in hand down the street just as they did that day.

Except they hadn't.

Kurt peered down at him, a brow crooked with curiosity and a small laugh escaping his lips. "What's got you looking tinkled pink?" he asked with an amused smirk.

"You're holding my hand," Blaine said with a wonder in his voice that made Kurt laugh again.

"Well of course I'm holding your hand silly, you act like I've never held it before."

"You haven't Kurt," Blaine said softly. "Not like this." They stopped in front of Kurt's apartment, their apartment, and Blaine gazed down at their fingers laced together in awe. "This is real. This is safe, Kurt." He looked up and Blaine's eyes were wet and heavy and completely full of love. "This is walking hand in hand in Central Park and going to classes together, and living together, and loving each other. This is kissing you wherever and whenever I want."

"Whoa, hold up their Romeo," Kurt teased lightly but there was a flash of caution in his eyes that wasn't missed. "We're still in Bushwick."

Blaine wasn't going to let that deter him though. With a step forward he declared that this was his moment. Their moment. And no one and nothing was going to take it from them. "This is Blaine and Kurt Hummel-Anderson," he purred defiantly, his lips only inches from Kurt's.

Kurt's heart beat quickly with nerves but he had to swallow against the electricity that was now coursing through his veins. "Anderson-Hummel," he choked out.

"Whatever you want my love," Blaine whispered seductively before stealing a kiss and running inside.

"Oh thank God Rachel is in Boston," Kurt murmured breathlessly, grabbing Blaine's abandoned bag and rushing in after him.

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One week. That's how long complete and utter bliss lasted. Lazy days of falling asleep next to each other and waking up next to each other in the quiet solitude of their empty loft, filling the hours in between with lazy kisses and passionate lovemaking followed by passionate kisses and lazy lovemaking. Blaine cooked blueberry pancakes and French toast and crepes, he prepared fresh squeezed orange juice and fresh brewed coffee for heavenly mornings of breakfast in bed, crossword puzzles, theater reviews and more kissing. There was always kissing.

They christened the couch and the table and Rachel's bed just for fun and they dreamt of a lifetime of nothing but a domestic paradise of pillow fights and dancing naked in the middle of the living room.

Neither of them wanted to believe that anything could change what they had so drastically, but they both knew that this paradise was not forever.

***From Sam to Blaine [3:46pm]: Hey man. Artie's Mom and I just dropped him off at his dorm and he's doing great. I should be there in about 20 minutes. Thanks for letting me crash!***

"It's only for a little while Kurt, I promise. I'm sure he'll find a place by the time Rachel gets back from Boston, and maybe we'll even get a few more days to ourselves in between." Blaine wiggled his eyebrows but Kurt wasn't buying his optimism. Nothing would beat the rent of the loft shared four ways once Sam got used to it.

But still, even Kurt couldn't deny it was fun having Sam around.

They all went out with Elliot, just the five men around town while they could before the girls inevitably all descended back upon them. Blaine vetoed beer night, Kurt vetoed the sports bar, and together they vetoed Sam's valiant attempt at convincing them they'd enjoy a strip club. Sam vetoed the art museum and Artie strongly vetoed a trip out to the Statue of Liberty, leaving them walking around New York for about an hour before Elliot led them all to Bamboo 52, a sushi bar in Hell's Kitchen.

"I used to know a guy who waited tables here," he explained. "Foods good, plus it's Karaoke night."

Elliot and Kurt regaled the newcomers with stories of living and working in the city and the ins and outs of getting by in schools where egos and reputations were more important than grades. Blaine reveled in the fact that he could touch Kurt's shoulder or place a hand on his thigh or whisper sweet nothings in his ear without worrying that someone was going to come over and make a scene. The five of them got off without a hitch and when Karaoke inevitably started they sung in nearly every combination, in every genre.

Sam got in the way and took over the couch, playing video games from noon when he woke up to 4am. Gone were the days of lazy lovemaking and dancing naked in the living room but there were even better nights of watching television together and laughing and playing games, reminiscing about late nights of gaming with Finn and Puck in the Hummel living room and Blaine realized that no matter how scary starting a brand new life over in New York was, with his boyfriend and his best friends by his side, everything was absolutely perfect.

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"So what was your favorite part of the first day of school. Go!" Blaine asked with an excited grin.

They'd always had lunch together in school, either inside the cafeteria at Dalton or outside in the courtyard at McKinley. But the \$15 boxed lunch from North Square they could share on the Washington Square lawn was quickly becoming Blaine's new favorite tradition and it was only their first day.

"Hmmm...let's see." Kurt thought as he took a bite of the Grilled Chicken Club then opened his eyes with wide excitement. "I actually think our Acting 2 class is gonna be phenomenal." He grabbed a few fries and waved them around while he talked. "Our professor once worked with Helena Bonham Carter in Planet of the Apes. I can't wait to ask her a million questions!"

"Did you have to keep that journal for Acting 1?" Blaine asked, delicately cutting a slice of apple with their plastic knife. "I'm thinking of going to Barnes and Noble this weekend to get a good one. Maybe leather bound, embroidered. Do you still have yours?"

"I'm pretty sure I went to the NYADA bookstore and got just a spiral notebook. It was blue maybe?" Kurt hadn't thought about that notebook in half a year and he didn't want to start now and he certainly didn't want Blaine to ask to read it. It was full of break up angst mixed with youthful idealism. "Elliot thinks journaling is a great way to start writing new lyrics. Maybe you should try it? You've always wanted to write your own songs."

"I don't know," Blaine shrugged shyly. "I think the songwriting might be best left to Rachel and Marley."

"Rachel's a little busy for songwriting right now, don't ya think?" he mused sarcastically. "Even as a part-time student until Funny Girl opens she has her hands plenty full. Which of course is fabulous for us since it means she's barely in the apartment...unlike a certain somebody else." He muttered the last part to himself.

"Well I think it's good Rachel's busy," Blaine said, ignoring the dig at Sam, which he recognized to be happening more and more frequently. "She needs to keep busy. She seemed really happy when she came back from Boston. And Nick was able to get there in time to see one of the final performances. He said she was great."

"He was probably just happy that Quinn came up from New Haven," Kurt smirked.

Blaine smiled and shook his head. "No he was actually pretty pissed I didn't tell him she was seeing it the week before. Said he would have stayed in a hotel for the week if he had known."

"So I take it you didn't break the news that Quinn and Puck are back together?" Kurt grinned.

"Nah, I couldn't break his little heart." Blaine took a gulp of the Limonata then passed it to Kurt. "I'll wait until he finds a girl at school and then hope that she's better than his high school dream."

"Speaking of high school dream, you speak to Santana lately? Elliot thinks she and Brittany are going to run away and get married before they come back to the city to become rich and famous," Kurt said.

"I think she has abandoned her dreams of notoriety to buy a tiny little house with Brittany in the town of Eresos," Blaine said. He leaned back on the grass, folding his arms beneath his head and gazed up at the blue sky. The breezes were starting to pick up and before they knew it the winter winds would start chilling the air, making it too cold for picnics. Maybe Santana had the right idea. "She says the water is crystal clear, the beach is long and dark with volcanic sand." He turned his head to look up at Kurt and grinned. "Maybe we should honeymoon there."

"It's Lesbos, sweetheart, not gaybos, I think we would stand out like a sore thumb," Kurt quipped. He laid down next to Blaine, his head perched on his hand looking down on him. "Besides, I thought we weren't going to make any wedding plans until at least Christmas."

"We have to make at least some plans by then Kurt, we have to offer the folks a little bit of a bone." Besides Blaine was pretty certain that his mother was making her own plans as they spoke. He wasn't supposed to know, but the guest list was already being scrupulously scrutinized. He'd have relatives flying in from the Philippines that he'd never even met before. Hell she was already preparing a short list of potential sponsors for them.

"Your Mom and I will have a blast planning every dramatic detail," Kurt promised. "After Christmas. Now hush." With a smile he grabbed Blaine's hand and pulled him up. They gathered their trash and walked hand in hand back to the NYADA campus.

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***From Blaine to Santana [12:45pm]: Please tell me you and Brittany aren't getting married.***

***From Santana to Blaine [12:50pm]: Brittany and I aren't getting married.***

***From Blaine to Santana [12:52pm]: Are you just saying that because I told you to tell me or do you mean it.***

***From Santana to Blaine [12:55pm]: You'll just have to wait and find out. Now stop texting me this is gonna cost a fortune.***

***From Blaine to Santana [12:58]: I'll pay you back. DON'T STEAL MY THUNDER LOPEZ, KURT AND I GET MARRIED FIRST!***

*From Blaine to Santana [1pm]: Santana...*

*From Blaine to Santana [1:03pm] Santana...?*

*From Blaine to Santana [1:05]: Hurry home, I miss you. xoxo*

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*Everything has its season  
Everything has its time  
Show me a reason and I'll soon show you a rhyme*

It became a habit of his anytime Kurt had work at the diner. It wasn't that he didn't love the loft the way it was, because he did. But it had so many touches of Rachel and Kurt, he just wanted to add his touch to it also. Just so that he felt like it was home and he wasn't just crashing like Sam.

*Cats fit on the windowsill  
Children fit in the snow  
Why do I feel I don't fit in anywhere I go?*

His first few purchases had been small and welcome. He'd discovered a quaint little antique store where he could buy old guitar picks and he arranged them in a shadow box he'd put on one of the shelves. He'd bought a SodaStream so they could stop spending money on 12 packs of sugar-laden soft drinks and he could make healthy freshly fizzed drinks for them all.

But then Kurt started yelling at him that it was too loud. And the sofa he'd purchased with such enthusiasm was infested with bedbugs and though Kurt didn't make him feel like he was to blame for the barely averted disaster, he certainly felt he was. And he knew he had to make it right, for both of them.

*Rivers belong where they can ramble*

So when he found the lamp and the desk the next day after class he realized that what he truly needed was his own little space, his own little corner of the apartment that he could call his own. He stopped at a local theater supply store on the way home and bought spike tape and as soon as he arrived he set to work on spiking it all out on the floor. When Kurt got home from the music store with Elliot, he was going to love it.



*Eagles belong where they can fly*

And when Sam came back Blaine was proud of him for cutting his hair and for booking his first job and even for finding a place and moving out of the apartment. He didn't really expect the pain in his heart at the idea of Sam no longer being around all the time. The fear of losing him to the exciting world of modeling, to Paris and Milan and wherever else his life would take him had him on edge. But this would be better for them he told himself. Kurt would be relieved that Sam was moving out and the loft would be less crowded. This was exactly what they needed. To make the apartment feel like he belonged.

*I've got to be where my spirit can run free*

Except Kurt never even gave him the chance to tell him Sam was moving out. Instead Kurt screamed that his decorating was hideous, that Blaine couldn't just barge into the apartment like he was at McKinley doing whatever he wanted whenever he wanted, as if that had ever even been true. Kurt declared the loft *his* home and admitted he'd run to *Elliot* to talk about *their* problems. Kurt called him psycho and pouty and weird and annoying and just for a flash it was like he was 14 years old again and being demeaned by his father. But he fought his instinct to apologize and make it right and instead he fought back, which was progress.

But as he backed out of the apartment, not running away he told himself, just making a point, tears blurred his step. Because Elliot had told Kurt he needed boundaries and there was only one reason Blaine could think of why Elliot Starchild would be trying to ruin the only thing that truly mattered to him.

And as much as he'd wanted it to be, the loft wasn't his home and he didn't belong there.

*Got to find my corner of the sky*

---

Leaving Elliot's apartment Blaine knew he still needed time. He needed perspective. He wasn't running away, he would never run away again, but he needed to sort out his thoughts, get his head on straight and give Kurt the chance to do the same. And there was no better place than the island where freedom was born to find a bit of his own.

He bought his ticket and took a seat on the ferry. There was something about the smell of salt water and the cool breeze in the open air that helped him see just how suffocating he must have been.

He'd been an idiot, going to Elliot's. Kurt's words had hurt and scared him and he'd needed a scapegoat, someone else to blame, because admitting that there were problems between him and Kurt was so much harder than blaming someone else. But he had to face the truth. This time there was no Sebastian or Chandler or Eli coming between them. There was no one else to blame. This time, for the first time, it was just about them.

Things weren't perfect. Their relationship wasn't perfect and living together wasn't perfect and he'd known all along he was part of the problem. He'd even asked outright in Mime class but Kurt hadn't admitted it and his heart had just told him to love Kurt more, to catch up harder, to hold on tighter now that he was here and to never let go. And he needed Kurt. He needed him to feel safe and loved and capable of making it at NYADA and he needed to take care of Kurt; to make him breakfast in bed and tuck him in at night and most of all he needed Kurt to need him just as much.

He was his father's son.

They were different in so many ways but in one very important way they were exactly the same. They needed to be the most important person in the world to the people they loved in order to know that they mattered. Because no one had ever taught them that they mattered on their own.

Just as he'd told Elliot, the boundaries he'd learned to build in his life were walls to protect himself, to keep the bullies and the pain out so he would stop being hurt. Back at Dalton where the walls of protection had been real it had been a battle within himself just to let himself be vulnerable enough to let Kurt inside. But once he had he promised himself he would never keep Kurt out again. It was hard to redefine that now, to come to terms with the fact that he and Kurt had to build boundaries between one another. It still seemed wrong in some ways, even though he knew that without it Kurt would wilt like the flower denied sunshine or air.

He stepped off the ferry and onto the Island. He took some time to clear his mind. He went on a tour, learning about the history of the island and the statue and hearing about the journey immigrants had taken to escape war and oppression. He thought of his mother and her family, choosing a life in America with more opportunity for themselves and their children. He thought of the family he hadn't met yet, still back in the old country. The family he would meet on his wedding day.

After the tour he drifted to the edge of the Island and gazed across the harbor to the city, so packed with buildings and people and not a tree in sight and suddenly in the serene beauty of the Island he understood

what Elliot had meant. A person could feel trapped inside of it, unable to escape like a rat in a cage. And he never wanted to cage Kurt. He never wanted Kurt to feel the way he had growing up.

He found himself dialing the number before he even realized. He settled in the shade on the grass beneath a tree and leaned against the bark. "Hey Dad," Blaine said nervously into the phone. "I need to talk with you about something."

"Well, that doesn't sound good," the Colonel quipped. "What's up? Things with school are okay I hope."

"No school is fine Dad, it's, well..." Blaine hesitated, not exactly sure why telling his Dad was so hard, but it was. "Kurt and I are fighting," he confessed softly. "I can't do anything right and he's being ridiculously stubborn and saying he needs space and maybe you were right." There it was. That was the reason. He took a breath, but only silence filled the line. "Dad, are you there?"

A tiny laugh escaped the Colonel. "I'm sorry, I just don't ever think you've said I've been right about anything before. Left me speechless for a minute."

Blaine chuckled softly, letting it calm him now that the words were out. "Well, I wouldn't get used to." He laid his head back and closed his eyes, the sun shining warmly on his face.

"So what do you plan to do?" John asked carefully.

"I don't know," Blaine sighed. "Maybe it would've been better if Sam and I just gotten a place. Maybe it would have been better to wait." He was almost afraid to ask, knowing what the answer would be. But he couldn't resist. "What do you think?"

"I think you need to do whatever's right for you and Kurt," John said. "Just make sure that if you're moving in with Sam that he can cover his part of the rent, I'm paying for you not him."

"Yes sir," Blaine answered by rote. But his own worries only led to others. "How are you and Mom doing?"

"Well, Mom and I are still living together, and doing great," he answered lightly.

"Must be 'cause I'm not there." Blaine was trying to make a joke but they both knew it was anything but.

"We are living together because you're not here, yes," his father told him. "But we are not doing great because you're not here. We're doing great because we waited until it was right. Nothing that happened between us was ever your fault, you understand that?"

"Yeah," Blaine whispered, knowing very well it was true but right now he was just a little bit insecure. "It's just apparently I'm not that easy to live with," Blaine scoffed with self-deprecation.

The Colonel was quiet a minute, then spoke tentatively. "Can I try and be right about one more thing?"

It made Blaine smile. "Well, I don't know if you can manage twice in one day," he teased.

"I'll give it a go," the Colonel said. "I think you need to be around Kurt all the time. I think you need constant reassurance that he's there, that he's not leaving, and that he still loves you. Am I right?" He waited a second for Blaine to deny it, but of course Blaine couldn't. "That's my fault too. I wasn't a good father Blaine, even before the war. I smothered you, never offered you an inch of freedom. And then when I came back..." He sighed and Blaine could feel the pain in his father's voice. "I know I wasn't there anymore unless it was to hurt you. I thought I was giving you what you needed but I let my own pain guide me. I never let you learn to trust. Instead I taught you there was no way of knowing one day from the next if someone was going to love you or hate you, keep you safe or hurt you. But now it's time to learn."

Blaine bit his lip. His father was right of course. It's why he'd backed away Kurt's senior year and why he'd cheated when Kurt left for New York. It was funny that he was the one who believed in soulmates and yet Kurt was the one who had faith that Blaine's love was forever. As much as he talked a good game, deep inside Blaine had always been afraid that he was wrong, that Kurt would forget him if he wasn't around or stop loving him if he didn't do everything for Kurt. Kurt's love for him couldn't possibly be forever because Blaine had never before had someone who had just always loved and protected him no matter what.

"You're an adult now Blaine," his father was saying. "And you love...you're *marrying*, a man who didn't grow up that way. He isn't afraid of those things. If there was one thing that Kurt always trusted about you, even when you were apart, it was that you loved him and he was worthy of that love. And you've always known how independent he is, how self-reliant he is. You always told me how he needed his space, not just when he's angry like you, but when he's sad, or working or needing to think. At McKinley you felt safe with him so you could give him that." It was true. At McKinley it had been easy to give Kurt what he needed. Now that everything was new and different it was much more frightening. "So you need to learn how to manage that. Trust him. Trust his love. Know that you're worth it just by being you."

"Wow," Blaine said, his voice filled with shock. "I think your counselor needs to win a therapist of the year award or something."

"Maybe I just am trying to learn the same thing myself," the Colonel answered softly.

Blaine smiled. "Well then, maybe we can learn together."

---

*"We can't go backwards."*

*"We're not going backwards," Blaine had said. "I think we're being smart."*

*"By protecting something that is very precious to me." Kurt told him. "You know that right?"*

*"Of course I know that, of course," he'd said and he'd wrapped his arms around Kurt, holding him tight because they were exactly the words he had needed to hear. The words that he needed to forever hold on to and never let go. "Always, I know." He needed to believe them, needed to trust them. He needed to make them a part of him.*

*"No matter who we become, even if we do need alone time, which is completely valid, we'll always belong to each other."*

As they made love, Blaine let the words play over and over again in his head. He belonged to Kurt and Kurt belonged to him and they were family. Near or far, together or separate, for the first time in his life Blaine was precious to someone, he was worth protecting, and he was home.

---

The covers fell loosely around their waists. Blaine was curled up on Kurt's chest, listening to his heart beating beneath his ear, moving with the rise and fall of his breath and brushing ever so softly the smooth skin beneath his fingertips. If he didn't know better he'd say that Kurt was sleeping, but the gentle scratch against his deliciously bruised hips proved to him otherwise. "That was hot," Blaine marveled.

"The hottest," Kurt agreed with a proud grin.

Blaine snuggled in as close as he possibly could. There was nothing better, nothing safer, than being nestled inside Kurt's arms. And as much as he knew he had to move out, had to do something to give Kurt the space he needed, in this moment he truly didn't want to leave at all. "I can't wait until we have our own place," he whispered dreamily.

Kurt hummed, his own fantasies filling his head. "A three bedroom luxury apartment. 24 hour doorman."

"A rooftop terrace where we can picnic whenever we want," Blaine added.

"A studio for you," Kurt offered. "An office for me."

"And doors," Blaine said firmly.

Kurt nodded. "Definitely doors."

They both smiled, knowing that those dreams were distant fantasies they probably were never likely to afford, at least not within the city limits. But then again, maybe they wouldn't always be in the heart of the city.

