

To Build a Home

by

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Kurt/Blaine || AU || NC-17

Kurt was almost asleep when Blaine left. He was gone little more than an hour. But it had taken no longer than that for everything to fall apart.

*Warning: eventual **character death** and possible triggers*

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1. Sun and Cell Phones

Kurt wasn't at school. That was strange, for him. What was even stranger was that he wasn't at rehearsal. Kurt never missed a rehearsal, especially since he'd been working on another duet with Blaine. It was just for fun, not for any kind of performance, but he still showed up diligently to every practice. Kurt had gone home to see his dad over the weekend, like he did most weekends, but he wasn't there when Blaine crawled into bed. The dorm they shared hadn't felt right without him. Kurt's empty bed was a reminder that he was alone tonight. He missed his company. He'd figured that Kurt had gotten held up in traffic or something and called his cell to leave a message. He'd fallen asleep soon after and when he woke up, he still wasn't there. He'd felt worried, and almost panicky when he called Kurt's cell phone again and heard the voicemail telling him to leave a message. Dialing his home phone on the way to class this morning was unsuccessful as well, with him having to leave another message. The no cell phone policy meant that he couldn't call again until after rehearsal.

When the luminescent clock over the door changed to 4:00, Blaine said his last few encouraging words to the Warblers and dismissed them.

Blaine followed the group out of the large rehearsal room and leaned up against the doorway, crossing his arms over his chest, watching as they dispersed, talking loudly or practicing a line they'd had trouble with. The sun was bright, getting lower in the sky, but still holding all of its influential power of warmth and life. They'd had a good rehearsal today. He was proud of them, of course, but he didn't truly show it. At least, not yet. Praise was good in small doses and he didn't want them getting cocky. Yes, they had had a good rehearsal today, but not a great one. One voice was missing and as Blaine shut the door and made his way back to the dorms, he felt himself getting more annoyed.

His shoes made light tapping noises on the concrete and he shoved his hands in his pockets as he walked. He didn't realize how much he missed Kurt until he wasn't there. Blaine sat next to him in English, Math, and Chemistry and they ate lunch together every day. Thankfully, Kyle had asked for help on the History homework, so he was able to take up that time, but he was itching to try and call Kurt again. And then at rehearsal, everyone had agreed it sounded great, but to Blaine's ears, it was mediocre. There was an audible hole in the chorus, left vacant by Kurt's absence.

He pulled out his cell phone and dialed the number absentmindedly. He knew it by heart. The monotone ringing seemed to grow louder as he counted the number of times it rang. Once... twice... three times...

four times. He furrowed his brow in annoyance. It rang once more before the cheery sound of Kurt's voice telling him to leave a message sounded, one he'd heard so many times today.

"You've reached Kurt Hummel. I'm not here right now, so-

"Hello?"

Blaine was slightly taken aback by Kurt's sudden voice in his ear as he answered. He smiled, forgetting his annoyance for a moment.

"Hey. I missed you today. Where were you? Didn't you get my messages?"

"I'm sorry. I meant to call you. I guess I forgot. How did rehearsal go?"

Blaine frowned. It didn't seem like him to forget to call. "It was alright I guess. To be honest, it wasn't the same without you."

Kurt laughed lightly. "Glad to know I'm missed."

"You still didn't answer my question. You okay?"

There was a pause on the end of the line. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Kurt."

"Blaine?"

Blaine sighed, running a hand through his hair and sitting down on his bed. "Are you going to make me guess as to the reason why you weren't at school today?"

He laughed again. "Possibly."

Blaine could picture the smirk that undoubtedly had appeared on his porcelain face and he smiled. "Okay, let's see here. Umm... well, you don't sound sick. Are you sick Kurt?"

Another pause. "No."

Blaine paused too, thinking. "You didn't get tired of me did you?"

Kurt inhaled, voice dripping with mock offense. "I love that you think so highly of me to ever tire of you."

"Alright. You got me. I can't think of any other reason why you wouldn't be here."

"I was just... really tired today."

Blaine knew he was lying and snorted quietly. "Want to tell me the real reason?"

Kurt's voice grew soft. "Please Blaine, can we just drop it?"

"Oh, umm... yeah. Sure." Blaine had lowered his voice too. He couldn't place it, but he heard something in Kurt's voice and suddenly wanted to see him so badly.

He didn't mind driving two hours to his house, not if it meant he got to see him. Kurt was acting different and it was a troubling thought.

"My dad e-mailed the office, so they sent it all to me. Thank you though. I'll be there tomorrow."

"Okay." Blaine tried to hide the disappointment in his words. "Get some sleep okay? Today sucked without you."

Kurt laughed again. "Sir yes sir." There was a pause. "I missed you too."

2. Dorian Gray and Sleep

True to his word, Kurt was there the next day. They didn't talk about why Kurt wasn't at school the day before. Blaine respected his privacy and hoped he would tell him on his own; he obviously didn't want to talk about it. Things went back to normal pretty quickly, with Kurt putting his focus on the things that had always grabbed his attention: schoolwork, the Warblers, and Blaine. Kurt wasn't officially his boyfriend, but they spent so much time together, Blaine didn't feel they needed a label. Yet. He would love to be able to call Kurt his boyfriend.

As they walked down the hall, steps and voices echoing slightly, Blaine asked, "Did you read Dorian Gray?"

Smiling coyly with his eyebrows raised, Kurt pulled out his copy of their assigned English book. And Blaine tried unsuccessfully to hold back a laugh. The pages had been lined with so many post-it notes with Kurt's tiny, curled handwriting on each one, that it looked as though the book had a mane.

"You're such a dork." Blaine commented, grabbing the book from Kurt's hand and flipping through the pages.

Kurt snatched the book back and put a hand on his hip, retaliating, "And who was it that begged me to study with him for the quiz on the first half of the book?"

Blaine paused, realizing he was right. "Fine. You win this round."

They came to their class and Blaine jogged ahead a few steps to grab the handle and pulled it open for Kurt, flourishing his arm in a wide gesture. "Winners first."

Kurt paused, raised his eyebrows, and stood taller as he passed Blaine, blushing slightly. "I could get used to this."

"Yeah? Well don't get too comfortable. I'm going to ace this next test."

They reached their seats and tossed their bags on top of the dark wooden desks and began to shuffle through papers and pulling out notebooks and pens.

"I smell a bet."

"Do you?" Blaine turned towards him, pen in hand, and pointed it like a sword at Kurt's nose. "If I win, you have to buy me coffee."

Kurt pushed aside the pen with two fingers. "Well, because I always love a good bet, especially when I know I'm going to win, you're on." He paused, thinking for a moment, and then with a smirk lowered his voice, telling him, "And I'll let you know what you owe me when you lose."

Blaine laughed and suddenly something caught his attention Kurt's raised arm. He grabbed his arm lightly. "When did you get that?"

There was a large dark purple bruise on his forearm.

Kurt pulled his arm out of Blaine's hand, tugging his shirt sleeve down over the bruise. "Oh, I fell. No big deal."

Blaine's eyes flicked to Kurt's other arm, where he was rolling down his other shirt sleeve, but he wasn't quick enough to cover the other bruise on the inside of his elbow.

"Kurt..."

"It's fine."

Kurt could be very stubborn when he wanted to be, so Blaine let it go.

After English, they had a free period, in which they usually headed to a local coffee shop to start homework or just talk. The past few days though, Kurt hadn't wanted to go, saying he was tired. He chalked it up to an overload of test preparation and having trouble falling asleep.

"Want to go back to the dorm?"

Kurt looked up, feeling guilty, but before he could answer, Blaine grabbed his hand with a smile and pulled him towards the large building of dorms for students who stayed at school during the week.

"You don't have to feel guilty Kurt. I don't mind."

"Thanks. You know, you can go without me."

Blaine smirked. "I'm not that much of a coffee junkie."

As they exited the elevator and headed down the hall, Kurt linked his fingers with Blaine's. He liked the way their hands felt together. He would never have been able to do this at McKinley. They were just holding hands and it felt like the most liberating thing on Earth. He smiled to himself. Dalton was a different place; there was a different atmosphere. People here had money, generally a lot of it, and Kurt had worried he'd feel out of place. But he felt as though he blended in, he didn't stand out here and in his mind, that was a good thing. A very good thing. He had Blaine and he'd made friends almost instantly, with Blaine dragging him along to Warblers rehearsal the first day he'd been here. Well, he didn't really need to drag him. Kurt was as excited to meet and actually see the Warblers when they weren't competing against each other as he would be to get a glimpse, just a glimpse, of the Chanel fashion for next year. And when he'd finally become a Warbler himself, he'd felt a sense of belonging and pride, something he hadn't openly felt in a while and it was then that he fell in love with being here.