"So who loses their space when we need to turn one of the offices into a nursery?" Blaine asked curiously.

"Whoever's working," Kurt said as if it were the most obvious answer in the world.

Blaine hitched up on to his elbow and met Kurt's eyes. "What if we're both working?"

Kurt rested his head on his hand so they were at the same level. "Then whoever has the better contract."

"What if we're working the same contract?" Blaine challenged.

"Then whoever has the bigger role."

"What if we're both the stars of our shows? On Broadway," Blaine arched a brow waiting for Kurt's answer.

"Then whoever wins the Tony first," Kurt answered smugly. "Which will be me of course."

"Oh you think so Hummel?" Blaine sat up reaching surreptitiously for his pillow.

But Kurt would not be caught off guard and he struck first, his hand thrusting out like a cobra to grab his own pillow and swing it swiftly, whacking Blaine square in the side. Blaine instantly rose to his knees and swung, hitting Kurt first on his head than on his backside when he tried to scurry away. Their laughter nearly drowned out their shrieks and they were lucky that the walls were thick as concrete in the building.

They struggled to get their breathing under control and reached for their clothes on the floor. Quickly dressing in their pajamas, they crawled back into bed, a truce silently accepted.

Blaine broke the silence first. "I'm sorry I accused Elliot."

But Kurt held no anger because of that. "Look, we both know you've had hang-ups about him since the first time you saw him on that video Santana sent you. But it's endearing Blaine, that you think other men could love me as much as you do."

"Everyone should love you like I do." Blaine's voice was reverent and he turned to the love of his life, cupping his face. "But is it wrong that I'm glad they don't?"

"No," Kurt whispered. "I'm sorry I called you psycho," Kurt offered.

"And pouty and weird and annoying?" Blaine smirked.

Kurt blushed with shame remembering the words. "Yes, and those too."

"It's okay Kurt, I was being all those things." Blaine softly twirled his fingers in Kurt's hair, brushing them softly. "In a way I'm glad you felt you could yell at me like that. I mean it hurt, but it was also kinda reassuring. You not baby stepping around me anymore."

"I don't feel like I should baby step anymore." Kurt said. "You're stronger than you know," he whispered before leaning in to the kiss Blaine was offering. Before it had been messy and passionate but now it was soft, loving, full of promise as Blaine's kisses so often were. When they pulled apart, Blaine lowered his head, a breath escaping in a chuckle. "What?" Kurt asked self-consciously.

"I just...." He blinked, refusing to let himself cry, not now. "I'm just going to miss this."

"No, you're not, Blaine," Kurt said, taking his hand. "Because this isn't going to end. The last three months have shown us just how good we are together and that hasn't changed at all. We just need to know we're as good on our own." Blaine nodded because he understood, he really did, but it didn't make it any easier. On the phone with his father, out on Liberty Island it had all made sense, but now, together in bed, it was hard to remember why. But then of course Kurt reminded him. "The theater gods willing Blaine, you'll be offered a National Tour or I'll be offered a National tour, or we'll have Broadway out of town tryouts, or a Regional Production across the country. I don't want to be afraid to go because I don't know you'll be okay. And I don't want you to decide not to go because you're afraid to be on your own. You were right, what you said. You need your own corner of the sky."

Blaine listened to Kurt, his eyes locked on their hands, intertwined, fitting together like a glove. "I know Kurt, I do, and I agree, I really do," he said quickly trying to convince himself as much as Kurt because it was hard. So hard to let Kurt go. "I won't lie, it scares me, but I guess that's exactly why I need to do it." He smoothly pulled his hand away and looked up to loving, proud beautiful eyes. "We both need our space. Because I can't learn to fly if I don't have room to spread my wings."

Kurt's chest heaved at Blaine's words, his eyes misted over, and he raised a stern finger. "Don't you ever think for one minute that I don't love you, do you hear me?" he scolded. "Whether I'm by your side or thousands of miles away our love is the most precious thing in the world to me. We almost lost it once. Never again."

Blaine fell into Kurt's arms once more, a soft melody playing in his head.

*Finding my strength I'm spreading my wings  
Put trust in the wind and see what it brings*

"Never again," he whispered.

*And I'm ready, I'm ready to fly.  
I'm ready to fly.*



## ***Chapter Two: Bash***

*Mother cannot guide you*

*Now you're on your own*

*Only me beside you*

*Still, you're not alone*

It was interesting how the news hit social media first. Kurt and Blaine's phones just lit up with warnings and well wishes from every New York LGBTQ group on the internet. The story spread quickly throughout NYADA and Rachel went to find them as soon as she had heard. Surprisingly, it wasn't until the three had returned back to the loft that they learned that the attack hit so very close to home.

"I think we should bake something for him," Blaine said, already pulling the ingredients out of the cupboards above, grabbing the muffin tin from below. "Hospital food tastes terrible."

"We can bring it over tomorrow when we head into the city," Rachel agreed. She grabbed the ingredients they'd need, grateful that the boys had just gone shopping the day before.

The urge to *do* something was strong. Baking muffins wasn't much, but it was something.

Blaine glanced over to Kurt while he filled the tins with cupcake wrappers. Kurt had been quiet since they'd heard, lost in thought. Now he sat on the chair, lost in the phone.

"What are they saying?" Blaine asked, lines of worry and sadness creasing his forehead.

"There's not a lot of information yet. Just warnings to be careful in the area." Kurt sighed heavily. He felt like his world was spinning. His phone buzzed again and he opened the text. "Elliot says there's gonna be a candlelight vigil. They're gathering a pretty big crowd from NYU."

"We should do the same at NYADA," Rachel suggested. "They won't be able to ignore a hundred voices rising up in song."

"They can ignore whatever they want," Kurt muttered under his breath. Defeat. That was what he was feeling more than anything. The sense that no matter where they went and no matter what they did, they could never truly escape the hate. They had been naïve to trust that it couldn't happen here.

Blaine could feel Kurt's emotions rolling off of him and he left the baking to Rachel. Sitting on the arm of the chair he combed his fingers through Kurt's hair and was left breathless, as he sometimes was, by Kurt's flawless beauty. "They can't touch us," Blaine reminded him and Kurt looked up at him. "Or what we have."

*No one is alone, truly*

*No one is alone*

Kurt gave a weak smile and handed Blaine his phone before getting up, too worked up to sit still. "They're sending out links to health care proxies and hospital visitation authorization forms. Just in case," he said.

Blaine scrolled through the document Kurt had handed him. "It's a good idea Kurt. We were so wrapped up in everything when I got here that we forgot to change things, but I know if there was an emergency I would want to make sure you were by my side."

"My dads have all those signed and copies all over including at every hospital within a hundred miles, I think," Rachel piped in. "I have a copy somewhere in my things we can look at."

"We can print the forms from the computer and then just bring them to a notary," Kurt said. "Keep them with us in our wallets or something. We may not need it here, but in Ohio."

Blaine could only watch Kurt pace for a few seconds before he was across the room taking hold of Kurt's hand. Kurt's wild eyes tempered at the touch and Blaine pulled him into his arms. "We'll be alright," he promised.

"I know," Kurt said. "I just...it makes you feel so helpless, like a sitting duck."

"We'll do everything we have to to stay safe and make sure we'll always be here for one another," Blaine promised.

They found the documents and called the notary at Bellevue, scheduling an appointment for early the next morning before they dropped the muffins off for Russ. After the baking was done and packed and the night had settled, they each filled out their forms. When they exchanged papers and Blaine read Kurt's, he wasn't sure how Kurt felt about it, but to him it felt like a promise.

*I, Kurt Hummel, a resident of Kings County, State of New York do hereby give notice and authorization that if I should become ill or incapacitated through any cause that necessitates my hospitalization, treatment, or long-term care in a medical facility, it is my wish that the following person(s), Blaine Devon Anderson and Burt Hummel, be given first preference in visiting me in such medical or treatment facility, and that said person(s) be given final determination as to all others who wish to visit me in such medical or treatment facility, whether or not there are parties related to me by blood or law or other parties desiring to visit me, unless or until I freely give contrary instructions to medical personnel on the premises involved.*

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Blaine jogged up to the front door of the theater and opened the door, walking inside. He looked around, trying to find his bearings, when a woman with blonde hair in her 30's rushed up to him.

"I'm sorry you can't be in here, this is a closed rehearsal," she stopped him anxiously.

"Oh, um, I'm Blaine Anderson?" He threw on his disarming smile and Dalton charm. "Rachel Berry asked me to meet her here on her dinner break? We're rehearsing a song together for the NYADA midwinter critique," he explained.

"Oh okay, sure," she said and she turned gesturing for him to follow. "Come on in, they're just finishing up a wet tech of Act 1."

"Thanks," he grinned. He took off his earmuffs and gloves, shoving them in his pockets as he followed who was likely the house manager to the theater. He ducked inside, the house dark, and he slowly walked down the aisle. It only took a moment before he was mesmerized by the girl onstage. She wasn't in costume but she wasn't Rachel either. Bathed in a soft amber glow, Rachel was Fanny Brice, heart and soul. And though he'd heard her sing it over and over again in the loft, the majesty of it all; the Broadway stage, the lights, the flies, took his breath away. Things he had only dreamed about when he sat in the audience of How to Succeed two years ago were right before his eyes and he was so close he could taste it. And here was Rachel, her dreams coming true.

"Ok folks, that's dinner," the stage manager yelled from the house. "Two hours, please be back at 7:15, we will go with Act 2 at 7:30."

Rachel looked down at Blaine with a curious smile, his wide eyes transfixed on her. "Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked, slowly descending the stage stairs.

*Sometimes people leave you  
Halfway through the wood  
Others may deceive you  
You decide what's good  
You decide alone  
But no one is alone*

"Finn would be so proud of you." His voice was a reverent hum and though Rachel wrapped her arms around herself at the mention of his name, her smile never faded.

"I feel him here," she admitted, looking up at the beautiful architecture of the building as if Finn's soul hid amongst it. "I know it sounds crazy but I know he's here with me."

"It's not crazy at all," Blaine assured her. "I believe it."

Rachel's eyes dipped, letting out a soft chuckle. "I can't talk to Kurt about this stuff. He wouldn't understand."

Blaine laughed fondly with her. "Kurt might surprise you. He talks a good game, but..." he trailed off with a shrug.

Rachel nodded then grabbed his hand. "Come on, let me show you around, then we can use the stage to practice."

She took him on a mini grand tour and chattered away about this room and that, this actor and that gossip. Though he'd lived in her apartment for nearly six months they'd barely seen one another and his focus had been so much on Kurt. He'd almost forgotten just how similar they were and how good their friendship could be.

She grabbed his hand and pulled him back to the stage. "We better rehearse before the crew comes back and kicks us off the stage. They'll only take an hour tops."

"Ok."

"We could have rehearsed at NYADA," Rachel continued to chatter, "but I thought there was no better way to truly feel like Broadway Babies than for you to really perform on a Broadway stage."

Blaine couldn't have agreed more and he had the time of his life playing piano for her, choreographing, and rehearsing. On the stage was where they both belonged, where they lived and breathed. It was where everyone in the house was family, where dreams came alive and where memories were as real as you wanted them to be.

The hour went by in a flash and the crew started filing back in.

"Come on, let's go get some dinner," Rachel said. She grabbed her purse and coat. He put his on and her hand slipped into his. She led him back up the aisle but at the doors he turned back at the stage, his heart aching with a sense of longing.

"I wish..." he started, but he didn't need to finish.

Rachel squeezed his hand and smiled tenderly. "I know."

---

Blaine had been so excited about the duet that it broke Kurt's heart to see that excitement turn to panic the moment Carmen had flunked them. The fact that she was giving them a second chance was a relief to him, but little consolation to Blaine, and Rachel was well on her way to making things worse before Blaine thankfully guided her out of the room. Kurt sighed and, knowing exactly what he'd be walking into, took a moment to center himself before heading out to them.

He found Blaine pacing the hallway. Rachel was no help to calm him down, ranting herself about Carmen and how dare she fail her, she was a Broadway star, and all sorts of nonsense that was entirely untrue and completely unhelpful. Kurt ignored her for the moment, instead placing himself directly in front of Blaine and grabbing his shoulders. "Blaine, stop."

*Mother isn't here now  
Wrong things, right things*

"He's going to kill me Kurt. I've never failed anything in my life." The words spilled out wildly. "You know what happened when I just got B's and C's Kurt-"

"Blaine, stop!" Kurt firmly took Blaine's face in his hand and forced his eyes to him. "You aren't a kid anymore. You haven't failed, you are going to redo your song and it's going to be wonderful and your father never needs to know."

"He told me to call when I was done with the critique," Blaine explained miserably.

"So don't," Kurt said as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "Get busy, forget to call."

"He'll call me."

Kurt rolled his eyes with frustration. His fiancé was 18 going on 8. "So you ignore it, Blaine, or you tell him you don't know your grade yet. Reschedule your performance to tomorrow and let him know you'll tell him then. You don't have to answer to him."

*Who knows what she'd say?*

*Who can say what's true?*

Blaine dipped his head, and remained quiet. Kurt didn't understand, but he didn't want to fight either. "I'll go reschedule."

"Good," he said with a smile. "I'll deal with Rachel while you do. And then you'll come back with me to the loft, we'll deal with your father or not, and then after I have dinner with Rachel I will make you feel all better," he winked and added with a sly smile. "You can stay over tonight."

With that in mind, Blaine hurried off to catch Carmen before she left the auditorium, apologized profusely and rescheduled for the next day.

He was quiet on the trip home with Kurt, mulling over in his mind the things that Kurt had said. It was still hard to wrap his head around the fact that he had a choice whether or not to tell his father things. After promises in counseling to start trying to always tell the truth, he felt like he was betraying their progress by not. But he also knew that even in the best of times, even with Cooper, school had always been his father's hot button issue. And Kurt was right, he didn't have to put himself through that.

It was only moments after they got inside the loft that the phone rang.

*Nothing's quite so clear now  
Do things, fight things  
Feel you've lost your way?*

Blaine looked at his cell, then Kurt. Kurt looked back at Blaine and shrugged. "It's your choice," Kurt told him.

*You decide, but  
You are not alone  
Believe me,*

Blaine answered.

"Hey Dad." He sat down on the couch, attempting casual as best he could, knowing that he still had the choice to tell the truth or lie his way out of it.

"Hey, so how was your performance?" the Colonel asked eagerly.

"She said Rachel and I were good..." Blaine trailed off. His nerves itched in anticipation, memories of his father's last words to him before he'd boarded the plane scratching at his skin.

"But..." the Colonel coaxed.

Blaine looked at Kurt whose eyes still urged him to lie, to let it go until his next performance. "What?" he choked, stalling, making every attempt to sound innocent but knowing he was failing miserably. He could lie to nearly everyone else, but the problem with going to counseling together was that his father now knew him far too well.

"There's a *but* Blaine, I hear it in your voice," he said, his tone commanding with a growing impatience.

Blaine took a breath and clenched his eyes shut. He didn't want to see Kurt's face when he gave in. "But the assignment was to do individual performances, not duets."

There was silence on the line. And then his father's too calm voice echoed in his ear like a dull roar. "And whose idea was that?"

That voice always sent chills down Blaine's spine. His leg bounced nervously on its own accord until Kurt sat down next to him and laid a steadying hand on it.

*No one is alone*

Blaine gripped it for strength. "It was mine, sir," he admitted weakly.

"So you thought you could just balk the assignment?" the Colonel admonished. "Do whatever you want? Is that giving your education the respect it deserves Blaine? College isn't Glee club Blaine, you don't get to do whatever you want."

"I know that Sir," Blaine said defensively.

"No I don't think you do," the Colonel continued. "I warned you this wasn't going to be like Dalton or McKinley but apparently you didn't listen."

Blaine wanted to curl up in a ball, feeling like a kid all over again under the harsh stare of his father. But he could feel Kurt's gaze on him as well, urging him to be an adult, fight back, refuse to be spoken to that way. His head fell into his hand, frozen in place, caught in the middle.

"So what happened?" His father asked before he could get out a word.

His voice dropped to a defeated whisper. "She flunked us."

"Good," the Colonel said. "You deserved it. When someone gives you an order you follow it. Imagine if someone pulled rank on the battlefield."

Blaine had long since stopped trying to explain to his father that not all the world was a battlefield. "But she said our performance was good so she's giving us another chance to do the assignment right," Blaine said, trying to offer a glimmer of hope.

"Well, you told me you wanted to claw your way to the top like your friends. Now's your chance." The Colonel sighed. "I'm very disappointed in you Blaine."

Blaine blinked back tears that he refused to let fall. Those words hit harder than any blow. "I'm sorry."



"You should be," his father said sternly. "Call me after your next performance."

"Yes sir," Blaine muttered and hung up. He threw the phone down on the couch and closed in on himself. His father hadn't touched him but his body ached as though he had.

But Kurt was going to have none of that. "No," Kurt declared, grabbing Blaine's hands and pulling him up. "I am not going to let him do this to you and neither are you. You're 18 years old and you're an adult and you messed up, fine, but I am not going to let him knock you down."

"I'm fine Kurt," Blaine muttered completely unconvincingly. "I just need a few minutes."

"Ordinarily I would absolutely respect your request for alone time, but I know you," Kurt said, his hands on his hips. "You're going to spiral down into panic or depression and there is no way I am going to let that happen over an F that won't even stay on F. Not on my watch. I'll go to dinner and come back to you and Sam acting out some god awful Star Wars fanfiction which would probably traumatize me for life or find a loft full of Carmen Tibedeaux puppets and one of that woman is far more than enough. I swear you and Rachel are cut from the same overly dramatic cloth-"

Blaine listened, a smile teasing at the corner of his lips the more Kurt ranted and though part of him wanted to know how long he could go on, another part, a much louder part, just wanted to kiss him.

For a second Kurt continued his tirade against Blaine's lips, but Blaine wrapped his arms around his waist and pulled him close and Kurt surrendered. He melted into Blaine's arms, an embrace so strong, and a kiss so fierce that he had to smile at his mission accomplished. Kurt knew Blaine. And he always knew what he needed.

*No one is alone*

*Believe me*

*Truly*

"I love you," Blaine breathed, only when he was desperate for air. He rested his forehead on Kurt's forehead, their eyes both closed.

"You can't let him do that to you," Kurt said gently.

"It's the one trigger that's left," Blaine tried to explain.

But Kurt understood better than Blaine thought. "For both of you." He pulled back, resting his hands on Blaine's chest. His heart still beat quickly beneath Kurt's fingers. There was still a part of Blaine that believed he had to be perfect. And a part of the Colonel that believed he should be. "He may still be your father Blaine but he can't yell at you anymore."

Blaine's eyes dipped and he stifled a laugh. "I don't think it works like that Kurt."

Kurt thought to argue but he knew it would do no good. Instead he glanced at the time. "I have to go, I don't want to leave Rachel waiting, she only gets a short time for dinner. Are you going to be okay?" he asked, searching his face for the truth.

"I'm fine," Blaine assured him with a smile and this time Kurt believed it.

"You could come," Kurt suggested, a small pout almost convincing him to go.

"No," Blaine decided instead. "I wouldn't want to interrupt your Hummelberry date night," he smirked.

"Alright." Kurt bent down to give him one more quick kiss on the lips. "When I come home we'll go through all the Sondheim songbooks and pick the perfect song. And tomorrow you will blow Carmen Tibideaux away."

Blaine smiled. "I like the sound of that." He grabbed Kurt's hand once more with a smile. "Be careful."

Kurt smiled fondly and let his hand trail away. "I will."

---

*You move just a finger*

"Is this Blaine Anderson?"

*Say the slightest word*

"Yes this is Blaine."

*Something's bound to linger*

"This is Nurse Johnson at Bellevue Hospital Emergency Room. There's been an incident involving Kurt Hummel, and your name is on the paperwork in his wallet. Is he a relative?"

*Be heard*

"Yes, yes, he's my fiancé. Oh my god, is he okay, what happened?"

*No one acts alone*

"The police are still trying to piece things together. It seems likely he was a victim of an assault. "

*Careful*

"He's in with the doctors right now. They'll give you an update when you get here. "

*No one is alone*

---

Numb. That was all Blaine felt. The kind of numbness where your body doesn't seem your own and the world rushes by while you move in slow motion. The kind of numbness that comes from a panic so deep that the tears don't even fall because crying would mean that this was real and happening and part of you still believes that you will blink your eyes and awake from the nightmare.

If he'd been alone he wasn't sure how he would have made it to the hospital because he didn't even remember how he'd gotten there. Sam's voice as he told the hospital staff they were there for Kurt was distant, muffled. He knew Rachel was hugging him, he could see her in front of him, but he felt nothing.

This wasn't supposed to happen. Not here. Not to Kurt, never to Kurt. His beautiful, gentle Kurt who had been through enough and didn't deserve to have to fight this fight, not again.

There was nothing worse than waiting. He leaned against the counter and he clasped his hands, his eyes staring but not seeing. Surely God or Elizabeth or Finn could make this right, could make him okay, could keep his heart beating and his lungs breathing and his soul from giving in to the defeat Kurt had felt so strongly after the first attack.

The click of the door woke him from his prayers, and he rushed to the doctor. "Is he okay?" Blaine's heart beat wildly in his chest.

"He has a hairline fracture above his right eye socket, some other cuts and bruises. He's alive and he will be okay," the doctor said. At his words relief washed over Blaine and he raised his eyes to thank whoever up there had protected Kurt. "He's sleeping now from the morphine but you can see him."

He stilled for a moment, stealing himself for what he knew all too well he would find inside. "Thank you," he whispered. A hand on his back waited, and with a step guided him into the room.

Walking through the door he went straight to Kurt's side. He took in the damage. The cuts on his lip and cheek and eyes were bad enough but the bruises around his neck broke his heart. He didn't even want to imagine what Kurt must have gone through to cause those. He looked so fragile. So broken. And he knew Kurt was alive and okay and only asleep because of the medication but in this moment it was just so easy to imagine how it could have been different. And he remembered being in the hospital himself after the dance, lost and lonely and so very scared and more than anything he needed Kurt to know he was not alone.

"I just wish he could hear me," he thought aloud, "so I could tell him I was here."

"He knows we're here. He does," Rachel told him.

But Kurt just looked so far away. Blaine wasn't sure he knew the right words to say to make it past the medication and the nightmares that were sure to plague him. And then he remembered a different night, a night that felt like forever ago and yesterday, his own face battered and bruised, sobbing in Kurt's arms. Until a song had rung out, and woke him from his nightmare.

***Nothing's gonna harm you  
Not while I'm around***

Blaine was singing before he even knew it, grasping Kurt's hand, caressing his skin, hoping beyond hope that Kurt could feel him. And though the roles were reversed now, Blaine could hear Kurt singing in his head, soothing him, the voice of his angel, singing like a whisper, and he was there again as sure as he was here.

***Nothing's gonna harm you, no sir  
Not while I'm around***

*Buried in Kurt's chest, Blaine whispered, "I'm so scared."*

*"Don't be scared," Kurt tried to reassure him. "Everything will be alright."*

*Blaine tried to believe him. He tried to imagine how things could possibly be made alright. But all he could think of was everything he had lost; Dalton, the Warblers, his friends, his family...*

***Demons are prowling everywhere, nowadays,  
I'll send 'em howling,  
I don't care, I got ways.***

The shadows of that night played in his head and he didn't notice everyone leave the room. The only people in the world were him and Kurt, lost in space and time, in the past and present, in the Hummel living room and here and all Blaine wanted to see were the beautiful blue-green eyes filled again with warmth and determination.

***Being close and being clever  
Ain't like being true  
I don't need to,  
I would never hide a thing from you like some.***

That was the day he'd promised; no more secrets. No more hiding. No more pretending to be someone he was not, no more masks.

***Demons'll charm you with a smile, for a while,  
But in time...***

The scent of his skin. That's what Blaine remembered most from that day. That and the complete sense of love and safety he had felt curled up in Kurt's arms. Every moment of his life since then he'd worked as hard as he could to give back to Kurt all he had received. Curling up beside him now, Blaine breathed him in again. He held Kurt as close as he could, which wasn't nearly close enough, and he whispered in his ear the dreams of their future, the family they would have, and the world they would create together.

***Nothing can harm you  
Not while I'm around.***

---

Even before he opened his eyes, the bright light over head sent darts of pain through Kurt's head and he groaned. Blaine stirred, waking quickly, holding him close, still nuzzled into Kurt's side.

"What's going on?" Kurt croaked, trying to gain his bearings, search his mind for the source of the pain and the warmth against his body. His hand reached over to feel Blaine before his eyes opened to see him, but when he did he turned and smiled weakly. "Hey you," Kurt whispered.

"Hey," Blaine choked, tears immediately coming to his eyes, but Kurt reached his good arm around him and drew him close to his chest.

"Hey, don't cry, I'm okay," Kurt tried to soothe. "My head hurts like a bitch but I'm okay," he added with a rough laugh.

Blaine started to get up. "I'll get the nurse."

"No," Kurt said, pulling him back into him. "I think I want to feel it for a little bit."

They laid in heavy silence for a few minutes. Blaine had so much he wanted to say but all he truly wanted was for Kurt to be okay, to not hurt, to be safe. "Rachel called your Dad," he said instead. "He's taking the first flight out this morning."

Kurt tried to nod but it hurt too much. He ran his thumb up and down Blaine's arm, just happy to have the man he loved in his arms, to be alive to have him in his arms, and so grateful that he was the one in the bed and not the other way around. Slowly he came to realize that Blaine was shaking and he began to feel silent tears wetting his hospital gown. "Shhh..."

"I was so scared Kurt," Blaine cried, unable to keep the words inside even though he desperately wanted to. "What were you thinking?"

"Of you," Kurt answered softly. He brushed his fingers in Blaine's hair, twirling the curls free absentmindedly, his eyes trained on the ceiling but seeing a different scene before them. "I was just imagining...what if it were you? What would I want someone else to do?"

"I told you to be careful Kurt," he said, his voice broken and small and unable to shake the fear.

But Kurt wasn't broken, or small or afraid. "Yes, but you've also told me to have courage. Not to run away. To refuse to be the victim." Kurt reached as best he could to brush Blaine's tears away. "I couldn't let them win. And honestly it felt good to fight back. It *feels* good to have fought back."

Blaine pushed up to truly see Kurt's eyes for the first time since the attack. His skin was still so battered and bruised, but his eyes weren't. His eyes glowed with pride and determination and the fire that Blaine loved so much about him, the fire that no matter what refused to die. He reached a hand out and gently brushed his battered cheek. "I just don't know what I would do if I lost you."

Kurt knew. He would grieve and he would mourn, but he would not be alone and somehow day by day he would continue to go on. But he didn't say that. "Well you haven't lost me," he said instead. "And I do believe that you have a solo this afternoon to prepare for."

"I can't leave you," Blaine said firmly. "I'll have to reschedule if she'll let me or just take the F, it doesn't matter."

"Blaine, my Dad will be here soon and when you leave I'll just take some more morphine and go back to sleep for a bit. I'll be fine," Kurt promised. "You need to do this."

Blaine shook his head, knowing Kurt was right but it didn't make leaving his side any easier. "I don't even know what to sing."

Kurt smiled and cupped Blaine's face tenderly. The song that had turned nightmares into dreams and reached his heart in breathtaking remembrance came back to him. Softly he assured him, "Yes you do."

Blaine realized what Kurt was saying and smiled shyly, nuzzling into Kurt's hand. "You heard me?"

Kurt brushed his lips, then reached down to clasp Blaine's hand. "I'll always hear you."

*People make mistakes*

*Fathers, Mothers*

The Colonel followed Burt's directions to NYADA then asked around. Soon all he had to do was follow the signs to the midwinter critique. He just hoped he wasn't too late. And that Blaine would forgive him.

*People make mistakes*

*Holding to their own*

*Thinking their alone*

He heard Blaine's voice before he saw him, hunched over and singing as if there was no one else in the room. The relief came first for John, seeing that he was okay. The regret soon followed, for having left things the way he had.

***Being close and being clever ain't like being true***

***I don't need to I would never hide a thing from you***

***Like some***

He'd been so afraid of letting him go, trusting him on his own to be the man he'd tried so hard to raise. He'd made so many mistakes trying to protect him from exactly this, when all he had ever wanted was to know he had a son that could make it in the world and make him proud.

***Demons'll charm you with a smile, for a while,***

***But in time...***

And despite all that he had done, the boy who poured his heart and soul into his music was everything he ever wanted. He was strong and resilient and not afraid of anything, not really. And the way he loved, but loved gently, with every fiber of his being, he continually strived to be more like him.

***Nothing can harm you***

***Not while I'm around.***

There was no applause when Blaine finished. The room was heavy with silence, but sitting on the stool, his head down, Blaine didn't even notice.



"That was raw and powerful and from the heart and it deserves an "A" Mr. Anderson." He lifted heavy tear filled eyes to meet Ms. Tibedeaux's and he knew he should be proud but he didn't have the heart to care. Not now. "Tell Mr. Hummel that everyone at NYADA is wishing him a speedy recovery."

"Thank you," Blaine whispered. He slipped off the stool and grabbed his things from the table where he'd dropped them. He turned to head back out the door, back to the hospital, when he noticed the man standing just inside the door frame.

The Colonel watched, barely breathing as Blaine slowly walked toward him. He stepped out into the hallway, holding the door open. Blaine walked silently passed him to the stairs, but paused, gripping the rail.

"What are you doing here?" He wasn't angry. He wasn't scared. He was exhausted. Too exhausted to fight.

The Colonel took a step toward him. Blaine didn't turn, but he didn't step away either. "You did a good job in there son. That was a beautiful performance. You deserve that A."

"Did you come just to talk about my grades Dad, because I have more important things to worry about right now," Blaine said flatly.

"No." John took another tentative step, and then another. "I came because I needed to see your face. Burt called me. Told me what happened." He reached a hand out wanting to touch him, but lowered it on the rail beside Blaine's instead. "I wish you had called."

"I haven't really talked to anyone," he muttered.

The Colonel's skin creased with worry. "I needed to see you were okay."

"Well I'm fine," he snapped bitterly, and it was a relief to the Colonel to finally see an emotion from Blaine, even if it was anger. "Kurt was out there fighting for his life and I'm fine! But I shouldn't be fine. It should have been me." He turned to his father, eyes hard and piercing. "You taught me how to fight, how to take it, it should have been me!"

This time John reached a hand to Blaine's and he didn't hesitate to grasp it. "It shouldn't have been either of you, do you hear me?" he said firmly and repeated it just to make sure the words reached Blaine's ears. "It shouldn't have been either of you." Blaine let the words wash over him and despite everything he

crumbled into his father's arms. He let his father hold him, soothe him, and though his eyes were dry he felt some of the tension he'd held onto all day finally fade away and his breathing slowed.

The Colonel's guilt held fast though. "Blaine. Yesterday." He paused, waiting to see if Blaine would pull away or lash out, but he didn't. "I shouldn't have yelled at you like I did on the phone."

"It's ok," Blaine said, stepping out of his arms, but not away.

"No it's not," the Colonel insisted. "You're right, there are things more important than grades."

"But you were right too Dad," Blaine admitted shamefully. "I was treating the class like Glee club and it's not. And, well," he gave a tiny laugh, and his eyes brightened just a touch with a bit of teasing. "Sometimes it's reassuring that you really still are my father."

*Honor their mistakes  
Fight for their mistakes  
Everybody makes  
One another's terrible mistakes*

Blaine would never cease to amaze him. "So how's Kurt?"

"They say he's going to be okay," Blaine said, trying not to let doubt and fear take over. "I'm heading back now. Do you want to come?"

His father looked away, off into the distance. A shadow fell over his face, memories swarming back. "After your attack, I was so angry. Angry at the kids that had hurt you, angry at myself for not stopping you from going, setting you up to fail. And I was angry at you Blaine, I was just so damn angry at you," he admitted. "But a part of me must have remembered that you were just my little boy, and I went to the hospital."

"No you didn't-" Blaine started to protest but his father cut him off.

"Yes I did. It was the first night you were there. You were fast asleep on painkillers. Your mother had already gone home. She never knew I went." Blaine stared at him, stunned. He'd always believed his father had never come, never cared. But even during the worst days, a little part of him still had.

*Witches can be right*

*Giants can be good*

*You decide what's right*

*You decide what's good*

"I was...*exactly*.... like the men that did this to Kurt." He looked at Blaine. He needed him to understand. Needed him to know it didn't mean he didn't care. "I don't think I can go see him. Because in my mind I would only see you."

Blaine lowered his head. In his heart he understood. "How long are you here?"

"I can stay a couple of days," the Colonel said hopefully. "If you want."

"Yeah," Blaine said softly. "That would be nice."

---

"Ohio Democratic Congressman, Burt Hummel's son was involved yesterday in an alleged hate crime, the second in a week against gay men in New York City. Congressman Hummel is best known for championing federal marriage equality laws."

Kurt grabbed the clicker and shut CNN off. "Not exactly how I wanted my name in the news for the first time," he told his Dad wryly.

"No publicity is bad publicity," Blaine said, peeking his head in the doorway with a smile. "Right?"

"Kids got a point," Burt smirked.

Blaine crossed the room quickly and kissed Kurt carefully on the lips. "How are you feeling?" He straightened up Kurt's blankets, if for no other reason than to feel that he was helping.

"A little bit better," Kurt said. "They've taken me off the morphine and now I'm just on regular pain meds. They say I'll live," he shrugged. "How was your critique?"

"It was good," Blaine answered with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. "I got an A."

"Then what's the matter?" Kurt asked.

"My Dad's here," he said and turned to Burt for the first time, a hint of accusation in his glare.

Burt had the decency to look a little bit guilty. "I told him to call you first, but you know how stubborn the Anderson men are," Burt said.

Kurt grabbed Blaine's hand and pulled him to sit beside him on the bed. "Did you talk to him? Is he really here because of your grade?"

"Yes I talked to him. And no," he said softly. He brushed the soft skin of Kurt's knuckles. Kurt's hands were one of his favorite things about him. Always gentle. And now they were turning purple with bruising. "He didn't come because of my grade. He says he's here because of you."

Kurt pursed his lips in silence, but Burt's low rumble drew both of their attention. "When something like this happens, a Dad needs to see his kid. He just wanted to make sure you were okay Blaine." Blaine nodded. He understood and it meant more to him than he could say.

"Mr. Hummel?" Everyone looked up, a nurse interrupting them from the door. "The police are asking again when they can see you."

"Kurt you don't need to deal with them yet," Blaine insisted protectively. "You have to concentrate on getting better."

"Right now I have to concentrate on peeing," Kurt declared. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and Blaine jumped off, grabbing his arm. "Tell them they can come in an hour. Blaine don't look at me like that, we need to get these guys off the street."

Blaine shook his head. The Andersons weren't any more stubborn than the Hummels, he thought while they slowly made their way to the bathroom. Blaine tried to stay but Kurt kicked him out, swearing that if he couldn't pee by himself than they had bigger problems than the police coming. Burt laughed from the armchair in the corner, suddenly picturing them as an old married couple, bickering about everything and nothing. It was an image he adored.

"I don't think he's ready for the police yet," Blaine worried, sitting back down on the bed.

"I don't think *you're* ready for the police yet," Burt corrected him. "I think he's been ready since his eyes opened."

Blaine sighed, running his hands over his face. "I just-."

The buzz of Kurt's phone interrupted them. Shuffling back from the bathroom across the room Kurt called, "Blaine can you get that? It's probably just Rachel calling for the hundredth time."

Blaine was torn between helping Kurt back to his bed and reaching for the cell on the nightstand beside him, but his hand froze inches above it when he caught sight of the name. "It's David Karofsky," he breathed.

*Someone is on your side*

*Someone else is not*

Kurt stilled for just a second before he looked up, determined. "Answer it."

Against his better judgment, Blaine did the absolute last thing he wanted to do and brought the phone to his ear. "Hello," he answered. His voice was hard.

"Oh, Blaine." David's startled voice rang in Blaine's ears. This was his fault. If it weren't for Karofsky, Kurt wouldn't have ever gone after these guys and he wouldn't be suffering. And now he had the audacity to call and for what? "It's David Karofsky. I heard about Kurt and I just wanted to see how he was."

*He's battered and bruised and he wouldn't have felt the need to charge head first into a gay bashing if you hadn't tortured him all through high school,* Blaine thought. "He's strong," he said instead, squeezing his eyes shut with the force it took to hold back the words that fought to escape.

"Can I talk to him?"

Blaine bit his lip and lowered the phone. "He wants to talk to you." Kurt had made it back to the bed and met Blaine's eyes, golden mirrors to his soul, pleading for him not to say yes.

*While we're seeing our side*

*Maybe we forgot.*

"Sure." Kurt reached out and Blaine handed it over, both holding on to it for a brief instant where their eyes locked and unspoken words flew between them.

*He did this*, Blaine pleaded in protest.

*He did this*, Kurt answered proudly.

*They are not alone*

*No one is alone*

Burt saw it all and understood both of them. As Blaine let go of the phone, let go of his need to protect Kurt from a man from who he didn't want protection, he felt Burt's hand on his shoulder. "Come on," Burt steered him gently. "Let's get some coffee."

---

They were silent as they rode the elevator downstairs to the cafeteria. At the counter Burt picked up the tab and Blaine followed him to a table. Blaine sat, fiddling with his coffee, waiting for it to cool. His thoughts just kept drifting upstairs to Kurt, talking to his first tormentor. The bully who had driven Kurt so close to the edge that it hadn't even been frightening to Kurt to jump.

Staring at his cup, he asked Burt quietly, "How do you do it?"

"Do what?" Burt answered.

Blaine just shook his head. He didn't even really know what he was asking. "I keep thinking 'what if?'. And that I should have been there. He invited me to come and I said no so I could mope over a grade. A stupid grade that I let my father blow up at me about and what does it even matter in the long run? Kurt was on the street fighting for his life and I was reaching for stupid Star Wars..." he trailed off. He knew his father was right, this shouldn't have happened at all. But Blaine had known it could have. He had told Kurt to be careful. "I should have been there to protect him."

"You know what Kurt did in high school every time he knew you were going to be with your father?" Burt asked. Blaine looked up, his forehead creased in question. "He paced. He went through all the 'what ifs'. He went back and forth about whether he should be there for you, to protect you like he had that first time, because he had promised. And you know what he decided?"

"What?" Blaine swallowed.

"He decided that the only way that you would truly be able to feel that you could fight back was if you did it on your own," Burt told him. "It's the hardest part of loving someone. Letting them go."

*It's your choice* Kurt had told him when his father had called.

"I just..." Blaine tried to let go of the pain in his heart but it wouldn't leave. "If I can't take care of him then I just need him to take care of himself."

"He was taking care of himself," Burt said. "Look kid, I know exactly how you feel. When I came in here I came in guns blazing, shouted at him for putting himself at risk like that, but you know what? I think he'd do it again in a heartbeat. With or without you or me by his side. And that may be the hardest thing in the world for either one of us to deal with, but we have to. We love a stubborn man." Blaine laughed roughly, shaking his head. "But he's a good man."

"He's the best," Blaine whispered.

---

Blaine rushed out of class to meet Kurt near the memorial, texting along the way and picking up his pace when he saw Kurt waiting against the wall.

"Hey," Blaine said. "You sure you're up for this? You just got out of the hospital; you don't have to do this."

"I do." Kurt told Blaine. This hadn't just been his battle to fight. "I want to."

They walked down the street, hands stuffed in their pockets.

Kurt's strength throughout all this had been what kept Blaine going and now he wondered how he'd ever thought he would have been stronger. He watched as Kurt crouched down, swapping out the old flowers for new for the man that Kurt had saved. "I heard he woke up," Blaine shared. "I heard he's gonna be okay."

Kurt though was quiet, lost in his own thoughts. Blaine didn't push. He just linked his arm with Kurt's and rested his head on Kurt's shoulder, knowing even in their pain how lucky they were.