The small room was dark when they entered and looked exactly as they'd left it. Neat piles of clothes were at the foot of each boys' bed. Blaine had done the laundry the day before. Blaine's bed was messy, with the sheets tangled in the covers, while Kurt had been sure to make his before leaving for class. Blaine flicked on the lights and threw down his bag, reaching over to pick up the pile of clothes and set them in their designated drawers. When he finished that and turned around, he saw that Kurt had immediately laid down on his bed, closing his eyes.

He kneeled down next to the bed, brushing a hand over Kurt's forehead, ruffling his hair. "Are you okay?" His voice became low with worry and he felt Kurt's forehead, then brought his hand down to the back of his neck. "You feel warm."

"I just need to sleep." He whispered as his eyes began to droop. He was so tired.

"You've been tired for a week. Kurt, I think this is more serious than that."

"Don't get ahead of yourself." Kurt chastised softly. "I'm due for my yearly cold."

"Seriously, when was the last time you had a cold? This doesn't seem like a cold."

"Well, how about I sleep on it and we can figure it out later?"

Blaine sighed. "Okay. I'll get some Dayquil and let the rest of your teachers know you won't be there. Lunch period ends in forty-five minutes."

"Thank you."

Blaine traced small circles on Kurt's warm cheek before covering him with the blanket and whispering, "I have my cell if you need me. I'll check on you before rehearsal."

He turned off the lights and closed the door quietly, heading to the local coffee shop until it was time for fifth period.

3. Fever and Circles

After an agonizingly slow rest of the day, Blaine rechecked his phone for the millionth time as he waited for the elevator to go back to the dorms. No messages. That was good.

He knocked quietly before turning the key and letting himself in, making sure to shut the door as silently as he could. The lights, he left off as he made his way to the bed with care, being sure not to trip, a difficult thing to manage in the dark. Thankfully, he found the bed and felt along the edge to guide him to where Kurt lay. He knelt down and brought his hand up to place on his cheek. Kurt inhaled at the touch and slowly opened his eyes.

Blaine felt bad. He hadn't meant to wake him. "Hey." He whispered, brushing a stray piece of hair away from Kurt's forehead. His eyes had fully adjusted now.

"Hey." His voice was quiet and hoarse.

"How are you doing?" Blaine frowned in the darkness. "I think your fever got worse."

"I'm so cold."

Blaine grabbed the comforter off of his bed and laid it out over him. "I'll be right back okay?"

He rummaged through a bag in his drawer using his cell phone for light as he didn't want to disturb Kurt. After he found what he was searching for, he resumed his place kneeling next to the bed.

"Here. Open your mouth." He placed a thermometer under his tongue, waiting until it beeped. Using his phone for light again, Blaine read out, "102.3. Kurt, I think that's really high."

He called Wes to let him know that he and Kurt wouldn't be at rehearsal and for him to lead the Warblers.

"Kurt, I'm going to call the nurse."

"No." He moaned lightly. "Don't. I'm fine."

"You are not fine. If you don't let me call the nurse, I'll call your dad and make him call her."

There came a series of grumbles from under the covers, but Blaine took that to be a yes. He got Kurt a glass of water before heading down to get the school nurse.

When he entered the nurse's office, he saw there were two other boys there. One was holding a towel to his bloody nose, and the other had his foot propped up on a chair with a bag of ice on it.

The nurse, a friendly older lady who reminded Blaine of his grandmother, came bustling out of her office, holding a small packet of pills. She brushed past Blaine, handing the pills to the boy with the hurt ankle. "There you go. That should help with the pain." The boy mumbled thanks and downed the little red pills with water.

"And what can I do for you?" She asked, putting band-aids in a box and straightening the files in a large cabinet.

"I'm actually here for my friend. I think he's really sick and I don't know if he can make it down here. I was wondering if you'd be able to go up to the dorms and take a look at him?"

"How sick is he?"

"His temperature is 102.3."

"Oh, the poor dear." She turned to the boy with the bloody nose. "Will you be okay while I'm gone? It shouldn't be too long."

He nodded and she began to throw random necessities into a small bag. "Okay boys. I'll be back soon, but while I'm gone, Cody is in charge."

A skinny, blond haired older boy stuck his head out of the office. "Hey."

Blaine waved curtly.

"Okay, let's go." She grabbed her bag and followed Blaine in the direction of the dorms, thankfully, not far at all from her office.

He led her up to their room, knocked, and asked, "Kurt, are you okay with having the nurse come in now?"

A low 'yes' was heard, so he let themselves in. "Close your eyes." He said to Kurt as he turned on the lights.

The nurse set to work as soon as she saw him. Kurt's eyes slowly opened and he blinked in the harsh light.

"What's going on hun?"

There was a pause before he answered, "I'm so tired. And cold. And thirsty."

She nodded as she held out a thermometer. As it beeped, she took it out and read it disapprovingly, "Same."

Blaine sat on his bed as he watched her and noticed how pale Kurt looked. How sick was he?

"Any nausea? Coughing? Trouble breathing?"

Kurt shook his head to all of these. "My throat's a little sore."

She nodded. "Joint pain? Weakness?"

"A little."

She stood up. "It seems like classic flu symptoms to me, but I'd get him checked out just in case. I can't prescribe antibiotics or anything. Do you want me to call his parents?"

"That would be great." Blaine answered. "Thank you."

He wrote down Kurt's name and student ID number. She could figure out the rest from the student log. "Okay hun. I'll call your parents when I get back to my office and have them come pick you up okay?"

Kurt nodded, eyes beginning to droop again.

She pulled Blaine aside for a moment before leaving. "Make sure he gets plenty of water and sleep. I'll call you when I know how soon his parents can be here."

"Okay. Thanks again."

When she left, Blaine turned off the lights and returned to Kurt's bedside. "Do you want me to stay with you?"

He heard Kurt's mumbled answer and pulled the pillows from his bed for him to sit on. Kurt was laying on his stomach, breathing beginning to become shallow as sleep took over. Blaine let go of Kurt's clammy hand and, remembering what he always liked when he was sick as a child, began to rub Kurt's back in soothing circles.

It was just the flu.

He would be okay.

4. Breadsticks and Blazers

Blaine's eyes had begun to burn, and his hand was still moving listlessly in circles. Kurt had fallen asleep long ago and Blaine was comforted in hearing his steady inhaling and exhaling.

Breaking the silence, the dorm phone rang, shrill and unwelcome. Blaine's heart skipped a beat and he jumped up, pouncing on the phone mid ring.

"Hello?" He whispered, glancing worriedly at Kurt, and he breathed a sigh of relief when he realized he hadn't woken up.

"Hi Blaine?"

"Yeah."

"This is Becky, the school nurse. How is Kurt doing?"

"He's sleeping. Hasn't woken since you left."

"Okay. That's good. The poor thing needed sleep. I wasn't able to reach his father or stepmother, but I did get a hold of his stepbrother, Finn. He said he can be on his way as soon as I get the okay from you to pick him up. Is that okay with you? He's on the contact list, but I just wanted to double check."

Finn? He didn't know if he was comfortable leaving Kurt in Finn's care, but waiting around until Becky could reach Burt or Carole seemed unwise.

"Yes, that's fine."

"Alright. I'll call him back and he should be here within a few hours. He said he can call Kurt's cell phone when he gets here."

"Okay. Thank you."

Blaine hung up and sighed. Thinking quickly, he looked around the dim room and began to fill one of Kurt's bags with some of his clothes for when Finn arrived.

There was nothing to do now but wait. He checked the time on his cell phone. 5:00. Rehearsal had ended an hour ago. Finn would be here in about two hours. After sitting on his bed for half an hour, he got up and dug around in Kurt's school bag until he found his cell phone, pocketed it, and scribbled a note in the dark on a blank sheet of paper. He placed it pointedly on the bedside table and slipped out the door.

Kurt-

Went to get dinner. Be back soon. Call my cell from the dorm phone if you need anything. Finn will be here soon.

-Blaine

Blaine didn't know how much time passed as he walked around, and eventually ate dinner in, the East Commons. There were six or seven different options for his meal, but nothing looked particularly appetizing. He settled on a greek salad and breadsticks, though he only chose that because it was the closest available option. The food had no taste and he chewed quickly, trying to hurry, though he didn't know why. Kurt was asleep and he had both of their phones; his in the right pocket, Kurt's in the left.

There were many other students in the commons now, or maybe he hadn't noticed when he first came in. He knew most of them from his classes, many of those he knew were Warblers and he received a lot of curious looks. They were wondering why he hadn't been to rehearsal. But they didn't approach him, so he knew there was something about his face that told them to stay away.