They stayed that way until Burt and John walked up and joined them. "He's the one that just got out of the hospital Blaine, he should be leaning on you," Burt smirked.

"Now that would be admitting he's not Braveheart, and I don't think that's gonna happen," Blaine teased.

"You're looking good Kurt," John said, holding his hand out.

Kurt shook it with only a moment's hesitation. "Thank you. The healing is slow but it gets better day by day."

John's eyes met Blaine's and he nodded with his own meaning. "Day by day," he agreed.

Blaine smiled softly. "I should get you to the airport Dad, don't want you to miss your flight. Here let me take that for you." He reached for his father's suitcase then turned back to Kurt, worry in his eyes. "You gonna be okay?"

"I got here just fine on my own Blaine," Kurt reminded him.

"I'll walk him back," Burt said with a wink, laying a steady hand on his son's shoulder. "Better not to take our chances." He raised a brow. "Right Kurt?"

"Well since Blaine is apparently right and we're not too old for our fathers to yell at us, I better listen," Kurt said wryly.

Burt laughed and ruffled his hair. "You'll never get too old for me to yell at you, now come on, let's get you home."

"I'll see you at dinner Kurt," Blaine promised and the Hummel's walked away. "Take it easy," he called after him.

John wrapped an arm around his son and gave him a squeeze. "He's gonna be fine Blaine. Kurt can take care of himself," he said with respect.

Blaine looked at his father and smiled. "We're gonna be fine too," he said.



"Now I will see you two soon," Burt was lecturing at the airport. "You keep each other safe and don't go barreling head first into any more fights, at least until you're all healed up from this one." He passed it off lightly, but Blaine and Kurt both knew he was serious.

"We'll be alright sir," Blaine promised and shook his hand. "You have a safe flight. And go give 'em hell in DC." The republicans had been having a field day with Kurt's attack. "Say hi to Carole for us."

"Will do." Burt reached out and pulled Kurt into his arms. "You take care of yourself," he said softly, choking up. "I don't know how many more frequent flyer miles I have left."

"Well, for the sake of your mileage awards then, I will refrain from saving the world at least for a few weeks," Kurt joked, then hugged him tighter. "I love you Dad."

"Love you too," Burt said, turning to grab his bags before wiping his eyes and Kurt and Blaine politely pretended not to see. "I'll call you when I land."

The boys waved as he went, falling quiet at the loss. It was nice having their parents around again, even if the reasons had been all wrong. They took a breath, as if the world had shifted and they weren't quite sure where to go from here.

*Hard to see the light now*

Kurt's gaze was low and Blaine followed it to his own hand. Kurt stared, as if unsure whether to take it or not. "You haven't held my hand since Russ was attacked," Blaine suddenly realized.

"I know."

*Just don't let it go*

Blaine looked up at him, not wanting to push, just wanting to know. "Why is that?"

It hadn't been intentional. But it had been instinctual. "I guess it just felt like we were back in Ohio."

*Things will come out right now*

"I know we both thought it couldn't happen here but the truth is, it can happen anywhere. My Dad knew that," Blaine remembered. "But we can't let them win like that. You're a Hummel."

"And you're a soldier's son," Kurt said.

*We can make it so*

Blaine reached his hand out, offering his palm, and his eyes turned to Kurt in earnest. "So we keep fighting?"

Kurt gently placed his hand atop of Blaine's and slowly laced their fingers together. "Together. We keep fighting together."

*Someone is on your side*

*No one is alone.*

### ***Chapter Three: Tested***

If it had happened slowly it may have been easier for Blaine to handle. But overnight, Kurt went from swimming just beneath the radar to hero.

Kurt's first day back after the attack, Blaine had walked proudly by his side, hand in hand. But he quickly got lost in the shuffle as professors, students, and staff crowded him out in an attempt to wish Kurt well, tell him how proud they were of him and shake his hand for jumping in where others might have run. Blaine stood back and watched as Kurt's gait grew stronger, his face grew brighter and his body stood taller. Pride did not even begin to define the swell in Blaine's chest. Kurt deserved every bit of the attention and praise and there was nothing in the world he wanted more. But overwhelming was the force by which he wanted to just shout *He's Mine*, sweep Kurt into his arms to kiss him and show the world that the most incredible man in New York belonged to him. That they belonged to each other.

Instead he stayed by the wall, forgotten and invisible and knowing all too well that Kurt wouldn't want that kind of affection in school. And as the attention grew, as men older than him and taller than him and far more toned than him all showered their attentions on the man he loved, Blaine began to wonder if maybe he was holding Kurt back. If maybe the scars from his past were wounds too deep to allow Kurt the life and the love he deserved. If maybe Kurt deserved a man, and not a boy trying to be one.

"Hey," Kurt said a bit breathlessly finally breaking through the crowd to reach Blaine's side. "Some of the guys invited me out to Karaoke after class today, you wanna come?"

"No," Blaine blinked once then twice, trying to come back from that place in his mind he knew was unhelpful. "Thank you. But I, um..." His mouth suddenly went dry with the feeling like he was coming up with an excuse and he didn't know why. "I mean, Sam and I have plans already. You have fun."

Kurt grinned and gave him a quick squeeze of his hand. "Ok, you and Sam have fun too. I'll text you tonight," he said happily bouncing back off into the crowd.

The hallway soon emptied and Blaine was left alone, wondering if anyone had even noticed he'd been standing there. He kicked off the wall and tugged his messenger bag tight. He was being ridiculous. Sure he was having trouble making friends and Kurt was better in all of their classes than him and had this whole life in New York that was separate from him but that was okay.

Because New York was his oyster, he thought as he stepped out on the street, and it was full of amazing sights and amazing people and most especially amazing food.

He stopped in at his favorite coffee shop on the way to the subway and the girl behind the counter, Jenny, he knew by now, flashed him a bright smile as soon as he made his way to the front of the line. "Hey Blaine," she greeted, her eyes warm and welcoming and well, if they were just a little bit flirty he wasn't going to turn down the attention. "Can I get you your usual today?"

"You betcha," Blaine said happily. "How'd that audition go yesterday?" he asked with genuine interest while she prepared his order.

Jenny shrugged. "Eh, you know how it is," she said. "You're great but you're not what we're looking for, blah, blah, blah."

"Aw, the right role is coming for you someday I know it," he said encouragingly, trading her his cash for the coffee and cronut.

"Thanks," she said sincerely. "And this way I get to see your smiling face every day instead."

Blaine beamed and took his food to a table. Yeah New York was tough and it was hard to figure out exactly where he belonged, but at least he had Jenny's smiling face and cronuts to cheer him up when things got tough.

---

He stopped at the restaurant Saturday night on the way to Kurt's. After the horror of his pants splitting he'd resolved to get back on track, go back to salads and healthy foods like he'd eaten in high school. But the moment he stepped foot in the Filipino restaurant the delicious smells of ginger and soy filled his senses and his stomach growled with desire. Before he even really had a chance to register what he was doing he'd ordered the Pancit Palabok and took a seat on the bench to wait. He could have a salad tomorrow.

*From Kurt to Blaine [6:03pm]: Band rehearsal's running late, Elliot's got these amazing new moves to show us and a brand new song.*

Of course he does, Blaine thought wryly.

*From Kurt to Blaine [6:05pm]: Be home about 9. Eat without me of course, I'll grab a salad when I get home. There's fresh veges in the fridge if you want them.*

*From Blaine to Kurt [6:07pm]: Ok. See you then.*

"Blaine?" A girl came out behind the register holding his bag of dinner. She smiled sweetly at him.

"Thanks Anna," he said, offering her his credit card with his own charming smile. "Busy night tonight," he commented looking around.

"Saturday night is always busy. But eating at home is better," she said with a wink.

Blaine hid his blush looking down to sign the receipt and traded the pen for his food. "Have a great night," he told her.

"You too."

He took his dinner to the loft, hugging his things to slip his key into the lock. He threw his bag and his coat by the door and grabbed chopsticks, sitting alone at the table to savor the delicious meal.

It was funny how Kurt had ever thought the loft was too crowded. But at least Blaine had his food for company and with one bite of the rice noodle dish, shrimp popping just right in his mouth, he moaned into the rich flavors that reminded him of home, glad he had time to eat before Kurt could come back and yell at him for finishing the entire thing in one sitting.

---

"So how did rehearsal with Rachel and Elliot go tonight?" Blaine asked. He was perched on the couch, his chin resting on his arms on the back of the couch watching Kurt make himself a salad. Kurt had offered him one but Blaine politely declined. His stomach was still heavy from his own dinner that maybe he'd had about ten mouthfuls too many. "Are things working out with just the three of you?"

"Well it would certainly be better if Santana would return from wherever the hell she is," Kurt said with great snark, dripping a bit of oil and balsamic vinegar atop his greens. "But I think the three of us sound really good together. We could be a modern day Peter, Paul and Mary," he grinned impishly. God Blaine loved that smile.

"Well I can't wait to hear you. When's your next gig?" He curled himself up on one side of the couch, a pillow comfortably in his lap, hiding what felt like the giant swell of his stomach. It had been delicious but now he just felt guilty, like he'd let himself down. Tomorrow he would stop this foolishness.

Kurt joined him on the couch with his healthful salad, taking a seat on the other side. "Not for another couple of weeks. We wanted to wait for Rachel and now we're waiting for Santana, and at least this way we have lots of time to practice. Plus with things getting crazy at school it's hard to find the time," Kurt said.

Blaine stilled for a second. "What's going on at school?"

"Oh you know, just the usual. I've got more people asking if I'll perform in their director's projects and Professor Jaumin wants me to sing for a demo for Voice I." Kurt rolled his eyes as if he this new found demand was a horrible burden, but Blaine knew he was loving every second of it. "I'm actually surprised she didn't ask you."

Blaine resisted the urge to frown. "Well I am just a freshman," he shrugged with forced indifference, but his eyes fell with the heaviness in his chest. He knew that back at Dalton or McKinley he would have been the one chosen, not Kurt. And he didn't want to be jealous because Kurt deserved everything he was getting. But then again, didn't he deserve it too?

He grabbed the remote and turned on the television. It was Saturday night and little was on so he loaded up an old Bridezilla and went to the kitchen. He looked in the fridge. He just needed a little something. He knew Kurt would want him to eat something healthy. There was a bag of celery that looked completely unappetizing and instead he grabbed the butter. "You want some coffee and popcorn?" he asked.

"Coffee yes, popcorn no," Kurt called behind him. Blaine set the machine humming and threw the bag in the microwave. "Do you believe these women Blaine? I mean, how much money do the producers have to be paying them to make complete fools of themselves and destroy their own wedding?"

"Some people just want their 15 minutes of fame, they don't really much care how they get it," Blaine said, swapping out Kurt's mug for his own and setting the machine once more. "They should make a new show. Groomzilla."

"Every gay man in New York would clamor for the role," Kurt rolled his eyes.

"Even you?" Blaine arched a brow as the microwave went off. He pulled it out, burning himself of course on the first attempt to open the bag, then dumped the popcorn into a bowl. He quickly microwaved a larger dollop of butter than he probably he should have and drizzled it on top. He grabbed their two coffee mugs and balanced all of it carefully back to coffee table.

"No, definitely not me," Kurt stated firmly. But a smile pulled at his lips and he set his salad bowl down. "But you on the other hand." He looked up at Blaine, waiting for him to sit then slid in right next to him. His eyelids grew heavy as he leaned in close. "You would make a gorgeous Groomzilla." Kurt closed the distance and kissed Blaine softly at first but quickly set to deepen it. Blaine allowed himself to get lost in the kiss, he wanted it so much, wanted Kurt so much. Blaine hummed into his lips when he felt Kurt's hand trace over his shoulder and down his back, resting on his ass. The ass that just yesterday had split his new pair of pants. He pulled back quickly, aiming for nonchalance but failing, and picked up his coffee mug. "What's wrong?" Kurt frowned.

Blaine blinked and took a drink, stalling as he thought. "I just don't think I'd be too zilla a groom I guess. I mean, I hope I won't be." He put his coffee down and pulled the popcorn onto his lap. He tried to ignore Kurt's sigh at him, and the move back against the other end of the couch in a huff. "I mean watch this," he said pointing the TV. "I'm nothing like this."

They watched for the hour, Kurt finishing his salad, Blaine munching away at his popcorn, commenting every once in a while on the show. He popped the corn into his mouth, barely even tasting it, until the bowl was empty and the show was over.

Kurt took it from his hands and placed it on the table with a sultry look in his eyes. "What do you say you and I practice for our wedding night," Kurt whispered in his ear and Blaine's eyes rolled back when he felt Kurt's lips and teeth and tip of his tongue begin to work first on his ear and then his neck. "We can worry about what we're going to wear later. We could just practice taking it off now."

Kurt's hand was strong on his thigh and moving upwards to his side and every nerve in Blaine's body came alive with anticipation before Kurt's fingers slid beneath his shirt and his hand stroked over his belly button.

Blaine jumped back again, without thought and without warning, anything to get Kurt's hand away from the softness of his stomach. "Why don't we just talk tonight Kurt. Imagine Dragons and Melissa McCarthy are on Saturday Night Live."

"Blaine what's the matter with you?" Kurt asked, his eyes narrowing. "You didn't hear something back from the clinic like Artie did you?"

Blaine's face went pale and his eyes went wide. "Oh no, Kurt, god no, definitely not. I just..." He just what? Didn't want Kurt to know how fat he was? How undesirable? How incredibly unlike all the men who wanted him at NYADA? "I just miss you," he said, sliding in closer to take Kurt's hand. "I want to talk, I feel like we never see each other anymore."

"We see each other all the time Blaine," Kurt argued.

A pang went through Blaine's heart but he hid it. "Yeah, no I just mean, we're always in class and you've been really busy lately and I miss," *making love with you*, "talking to you. You know, just talking."

Kurt was staring at him, as if he couldn't figure out who this person in front of him was and maybe that was so much truer a problem than Kurt even knew. Then his face hardened. "Yeah, sure, whatever." Regret struck Blaine for just a moment, but he knew he couldn't be with Kurt, not tonight. Not when the moment Kurt undressed him he'd realize that he wasn't the guy that he'd fallen in love with anymore, that he was just some dumb kid. That he deserved someone better. "What do you want to talk about?" Kurt asked with a tired sigh. But he wrapped an arm around Blaine and pulled him in close.

Blaine smiled softly. This he could do. This is what he needed. To know that he and Kurt could still sit up all night and cuddle and talk about nothing and everything and no matter what those other guys had on the outside, no matter how they looked at Kurt or Kurt looked at them, they didn't have this with him. They couldn't have this with him.

---

He'd begged out of the loft late Sunday morning with an excuse that he had homework to do. Which wasn't a lie, but it was also not really the truth. If the idea of Kurt seeing him naked had been worrisome the night before it had been terrifying in broad daylight. And after breakfast in bed, Kurt had seemed quite intent on making that happen and Blaine had so badly wanted to say yes that he had to get out of there while he could still say no.

So instead Kurt texted his friends at school and walked Rachel to the theater before heading to the gym with the guys that Blaine was beginning to hate. Watching him walk off to the subway arm linked with



Rachel, he couldn't help but truly look at Kurt as everyone at school saw him. He wasn't that boy who had for so long been told he was unmanly that he couldn't even imagine being sexy. He wasn't the boy that had needed the walls of Dalton for protection or someone by his side to make a stand. He wasn't even the boy that had nervously stood up to the Colonel or feared Blaine's friendship with Santana or worried that Blaine was going to take the leading role from him. Because the boy that had left Blaine behind at McKinley was nothing like the man that walked away from him now. That man was the leading man, he had proven beyond a doubt that he could protect himself on his own, and he was stronger than anyone back home could have imagined he'd ever be.

And Blaine was starting to believe that maybe Kurt was better off where he was going to, instead of being held back by where he'd come from.

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A note told him that Sam and Mercedes had gone to church and he had the house to himself. He went to his room, grabbed his books and opened his laptop, staring at the screen with his mind racing instead of writing his five page theater history paper due Tuesday. Bargaining with himself that he'd just spend a minute online he opened his email and a new message.

*To: Santana Lopez  
From: Blaine Anderson  
Subject: Hurry Home*

*Dear Santana,*

*You need to hurry home, there's this Spanish restaurant that makes a seafood paella as good as your mother always made, maybe even better, and I need a date since Kurt's been on this health kick since the attack.*

*Plus I miss you.*

*You were supposed to be here when I came to New York you know. You were gonna be my girl and keep me sane and smack me upside the head when I started fucking things up with Kurt.*

*He's changed so much. And not just since the attack, though everything's changed since then. He's a hero at school and he's getting all these amazing opportunities and he's working out in the gym and he's incredible*

*at Stage Combat Santana, you should see him wield a sword. He's so different you almost wouldn't recognize him. I almost don't recognize him.*

*It's almost like that day at Dalton I proposed to a memory. And I was blind to it before but now that other people are looking I can't help but open my eyes and I'm finally realizing that he isn't the boy who needed my permission to leave Ohio. Honestly I'm not sure he needs me at all anymore.*

*I know now why you did what you did with Rachel. Because when you've always been on top afraid to fall and suddenly you're crashing down it's easier to grasp hold of anything to keep you from plummeting rather than feel the pain of hitting bottom.*

*It hurts to know that maybe he's moving past me. Maybe I was meant to be with that memory but too much time has passed and he's changed too much. Maybe in this lifetime we were only meant to be together for a time. Maybe we weren't meant to be forever.*

He'd just let the words pour out without thinking and pushed send before he could reread or rethink it. He meant to go right back to his homework but the feeling inside him would not fade away. The feeling that he was lost, that he was losing, that he was floating and needed something to ground him, Kurt's arms, Kurt's hands, Kurt's lips and skin and something to assure him that despite all his fears Kurt did still love him. Lost in his head, his fingers acting without instruction his cursor hovered on the search bar above. He told himself he was just searching for inspiration, for something to show him the kind of body he could have if he just started trying again and stopped stuffing his emptiness with food. The kind of body that Kurt could love, could be proud to stand next to, that Kurt would want to stand up in public and declare *he's mine*. And the image of that, the image of Kurt claiming him threw him over the edge and he knew exactly what he was looking for and he knew exactly what he was going to do with it because he needed this, he needed to let go of the stress that was bottled up inside, the things he had so desperately wanted to do with Kurt this morning but couldn't bring himself to do because he knew the moment Kurt saw him he would realize how much better he could do. Leaving his book behind, he brought his laptop over to his bed. Just once and then he would fix this. He would get himself in shape and he would make Kurt still love him. Just once and he would leave this all behind him and prove to himself and everyone else at school that he could be the man that Kurt deserved.

Kurt grabbed his coat and stormed out of Blaine's apartment so grateful that he had an apartment of his own to storm out to. He should have known. He should have seen the signs, hell he *had* seen the signs but he'd been an idiot, thinking that Blaine would come to him when he was ready before he ran away to some other guy.

It didn't even matter that it had just been bodies on a computer screen. What mattered was that after all this time, after the constant reassurance, Blaine still didn't believe that Kurt would be there for him when he needed him. Blaine still didn't trust him. And Kurt understood that it wasn't a trust that he could earn, it was a trust deep inside Blaine that had never grown, a trust that should have told him he was worthy of being loved and cared for. But knowing didn't make it any less exhausting to deal with. It didn't make it any easier. It didn't make it hurt any less or make him feel like he wasn't doing something wrong every time Blaine pulled away. It just made him wish desperately that Blaine would someday feel okay in his own skin so they didn't have to do this anymore.

There was nothing he could do to tell Blaine. There was nothing he could say. All the *I Love You's* and *we belong together*s and *this is forever*s couldn't get past the walls guarding Blaine's heart. The only thing that broke through Blaine's defenses was showing him, making love with him, and Blaine had shut him out.

He knew that Blaine was struggling here. He knew that just like he and Rachel, the freshman doubts that plagued NYADA students were rearing their ugly head. And he knew that the attack had shattered a sense of safety for both of them that they'd believed would exist here. It was why Kurt had taken to the gym, why he was throwing himself into Stage Combat which he surprisingly excelled at. He had promised Blaine they would keep fighting, together, and he wasn't taking that promise lightly.

*From Blaine to Kurt [6:35pm]: Kurt, I'm sorry.*

But he was tired of fighting Blaine's demons. And he was definitely tired of fighting them harder than Blaine.

*From Kurt to Blaine [6:38pm]: I know.*

*From Blaine to Kurt [6:39pm]: Can we still meet at the diner tomorrow before class?*

But Kurt loved him. And though he couldn't protect Blaine from himself, he could make him keep fighting.

*From Kurt to Blaine [6:41pm]: Yes*

*To: Blaine Anderson*

*From: Santana Lopez*

*Subject: Re: Hurry Home*

*Blaine Anderson, that is the biggest load of crap email I have ever read, what the HELL is going on in New York?! I'm gonna come back if for no other reason then to slap you upside the head until I knock some sense into you. Then I'm going to do it again just for good measure. And don't go getting all triggery on me, you know it's a fucking metaphor, Boyfriend.*

*Kurt loves you, you dumbass, and if you think for one second that's gonna change because he's finally graduated from Barbie to GI Joe then perhaps you've forgotten who you are. You claim to be a soldier's son, remember? So man up and act like it!*

---

Kurt could see it when Blaine took the helmet off, the anger turn to embarrassment and shame when he remembered this hadn't been their own private duel but a class full of students were watching them.

"Alright guys, I think that's enough for one day," the instructor announced.

Kurt put his equipment away and piled into the dressing room to change out of his fencing gear. Blaine must have raced because he was nearly dressed by the time he arrived. He didn't look at Kurt, but as the rest of the guys in the class started piling in, they definitely looked at Blaine. Kurt could hear their snickering while he changed, their whispering, questions of *how'd he get in this class anyway*, and he watched Blaine's neck turn red. He also saw his hands curl into fists. Blaine grabbed his bag and pushed through the small crowd to get out of the room without even once glance back at Kurt.

"Blaine," Kurt called after him.

Blaine paused for a just moment, then Kurt watched helpless and frustrated as Blaine stormed out the door.

"Trouble in paradise Hummel?" One of the guys asked. He sounded sympathetic, but Kurt was neither dumb nor blind. He knew the way the guys were looking at him now. And he could hear the glee in his voice at just the idea that Kurt might be single soon. "We're all going out to lunch, want to join?"

"No thanks," he muttered grabbing his things. "I have to go to work."

Kurt was still upset as he arrived at the diner, but the walk and the change in atmosphere calmed him some. He went to the employee bathroom to change into his uniform then came out to relieve Rachel.

"Thank you so much for covering for me during class. I have no idea how they screwed up the schedule," he said as he grabbed his apron and tied it around himself.

"No problem, I could use the money anyway," Rachel shrugged, taking her apron off. "Blaine came by earlier looking for you. I told him you'd already left."

"Thanks," Kurt mumbled and the scowl on his face was certainly not missed by his best friend.

"He seemed kinda upset you weren't here." Rachel leaned on the counter, with a frown. "Are you two fighting again?"

"Quite literally, yes," Kurt nodded with an eyeroll.

"What are you fighting about?" Rachel asked.

"Honestly I have no idea," Kurt muttered, though that wasn't exactly true. He knew exactly *what*. He just had no idea *why*. "He's just been really weird lately."

"Well maybe it has nothing to do with you?" Rachel suggested optimistically. "Maybe it's something with his Dad or classes. I mean, he is in mostly sophomore classes as a freshman. That would be a lot of pressure for anyone but Blaine's a perfectionist."

"No Rachel, I mean you're right about all that but..." the vision of Blaine's desktop flashed before his eyes. "Trust me, this has something to do with me." He ducked down for a second to grab the ketchup so he could fill the bottles. "It's like everything was fine and then snap. Suddenly he's force feeding me fat and calories and doesn't want to..." he looked around then leaned in to whisper to Rachel, "have sex."

Rachel smirked. "I had noticed it's been a little quiet behind your curtains lately, but I figured you were just going at it before I got home and honestly I was counting my blessings," she teased. Kurt though just glared and turned his back to work at the back counter. Rachel took pity on him. "Look Kurt, Blaine's lived a pretty sheltered life until now. I know you never looked at it like that, but..." Kurt turned back to listen, leaning against the counter. "It sounds to me like moving to New York's been harder for him than it was for you. Maybe you just need to cut him some slack and help him ease in a little bit more. Especially at NYADA."

Kurt knew Rachel was right and he frowned with a touch of regret. "Like not going at him quite so hard in our fencing match? I got two strikes on him without even breaking a sweat."

Rachel gasped and covered her mouth. "Oh no Kurt, you didn't!"

"What?" Kurt asked innocently. "Just because he's my boyfriend doesn't mean I can't try to beat him." But his choice of words brought Blaine's fighting back to him. The way he'd recoiled from the swing of the sword but punched with all his strength during boxing. The way he'd cringed and cried out each time the rapier had struck. And suddenly he realized exactly why Blaine was struggling so much and how big a mistake he might have made. "Oh god Rachel, I did."

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"Hey Coop." Blaine tried to keep his voice steady, to hide the fact that his thoughts were racing and his heart was aching and Kurt's icy glare as he'd backed away from their match was etched into his mind.

He'd just had to get out of there as fast as he could. His hands had shook as he changed, an unbearable mix of anger and embarrassment and fear gripping him in a crowd that held none of the safety that he'd felt in Glee club. He'd wished he'd had Santana or Tina or Nick to whisk him away to the shelter of the auditorium or the chapel to laugh or cry or yell in a place that embraced him. But he wasn't in Ohio anymore and he didn't have a refuge here beyond the food he stuffed in his mouth. And he didn't want to do that anymore.

He could still feel the sting of the rapier on his back and side but whether it was real or imagined he didn't know. All he knew was that he hated the feeling.

He'd found himself in Central Park with the phone in his hand and Cooper on the line before he'd even really realized what he was doing. He supposed it was because only Cooper would truly understand.

"What's wrong Squirt?" Cooper asked with concern. "And don't tell me nothing because I hear it in your voice and you called me which means you want to talk."

"Why don't you have a girlfriend Coop?" Blaine asked. "And I don't mean girlfriends," he stressed the plural, "I mean a steady girlfriend."

"Is this about Kurt or did Mom send you fishing?" Cooper replied suspiciously.

"Just answer the question," Blaine pushed tiredly.

Blaine heard Cooper sigh, considering the question, and it sounded like he was settling in for what his brother suspected would not be a quick conversation. "I don't know. I think I'm just not really relationship material."

"Because of Dad?" He might as well cut to the chase.

"Well it's not like he was really the best of role models. It wasn't like things were perfect before you were born Squirt," Cooper reminded him and Blaine knew it answered the question. "Things were still bad. Just not *as* bad."

Blaine frowned. He realized that though Cooper finally knew all about him, he still really didn't know much about what Cooper had been through. "You don't think you could, I don't know," Blaine shrugged. "Do better?"

Cooper gave a quick chuckle. "I'm not you Blaine."

Blaine scoffed and rolled his eyes. "I'm not that special Coop." In fact he felt about as far from special as the earth to the sun.

"You and Kurt fighting, Blaine?" Cooper finally guessed.

Blaine looked up at the sky. White clouds drifted, forming and changing right before his eyes. Even though he sat right here, staying exactly the same, the world around him was always shifting. "Yeah, I guess. I

mean, I don't even know." Blaine wearily ran his hand down his face. "I did something he didn't like and he walked out on me and then he quote unquote *forgot* to text me this morning before class that we weren't meeting and he says he's not still mad about what I did but he sure as hell seems to be because he beat the crap out of me in stage combat, which apparently I completely suck at-"

"Woah, hey, slow down their tiger," Cooper interrupted. "Breathe for God's sake." Blaine did as he was told and took a breath. "Now, what is this horrible thing you did?"

Blaine fingered his gloves. "It's kinda private Coop," he blushed.

"Oookay then," Coop said, trying again. "Why did you do it, whatever *it* was?"

"I don't know," Blaine said honestly. "I guess I'm just feeling like I don't belong, like I'm not really good enough for anyone; Dad, you, everyone at NYADA, Kurt-"

"Wait, me?"

"And most of that's not a new feeling I know, but I've always been the best at school, I've always been good enough there and here..." He bit his lip, shame and doubt weighing on him like the world. "Here, I'm not even close."

"Maybe you're putting too much pressure on yourself, Squirt. You don't have to be good at everything."

"But Kurt is!" Blaine yelled. "You should see him Cooper, you wouldn't even recognize him. His body is incredible, everyone at school loves him, he's amazing in his classes, he's one of the most talented guys here and it's like, I'm none of those things and Kurt deserves all of that in the man he loves and I always thought I was before but I can't even say no to my own father for God's sake and the only thing I'm good at these days is stuffing my face full of cronuts." Tears pooled in his eyes and he got up, unable to sit still. "And what is there to love in that?"

Cooper was quiet a minute and Blaine leaned back against the bark of a tree, closing his eyes. "Have you told all this to Kurt?" he finally asked gently.

"No," Blaine said, his voice cracking. "I've tried but he says we talk too much, which is ridiculous because clearly we don't talk enough. Maybe he's just tired of what I have to say."



"Or maybe you're still just hiding." At Cooper's words Blaine fell silent. They hit him hard. "Blaine, he's been there a year longer than you. Of course he's going to be better. And I'm sure he went through this too."

"No," Blaine said defensively. "He was a star as soon as he got here, he had Vogue and Adam and then he beat Rachel in a diva off as soon as he got into NYADA and I know he's been here longer that's why there's no way I can keep up! He's on the fucking news as a hero for god's sake when three years ago he couldn't even stand up to a high school bully without me by his side and I still can't even stand up to my own father. He's better here, stronger here than he ever was with me by his side." He sniffed and wiped his eyes from the tears that fell. "Maybe he's better off that way," he whispered.

"Come on Squirt, Kurt loves you, you know that's not true."

"Yes it is!" Blaine cried, not even caring at this point who might hear him. "I used to know who I was. People looked up to me and respected me. *Kurt* looked up to me and respected me. I was someone that he could be proud of and now..." He pulled his knees to his chest and pulled the phone in tight. "I'm nothing here Coop. I'm trying so hard but no matter what I do he's better than me. What could he possibly love about me? I'm a high school star who obviously can't make it in the real world."

"Blaine," Cooper said softly, softly enough that Blaine had to stop crying to hear him. "Those voices in your head, they aren't Kurt's. And they aren't right. Go home to him. Be honest with him. You want to be the man he deserves? Well he deserves that."

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*For the first time in my life, I really feel like I'm losing.*

*I loved being able to protect you...*

*You don't need me anymore, to protect or anything.*

*I'd much rather be running this race with you rather than against you.*

*As equals.*

*I'm always going to love you.*

Wrapped in Kurt's arms he worked so hard to believe it. To believe that Kurt would always love him and they would run the race together. To trust that Kurt would wait for him while he fought to catch up.

"I love you," Blaine sobbed into his shoulder.

Kurt just held him while he cried, letting out all the fear and frustration. He knew there was more they needed to talk about. What he'd meant to talk about before Blaine had thrown him for this loop, but there was time.

When he finally ran out of tears, Blaine pulled away, wiping his eyes with embarrassment. "I'm sorry," Blaine apologized again.

"You never need to apologize for how you feel Blaine, you just need to tell me. We have to be on the same side here for this to work. Love is *not* a battlefield Blaine," he said firmly but with care. "I know you grew up that way, but I didn't and I won't."

Blaine nodded, the tears starting to fall again. "I know," he whispered. And he looked away from Kurt, biting his lips with shame because he knew exactly where this was headed.

Kurt hesitated. They needed to talk about this, *he* needed to talk about this, but the last thing he wanted to do was upset Blaine more. But looking at Blaine, Kurt knew he was just waiting for it. So he didn't hold back. "When you were coming at me in fencing-"

"I felt it," Blaine admitted, his voice full of what Kurt could only call disgust. Blaine shook his head, as if he was trying to get rid of everything inside of him. "Kurt, you have to know I would never hurt you."

Kurt reached for him and laid a hand on Blaine's arm in comfort. "I do know that," Kurt assured him. "Do you?" Blaine hung his head, unable to answer which told Kurt everything he needed to know. "I'm not scared of you Blaine, but are you scared of yourself?"

"No," he squeaked then cleared his throat. He finally gained the courage to meet Kurt's eyes. "Not really. But I didn't like it. That feeling that for even a second a small part of me wanted to hurt you."

"Blaine, I think it's natural," Kurt said. "It's not like I was holding back, I wanted to win too."

"No Kurt, this was different. I didn't want to win I wanted you to lose. I wanted to knock you down just so I would feel stronger. I know that's how my father would feel and to feel it for myself..." Blaine's face fell, but though his eyes filled with regret he kept them on Kurt as if he owed him that much. "To blame you when I was at fault..."

Kurt fought the urge to sigh and instead took his hand. He didn't wonder how many times they were going to have to go through this, how many times Blaine was going to have to fight for his freedom. Because he knew that it would take a lifetime and he'd signed up for this and was never going back. "It doesn't make you like him," Kurt insisted firmly as to make Blaine believe it.

"I know that Kurt, I know." Blaine took a deep breath, trying to let go of the past and come back to the present. "And I'm sorry I ran out of there, I just...I just needed some time. To sort that out. And some other things."

"And what did you figure out?"

"Well, first of all," Blaine started, his eyes serious, "we should never be partners in stage combat when we're mad at each other. I've never felt that way before and I never even want to chance feeling it again."

"I completely agree," Kurt said with a nod. He tugged Blaine's hand and pulled him over to the couch, where they could talk more comfortably. "What else?"

"We *don't* talk too much Kurt," Blaine insisted. "It's not fair of you to tell me to talk to you when I'm going through things but shut me out when we're fighting. I tried twice, but both times you walked away."

"And twice you chose to walk away rather than be honest about why you didn't want to be intimate," Kurt pointed out. "I was mad. I shouldn't have said that. We need to talk before we start fighting, before you start running, and yes," Kurt confessed knowing Blaine was absolutely right, "I need to listen better, even when I'm mad." Blaine smiled softly and Kurt did too, just for a moment taking in the beauty of the man before him. He was gorgeous on the outside and Kurt knew no matter what he always would be, but it was his heart that made him beautiful. "Anything else?"

Blaine shook his head. "The rest is me Kurt," Blaine told him. "I need to figure out who I am. Away from my father. As a fiancé."

Kurt scooted closer and linked their fingers tighter to make sure Blaine heard him. "The only thing I want you to be as a fiancé is you. To be your amazing, handsome, loving, overdramatic self who needs me too much and knows me too well and crowds me with love." Kurt smiled and cupped his face, brushing a thumb across his lips to make him smile too. "Who whether I'm ridiculously angry at you or passionately making love to you, makes me know I'm alive."

Blaine blushed shyly and teased, "Sondheim week was last week Kurt."

"Well what's this week's assignment then?" Kurt raised a brow with a smirk.

"Um, sex?" Blaine guessed with a furrowed brow, half joking and half serious. "I mean there was Sam and Mercedes, Artie and, well, whoever the heck he was dating, me and my website..." he trailed off when he realized he'd let the words slip.

"Yes, let's talk about that website for a minute, while we're talking," Kurt said, his eyes narrowing.

"Kurt, I'm sorry, I won't-"

"As long as we're going back to discussing Dalton, I've known you were into those websites since the first time we talked about sex," Kurt said.

Blaine winced. "And I've known you don't like them-"

He was cut off by Kurt's finger on his lips.

"But I was thinking," Kurt hinted. His smile turned flirtatious, his eyes darkened quickly and Blaine's heart skipped a beat. "Maybe they wouldn't be quite so bad if we looked at them together?"

Blaine swallowed hard and licked his suddenly dry lips. "Are you serious Kurt, you don't have to."

"I'm very serious Blaine," Kurt purred and leaned in to kiss Blaine just enough to leave him wanting before pulling back. "And I know I don't have to."

Blaine's heart raced. "Well, if this is the lesson of the week, they can certainly be very educational," he breathed.

Kurt tilted his head the way he did that drove Blaine wild. "As long as it's an advanced class. I think we've got the basics down pretty well, don't you?"

Heat crept up Blaine's spine, his nerves tingled beneath his skin and he couldn't stop the images that flashed through his mind. "Yes I do," he breathed. He grabbed Kurt's hand and pulled him into the bedroom, swiping the laptop from the desk and landing on the bed in one motion. Kurt laughed watching Blaine open it and log on as quickly as he could, talking while he typed. "Oh god Kurt, there's this one where the bottom has his legs...well I think you have to see it for yourself, but I just kept imagining you, I'm pretty sure you're flexible enough-"

"You're pretty sure *I'm* flexible enough," Kurt arched a brow.

Blaine stopped what he was doing and stared Kurt down. "Yes Kurt," he maintained adamantly, accentuating the 't'. "I think *you're* flexible enough," he repeated.

Kurt grinned deviously as he grabbed the laptop and placed it aside. In what seemed to be the same graceful movement he pushed Blaine down on the bed, throwing a leg over one side to rest atop him. "And *is that* the way you want it?" Kurt smirked.

Blaine though would not be beaten this time and he grabbed Kurt and flipped him over, hovering above him pressing his hips against Kurt's just for good measure. "Yes, Kurt that's exactly the way I want it," he said roughly and he bent down and kissed him, firm and claiming until they were both out of breath. Only then did he push back up resting just inches from Kurt's face, his eyes now soft and pleading. "Please," he whispered.

Kurt looked up at beautiful smoky amber eyes. "You really imagine me when you look at those websites?" he asked and the touch of insecurity in Kurt's voice made Blaine's heart swell. He'd been crazy to think that Kurt would ever judge him.

"Of course Kurt," he said tenderly. "Even before I knew you."

Even if he'd wanted to Kurt couldn't stop himself from pulling Blaine down on top of him, and kissing him fiercely. He was done talking. There were times when talk was highly overrated. And Kurt knew exactly what the man he loved needed.

"Show me how strong you are Blaine," he whispered.

## ***Chapter Four: Back Up Plan***

"Ugh, my head is killing me right now," Kurt groaned. He rolled over in Blaine's bed away from the window and the glare of light that was penetrating his delicate eyeballs.

Blaine chuckled unsympathetically. "You didn't even drink anything last night Kurt." He swung out of bed and unceremoniously dropped his pillow over Kurt's eyes.

Kurt pushed it off and rolled over on top of it instead. He watched Blaine's gorgeous form as he stood to dress, his perfect view of his perfectly imperfect fiancé. "No I didn't drink, but we partied at Elliot's favorite gay bar all night, came home to Sue Sylvester having slept with some random in my bed, went out at the butt crack of dawn to stress over Rachel's reviews, learned Mr. Schue named the baby after Finn and finally came back here for a whopping three hours of sleep."

"You could have had five hours of sleep Kurt," Blaine smirked. "That was all your doing."

"You're sexy as hell dancing in a club full of half naked men with your bowtie undone. I didn't even stand a chance." Blaine laughed and Kurt groaned. "How the hell are you so chipper?"

"Because I only got three hours of sleep instead of five," he said, wiggling his eyebrows. "And because I got to spend the evening with Tay Tay and Tana and your best friend just opened on Broadway." Blaine's eyes were wide with delight. "And I personally think it's hysterical that Sue Sylvester slept with some random in your bed."

"And all over the loft Blaine, that place needs to be disinfected," Kurt insisted.

"I'll do it for you," Blaine promised with a kiss.

"Well while you're doing stuff for me go make me some breakfast and coffee please before I pass out again and we miss our 3 o'clock class."

Blaine smiled and gave a quick salute. "You are my Gay Bar Superstar Kurt Hummel and your wish is my command."

Blaine went to the kitchen to set the coffee running, a dark roast hazelnut that they both enjoyed. Soon the smell filled the kitchen as he worked on the pancake batter. Kurt's gorgeous voice in the shower carried

throughout the apartment and Blaine didn't think that a morning could ever be more perfect. Especially since it was already afternoon.