He realized his plate was empty; he had eaten without tasting anything. Now he felt free to go back to Kurt. Then Kurt wouldn't be mad that he hadn't eaten anything. He grabbed a bottle of water and some extra breadsticks to take to him, if he wanted them.

Halfway back to the dorms, a phone rang. His left pocket vibrated. He tucked the water under his arm and flipped open the phone.

"Hello?"

"H-" There was a pause. "Kurt?"

"No. This is Blaine."

"Oh. Hey. It's Finn."

"Hey."

"Well, umm... I'm here. I don't know what you want me to-"

"Can you come up to the dorm? I'm on my way there now. I can meet you there."

"Yeah. Okay. Umm... Where are the dorms? I'm in the front parking lot. I think."

Blaine had to laugh. He sort of forgot when visitors came that they didn't know Dalton as well as he did.
"Hold on. I'll come get you."

Blaine jogged down to the parking lot in a few minutes. That was the good thing about Dalton. Things always seemed to be in close proximity with each other.

He noticed Finn immediately. It was dark outside, but the many lights around campus and the parking lot shone brightly. Leaning up against his truck, in dark jeans and a grey and green striped long sleeved shirt, he stood out amongst the Dalton's uniform-wearing students who roamed the campus, heading back to the dorms from dinner or just out enjoying the night. He hadn't talked to Finn much, but he could see why Kurt had fallen for him.

Finn noticed Blaine as well and met him halfway from the lot. "Hey." He called, raising a hand in greeting, with the truck's keys dangling from his fingers.

"Hey." Blaine turned and began to lead the way to the dorms.

"So... Kurt's sick huh?"

"Yeah. The nurse said flu, but I don't know. I'd feel better getting him checked out you know? Plus, the nurse can't give any 'real' drugs, so I think he's going to have to see his doctor anyway."

"Yeah. Okay."

"The nurse said she couldn't get a hold of Carole or Burt. Do you know where they are?"

Finn smirked. "They're at the movies. They went to dinner first. Or maybe they're going to dinner after. I don't really know. Either way, their phones are off."

They reached their destination and Blaine turned to him. "Well, thank you for coming out here. I know it's not exactly right down the street."

"No problem."

Blaine opened the door and found Kurt still on the bed. He pressed his hand to Kurt's cheek. Still just as hot as before. "Kurt." He whispered. "Kurt, wake up."

The still form under the covers began to move slowly. His eyes opened and searched around for the source of the sound that woke him.

"Kurt, Finn is here. He's going to take you home." Blaine uncapped the water bottle. "Are you thirsty?"

Kurt pushed himself up on his elbows. "Yeah." His voice was soft, but it sounded less hoarse.

Finn took a few more steps inside the room. "How are you feeling?"

"A bit better." He took a sip of the water. "Still feel like crap though."

Finn smirked. "You ready to go?"

"Yeah."

Kurt moved the covers away and got up slowly.

"Need help?" Blaine murmured, noticing Kurt's hands shaking slightly.

He took a deep breath. "I'm fine. I think." He smiled up at Blaine. "Thank you though."

"No problem."

Blaine instead grabbed the bag he had packed and Finn took it from his hand. "I packed some clothes for you in here. Don't really know why you'd need them, but it can't hurt."

Kurt smiled at the touching gesture. "Thank you."

Finn held open the door as they left, Blaine locking the door behind them. As they went down in the elevator, Blaine noticed Kurt leaning heavily against the railing. Maybe it was just the horrid lighting in here, but Kurt's skin seemed almost ashen.

The night air was colder now and Blaine felt stupid for not thinking to get Kurt a jacket. He had a fever and probably chills, so being out in the cold before getting in the car couldn't be good. He took off his blazer and wrapped it around Kurt's shoulders. Not much, but it was something.

Blaine stayed next to Kurt as Finn went ahead to get his truck. He reached into his pocket and pulled out Kurt's cell phone, slipping it into its owners' pocket. "Sorry. I forgot to give this back." He reached an arm around Kurt's back, holding him to his side. They both relaxed, tense muscles slackening.

Blaine turned his head and whispered in his ear, "I told Finn to make an appointment for you when you get home, or have your dad do it. Hopefully for tomorrow. Can you call me after you go?"

"Of course."

A rumble of a truck starting was heard close by. Blaine pulled Kurt closer. Finn pulled up, stopping by the curb, put the truck in park, and hopped out. Not letting go of Kurt, they walked up to the side of the truck as Finn opened the door, and Blaine reminded Kurt to call him and to get better soon. He squeezed Kurt's hand before shutting the door.

Blaine turned to Finn. "Turn the heat up in there okay? He's freezing."

"Yeah. No problem." He jingled the keys in his hand. "Okay, well, I guess I'll see you later."

Blaine nodded. "Try to make the appointment for as soon as you can."

"Yep." Finn walked around behind the bed of the truck, but paused and turned back. "Blaine?"

He looked up at him, glancing away from Kurt's face in the window, where he was slumped against the side of the door, eyes closed.

"He's going to be okay."

Blaine nodded again. "Just call me when you get the appointment."

One side of Finn's mouth lifted up in a departing lopsided smile and he loped around to the driver's side, and maneuvering his truck through the parking lot.

It was when he lost sight of the truck's taillights that Blaine remembered his blazer was around Kurt's shoulders and he decided he didn't care; there were three more in his closet. He sighed and checked his phone. It was just after eight o'clock. He vaguely wondered how much studying he could get in before he fell asleep.

He wasn't sure how much of that information he would retain, but then, at least he could say he tried.

5. Math and Lights

When Blaine woke the next morning, a little red light was blinking on the table. It was his cell phone. He reached over and grabbed it without getting up and saw he had two missed texts.

They were both from Finn. The first was sent at 10:14 pm.

It's Finn. Kurt gave me ur #. We r home now. He's sleeping. Will call dr in the morning.

The second was sent at 7 am, about ten minutes ago.

Mom got an app for today at 3. His fever is going down.

Blaine sighed in happy relief and replied, *Thanks for keeping me updated.*

Blaine loved school as much as Kurt did, but now, when he was so anxious to know that Kurt was okay, school seemed like a prison. He was trapped and as much as he tried to focus on Mr. Lynn's lecture, his thoughts would not let him. The math teacher's monotone, scratchy voice droned on and on, and Blaine rested his head in his hand, staring up at the whiteboard without really seeing the problem on it. The different colors highlighting each step of the problem blurred together, a rainbow of confusion. When the bell rang, he began to back up his things and realized in slight amusement that the sheet of paper he'd pulled out at the beginning of class was as blank now as it was an hour ago. He sighed. He could go to tutorial tomorrow.

When the shrill bell sounded, signaling the end of fourth period and the beginning of free period, all Blaine wanted to do was take a nap. But it was a beautiful day and he figured he had all night to sleep. He walked around for a little while before settling down beneath a large tree on the grass in the upper quad, and pulled out his copy of *Dorian Gray*. The test was in four days and he still had nine chapters left.

He got through one and a half chapters before the words started running together. He sighed and put aside the book, knowing that he wouldn't be able to concentrate.

The bell rang a short time later and Tim, one of the Warblers, jogged up next to him as he was putting away some homework.

"Hey Blaine."

Blaine smiled at the sophomore. "What's up Tim?"

"I was wondering if you could help me with the chorus. I'm having a little trouble getting my voice to reach that note."

"No problem." They walked together on the concrete pathway, lined with grass on either side now filled with students just coming out of their classes. "It's all about the breath."

When they entered the music room, Blaine noticed about half of the Warblers were already there. Nods and warm greetings met him at the door.

"Blaine!" Wes broke off from the group and powered over to him. "Dude, you have to hear this. We've been in here for an hour practicing."

"Wow, really? That's great guys."

Wes smiled and held out his hands, waiting. "Want to hear it?"

Blaine smiled wider. "Hell yeah."

Wes clapped his hands together and turned back to the teens sitting on various levels of the white steps they used to practice choreography on. "Alright guys. From the top."

6. Gravel and Breathlessness

Three days later

The phone rang, clear and obnoxiously loud in the quiet classroom. The only sounds to be heard were the scraping of lead on paper and the tapping of fingers on desks as the class focused on the English test in front of them. Some boys looked up, grateful for the distraction. Blaine ignored them, turning his attention back to a particularly difficult problem. He wished now that he had finished his assigned reading. Kurt usually went over the important parts with him. He was good at knowing what details would show up on the tests. But Blaine had found out two days ago that Kurt's doctor thought he had the flu, as suspected, and given him antibiotics and an order to rest until he felt better. However, they'd taken blood samples and sent them to be tested just to be sure. Blaine had talked to him this morning and he sounded not as tired, so he hoped the antibiotics were working. He found it difficult to study without Kurt's diligent guidance to keep him on track.