Kurt made his entrance just as Blaine was flipping the pancakes onto their plates and he poured them both cups of coffee. Kurt settled into a seat at the table. "So I saw you and Santana talking at the bar," Kurt mentioned while he sprinkled the tiniest amount of powdered sugar onto the plate Blaine placed in front of him. "You find out what her plans are?"

"She doesn't seem to really have any other than crashing on our couch," Blaine said. "I can't believe you called her in the taxi. I was too afraid she would make everything worse honestly."

"Well, the one person Rachel really needed isn't here." Kurt said with a frown. "For better or worse there's no one more capable of getting Rachel to hear his voice in her head than Santana." Blaine nodded. He wasn't sure he'd ever understand the relationship between those two but he had to admit there was a connection there. "Besides," Kurt continued. "She always gets *your* head on straight. I figured it couldn't really hurt at that point."

"You are a smart man," Blaine agreed. He took a sip of his coffee and a bite of his food and watched Kurt carefully for a moment. Part of him thought he shouldn't bring it up. But the other part needed to make sure he was alright. "So are you okay?"

Kurt glanced up. By all rights he should have had absolutely no idea what Blaine was talking about. But the soft amber glow of Blaine's eyes and the lip being worried between his teeth told Kurt all he needed to know. "I should be used to it by now, right?" Kurt asked with a sigh. Blaine reached across the table and took his hand. "It's not like it's a surprise. I think everyone knew he'd name the baby Finn."

"Still..." Blaine said softly. He rubbed his thumb against Kurt's knuckles soothingly.

"I guess I just wonder how many more things I'm going to lose to him?" Kurt thought aloud. He'd never put these thoughts into words before, he felt guilty even for thinking them sometimes, but they had been there for a long time now. "It just doesn't seem fair sometimes. He was my brother but sometimes it seems Mr. Schue thinks he is instead. Best Man at his wedding, the letterman jacket, now his name-"

Blaine's brow rose in shock. "You really think he took the letterman jacket?" he asked.

"I'd bet on it," Kurt shrugged dismissively. He'd come to terms with that a long time ago. The fact that Finn wouldn't be there standing beside him when he married was another story. "But it's nice. That he named the baby after Finn."

"It is, I just...I don't know." Blaine frowned. "I kinda feel like it's something he should have talked to you about first. Given you first dibs."

"It doesn't stop us Blaine," Kurt said, squeezing Blaine's hand tightly. Kurt understood that when it came to Finn Blaine had his own unresolved feelings. Unfinished business that he felt he still needed to make right. Besides, Blaine had always been the far more sentimental one of the two of them. "If we have a boy and you want to name him after Finn then that's what we'll do. It doesn't matter if Schue did it first. The way I see it, the more Finn's in the world the better."

Blaine's eyes watered and he tilted his head in awe. "I love you."

Kurt smiled softly. "I love you too."

---

"Oh my god Blaine sometimes I wonder how you even keep your gay card," Kurt snapped in frustration.

There were magazines sprawled all over the coffee table and Kurt had been pouring over them in study. Blaine strummed away on his guitar paying absolutely no attention until Kurt snatched it from his fingers.

Blaine could have pouted but instead his eyes grew heavy and he grinned hungrily. "I could show you," he said, crawling up Kurt's body temptingly. He never gave Kurt a chance to resist, just dove in and captured his fiancé's lips in a delicious kiss that sent blood flowing directly south. He pressed his hips lightly, letting Kurt feel him. "Gay card. Right here," Blaine quipped against Kurt's lips. Kurt smirked but pushed Blaine off of him unrelentingly. Blaine toppled over and laughed. Kurt glared at him sternly and Blaine regained his composure, curling his legs beneath him but otherwise sitting up straight and tall like the good student he was. "Fine Professor Hummel. Tell me everything you know about June Dolloway."

Kurt opened up website after website reading to him about all the events she'd attended and people she'd known. Blaine had to admit that the more he learned the more excited he became to sing for her and maybe even get to meet her and ask her a question or two about all of the fascinating people she'd met in her lifetime. He was snuggled into Kurt's side, reading over his shoulder and listening intently to a story



from ten years ago, when a tiny little picture and blurb on the bottom right hand side of the page caught his attention and sent his mind stirring.

---

"Cooper do you know who June Dolloway is?"

Kurt had gone home for the night after school. Blaine had long ago climbed into bed, but he lay awake until his brother was likely to be home from set. The memory had held firm, tugging at the back of his mind. And he knew his brother held the answer.

"Of course I do Squirt, she's only one of the biggest socialites America has ever seen," Cooper said. "American Royalty. But you know her too."

Blaine's brow raised. "I do?"

"Sure." Blaine could hear his brother's grin through the phone. "Let's see, you were about 7 and I was 17 and Grandfather had brought us to one of those rich dish Galas he loved so much, some Westerville Symphony Fundraiser or something. He always paraded us around the room and introduced us to all the elite, though I never knew if he was showing us off to them or them off to us. Either way, that night we both met June Dolloway."

"I don't remember," Blaine said softly, deep in thought, but a part of him had suspected as much because that event was exactly the one in the article.

"Well I'm not surprised, you were only 7. That night may have actually been our first public performance together of Rio though, Grandfather had us up on stage singing for our supper," Cooper remembered. "We brought in a pretty penny too. I killed it."

"Was she nice? June I mean?"

"Well if I remember correctly she took a very special liking to me, of course," Cooper gloated. "Why all the questions Blaine?"

"Kurt and I are gonna be singing for her at NYADA. She's donated a bunch of money and Kurt was chosen to perform for her and he asked me to join him."

"Blaine that's amazing!" Cooper shouted. Blaine laughed at his enthusiasm.

"It's for Kurt, he's the one that really wants to meet her. Maybe see if she'll take him under her wing, which would be just amazing." Blaine said. "I'm only singing 'cause he asked me, but it should be fun."

"It'll be more than fun Blaine. She's gonna love you. You are my brother after all," Cooper told him. "Kurt better watch out."

---

Kurt skittered around the soon to be dedicated Dolloway Dance Lab, wringing his hands and biting his lip. "Oh my god I'm so nervous," he breathed, bouncing from toe to toe.

Blaine looked over at him and smiled. One of the things he loved about Kurt was just how nervous he still got in front of a crowd even though he was one of the most incredible voices Blaine had ever heard. "Don't be nervous, she is going to love you," he promised.

"But what if she doesn't?" Kurt looked at him with earnest. He was used to being overlooked and rejected because of who he was or the sound that came out of his mouth. The acceptance he'd been feeling lately at NYADA was foreign to him.

Blaine knew this and he knew how to deal with it. He wrapped his arms around Kurt's waist and held him close, letting Kurt's racing heart settle into the slower rhythm of his own. "If she doesn't then you and I will keep fighting and working until somebody does notice just how incredible a talent you are." Blaine nuzzled into the crook of Kurt's neck, one of his most favorite places in the world. "Just like everyone at NYADA has learned, and just like I have always known from the moment I heard you sing."

Kurt looked over his shoulder at Blaine and smirked. "Not before?" he teased.

"No," Blaine hummed into his ear. "Before I just knew I loved you."

Kurt's worries melted into a bright smile. "Me too."

---

"Now June, you know as well as I do we couldn't ask a freshmen to sing at the dedication." Carmen Tibedaux looked up sternly at the socialite from behind her desk. June may have had the money but Carmen still had the authority to make this decision. "But Mr. Hummel is very talented, a rising star at this school and quite predictably he has asked his fiancé to sing along with him."

"And he's doing well?" June asked, settling into the chair across from Carmen. "Blaine I mean?"

Carmen frowned slightly. "We've had some issues with a sense of entitlement but I think we've nipped that in the bud. Otherwise yes, he's doing as well as you said he would."

"Good. Now let me judge for myself."

June rose to her feet and made her way to the door to await her introduction. When the doors opened she thanked the crowd and took her seat in the audience, glancing over at the boys surreptitiously. She hadn't seen him perform in person since he was at Dalton but she'd followed him online. She had to admit she'd been worried that his star might burn out surrounded by true competition, but it seemed he was burning as bright as ever.

She scrutinized his performance intently, but less than a minute in with a shy flutter of the eyes she saw exactly what she'd seen so long ago in that 7 year old boy. Though she'd lost track of him after that first time until he'd started leading the Warblers at Dalton, she'd been right from the very beginning. He was a star, inside and out. The charisma that had always been there had only matured over time. Every love and every heartache adding beautiful layer upon beautiful layer to the soul that made him shine.

Kurt, on the other hand, didn't have that. Carmen was right, he had a beautiful voice, but much like Blaine's brother Cooper, he tried too hard. But it wasn't just that. June could see that Kurt kept a distance from his pain, walling it off instead of inviting it in to let it sit and simmer to develop flavor. Kurt was talented, but he wasn't right. Not for her crowd.

Not for her plans.

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*Written on these walls are the colors that I can't change  
Leave my heart open but it stays right here in its cage*

*I know that in the morning now I see us in the light upon a hill  
Although I am broken, my heart is untamed, still*

Blaine waved to June on the front stoop of his apartment and rolled into his apartment at one in the morning, barely able to keep his eyes open. The night had been amazing but exhausting as well, emotionally and physically, performing on and off the stage. Fighting the demons that he refused to let surface. Because walking into the Soho gala was like walking into a memory for Blaine.

Even though he and the Warblers had occasionally performed at events like this inevitably hosted by Dalton parents or alum, what Blaine vividly remembered now was exactly what Cooper had described. June led him around the room just like his grandfather had so many years ago and throughout the night introduced him to every single one of her very influential friends. They'd all seemed bigger so long ago but so much came back to him. Most especially his grandfather's words.

*Find yourself a pretty lady to walk on your arm Blaine and the society magazines will keep a handsome boy like you set for life.*

After his grandfather had died the parties became a little bit smaller and a little less luxurious but no less snobbish. In fact, because the money was less and the country club crowd was trying so hard it was probably even more so. And the pressure to find a pretty lady for his arm grew more and more.

"Blaine, come up please, I want to introduce you," June called. Blaine looked around. By his brother's side when he was 7 years old and carefree was one thing, but now he had to meet June's expectations. His performance would reflect on her. "Blaine Anderson."

Stepping onto the stage, looking out at the crowd he couldn't help but flashback to the fateful day he'd sung *Baby Its Cold Outside*. But the moment the music started and he looked up at June the Dalton mask and performance settled deep inside him. It was so easy to fall back into old patterns.

If he had been straight, this was exactly what his life would have been.

Walking into his bedroom, trying to let go of the night, he stripped off his coat and tie, hanging them both on the back of his chair before switching on the light to get ready for bed.

"What the hell!"

He jumped back slightly as his sheets rustled and a sleepy Santana sat up in his bed rubbing her eyes. "What's a girl got to do to get a little shut eye around here?"

"Uh, stay in your own bed maybe?" Blaine suggested with a brow cocked. "What are you doing in here?"

Santana though didn't move, she just grabbed his pillow and snuggled into it again. "I am pretty sure they call it sleeping Boyfriend, you should look it up. It's something you and Kurt don't do when you're together and apparently neither do Sam and Mercedes even though they're flying Virgin."

"Virgin doesn't mean dead 'Tana," Blaine smirked.

"Uh, I'm pretty sure it does," Santana countered.

Blaine just rolled his eyes and pulled back the sheets. "It doesn't, believe me. Now get the hell out of my bed."

Santana though pulled the sheets back up. "You snooze you lose. I'll move over. It's the best offer you're going to get tonight," she said.

Blaine sighed. "Fine." He went to the bathroom and took a quick shower before putting on some pajamas and climbing into bed with Santana. "I get my pillow though." He yanked it out from under her head and lay down. He closed his eyes in frustration when she stole the blankets from him in retaliation but eventually they settled in. Quiet fell over the room and Blaine was almost asleep when Santana woke him.

"So how was the party rich boy?" she asked.

"Like déjà vu," Blaine muttered, his eyes slowly opening again.

Santana rolled over onto her side and tucked her hand beneath her chin. "How so?"

Blaine shifted to face her, but his eyes were distant in memory. "When I was young, especially when my dad was deployed, my grandfather used to come around a lot, probably to keep an eye on us. He would take Coop and my mom and me to these tremendous galas. Maybe not quite the 1% of the 1% like tonight, but close enough. I remember being just so mesmerized by everything, the lights and the excitement and just the electricity that buzzed around the room. I wanted so badly to be a part of it, to live that life where it seemed that everything was beautiful and nothing hurt." He met Santana's eyes shining in the darkness.

"And my grandfather wanted it too. I was raised for it Santana. I was groomed to be the golden boy on the beautiful girl's arm."

"Except you were looking for the handsome boy's arm instead," Santana noted gently.

"Yeah." Blaine closed his eyes. The pain was still deep in his heart. He was coming to terms with the fact that it would probably never fully leave. "But now it's different, you know?" he said softly. "I'm out and proud and engaged to Kurt and June doesn't care. And I wonder if maybe I really can have that life anyway?"

"Except there's still no man on your arm Blaine," Santana pointed out and her tone was a touch harsh. "You're still leaving Kurt behind."

Blaine's heart sunk slightly, guilt rolling through him. "That's not why though," he said defensively.

Santana would have bet all of June's money it was but she didn't say that. "Why did you stop going to these things? When you were a kid?"

"Dad loved that world, fit in perfectly, and he always greatly approved of us learning proper etiquette and diplomacy and all the other things that high society showed to the outside world. But my mom hated it. She said she didn't like the types of people he was exposing us to though I never really understood what she was so afraid of. Even after my grandfather died, when my Dad returned from Iraq we kept going for a bit. Dad was this big war hero and it was fashionable then to honor veterans. But eventually that grew out of style and with too much of my grandfather's money tied up in trust funds for me and Cooper my Dad settled for the country club life instead. I still performed all the time," Blaine said then grew quieter. "Until word got out."

"Was that after the Sadie Hawkins dance?" Santana asked carefully.

"No. Dad was somehow able to keep that all quiet then and Dalton played right into the beautiful lie he told the world," Blaine said. "It was after Christmas three years ago." He'd told her before about what had happened. "That was the last time I was invited to sing."

"That world is full of beautiful lies Blaine, you know that," Santana warned him. "You should be careful. I know it's easy to get caught back up in it, it's rich and glamorous and it holds opportunities you can't find anywhere else. But it also forces sacrifices Blaine. Ones you may not be willing to make."

Blaine thought back to his evening and he frowned. "June isn't like that," he told Santana. And himself.

"Just be careful," she said softly. "Things are never quite what they seem."

Blaine nodded. He knew that better than anyone. "I will."

---

Blaine was out another night with June and Kurt was curled up on his couch very happily watching television when Santana came barging in dressed to the nines. He tried to get her to leave. He failed miserably.

"Look Hummel, I am not going to let you sit around here rewatching season after season of whatever god awful show you are watching," Santana snapped, staring at the screen with disgust. There were girls with nose jobs that looked worse than Berry's original and booties bigger than the ones in Sam's last ad campaign. "Get your ass up and go out with me. The jazz club awaits."

Kurt pouted and settled further into the couch. "I'm just not really feeling like going out Santana," he groaned.

She picked up the remote and turned the television off. "Don't care." Ignoring his death glare she grabbed his wallet and threw it at him. "Listen to me. They're plastic," she said pointing to the television. "Smoke and mirrors pretending to be people they aren't in order to make a name for themselves. Sound familiar?" she raised a brow.

That got Kurt's attention. "That's not what Blaine's doing with June," he insisted, standing up and putting his wallet in his pocket.

"Sure. And it's not what Mercedes is doing on her album either," she said sarcastically. "You and I, we have just as much of what it takes to make it, the difference is that we aren't willing to compromise who we are to be what they want."

"Blaine isn't either," Kurt protested but Santana just hummed.

"We'll see," she muttered and pushed him out the door. They walked in silence toward the club, the horns and sirens surrounding them as dusk fell over the city. "I've been gone too long. None of you can manage life on your own without me. You're all falling to pieces."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "I think that's a little egotistical Santana." They rounded the corner and headed down the two blocks to the subway. "Blaine can handle himself in that crowd just fine."

"It won't be hard for him Kurt. To slip back into that life. A life with a lot of not so good memories." Kurt shoved his hands in his pockets, trying not to believe her but knowing she was right. "And no matter how beautiful it looks on the outside, it isn't really a pretty place," Santana continued. She stopped at the top of the subway stairs, leaning against the rail. "You know that and he knows that and yet you're both so willing to let him fall." She looked at him and she could see his mind turning. *Take one for the team*, Kurt had told him. Would the price be too high? "You might want to ask yourself why." Santana raised a brow before heading down into the station.

Kurt paused a minute, considering her words. The fact was he knew exactly why. It was the same reason Rachel had flown off to Los Angeles.

Chasing a dream was always more exhilarating than catching one.

---

"Hey Mom, what's up?" Blaine was walking from class to meet June at the restaurant. June had told him she had something important she wanted to talk about and Kurt had just kissed him on the cheek and told him to go ahead.

"Is it true that you've been spending time with June Dolloway?" his obviously upset mother asked.

He hesitated slightly to answer. "Where did you hear that?"

Amy scoffed. "You don't hang out with a woman like that and have it go unnoticed Blaine," she chastised. "I have people stopping me in the grocery store. Gossip magazines prey on these kinds of stories and I don't like it."

"Mom, I don't know-"



"Blaine I know it's been a while but you know exactly how I feel about that crowd. You were still pretty young when we were in the thick of it but I steered Cooper away from those benefactors on purpose and you..." she stopped short, not wanting to say the wrong thing. "Those people wouldn't accept you for who you were Blaine. I'm not sure why you'd want to go back into that world."

"June's not like that," Blaine protested, anger building because he was sick of having to defend himself and June. If Santana had called her and the magazines were just an excuse then he had a thing or two to say to his best friend. "And maybe the world's changed."

"And maybe it hasn't," she countered.

"Well then maybe *I* have," Blaine snapped. "Maybe I'm old enough and smart enough to make my own decisions about who I spend time with and where I go. Kurt supports me, I don't know why you and Santana won't."

Amy sighed, a silence falling over the call. Blaine rounded the corner to the restaurant and he saw June waiting for him inside. He tried to let his anger go before he said something he'd regret to either of them. "Look Blaine, I will always support you," his mother assured him. "But I also want what's best for you and I don't know that this is it."

Blaine bit his lip and he glanced to June then down to the ground. "I don't know if it is either Mom," he admitted. "But June's my friend and she's done a lot for me already. And I love it Mom. I love her stories and the parties and being in the middle of so many amazing people. And they don't seem to care that I'm gay Mom, not anymore, not like it used to be."

"Do you see any other gay couples there?" Amy asked. Blaine pressed his hand to his face. He didn't want to have to deal with this, not anymore. "These people say one thing and do another. I know you want to believe in the best of people and I love that about you, but please, just be careful."

Blaine nodded, his stomach clenching and for the second time he made the same promise. "I will."

---

It was the footsteps in the dark that woke her for the third time in the last thirty minutes. "I swear to God Blaine if you pace back and forth between the kitchen and your bedroom one more time I am going to tie you to your bed and not in any sort of a good way," Santana growled. Her eyes were squinting with sleep

as she sat up on the couch, curling up with her pillow in her arms. "Now what the hell is eating you up so much?"

"It's nothing, I'm sorry I woke you," Blaine muttered starting back to his room but Santana stopped him.

"It's clearly not nothing, Boyfriend, so now that you've woken me up you best get your perky little ass sitting on this couch and talk to me," Santana ordered.

If there was one thing in the world that Blaine needed to learn it was how to say no, but tonight would not be the night and Santana would not be his first attempt. And reality was if he didn't talk this out he would be much to wracked with guilt to fall asleep and he knew that no matter what he could always tell Santana the truth. "It's Kurt," Blaine sighed, sitting down across from her. He pulled his knees up and wrapped his arms around them. "Well actually it's me. I kinda lied to him."

"I don't think *kinda* and *lie* really go together in Kurt's mind," Santana said.

Blaine squeezed his eyes shut, running his hand through his hair. "I know, and I didn't mean to it's just, I wanted so badly for June to let Kurt be in my showcase and then, god Santana you should have seen how his face lit up when I told him he could sing, I just want to always be able to do that for him, you know, make his face light up like that? And he deserves it Santana, he really does and June is wrong, the world *does* need to see his talent, but now I have to convince her of that and I don't think I can." Blaine finally stopped to breathe and Santana stared back at him like he had just confessed to killing three puppies.

"I don't even know what to say to you right now Anderson." Santana shook her head angrily. "What is it about you and Mercedes that makes you think you can get the rest of the world to love us when we're clearly not wanted."

Blaine's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean you're not wanted?"

Santana's fierceness softened and she bit her lip with a vulnerability that was rarely seen by anyone other than Brittany or Blaine. "Mercedes tried to get me on her album as a duet partner. And apparently I'm not what the label is looking for. Which is fine." Her eyes raised to Blaine with a sternness that made him shrink slightly. "I'm glad I know rather than thinking I am and having the rug pulled out from under me."

"I won't let that happen," Blaine swore, but he knew that Santana was right. June had been very clear she didn't want to showcase Kurt, didn't even want him to *be* with Kurt. Just like Santana and her mother had both tried to warn him. His fingers twirled a phantom wedding band on his left hand. "I *can't* let that happen. I can't hurt him like that."

"You're playing a dangerous game Boyfriend," Santana warned her. "This June Dolloway isn't going to give a crap about what you want or what's good for you. People like that are what folks in Lima Heights Adjacent would call a vulture. She'll pick and pick at you until she's had her fill and then she'll drop you and move on."

Blaine wished he could once again say that June wasn't like that. But at least a little part of Blaine had to finally admit that maybe Santana and his mom were right. "Well if that's true than I need to take my chance while I can," Blaine said firmly. "But I promise I will take Kurt with me. We're running this race together or not at all."

---

Kurt swung Blaine's hand exiting the Spotlight Diner, nearly skipping down the shadowed New York City streets. It wasn't just how much he'd missed Kurt over the last week that made Blaine unable take his eyes off of him. It was simply that there was absolutely nothing better than seeing Kurt glow with the happiness that everything at the nursing home and Rachel's project had given him.

He hated that soon he'd been the one to crash it all down around them with his own lies. Because though he'd been trying all week to get June to change her mind about Kurt, he was having no luck. And now he'd dug his own grave and soon would have to face the music. But now wasn't that time. Now he'd enjoy this moment as much as he could and his eyes shined, a smile teasing at his lips.

Kurt glanced at Blaine out of the corner of his eye. "Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked with a crooked grin.

"I just..." Blaine bowed his head as his heart swelled. "I'm just really proud of you Kurt. Everything you did tonight. Watching you fly...it was amazing."

"Well the harness helped," Kurt smirked.

"I don't mean the harness," Blaine said softly. He stopped out front of a bookstore and he took Kurt's hands, holding them tight. Proud tears shined in eyes full of love. "You are my lucky star Kurt. You have been for so long now and you always *always* will be no matter what."

Kurt blushed. "You're such a sap," he teased.

But Blaine was too lost in his eyes and in the past to care. "Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight-"

"There aren't stars in New York," Kurt interrupted.

"Don't ruin this," Blaine scolded quickly and Kurt lowered his eyes and smiled demurely. "Do you remember, about two years ago? We stood outside my father's house in the freezing cold and you asked me what I used to wish for on the stars when I was a kid."

Of course Kurt remembered. "You said you wished for me."

"And you asked me what I used to wish for before you," Blaine reminded him. When Kurt had sung tonight it had all come back. "And I wouldn't tell you because then it wouldn't come true. So you wrapped me in your arms," he said as he wrapped Kurt in his, "and whispered in my ear: Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight."

"I wish I may," Kurt continued, "I wish I might have this wish I wish tonight."

Blaine nuzzled into Kurt's neck. He didn't care at all who was watching. "I know how you felt about my dad that night Kurt. But even so you encouraged me to keep trying. Because he was trying and he was alive and as long as he was alive I should have a chance to have a father. Because once they're gone, they're gone. And you were right." A tear slipped from Blaine's eyes and he swallowed against the rising tide, brushing it away. He looked up to the empty sky and let out a breath. "I wished not to lose him. When I was a kid, that was what I wished for." Kurt turned in Blaine's arms. He could see the pain in Blaine's eyes though he wasn't sure exactly where it was coming from. "Though I always hated the way he treated me I was still terrified every day that I would go too far, I would make one mistake too many and finally he'd just give up on me and walk away forever."

"Blaine," Kurt sighed.

Blaine shook his head, reaching up to caress Kurt's cheek. "I just wanted you to know," he said softly. "Watching you sing that song, watching you fly. I just..." He rolled his lips nervously between his teeth. He still had time to make things right, but just in case he couldn't... "I just wanted you to know my wish."

Kurt's brow furrowed with worry, but he gave a quick nod and a small smile. "Okay." Kurt linked his arm in Blaine's and started back down the street. And quietly he sang as they walked home.

*Just come with me where dreams are born*

*And time is never planned*

*Just think of happy things*

*And your heart will fly on wings*

*In Never Never Land.*

## ***Chapter Five: All of Me***

Blaine couldn't help but think about how best friends seemed to come in and out of his life on a fairly regular basis, there for the time he needed them until one or both of them were ready to move on. Try as he might he couldn't silence the little voice in the back of his head that said it could be the same thing with Kurt. He'd read enough soulmate stories to know that not all ended in happily ever after.

He knew his mind was wandering to avoid the situation right in front of him. He sat on the couch watching Santana pack her meager belongings into a suitcase she could carry onto the plane.

"You're not coming back, are you?" Blaine asked, his voice heavy with the weight of that possibility.

She found it hard to look at him in the eye to answer, but she did with a mix of sadness and excitement. "I don't know," she admitted.

"What am I going to do without you?" he asked, pulling a pillow into his lap.

"Same thing you'd do with me, Boyfriend," she snapped. "Stop being stupid. Tell Kurt the truth."

Throwing his head back, Blaine groaned. "He's going to hate me, Santana. Lying is the one thing he can't stand me doing."

"Then you need to figure out a way to stop," she stated the obvious with a raised brow.

"I know, I know," Blaine whined and Santana rolled her eyes. "I don't even know why I do it."

Santana sighed. "Yes you do," she said gently, pulling the pillow from his arms and sitting down next to him. "And so does Kurt."

Memories came back to him in a flood, the hundreds of lies he must have told over his lifetime. His eyes darkened and fell on his best friend. "It's just, I've been doing it my whole life."

"Well this is the start of a new life Blaine," Santana told him firmly. "You don't have to pretend for him. You don't have to be perfect for him. And you don't need to protect him."

He knew she was right in every way and yet one worry kept running through his mind. "What if it's too late?" he asked.

She pulled him into his arms and held him as he rested his head on her shoulder. Her thoughts turned to Brittany and the way they'd last ended things. "It's never too late for love Blaine. It's the one thing Kurt will always trust about you. So trust him."

---

"You're up late," the Colonel said with a soft smile as he sat down beside his wife in the backyard swing. She returned the smile but said nothing, just staring up at the crescent moon as it shined down on them both. "Which kid is worrying you now?" he asked with a bit of a tease. "Or is it me who's in trouble?"

"You're safe this time," she teased back, leaning her head on his shoulder as her smile faded. "It's Blaine."

John hummed against her hair. "Is this about June? He's a big boy, Amy, he can handle himself."

"He's a trusting boy," she corrected. "Too trusting, especially when he doesn't want to believe that someone isn't all that they say they are. But I know that woman, she doesn't have Blaine's best interest at heart."

"Maybe he'll win her over. He's good at that," John said with an embarrassed grin. "Worked for me and I'm about as stubborn as they come."

Amy shook her head though. "She won't accept him as he is. And he's suffered enough with that, I don't want him to have to go through it again. I thought in New York-

"He will handle whatever comes his way, he's had a lot of practice. He and Kurt both have." He kissed her softly on her temple. "They're both going to be fine."

She sat up, leaning her head against the cushioned back. "When he's scared he holds on too tight. And Kurt-

"And Kurt pulls away," he said looking at her pointedly. "But somehow even through the worst they find their way back to one another. Kurt has a big heart to forgive. When he wants to."

She smiled, knowing though he talked of the kids, he spoke of themselves as well. "Love is worth forgiving for," she said.

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***Kurt to Blaine: You got some time for lunch? I don't have class until 1.***

***Blaine to Kurt: I'm sorry Kurt, I really have to rehearse as much as I can while the dance lab is free. I can do dinner tonight though.***

***Kurt to Blaine: I've got a dinner meeting for my scene study class. Why don't I come rehearse with you?***

***Blaine to Kurt: June wants to work on our numbers today. Soon though...***

***Kurt to Blaine: Okay. See you after dinner?***

***Blaine to Kurt: I promised Sam I'd spend some time with him since Mercedes is meeting with her producers. You could come join :-)***

***Kurt to Blaine: I think I'll pass. :-P***

***Blaine to Kurt: K. I'm sorry. I really miss you.***

***Kurt to Blaine: Don't be sorry. 3***

***Blaine to Kurt: 3***

Kurt's phone rang as he started to head out to the street. Blaine may not have time to go out to lunch, but if he was lucky he could meet Blaine before he'd eaten and without June there to rake her eyes over Kurt as if he was barely worthy to grace the stage with Blaine. He knew they'd only have a few minutes at best, but it was becoming harder and harder to sneak in time together the closer the showcase got and he missed his fiancé.

"Hey," Rachel greeted cheerfully when he answered his cell. "You free for lunch? We're taking a writing break, thank god," she added on her breath.



"Oh gosh, I wish I could Rachel but I have to be in class at 1 and I'm going to try to sneak it a quickie with Blaine. Lunch that is," he quickly clarified. "Not, well, an afternoon delight," he blushed.

"Miss Pillsbury's version of an afternoon delight. Not as good Kurt, you should go for the original," Rachel teased. "Either way have a good time. I'll see you later."

"Bye," he said, putting his phone away just as he reached his and Blaine's favorite nearby take out place. Waiting for his food, he scrolled through Facebook, catching up on Tina and Puck and the NYADA gossip of the day. His name was called and he took the bag and walked the couple of blocks to school. He grabbed the brass handle to the NYADA door, swung it open and climbed the stairs up to the dance floor.

As soon as he topped the stairs he heard Blaine's voice ring out and he smiled walking toward it.

*Cause I give you all of me  
And you give me all of you  
Give me all of you, cards on the table we're both showing hearts  
Risking it all though it's hard*

The smile faded though, the closer he got. Blaine lifted his eyes and Kurt knew immediately that something was wrong, he could feel it in the crawling of his skin. Blaine's voice had always been a window to his soul and right now it was screaming out.

But Kurt ignored it. Blaine's face full of pain and guilt, he knew that face all too well by now not to recognize it in an instant, but he ignored it, hoping it was just his imagination. All he wanted was to see his fiancé and have lunch and steal a quick kiss before going another 24 hours without seeing him. All he wanted was a smile and wink and not the eyes that clenched his heart, so he ignored it just hoping that today wouldn't be the day that everything came full circle, and if it was he really didn't want to know. Because he just wasn't sure he could take it one more time.

But Blaine's confession that he lied broke the damn and he didn't even think about what Blaine's reaction might have been when he flung the carefully selected lunch he'd brought halfway across the room. He didn't accept Blaine's pleas of apologies and explanations. The words were becoming meaningless, too often spoken like the boy who cried wolf. And most of all he was angry at himself for believing it every time. For trusting him when he'd been given so many reasons not to. For constantly coming back just for Blaine to lie to him over and over again.

He stormed out of the room, needing to get away, but he couldn't go far, he had classes and rehearsals and people relying on him and he wasn't one to let anyone down. He tried to let go of it, forget it as he sang songs that didn't matter and said words that weren't his and pretended to be someone he wasn't. But when dinner was finally done he walked, dodging his way around the millions of people in the city in a way that he never would have been able to just two years ago. He'd changed so much since the day he'd stepped off the plane and run into Rachel's arms. He'd grown physically and emotionally and how on earth was he just supposed to constantly stay by a man who couldn't seem to do the same?

He settled on a small stone ledge, leaning back on the grass to stare up at the dark sky. There was no moon and he could see only one tiny star trying to burn bright enough to be noticed. It blinked at him and in his head he sang *"I wish"* and Blaine's words after his Peter Pan performance came crashing back.

*"Though I always hated the way he treated me I was still terrified every day that I would go too far, I would make one mistake too many and finally he'd just give up on me and walk away forever."*

Blaine had known when he'd said that what he had done. How long would Blaine's childhood fears haunt them? How long would Kurt pay for the sins of the Colonel?

He pulled out his phone and looked at the time. Rachel would be home soon, worrying about him. Rolling the phone over in his head, he meant to put it back in his pocket, but instead he found himself dialing the one person he thought might have the answer.

"Santana's pizza and pole," she blurted out but Kurt didn't laugh.

Instead he simply said, "You were right." It wasn't an easy admission to make and the heaviness in his voice told Santana everything she needed to know.

She exhaled heavily. "He told you," she guessed.

Kurt sighed, pulling one knee up to hug. "He always does eventually, doesn't he?" He stared out into the distance. Young couples in love were holding hands, carefree on a summer night. Those were the moments he cherished. "I guess that's the one thing I can trust, isn't it?" These were the moments he hated.

"The guilt eats away at him," Santana shared softly. "Old thoughts come back about what he deserves."

"What about what I deserve Santana?" Kurt snapped. "Don't I deserve a husband who can be honest? Who doesn't break my heart with every lie he tells? Tell me who is going to protect me if I don't protect myself?"

"Blaine is," Santana insisted with obvious frustration. "And if you don't believe that you're the most important thing in the world to him then that's your issue, Porcelain, not his. 'Cause I don't know how else he could possibly prove it to you."

Kurt rested his chin on his knee and closed his eyes. "It's exhausting Santana."

"Yeah," she said. "Well, just try to imagine how it is for him."

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***Blaine to Kurt: I'd really like if we could just talk about this.***

***Kurt to Blaine: I'd really like for you to just give me my space.***

"I'm beginning to think you two fight just to have make up sex," Sam said, peering over Blaine's shoulder.

"I'm pretty sure make up sex requires making up Sam, and right now Kurt won't even talk to me."

"Well what exactly did you expect? Blaine Anderson, I don't even know what to do with you anymore," Sam lectured, pacing the living room. Blaine fell back on the couch, rolling his eyes, but he didn't say anything. He knew he deserved it. "How many times have we talked about this? You don't lie to Kurt. How hard is that?"

"Apparently very hard," Blaine muttered and Sam smacked at his knees with the pillow.

"Why. Just tell me why you thought it would be a good idea to lie to your fiancé," Sam demanded, crossing his arms angrily. When Blaine said nothing he tapped his foot. "Well? I'm waiting."

It seemed to Blaine that at every moment in his life he had that one friend who forgot his history and just told it like it was. As much as he hated being lectured, with Santana gone he was glad that Sam was here. It was somewhat reassuring. "I just...I knew it would make him happy and I thought I could make it happen." He sat up with a groan and grabbed the pillow to comfort himself. "I guess I figured that I could just charm

June like I do everyone else. But it's not as easy here as it was in Ohio," Blaine frowned. "Maybe I've lost my touch."

"Maybe you've...?" Sam stared at him incredulously. "Maybe you've lost your touch for lying and manipulating? Well I should sure as hell hope so. You should be ashamed, young man. Ashamed!" Sam pointed sternly.

Blaine rolled his eyes but was saved by the doorbell and the arrival of Artie. "Hey hey hey, it's boys' night out time!" Artie called as he rolled in and immediately to the game system to set up. "Imma gonna kick yo' asses tonight. Mega tournament, no holds barred." He looked around at the boys. "Where's Kurt?"

"He's with the girls," Blaine muttered, avoiding Artie's raised brow.

"Because they're-" Sam smirked.

"You know I'm not the only one with relationship issues Sam," Blaine interrupted with an accusing glare as he sat down and picked up his controller. "It's not like you and Mercedes are in seventh heaven."

"You are just trying to escape my wrath," Sam said sitting next to him.

Blaine looked over at Sam with a plea in his eye. "Maybe I just feel bad enough already and I don't need your reminder of how I screwed up."

"Yeah fine," Sam allowed. "But this conversation is not over."

Blaine rolled his eyes as he blew up an enemy encampment. "I wouldn't expect anything else."

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She rested her head in her hands only moments after the curtain call. Running her fingers through her hair she raised her eyes to the dressing room mirror. She looked tired. Worn. And at 20 years old that was entirely unacceptable.

She reached for her makeup remover, pulling a pad out of the container and slowly inching it along her face – her cheeks, her nose, beneath her eyes. She tossed a used one into the trash and grabbed another when she heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," Rachel called. As she worked the pad along her chin and to her ears, she glanced up in the mirror expecting the stage manager or producer, maybe one of her costars. Her heart flipped though as she saw her mother walk through the door, closing it behind her with a warm smile. Rachel spun around. "Shelby!" she exclaimed, jumping up to hug her, surprised and pleased and suddenly reviewing every move she'd made in her performance that evening to decide what mistakes her mother might have seen. "You didn't tell me you were coming!"

"Well I didn't want to make you nervous," Shelby said, grabbing a chair across from hers and they both sat down. She reached for Rachel's hand who let it fall into the woman's she had grown to love and respect in the strangest of ways. "Because you have no need to be. You were incredible Rachel. Born for the stage."

Rachel blushed and looked away sheepishly. "Thank you. That means a lot coming from you."

"I don't give praise where it doesn't belong, Rachel, even to my own daughter." Rachel looked back and Shelby's eyes were soft but judging and Rachel knew that she hadn't come only for the show. "So what's this I hear about you heading to LA?"

"Oh." Rachel took her hand back, folding it on her lap with the other, wringing them together nervously. "It's nothing definite. Not yet. I just thought that I should try to branch out, try new-" Shelby's glare stopped her, the glare that looked a lot like whenever her fathers had caught her in a lie. She sighed and turned back to her mirror, finishing with her makeup and picking up the brush for her hair. "I can't stay here," she said softly. "It's too hard."

"Hard how?" Shelby asked gently.

Rachel put the brush down. She looked at her mother in the mirror. She'd understand, wouldn't she? They were alike in so many ways and being near Rachel had been hard for her. It wasn't the same, but it was close. "I see him in the audience. He's in the theater. Every night. And for a long time it was comforting, everything I needed to stay connected to him in that way, to know that he was still with me. But I can't do it anymore."

"The pain gradually fades," Shelby said.

Rachel turned, knowing there was only compassion in her mother's voice. "That's just the thing though. Some days are hard, sure, and I know that will never change. But the pain has faded. And a large part of me

wants to move on, but I can't. Not as long as I'm here. It's like," she paused, searching for the right words. "Broadway was a part of *us*. Our dream. And I think I need a new dream now. One that's just for me."

Shelby pursed her lips, but she nodded her understanding. "I think that makes sense."

"You know," Rachel said, surprised at even the thought. "I'm not afraid of failure anymore. Not like I used to be. We can make all the plans in the world and do everything right and still you don't get the end you expected. The one you thought you deserved. From here on out my life is uncharted territory. So why not do something I never even dreamed would be possible?"

Shelby sat back and she looked at Rachel with a mother's pride. "I think there's no reason you shouldn't."

---

"Brittany sometimes you are just so stupid," Santana snapped. "Why can't you just be happy for me?"

"I am happy for you Santana, of course," Brittany said, curled up on the couch in the loft. Kurt was out, Rachel was sleeping and finally Santana had called her on the new cellphone Mercedes had insisted she get for tour. "I just don't understand why you didn't tell me earlier."

"You know why Britt," came the quiet voice on the other end of the phone. "I'm just...I'm not good at this. When we're together it's amazing but..."