He sighed and lightly drummed the end of his pencil against his lips, as he did when he was thinking, and turned his thoughts back to his test.

Over which issue does Basil confront Dorian on the-

"Blaine?"

He looked up, startled.

"You need to go to the front office. Bring your things."

His eyebrows pulled down in a confused frown and he got up quietly, pulling his bag onto his shoulder and grabbing his test and pencil in one hand. "I'm not done with the test," he said as he reached the front desk.

"That's fine Blaine. You can finish it later."

His teacher held out his hand and Blaine handed over his test, getting slightly anxious, and began to walk to the office, hearing the door creak behind him as he left.

He had no idea why he was being called into the office. Did the dean want to congratulate him for something? He had been working the Warblers harder and they sounded really good, almost great. Or maybe he was in trouble for something? His mind raced as he tried to think of the things he'd done recently. He couldn't remember doing anything that would be seen as rule-breaking. Maybe he just didn't realize he'd done something wrong?

Mind reeling with these possibilities and their consequences, he took a breath and pulled open the heavy door, hand sliding on the cold brass door handle. He looked up and saw the dean standing there in front, and off to the side sitting in one of the chairs, was Burt.

"Hello Blaine." The dean greeted him, voice deep and strong.

He heard the door shut with a small *click* behind him and he stood up a little straighter. "Hello."

"Do you know why you're here?"

"No, I don't." He shook his head slightly, feeling his palms begin to get clammy.

The dean looked over at Burt and nodded. Blaine looked too. There was something different about Burt. He looked... tired? Burt stood, crossing the room to stand next to the tall, slightly overweight man.

"Blaine you've been excused from the rest of your classes today," the dean told him, eyes locked on his.

"What about rehearsal?" The question blurted from his mouth before he could think.

"I'm sure they will get along without you just fine for one day." His lips twitched into a small smile. He turned to Burt, nodded curtly and shook his hand. His voice lowered and he leaned in slightly as he said, "Again, I'm terribly sorry. If there's anything we can do in the way of fundraising or anything, don't hesitate to call."

"Thank you." Burt's mumbled reply sounded like he was trying too hard to be nice.

Blaine stood there, watching this exchange of words, trying to gauge the situation. What the hell was going on here? Before he could do anything, Burt put a hand on his shoulder, turning him around and guiding him out the door. The hand dropped as the door shut and Burt began to walk faster, towards the visitor parking lot. Blaine didn't know what else to do besides follow.

"Burt, what's going on?" He kept his voice low and stayed a little to the side of him, his blazer flapping open a little as he kept pace.

"In a second. Just... just wait a minute."

The dismissal was terse and just made Blaine even more worried, though now he was slightly annoyed. He stopped walking.

Burt stopped after a moment, ran a hand over his head, and quickly turned back to the confused teenager standing a few feet behind him.

"Blaine, please. Just not here. As soon as we get to the car. Just not here."

Burt's eyes were searching Blaine's, almost begging. That look in his eyes was terrifying and he fell back into step next to him without a word.

The sun was out today and it was warm. The clouds had drifted in lazily during the day. The gravel crunched under his shoes as they walked, getting closer to the open parking lot. Burt's truck was parked in front and Blaine got in wordlessly, waiting for Burt to keep his promise.

Burt slid into the driver's side, but didn't put the key in the ignition. His head was down and he took a breath, gripping his hands on the steering wheel and looking up, not gazing at anything, just staring straight ahead as he began. His voice was low and he didn't look at the teen sitting next to him.

"Blaine, you know how life sometimes seems unfair?"

"Sure, I think." Blaine said slowly, not really understanding.

"How you try to do everything right and someone just comes up and snatches the only good thing you have left right out from under you?" His voice was getting wobbly and his hands gripped harder at the steering wheel.

"Mr. Hummel, you're scaring me. What's going on?" He reached a tentative hand out and placed it on his shoulder. Burt didn't look at him, but lowered his head on his hands for a moment, before regaining composure and sitting up straight, finally meeting Blaine's eyes.

"You mean a lot to Kurt. You know that right? You mean a hell of a lot to him. I don't know where he'd be if it weren't for you."

He nodded, encouraging him to go on, though the fear increased with his rambling.

"You have no idea how much you've changed him. He's happy. He's... he's not scared anymore."

"Mr. Hummel." Blaine's tone was definite and strong, unknowingly demanding an answer that would change everything.

Burt let his gaze fall; his voice so low wasn't sure he heard right. "Kurt has cancer."

7. Disbelief and Heaviness

Blaine felt his world fall. His throat closed and his chest constricted, his heart stopped for a long pause before banging against his ribs in sporadic thuds. He felt his entire body grow cold, his hands tingled. He couldn't breathe.

He swallowed hard against the lump in his throat and said shakily, "But he's just sick. He has the flu."

Burt sighed heavily. "That's what we thought too."

"Wait. What... Are... How can... That's not..." His voice swelled louder and faster and became more panicked with the jumbled sentence fragments that escaped his lips.

Burt placed a hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently. "Easy, son. Breathe."

Blaine found it hard to even remember how to breathe as his eyes darted back and forth in disbelief. This was all some elaborate joke. It had to be.

The sound of the key turning in the ignition and the engine roaring to life seemed so much louder now. The sounds were deafening.

"I know this is hard to hear and I'm sorry you had to find out like this, but I thought it was best you heard it from me."

"When." Blaine's question turned into a harsh statement as he flicked his head up, eyes blazing.

"The test results came back yesterday night. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. We've had a lot to deal with..."

His hands clenched so tightly, the knuckles turned white. He wasn't even mad that Kurt hadn't told him. "What kind of..." He couldn't bring himself to say the word.

"Leukemia."

His eyes squeezed shut and he bit his lip hard. This couldn't be happening.

It was a long time before either of them spoke again. Blaine's next question was spoken in a hard tone, closed off and sounding desperately as though he didn't want to know the answer. It was a question that Burt had hoped would not come up. He didn't want to face it either.

"How long does he have?"

Burt just stared ahead and snapped the turn signal on, pulling onto the street and into the Hummel driveway. He turned off the truck and sighed deeply.

"Blaine, why don't you go talk to him?"

Blaine looked down at his own cold hands and noticed they were shaking.

"He's in his room. I'm sure he wants to see you."

He nodded and heaved opened the door. It seemed to weigh a thousand pounds. They trudged up the steps without saying anything and Burt fumbled with the key to unlock the front door. Blaine made his way up the stairs feeling his legs grow heavier with every step he took and stopped outside Kurt's door, which was cracked open so the light shone through in the dim hallway. He knocked carefully and felt his heart thud when he heard his beautiful voice call, "Come in."

8. Tears and Gentleness

Blaine watched his hand lift up and push the door open, watched as his feet moved him forward. He felt like he had no control over what his body was doing. There was a large bag on the floor, open and filled with clothes. Kurt was sitting on the small bench in front of the mirror on his desk. He didn't look up as Blaine entered. He was entirely immersed in the journal that lay in front of him, a pen held lightly in his hand as he filled the page with his slightly curly, scrawled handwriting.

"I'm almost done with this sentence. Hang on a second."

Blaine didn't move. It was only a few seconds, but it seemed like an eternity before Kurt closed the journal and placed the pen carefully on top before looking up. His pale face broke into a smile as he saw who had come in, but as he swung his legs around on the bench, turning away from the reflection, and looking into the face of the dark-haired teenager in his doorway, his smile fell.

"Oh God, he told you."

Kurt got up, crossing the room in three long strides and took Blaine's hands in his. "Come on. Sit down."

He led him to the neatly made bed and sat opposite him, never letting go of their touch. "Your hands are freezing." Kurt remarked and curled his fingers around Blaine's hands.

Blaine's mind was racing and it was all he could do to not fall apart as he looked into Kurt's beautiful face. The blue eyes looked at his softly. They sat, neither one saying a word for a long time before Blaine's voice, for once small and meek, broke the silence.

"Tell me it isn't true."

There was a pause and Kurt looked down for a second before meeting his eyes again. "I wish it wasn't."

"You're serious? This is really happening?"

Blaine's voice shook and his eyes had filled with unshed tears. Blaine's hands were suddenly empty as Kurt leaned forward and pulled him into a hug. Cheek pressed to cheek, Kurt whispered in his ear.

"It's going to be okay."

Blaine's whole body began to shake. He was losing it. Kurt wrapped one arm around to his back and the other, he ran through Blaine's hair, holding him tightly. The strangled breath of the teenager he held came faster and Kurt kept whispering in his ear, not really knowing or caring what he was saying, as long as it gave Blaine some comfort.

Blaine squeezed his eyes shut as the tears began to fall and he brought his hands up to pull Kurt in tighter. He never wanted to let him go. Kurt leaned his head down, softly pressing his lips against Blaine's neck. "It's going to be okay," he whispered against his skin.

Blaine took deep breaths. If he was holding Kurt too tightly, he didn't say anything and Blaine immediately felt guilty. Kurt was the one who had cancer. Kurt was the one who needed to be comforted right now. So why was Kurt the one who was being strong?

Blaine's breathing began to slow and Kurt broke their embrace, unwinding his hands from around him.

"You told me you had the flu." Blaine whispered, unable to look Kurt in the face.

"I know. I thought I did. Until the blood test results came back. They took a few days."

Blaine didn't speak. He couldn't. He didn't know how to say what he was feeling. Warm palms found Blaine's cheeks, holding his face to look Kurt in the eye.

"This isn't the end of the world." Kurt told him, with more strength than he had thought himself possible of possessing.

"I don't want to lose you." Blaine's whisper was full of sadness, though he no longer cried.

Kurt smiled slyly. "Then don't stop looking."

Even under these horrible circumstances, Kurt was able to make the situation seem slightly less agonizing. It was one of the many things Blaine loved about him.

They were close. They were so close. Kurt could see the thick ring of eyelashes lining those beautiful deep brown eyes, so full of pain. Blaine became suddenly aware of how Kurt's soft hands were holding his face so gently and how he had involuntarily leaned forward, drawn into the comfort of him.

"Kurt... I..." Blaine began his sentence in a whisper.

"Blaine." The murmured word brushed softly from Kurt's lips.

There was a tense, hesitant pause before their lips met in unison. The kiss was so gentle, Blaine wasn't even sure it had even happened. They pulled away so an inch of space was between them. A sigh of longing escaped his lips before Blaine leaned in and kissed him again, hands reaching up to support Kurt's neck, pulling him in. Kurt pressed a palm to Blaine's cheek. Though Blaine knew Kurt didn't have the flu, at this moment, he would risk catching anything in order to kiss him.

Much too soon, Blaine broke the kiss, and lowered his head onto Kurt's shoulder for a moment before looking into his eyes.

He struggled to keep his voice even as he found Kurt's hands and linked their fingers together. "What happens now?"

"I start chemotherapy tomorrow."

"And then what?"

"Well, there's a few rounds of chemo and-"

"And if that doesn't work?" His words came out harsher than he'd meant them to.

"I don't know. They're going to tell me all that stuff when I go in tomorrow."

"How long does it last?"

"Five days. Then a three or four week recovery period. I have three sessions and they'll see where it goes from there."

Blaine squeezed his eyes closed and turned away from him.

There was a long pause. Kurt's gaze softened. He brought a hand up to his cheek and turned his face to meet his eyes.

"It'll be okay Blaine."

Blaine set his jaw and Kurt saw the fierce loyalty flash in his eyes. "How do you know that?"

"I don't." His voice was low. "I know this must be hard on you. I don't know if I would be able to handle it if it was you who was going through this."

"And it's different because it's happening to you? Kurt, I don't think-"

"It's not a death sentence alright? It's chemotherapy and it'll probably help."

"And what if it doesn't?"

"Listen," Kurt grabbed both of Blaine's hands again, squeezing gently. "Whatever happens, happens. But let's not get ahead of ourselves okay?"

"I can't lose you!" The tears spilled over; anger and agonizing hurt filled him.

Kurt didn't know what to do other than hold him. He could only gauge how Blaine was feeling by his reactions and he didn't want to make him feel any worse than he obviously felt. When Kurt noticed Blaine had stopped shaking, he pulled away from their embrace and pressed his forehead to his, bringing a hand up around the back of his neck. They stayed that way for a long time, lost in their thoughts and connected in emotions. Kurt wanted to kiss him so badly.

Blaine bit his lip and they pulled away.

Kurt spoke first. "Are you okay?"

Blaine's whispered answer was simple and Kurt expected it. "No."

"What do you want me to do?" Hold him, kiss him, let him cry, whatever. Kurt would do anything at this moment to take away the pain Blaine was experiencing.

His answer was another question, spoken low and small. "How do they do chemo?"

Not the question Kurt was expecting, but it might help him to know. "I'm not entirely sure. I think it's like an IV and it's in for five days, then they take it out and then I rest for a while."

"I want to go with you."

Kurt's eyes softened and he curled his hands around Blaine's. "I don't know if you can. And I can see how much this is hurting you. You're probably in some sort of shock right now and I don't want you to feel like you have to be with me."

"I want to."

"Blaine, I'll let you know when you can see me after okay?"

Blaine felt like his heart had been painfully squeezed. Kurt didn't want him there.

A long pause passed before Blaine was able to control the ache and looked him in the eye without worrying that he was going to cry again. He didn't want to cry again.

"The day you first missed school... did you know?"

"No. I didn't feel good and I was tired."

"You're still warm. Is your fever gone?"

"It's slightly high. But nothing to worry about."

Blaine doubted that. Kurt had a tendency to make these things seem as though they didn't matter much. Blaine brushed his thumb across one of the bruises on his arm. "How long have you had these?"

"A few days before I felt sick."

"Why didn't you tell me you were sick?"

"I didn't want to worry you."

"Kurt, you can tell me anything."

"I'll remember that."

A small smile pulled at Blaine's lip. "You'd better."

Blaine looked up into Kurt's face and noticed that there was a glazed look in his eyes. Tiredness? Sadness? Sickness? He felt guilty for asking all these questions.

"You should get some sleep." He whispered.

He moved off the bed and began to pull down the comforter and sheets. "Do you want to change?"

Kurt shook his head, standing up to wrap Blaine in a hug. Blaine pulled him in, enveloping him and trying to say so many things without saying anything at all.

Kurt laid on the bed and Blaine covered him with the blanket. Brushing his hand over his hair, Blaine leaned over to kiss his forehead and whispered, "You'd better call me or I swear to God, I will bulldoze that hospital faster than Lady Gaga changes her hair."

"Of course I will." A small laugh broke through Kurt's lips.

Blaine stood up to leave, but when he got halfway across the room, Kurt called him back.

"Wait."

He turned, hands in his pockets.

"Will you stay with me? For now?"

He smiled, pulled the chair from Kurt's vanity mirror over, flicked off the lights, and sat by his bed. "You'd have to force me to leave you."

And he meant it.

9. 2am and Changes

Blaine remembered his eyelids getting heavy, though it wasn't near the time he normally went to bed. But he was exhausted. He remembered getting up, feeling his way around in the dark, and kicking off his shoes before crawling into bed next to Kurt. He remembered hearing the soft, rhythmic breathing pattern of the boy who lay beside him before he pulled up the covers. Then he didn't remember anything. He didn't dream.

They fell asleep so early; their sleep schedule was disrupted. Blaine usually slept for eight hours, but today, he slept for ten. Unusual, but not unexpected. Opening one eye, he could see the luminescent red glow coming from the clock on Kurt's bedside table. 2 a.m.

He didn't move. Kurt was curled up close to him. So close, if he had rolled over, he would have squashed him. He didn't want to move. Instead, Blaine reached an arm over and pulled himself into the curve of Kurt's body, holding him securely. This was how he wanted to stay forever.

Blaine nuzzled his nose against Kurt's neck and he pulled back and lightly kissed where his nose had been a moment before. Kurt inhaled deeply and for a moment, Blaine feared he had woken him. But he just curled up tighter, pulling Blaine's arm in with him. Blaine was okay with that.

When he next awoke, it was five in the morning. And he was sweating. Neither boy had moved since Blaine had last woken, and Blaine could feel Kurt's body heat radiating through his shirt as if there was a heating pad on his back. He scooted away, carefully taking his arm back with him. His hand was numb. He slowly wiggled his fingers, trying to get the prickly sensation of sleep to go away.

Kurt rolled over as Blaine backed away. Blaine froze. Kurt opened his eyes.

Blaine bit his lip. "Sorry." He whispered.

"No need." Kurt whisper-replied. "I was waking up anyway. What time is it?"

"Five."

"In the morning?" Kurt groaned. "I have to leave at eight."

"Are you tired?"

"No. You?"

"No." Blaine slowly began to sit up.

Kurt did too and Blaine's hand found its way to his forehead. "You're really hot." Blaine remarked.

Kurt smiled. "Thank you."

Blaine snorted and stood up, stretching his arms above his head, and trudged into Kurt's bathroom. He came out quickly and held a thermometer in one hand and a washcloth in the other.