"But you're scared. I know."

The line went quiet. Brittany could still hear the music from Santana's night shoot softly playing in the background. "I love you," she said firmly. "Nothing you do or say is ever gonna change that. And when you're ready to trust that you know where to find me."

"I love you too," Santana whispered and hung up.

Brittany put the phone down and drew the blanket at her feet up over her. She laid down, closed her eyes and tried to drift off to sleep. The song played over and over in her head, flowing into her dreams. She woke up with it embedded in her heart.

*The sun is setting in your quiet eyes  
You take for granted what we've always seen inside*

Music permeated Kurt's dream just moments before he awoke, his eyes fluttering open in the loft. He'd come home late, slept late, drowning himself in the darkness and maybe just a little bit of drink last night with some of the guys from school. But it hadn't been the same without Blaine.

*You run in circles  
And you don't know how  
You got to this place  
But you sure do live there now*

He picked up the phone, knowing it would be there despite telling him not to. In truth it soothed him. He wondered what exactly he'd do if one morning it didn't come.

***Blaine to Kurt: Good morning Kurt. I love you.***

It was always the same, every time they fought. They run, they follow. Round and round in circles, the same issues every time. Trust. Honesty. One terrified Kurt. The other terrified Blaine. Would they have believed on the staircase at Dalton that this would be where they would end up? But staircase after staircase their world constantly changed.

*And I won't blame you if you fall  
And I won't ask you to believe that life won't hurt at all  
When the tears stream down your face  
And you've given all your light away  
I'd like to be the safest place  
Your hideaway*

The music drawing him in, Kurt pushed a small corner of the curtain aside to find Brittany dancing beautifully in the living room, the furniture pushed aside, to the song she played. It was rare to see Brittany dance anything but pop, but she'd taken years of ballet. Kurt found himself wishing she danced it more often. She was absolutely stunning. He nearly stepped out when he realized her phone was sitting perched on the table, recording. He didn't know who it was for. He just knew that the words could have just as well been for him.

*The fear keeps coming back to you in waves  
When you catch the wrong side of the same mistakes you've made  
You're tuning out because it hurts too much to try  
You're giving up before you've had your chance to fly*

Blaming Blaine was easy. Easier than coming to terms with his own faults anyway. In the moments though where he could see Blaine's parents inside him, his fear did indeed come back. Blaine had so much to overcome and Kurt knew in his heart that he had to have patience, but sometimes it just hurt so much to try. So instead he tuned it out, pretended he didn't see the signs, hoping that they would just go away, that he was just being paranoid. But he knew. He always knew. And then he always walked away as if he hadn't.

He didn't want to give up before they'd had their chance to fly.

*And I won't blame you if you fall  
And I won't ask you to believe that life won't hurt at all  
But when the tears stream down your face  
And you've given all your light away I'd liked to be the safest place  
Your hideaway, Your hideaway  
And here comes the rain*

*"I can't stop you from failing, but I can promise to make it safe if you do."*

He'd promised. Was he a man of his word? Could he keep himself safe when Blaine falling meant breaking Kurt's heart?

*When you've given all your light away I'd like to be the safest place  
I will close the doors and lock the gates  
And give to you my safest place  
Your hideaway  
Your hideaway*

He stepped out from behind the curtain after she'd turned the video off. "That was beautiful," he said softly.



Brittany spun around, startled. "Oh Kurt, you scared me. I didn't think you were home, I thought you were at Blaine's last night."

"Sorry," he apologized, stepping out into the living room. "I didn't mean to scare you. Or pry. The song just...and your dancing was beautiful Britt," he said, leaning against one arm of the couch. She smiled at him and grabbed the other end of the couch. Together they put it back where it belonged. "I miss getting to watch you all the time. And it's been a really long time since I've seen you dance like that." He moved to the armchair, put it back where it belonged and took a seat. "Who was it for?"

She went to the kitchen and poured herself a glass of water. "Santana. We had a fight."

It had been a long time now, he and Britt, the unicorns, fighting to keep up with Santana and Blaine. Somehow Brittany never stopped, no matter what. "How you do it Britt? She's certainly not the easiest person to love," Kurt said.

"Who said love was supposed to be easy?" Brittany asked breezily, but she looked at him and she knew. She always knew that look on Kurt. "Nobody's perfect Kurt. Santana and Blaine, they have their faults, but so do we. She puts up with me when nothing around me makes sense. And sometimes her words bite, but I know it always comes from a place of fear. She would never mean to hurt me with them."

"But what if she does?" Kurt asked quietly. "Hurt you with them?"

"When Santana messes up it's usually *because* she loves me. Not because she doesn't." Things like this were so clear to her. These were the things that made sense. "Sometimes life hurts. Sometimes love hurts. It's how you know you're alive," Brittany explained. "Look, Kurt, I love Santana, all of her, the good and the bad." *All your curves and all your edges. All your perfect imperfections.* Kurt's heart felt like it stopped and he took a deep breath to restart it. "So I just trust her that if she does hurt me she'll make it right."

"How?"

Brittany shrugged. "I just do."

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***Kurt to Blaine: I'm ready to talk.***

***Blaine to Kurt: Do you want to come over?***

***Kurt to Blaine: I'll meet you out front.***

***Blaine to Kurt: I'll be waiting.***

---

Blaine sat on the stoop feeding the birds. It was nothing like the lake back home where he and Kurt would walk hand in hand, soaking in the beauty of the world around them when the future seemed so bright, so sure. Now nothing was certain. He didn't blame Kurt at all. Blaine lied and lied again and though he never ever meant to hurt Kurt, he'd known in his heart that Kurt's trust was still shaky. And he couldn't blame him after everything he'd done. After where he'd come from. There were demons inside him that were so hard to shake, every time he tried they only weighed him down more.

*"What do you think it's like to fly for the first time?"*

Blaine remembered that day, he always did. Him and his keyboard, looking out on a sea of blazers, family and strangers. Kurt staring up at him, hoping for a chance at a life free of lies and pain. Blaine's eyes had met Burt's, full of a pride he'd never seen before and faith he'd never felt. For the first time, he'd been ready to fly and it had been terrifying. But with Burt by his side he took a step outside his nest and he jumped. He hadn't realized how many times he would fall.

*"I mean, here you are, up in this nest which is the only home you've ever known. Even though your DNA and millions of years of evolution are telling you that if you jump you won't hit the ground like a stone, you can never really know."*

He looked at Kurt. Sometimes he forgot how much hurt his falling could cause the one person in the world he always wanted to protect. Sometimes he forgot that they were one, and with every fall he took, Kurt came tumbling down as well.

*"Relationships are like that."*

Words he would never forget echoed in his mind. *"Relationships are about trust...and I don't trust you anymore."*

Blaine looked away. Because if Kurt couldn't trust him then the relationship was over. Kurt would decide that it was too hard, too much. That he couldn't keep holding his breath waiting for Blaine to soar.

*"You give someone your heart to look after and you tell yourself that you're safe, but you never know if today or tomorrow is the day they drop it like a stone."*

Blaine knew exactly what it was like, to give someone your heart, to expect it to be protected, and then have them drop it over and over again until it broke.

He'd promised himself that he would not follow in his parents' footsteps. He had promised himself that he would never do that to Kurt.

So many promises he had broken.

"Kurt, I'm really, really, really sorry," he said, his voice and his eyes begging for forgiveness. Searching for it.

Walking from his apartment to Blaine's, Kurt had thought about what Brittany had said. He knew how much Blaine loved him, he never doubted that. But every single time Kurt made the mistake that Brittany never did; forgetting that the running and the lying and the clinging, that it all came from fear. A fear so entrenched that it would take more than a gentle kiss, more than a night in bed, more than a ring to make him feel safe. It took him. Kurt. Changing. Being his safest place. Always.

"I get what happened," he told Blaine honestly. "The way that I was talking about the showcase there's no way that I would have been cool with not being in it. I would have lied to me too."

"I don't understand," Blaine said. "If you're not mad then where were you going with all this flying stuff?"

"Oh no, I was mad," Kurt said firmly.

Blaine looked away, broken. This was the moment Kurt would take off the ring and say that Blaine's demons were just too much for him. And Blaine couldn't blame him. They were too much for him sometimes too.

"But then I realized that trust is a choice," Kurt said. It was the hardest choice he thought he would ever make, letting someone hold his heart of glass in his hands every day where just the smallest fumble could

make it shatter. But somewhere along his walk from home to this moment, Kurt remembered that his heart wasn't that delicate. It wasn't made of glass. It was so much stronger and if it was dropped like a stone, well, a stone was very hard to break. "Every day we're going to roll out of bed and send each other into the world just trusting that we have each other's backs."

Blaine looked at him, hope glowing in his eyes for the first time in days.

"And we will slip up, and we will be scared, but..." Kurt took his hand. Just like he had at every other crossroads on every other stair where they'd chosen to trust. A little more every time. This time he would choose completely. "I choose to trust and to love you through everything."

"Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you," Blaine muttered, hugging Kurt, burying himself in the crook of Kurt's neck. Kurt could feel Blaine's heart beating in his chest. He could feel the breath of relief on his skin.

Kurt wrapped an arm around him and held him close, but it wasn't easy. Sixteen years of insecurity and negative patterns could not be erased in two. Loving Blaine would never be easy.

But whoever said that Kurt Hummel took the easy way out?

"I love you so much," Blaine said, his words not nearly enough to express the swell in his chest. Nothing mattered more to him than the chance to love Kurt the rest of his life. He would give up anything he had to for that chance. "I meant what I said about the showcase. Either we fly together or we don't fly at all."

But Kurt knew that he couldn't, he *shouldn't* be enough for Blaine. Blaine would easily drown in him if Kurt let him, but drowning wasn't soaring. Blaine was a star, and the world deserved to know. "I am very happy for you. And I'm very excited the world gets to see you spread your wings. Now it's your turn to fly."

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Blaine grabbed his things from where he'd kept them behind the stage of the dance lab. "Come on Kurt, the party's gonna start and I'm kinda of the guest of honor so I don't think it will do to be fashionably late," Blaine said, grabbing Kurt's hand.

Instead of following though, Kurt pulled him back, taking his other hand in his. Blaine paused, looking up at him with the eyes of pure adoration that Kurt would never grow tired of seeing. "I can't believe you'd risk everything June was offering for me," Kurt said. "I'm proud of you."

Blaine shook his head and laughed softly. "It wasn't just for you Kurt. It was for us. I promised you Kurt, and I don't ever want to break your trust again. I meant what I said. We fly together or we don't fly at all."

Kurt smiled, then looked at Blaine seriously. "Well not flying is not an option," he declared and any lingering doubt he'd had in his mind slipped from his thoughts. "I think you should move back in."

Blaine blinked in surprise. "Oh. Wow, Kurt, I..." It was rare for Kurt to fluster him these days but he still loved the way his fiancé's zigzags could make his heart flutter like the very first day they'd met. "I would love to, of course. But..." He looked in Kurt's eyes, searching for whatever was going on inside that beautiful mind. "Rachel's still there, there are still curtains instead of doors. What's changed?" he asked nervously.

But Kurt's soft smile eased any worries. "*We* have," he said simply. "And we're gonna be okay."

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Sam was splayed out on his bed, strumming away softly on his guitar while Blaine packed his things once again. After moving so often in the last year, he was beginning to have it down to a science. He still hoped though that he wouldn't be doing it again anytime soon.

"I feel so bad leaving you," Blaine said, apologetically. "We just finished talking about splitting the rent when Mercedes moved out and then I up and leave too. What are you going to do? I can maybe try and find someone at NYADA who needs a roommate, or who wants to move in, what do you-"

"I think I'm gonna go home," Sam said, halting the strings. He looked up to find Blaine shocked into silence. "I don't think modeling's really my thing. Mercedes and Brittany are leaving. You and Kurt will be good as gone in your own little wedding planning world. Artie's all the way out in Brooklyn in a dorm and...this city isn't for me. I'm a country boy at heart. And I just don't have anything here that's for me."

Blaine sat down next to him, curling his leg beneath him. "What is there for you at home?"

Sam had been asking himself the same thing for a while now as he floundered around a city that was too big, too loud, too smelly and far too lonely. "You know whenever I thought of coming to New York, I always figured that Finn would be here too. I mean, I knew that someday he'd go home, but I always figured that with Rachel here that he'd be here eventually." Sam looked at Blaine, eyes sad and tired. "But now I just feel further away from him and everything that mattered to him. And I worry, about what he left behind at home. I don't know exactly what I'm gonna do. But then again, neither did he."

Blaine nodded, understanding. "I'm gonna miss you man," he said. "Where am I gonna go when Kurt's being crazy?"

Sam laughed and started strumming his guitar again. "By his side Blaine," he said. "Right where you have always belonged."

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"Are you sure you guys can handle this again," Rachel asked, helping Kurt put the finishing touches on Kurt's surprise for Blaine. "I mean, I certainly don't mind having him here at all, but I'm getting a little bit of whiplash," she teased.

Kurt chuckled. "Aren't we all? I can't even keep track of who lives here anymore." He straightened out the books he'd put on the desk then took them away again. Maybe he'd just let Blaine decorate it, it was his space anyway. "But yes. I'm sure. Are we going to fight? Yes. And then we're going to make up. Over and over and over again." A smile teased at his lips in memory.

Rachel rolled her eyes. "You always were a drama queen," she said.

"And I have the crown to prove it," Kurt preened proudly. He looked back at the desk and back at Rachel. "What do you think?"

She stood to the side and smiled at him. "I think it's perfect."

Kurt grabbed the lamp just as the door slid open. Blaine came in, rolling the last of his suitcases behind him and his eyes widened at the sight of the desk. Letting the suitcase stand, he rushed over to Kurt and hugged him tight. "I can't believe you'd do this for me," he said.

"This is your home. Your safe place. I want it to be everything we've ever dreamed of," he smiled softly, holding Blaine's hands in his. "Plus Rachel," he shrugged with a grin.

"Minus doors," Blaine reminded him.

Kurt nodded. "Minus doors," he agreed and he looked down at the man he loved and thought of the vows he'd made and someday would be a making. "Your hideaway," he promised. "Whenever you need it."

Rachel watched as Blaine said nothing, merely leaning in to kiss Kurt with a softness that she desperately missed. Still, there was nothing more beautiful than love and she knew that in the world there was more out there for her. She smiled softly, grabbing her bag for work and slipping out the door to the theater and she walked through the city full of promises, memories, and dreams fulfilled. Seeing Kurt and Blaine start a new chapter in their lives, her heart beat with excitement, knowing her own new chapter was just around the corner.

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"Look out for her Coop, okay?" Blaine looked back in Rachel's room, Kurt sorting her clothes into an "LA Chic" bag and an "absolutely not" bag. "I know she thinks that she's tough and she can do all this on her own, but it's a big city. Totally different from Ohio or even New York. She's gonna need someone she can trust."

"You know you can count on me Squirt," Cooper promised. "I found her that amazing deal in Los Feliz didn't I? Just took a little finagling, if you know what I mean, with the Subletter."

Blaine rolled his eyes. He really wished he didn't know what Cooper meant and he wished even more that those images were not now trying to fight their way to the forefront of his mind. "Well she appreciates it I know. And she appreciates even more that you'll be so close."

"Of course she does," Cooper said suggestively.

Blaine closed his eyes and fell back on the bed. Sometimes his brother was insufferable. "Whatever you're thinking she is off limits. Got it? O.F.F off limits."

"Woah, little brother, who do you think I am?" Cooper sounded deeply offended and Blaine almost felt bad. "I am nothing but a perfect gentleman and I would never go after your fiancé's girl. That would just be wrong."

"Okay, I'm sorry," he apologized. "Thank you. For all you've done."

"You just come out and visit her soon, okay?" Cooper said. "You and Kurt. I miss you guys."

Blaine couldn't help but smile. "We miss you too. I'll talk to you soon okay?"

"You better," Cooper warned and Blaine laughed. "Bye Squirt."

"Bye Coop."

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"Finally, finally alone," Kurt said, pulling a champagne bottle he'd been saving for a special occasion from the cabinet next to the fridge. "No one around, not even the chance of being walked in on..." he turned to Blaine with a grin that immediately fell. Blaine had his arms wrapped around himself staring out the window onto the streets below. The lights from the blinking neon signs lit his form, on and off, on and off, but Blaine made no move. Walking toward him he left the bottle on the coffee table and wrapped his fiancé up in his arms. "What's the matter?" he asked gently.

"Everybody leaves," Blaine said. His voice was wistful and with a little urging he turned around in Kurt's arms, leaning his head back against the window. Tears shined in his eyes. "Cooper and Rachel in California, Nick in Boston, Santana and Brittany in Reno, Tina in Rhode Island and now Sam, going back to Lima. It's like I choose to love someone and they just walk out of my life. Gone."

Kurt's hands flew to his hips. "They are *not* gone, Blaine," he said sternly. "They are in your phone, they're on the computer and they will be by your side the minute you need them. If this year has taught us nothing else it's taught us that when we truly need each other we are all there. Every single one of us."

Blaine nodded, knowing Kurt was right. "I just worry-"

"Now you listen to me Blaine Anderson," Kurt interrupted, knowing exactly where this was headed and held his hand up to Blaine's face. "Do you see this ring?" Blaine nodded. "It means forever."



"It can come off," Blaine pointed out.

Kurt lowered his head and heaved a sigh. "I know it's not easy for you to trust. I get it Blaine, I really do. But you need to realize that your father *never* stopped loving you, he *never* truly left you and neither will I." Blaine took a deep breath, letting that truth settle in his heart. "Save your wishes Blaine for things like Broadway or record deals. Because you don't need to waste them on me, I am not going anywhere. No matter what you do. And if the only way to get you to trust that is to wake up every morning and go to bed every night for the rest of our lives reminding you of that then I am more than prepared to do that, though I admit that I will run out of clever ways of doing so," Kurt said.

Blaine laughed wetly, then bit his lip. "Trust is a choice," he repeated quietly.

Over and over again Blaine always tried. And so Kurt always would too. "Trust is a choice," he nodded. "So make it. Trust that I love you. And for the first time ever we have our own apartment, completely to ourselves and I don't want to waste another moment of it."

"Okay," Blaine smiled.

Kurt smiled back. "Okay." He went back to the kitchen for two glasses and brought them to the coffee table while Blaine curled himself up on the couch. "Now how about we pop this champagne, watch a little Moulin Rouge, sing a little *Come What May* and make a little love?"

"That sounds perfect Kurt," Blaine agreed, his face brightening already. Kurt went to get the DVD while Blaine popped the champagne cork and poured their glasses.

"You know there were a few days after Schue's wedding last year that I was snowed in here with Rachel, Santana and Adam?" Kurt slipped the DVD into the player then joined Blaine on the couch. "We watched Moulin Rouge, and when *Come What May* came on, all I could think about was you and me."

Blaine didn't share that Santana had texted him that night, he only gathered Kurt in his arms, remembering what he'd told Kurt: *Take your time. I'll be here when you're ready.*

"It's always been you Blaine," Kurt said softly. "From the very first moment I saw you. I've loved you when you were confident, and when you were insecure. I've loved you when you were scared, and when you had more courage than anyone I'd ever met before. I've loved you when you were hurting, and when you've hurt me. I've loved you when you protected me, and when you've needed my protection."

"Kurt," Blaine whispered.

Kurt sat up and turned to look at him, their eyes meeting like that first day on the stairs and like every day on every stair as they climbed through life together. "There is not a single thing you've ever done that has made me stop loving you. And there will never be a single thing you could do. I love *all* of you," Kurt promised. "And I never give up on anything I love."

"Come what may?" Blaine asked.

Kurt nodded and picked up the champagne glasses, handing one to Blaine. "Come what may."

They clinked glasses, took a sip and laid back down. Kurt started the movie, snuggling into Blaine's chest. Blaine pressed a kiss to Kurt's head then rested his own against him.

He truly did love all of Kurt, with all his heart. And today, he trusted that Kurt loved him. And he would do whatever he had to in order to trust that for the rest of his life.