He sat back on the bed and handed the thermometer to Kurt. When it beeped, he read aloud, "101.9."

"It went down." Kurt told him.

"But that's still high."

Kurt could picture the look on Blaine's face in his mind, as he could only see shadows in the dark. He imagined Blaine's beautiful lips pursed together, his eyebrows drawn down, and his hazel eyes filled with concern. Blaine cared too much for his own good. And that was one of the things Kurt loved about him.

Kurt could hear and feel Blaine move off the bed. He heard light footsteps on the carpet, and then the light flicked on. Kurt groaned and closed his eyes.

"The light! It burns!"

"Shut up." Blaine laughed.

Kurt peeked out from one eye to see Blaine sit on the edge of the bed, nearest him. He still held the washcloth and began to scoot closer. Kurt didn't move and opened both eyes fully.

"This always helped me when I had a fever." Blaine said and nonchalantly brought the cloth to Kurt's forehead, bringing it slowly down to trace his cheekbone.

Kurt involuntarily closed his eyes. It felt so good. Both in having the coldness on his blazing cheek, and in knowing that it was Blaine who was taking care of him.

Blaine moved the cloth to the other cheek. Some water dripped onto Kurt's chest, creating little grey patches in the now wrinkly white uniform shirt that stuck to his skin. He shivered.

"Is that okay?" Blaine asked softly. "It's not too cold?"

Kurt opened his eyes and smiled. "It's perfect."

This time, it was Kurt who initiated the kiss. He reached a hand up to the back of Blaine's neck and pulled him down to his level. For having as little experience as he did, Kurt couldn't believe he'd let their friendship go on for so long without saying anything about how he felt. Kissing Blaine was amazing. He felt safe, happy, loved.

When Kurt pulled away, he looked up into Blaine's eyes and since finding out about the cancer, for a moment, he wasn't scared out of his mind.

"What do you want to do now?" Blaine asked.

Kurt paused, thinking, and then let go of Blaine's neck and began to get up. "Come on." He said as he bolted past Blaine with a surprisingly quick gait.

"Wait. What?" Blaine turned his head in the direction Kurt had gone, now just confused. "I thought you were resting before chemo!"

Kurt's voice sounded from outside the door. "You thought wrong. Come on, lazy. You're wasting time."

Still confused, Blaine furrowed his eyebrows again, shoved his hands in his pockets, and turned on his heel to follow his apparently crazed boyfriend.

Blaine caught up with him on the stairs. "You do realize that it's five fifteen in the morning right?" He whispered, trying desperately not to wake Burt and Carole or Finn, when at this early in the morning, every sound seemed magnified a million times.

"Of course."

"And your plan is..."

"Just trust me."

Kurt marched up to the back door and carefully turned the knob. As he pulled the door halfway open, it squeaked and both boys winced, hoping Burt wouldn't hear. Kurt slipped through the opening as soon as there was enough space for him and Blaine followed, still uncertain. He closed the door behind him and when he turned around, Kurt was standing in the middle of the Hummel's grassy backyard, staring at the sky.

Without looking at him, Kurt settled himself down in the grass, lying on his back with knees bent up and hands behind his head.

"Blaine. Come on." He said eagerly.

The corner of his mouth lifted in a small laugh as he walked over and sat down next to him. There were little patches of dew on the blades of green grass. Blaine stared down at Kurt and noticed how un-Kurt-like he looked at this moment.

His hair was sticking up on the side that he had slept on, his white button down shirt was slightly twisted around his torso and the fading patches of water still stood out on his chest. His pants were wrinkled horribly. He wore no shoes and one sock had been pulled down, bunching at his ankle. His face was flushed, though amazingly still pale, and his blue eyes stared up at the sky as if seeing it for the first time.

And Blaine realized he loved it.

Kurt's eyes met his and said airily, "You're making me nervous. Lay down."

Blaine smirked, but did as he was told and lay beside him, bringing his hands up under his head. For a moment, he couldn't take his eyes off Kurt's profile and his beautiful jaw line, but then, he followed Kurt's upward gaze to the sky and realized now why he'd brought him down here in the first place.

It was so calm, so peaceful here. Blaine closed his eyes and he could hear the small, random chirping of birds off in some tree somewhere. He could smell the grass and a hint of the cologne Kurt had worn the day before. He felt safe. When his eyes opened, he saw the darkness and the mixture of the black sky, filled with the purple and grey clouds. He exhaled deeply and could see his breath make a white cloud in the air before disappearing. It was cold out here, but he didn't care.

"Ten more minutes." Kurt whispered beside him.

Blaine knew he was waiting for the sunrise. And to be honest, as much as he was not a morning person, he knew he would do anything to make Kurt happy. He had always kind of wanted to see the sunrise anyway, and with Kurt next to him, it was worth being up early.

They laid in silence under the dark sky, waiting for the time when the light would begin to peek out from its slumber. Out of the corner of his eye, Blaine noticed Kurt staring at him and he immediately became self-conscious.

"What?"

"Thank you."

"For?" He propped himself up on his elbow, resting his chin in his hand.

"For staying with me."

"Kurt, you say that like it was a hard decision." Blaine laughed.

Kurt smiled lightly and mirrored Blaine's posture. He looked down. "I'll call you after I'm done. Or today. I don't know what I'm going to be doing. It's probably going to be boring. I should have bought a new book. I-"

He was rambling.

"Kurt, it's okay. You can call me whenever you feel like it. And I can bring you a book. I've got plenty that I'm not using." He laughed again.

"Thank you."

There was a pause. Kurt bit his lip and laid down again, staring at the sky.

"Blaine, I'm scared."

The air was so clean and the early morning was so clear, it seemed to allow for a change. The comfort given to Blaine by Kurt last night instilled a new courage in him and he was able to face this situation clearly, though inside, he was still scared as hell.

Blaine laid down again too and turned his head to face Kurt. "I know you are."

Kurt closed his eyes. "I don't think I can do this."

"The chemo?"

"No. Just *this* in general." He sighed. "I don't know. I can't tell anyone I'm scared."

"Why not?"

"Because... because then it will make this real. If I'm not scared, then there's no reason to be worried."

Blaine's voice was gentle. "You can't pretend like this doesn't exist. Burt and Carole and Finn love you and they expect you to be scared. It's a natural emotion, especially now."

"But I can't tell them. Dad is so fragile right now. Did you know that after he found out, he couldn't open a bottle of water because he was shaking so bad? I'm the cause of that. Me."

Blaine couldn't believe what was coming out of Kurt's mouth. He knew he was selfless, but he hadn't realized how much. He had cancer and he was worried about his dad.

"Kurt, any parent would act like that. You're his son. He loves you and he's scared. There's no reason to act brave in front of him to spare his feelings. Do you remember how you felt when he had the heart attack?"

Blaine paused, searching Kurt's eyes. Kurt had told him about that during one of their "spill your guts" out talks. "Do you remember how scared you were? How you were so sad, so angry, so hurt? That's what he's feeling." He stopped, watching as Kurt's eyes slowly glazed over. He remembered.

He never wanted to feel that hopeless ever again.

"You know why I cried so hard I couldn't speak last night?" As if to illustrate his point, Blaine's throat began to constrict. "It's because I'm scared of losing you. Your dad is too. You told me it was going to be okay and now I need to tell you."

Blaine reached over and gently turned Kurt's face by the chin to meet his eyes. He paused, locked on his gaze and told him with the greatest amount of courage he could find, "It. Is. Going. To. Be. Okay."

He said each word slowly and when Kurt closed his eyes, Blaine leaned over and kissed his forehead. Then he laid back down and stared at the sky, silently leaving Kurt to his thoughts.

A minute later, Kurt's hand wound into his and he intertwined their fingers. The sun was rising. The sky, once black and cold, was soon painted in an array of purple, pink, orange, yellow, and blue. The clouds became washed in a shimmer and the mist seemed to glow. The sun's rays reflected down on them, making the dew on the grass sparkle. Birds, embracing the beautiful morning, sang in delicate harmonies.

Blaine felt the weight of Kurt's hand in his and, noticing happily that their hands fit perfectly together, he smiled and thought that he should start getting up earlier more often.

With every sunrise, begins a new day. And the elemental shift from night to morning had never seemed more important than it did today.

10. Pancakes and White Jeans

Blaine had no idea what time it was as they lay there, silently watching the rising sun. It was only when Burt opened the back door that he knew they had been out too long.

Blaine turned his head and heard Burt mutter a curse word under his breath before marching out and loudly proclaiming, "Kurt, you need to get ready! It's seven o'clock. What are you doing out here?"

Kurt had sat up, taking Blaine up with him. Burt grabbed Kurt's free hand and pulled him up, then ran his hand over his forehead. His face fell to one of concern. "You still have a fever. You can't be out here when it's this cold. Get inside and take a shower. Carole's making breakfast now so you can eat when you're done. Make sure you wear something comfortable. I'll have Finn bring down your bag."

Kurt nodded solemnly. Blaine felt terrible. Kurt's hand was warm, but he noticed Kurt was shivering and unsuccessfully trying not to. How long had he been that cold? Why didn't he say anything? Blaine knew he should have told him to stay inside. Kurt let go of him before leaving to follow his father's instructions.

Burt shifted his weight from foot to foot before looking Blaine in the eye. "You can eat with us if you want."

Blaine smiled. "That sounds great."

As Blaine walked through the back door, he contemplated how he was going to get to school on time. It was seven o'clock and it took an hour and forty-five minutes to get to Dalton. Class started at nine.

He figured he could be late today.

He milled around the Hummel living room before wandering into the kitchen where Carole was busy flipping pancakes. She turned her head when she heard him enter and a small smile appeared on her face.

"Hi. I'm Carole. I don't think we've met yet."

Her hair was up in a sloppy ponytail and she wore pajamas and an apron. Her hands were covered in pancake mix, which she wiped on the apron before offering her hand out to Blaine.

He took it, telling her, "I'm Blaine. Nice to meet you."

She smiled a bit sadly. He noticed her eyes, the same color as Finn's, were red and blurry. "Kurt has told me so much about you. It's nice to finally meet you."

"Do you need any help?"

"That'd be great. Could you set the table? Plates are in the far cabinet and forks are in this drawer."

He gathered five plates in his hands and turned around to see Finn trudging down the stairs. He moved slowly, obviously having just gotten up, and rubbed a hand through his hair, making it stick up even more than it was. He wore red flannel pajama bottoms and a rumpled white tee shirt. He blinked languidly and nodded to Blaine as he sat down at the table.

"What's up?" He asked sleepily.

"Did you even sleep last night?"

"It's never enough, man. But it was kind of hard to fall asleep last night, I mean, with... you know."

Blaine nodded. Oh, he knew.

"Don't you have school?"

"I'm going late today."

Finn nodded. Blaine had finished setting the table and Carole began sliding hot pancakes onto each plate. Burt appeared, fully dressed and ready for the day, and rummaged through the fridge for butter and syrup, which he placed on the table. Blaine could hear the water running upstairs and he knew Kurt was taking a shower. He had to act fast.

"Finn, can I talk to you?"

"Sure." He was in the middle of pouring syrup over his stack of steaming pancakes and seemed to have perked up.

Blaine paused. "In the living room?"

Finn looked up. "Oh, uh... sure."

He stared longingly at his pancakes, but got up to follow Blaine. Finn flopped on the couch and eyed Blaine as he unknowingly sat in Finn's father's chair, but didn't say a word. As much as he accepted Burt into his life, he wasn't ready to give up his father's chair and Burt had moved it into the living room himself when they had moved to Kurt's house. Perhaps doing that was a peace offering at the time, but Finn was glad all the same.

"So, what's up?"

"Are you going to tell Glee?"

He looked taken aback at that. Maybe it didn't dawn on him that that responsibility would fall on him. "Oh, well... I guess. I mean, if Kurt wants me to." He paused. "Are you telling the Warblers?"

"I don't know. Dalton knows already. At least, the dean does. I don't know if they've told the other teachers or any of the students. But I have a feeling the Warblers would want to hear it from me. More personal you know? If it comes from the dean or another teacher, I think they would feel... I don't know... like-"

"Like we didn't trust them enough to tell them?"

"Yeah."

"That makes sense. I know what you mean though. I want to be the one to tell them, if Kurt doesn't."

"Okay. Well, we can talk to everyone else and see what they think."

Finn stood up, nodded, and plodded back into the kitchen.

Kurt was sitting at the table when Blaine entered. He smiled at him and began to carefully cut his pancakes.

"Here you go Blaine." Carole swiftly handed him a plate with two steaming pancakes on it.

He smiled up at her and sat next to Kurt. They ate in silence for a while, lost in their own thoughts. Blaine noticed Kurt's hand shook. He must be really scared. Blaine was too, but it was different for Kurt. Kurt actually had to go through this.

Blaine was the first to speak and he began his sentence slowly. "I was wondering if you've told McKinley yet?"

He directed his question at Carole and Burt. Kurt stopped eating, his fork frozen in midair.

"We did. We let both schools know when we found out."

"Do you know if the students know?"

Carole and Burt looked at each other, then back at Blaine. "We asked the principals not to say anything to anyone but the teachers until we talked to Kurt."

Finn's gaze immediately moved to Kurt's face. He was staring at Burt, who asked him, "Kurt, what do you want us to do?"

Kurt looked back and forth from every face at the table, stopping the longest on Blaine's. "I... I don't know." He switched his gaze to Finn as he said, "You have Nationals to worry about." He looked back at Blaine. "And you need to worry about the Warblers. They can't get distracted."

Blaine's voice was soft. "They're going to start questioning things eventually."

"I know."

Finn spoke for the first time since they'd sat at the table. "It's up to you Kurt, but I think they would want to know. They still love you and they will want to be there for you, as much as we are. You can tell them directly if that will make it easier, or I can tell them if you want. Or, we don't have to say anything yet. But I really think they would want to know."

Kurt turned grateful eyes on his stepbrother. "I don't know if I could tell them." He said softly. "I would like them to know, but not from a teacher." He sighed. "But I don't want to put you in that position."

"Kurt, it's not a problem. Really."

Kurt looked back and forth between the two boys. Blaine nodded at him encouragingly.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course." Blaine smiled at him, found his hand under the table and squeezed.

Kurt's whisper was barely audible. "Thank you."

"Hurry up and eat guys. We have to leave in fifteen minutes." Burt said this, and yet, hadn't touched his food at all.

Blaine barely managed to force down his breakfast. He didn't feel like eating at all, but Carole had made it for them and he knew she probably wanted the house to feel normal with all the chaos of the preceding days. Finn seemed to have no problem finishing off his food, and he was the first up to clear the table when everyone was done.

Blaine ran upstairs to get dressed. His school stuff was still in Burt's truck; he hadn't bothered to take it out. "Getting dressed" was actually only a matter of grabbing his discarded blazer and shoes. He tried his best to smooth out the wrinkles in his shirt, which was thankfully mostly covered by his blazer, which didn't look too bad. His pants were in bad shape though. There was no way he could get the creases out now.

"If there was more time, I'd iron them for you, but you can borrow mine if you want."

Blaine hadn't even noticed Kurt come in the doorway. He rummaged through some drawers at the bottom and pulled out a fresh white button down and a pair of dark grey slacks. Smiling, he tossed them to Blaine. "I kept an extra pair here. Just in case. Oh, and this is yours."

He handed over a square dark grey bundle. His blazer. It had been washed, ironed and carefully folded.

"Thank you for that by the way. I wore it when dad took me to the hospital that day. It was comforting."

That was just like Kurt, to think of the things that weren't obvious. Or maybe, they just weren't obvious to Blaine. He shook out the shirt, which was amazingly wrinkle-free, even after being in that drawer for a while, and switched it with his own. It was a tiny bit tighter than Blaine would have liked, but after he realized his range of motion wasn't slighted, he decided he'd rather look polished than comfortable.

"Heads up." Kurt's head looked up from his vanity mirror and suddenly something black came hurtling through the air at Blaine's face. He caught it and gratefully tugged Kurt's comb through his hair.

"And..." Kurt disappeared into his bathroom for a moment and came out with an extra toothbrush.

Blaine laughed. "Always prepared aren't you?"

He laughed too. "Only because you never are."

"Whatever. I'll be downstairs when you're ready."

Blaine returned to the kitchen, where he found Carole and Finn doing the dishes. They didn't notice he was leaning in the doorway, hands in his pockets, waiting.

"Are you sure you want to go to school today, honey?"

"No. I don't, but I can't not go. I need to tell them."

"It's a brave thing you're doing for Kurt. I'm proud of you."

Finn didn't look at her, but at the dish he was holding. "Thanks mom."

"Just know that they'll probably get upset and want answers and you don't have to tell them anything you don't feel comfortable with."

"Do you think Kurt will talk to them eventually?"

"I don't know honey. I hope so, but give him time. I'm glad Kurt has Blaine and it's so relieving that he can count on you too."

At that moment, Kurt came down the stairs, dressed in cuffed white jeans, faded (on purpose) shirt, and a black blazer. When Burt saw him, he stood up, keys in hand.

"Kurt, I told you to dress comfortably."

Kurt hoisted his black bag onto his shoulder. "Just because I'm going to the hospital doesn't mean I can't look good."

Burt sighed. "Alright. But I'll bring you some sweatpants later today."

Cringing at the word *sweatpants*, Kurt turned to Blaine. "I'll call you when I get done okay? No arguing. You still have school and other things to think about besides me."

He nodded. Burt opened the door and began to head out to the truck. Kurt hugged his stepmom and Finn in turn, pausing with Carole, who held him longer as her eyes began to fill with tears. Finn clasped a hand on her shoulder when Kurt left the kitchen.

Blaine's eyes followed Kurt as he turned to the door, but his heart wrenched. It felt like he was being made to carry out a death sentence. He reached out and grabbed Kurt's shoulders, turning him to face him fully before throwing his arms around him. Kurt dropped his bag and pulled Blaine close.

After a while, Kurt pulled away. "It'll be okay." He told him softly. "I'll call you."

The door shut with a little *click* and all Blaine wanted to do was run after Kurt and tell him to never leave him. Instead, he sighed and turned back to Finn, who stood there with his backpack on his shoulder and Blaine's school bag in his hand.

"I thought you might need this."

Blaine took it gratefully. "Thank you."

Finn's lopsided smile appeared on his face for a moment before Carole announced that she would be driving both of them to school. Blaine tried to tell her that he could have his parents pick him up, but she wouldn't take no for an answer and soon enough, they were in her car. McKinley High was a short distance away and Finn was dropped off first.

"Good luck." Blaine told him with a hint of sadness.

Finn nodded, eyes stony, and wished him the same.

Despite having ten hours of sleep the night before, Blaine felt exhausted. He had no idea what he was going to say to the Warblers and he doubted the news would be easy to swallow. The two were quiet the whole ride to Dalton and after he repeatedly thanked Carole for driving him, when she pulled away and he stared up at the school, he wondered if he would regret coming today.

11. Wishes and Gold Stars

Finn

He trudged into school that morning, exhausted already. Sure, he'd gone to school surviving on three hours of sleep before and made it (barely), but this was different. This was emotional exhaustion, coupled with the physical exhaustion because he hadn't been able to sleep the night before.

His mind was reeling with how to tell Glee about Kurt. He wanted to; he knew they would take it better if it came from him and in a way, he felt like he needed to do this. It wouldn't really be hard. He just had to take a deep breath and say it. Kurt has cancer. Three words. That was it. Just three words. And he already felt the crushing weight of it on his lungs. Three words that would change the lives of those who heard them. Three words that had to be said. They would be upset. He knew that. But he didn't know how to cope with that. He could deal with himself, sure, but the others, who loved Kurt just as much as he did? That was not going to be easy.

He felt nauseous. His stomach twisted and suddenly he wished he didn't eat those pancakes for breakfast.

The hallway was crowded with students, just like any normal day, but he didn't really notice them. The chatter and laughter around him became white noise; humming and annoying and still there no matter how much he tried to block it out. He wished he could swat it away like a fly. He wished he could ball up this whole situation into a jumbled heap of fear and anger and sadness and throw it away. Just throw it away.

Maybe he should sing it, not tell it. He was talking to Glee club after all. They had no problem singing about their feelings and he shouldn't be the exception. But there just wasn't a multitude of songs about cancer. He sighed.

Someone whacked their shoulder into his and he twisted around, not in pain at all, but because the impact had shocked his system into momentary panic for a split second, where his heart raced. And then he felt nothing. All he wanted to go was go back home and sleep.

"Sorry." He mumbled and kept walking, hoping that somehow he could not have to go through today.

There was silence for a moment, except for the white noise around him, and then a sharp intake of breath, a huff. A hand on his shoulder, turning him around. Eyes that glared.

She stood in front of him, crossing her arms over her chest, looking up with daggers in her stare.

"Sorry?" She said, annoyance and almost a mocking tone in her voice. "That's all you have to say?"

He didn't feel like playing her games today. He shrugged. "I'm really sorry?"

Rachel's posture slumped and her arms relaxed as her eyes fell from his. "I saw you from the beginning of the hallway. I was on the other side and I made eye contact the whole time. Well, I tried to. I did everything short of yelling your name and you didn't even notice?"

"I... I guess I'm just distracted today."

"You didn't say anything about my hair." She brought a hand up to her chocolate colored locks self-consciously.

"Oh... Uh..." He studied her hair for as long as he could get away with. "It's pretty. But it's always pretty. You know... very... umm... shiny."

And her hair was shiny. Shiny and soft and straight. He hoped he'd picked the right adjective. Now that he looked closer, he noticed it was a few inches shorter, random layers sliced throughout.

To his relief, she smiled. "I told my stylist that the layers wouldn't work in my hair, that someone with such luscious hair like my own should do something a bit less edgy. But she convinced me to try it, that I'd love it. And I do!"

He let her ramble for a while as they walked to class, only hearing about half of what she said. They parted to go to their separate morning classes and Finn couldn't rack his brain any longer. There simply wasn't a song that could convey what he had to say and how he felt. He had Glee third period. That was enough time to come up with what to say. Right?

By the time the bell rang for passing period to his third class, Finn's heart was racing. The shrill bell pierced his ears and continued to resonate in his brain even after it stopped ringing. He felt his palms get sweaty and he licked his lips.

He didn't notice he'd gotten to class early until he looked up and only Artie was there.

"What's up man?"

Finn could only nod in greeting as he sunk into a chair in the back, dropping his backpack down next to him. Quinn and Sam appeared, followed by Brittanie and Santana. Mercedes was fixing a red scarf around her neck as she strolled into class. Tina and Mike were giggling to each other at some inside joke, holding hands. Rachel came in next, bouncing and bubbly as always, flopping down next to Finn and began talking about the "uneducated, unqualified" substitute her class had to endure last period. Puck and Lauren waltzed through the doorway just as the bell rang, a smug smirk on Puck's face that he had made it on time.

The room was filled with happy chatter, which died away as Mr. Schuester appeared, saying, "guys, quiet down."

"A lright

Mr. Schue took his place at the front of the room, leaning nonchalantly against the piano and clasped his hands together. "As you all know, we have Nationals coming up."

There was a little excited burst of happiness from the students. He smiled at them, feeling the pride well up in his heart. "Now, I know we have a lot to get working on, but I think that in order for us to succeed, we definitely need to continue to grow. Singing our own songs gave us an edge at Regionals, which I think is one of the major reasons why we won. Not to mention the talent we have here, but it was a contributing factor. So I would like to start off by putting it to a vote. Should we sing original songs for Nationals?"

He looked around and hands began to ascend, growing with more confidence as they glanced at their friends' hands rising. Rachel had thrown her hand up so fast, Finn wondered if she might have snapped something in her shoulder. He halfheartedly raised his own hand, not really caring the outcome of the obvious majority vote right now.

Mr. Schue's smile grew larger. "I thought you'd all agree. Well, now that that's settled, we need to get working on our song. Let's break up into pairs and start writing. It can be about anything; we don't really have a genre or theme to stick to. Try to make the words mean something. Do whatever you have to do to make this the greatest song we've ever done. If all goes well, I'd like to hear them by Thursday."

People had already started pairing off, pulling out notebooks and pens, arguing calmly about what they would sing about. Rachel's yellow notebook, decorated with tons of gold star stickers on the front, was in her lap and she clicked her pen in her right hand, turning to Finn. He could see the gears whirling in her brain as she no doubt had been planning this for weeks.

He sighed. It was now or never. "Hold on a sec Rachel."

He stood up and made his way over to Mr. Schue, who was talking to Tina and Mike. Waiting until he was done, Finn got his attention.

"Mr. Schue?"

"How's it going Finn?"

He didn't respond and instead, walked over to the corner of the room and waited for Mr. Schue to follow.

"Hey, Finn." The teacher's voice dropped. "Don't let Rachel take over this okay? You've got some great ideas. Don't be afraid to let yourself be heard. I want to see some of you in this song, not just Rachel's thoughts."

Finn glanced up to where Rachel sat, scribbling in her notebook.

"Point taken. Umm... actually, this isn't about the project. I was wondering, umm... if you'd heard anything about Kurt?"

A look of confusion and concern appeared on Mr. Schue's face. "Kurt? No, Finn, I haven't. Is there a reason?"

"Well, actually, I have something I want to say. To everyone."

"Oh, well, okay then."

Mr. Schue turned to the paired off teens, advancing away from the little corner and into the view of everyone. "Okay guys, listen up. Finn has an announcement."

He paused and stepped back, waiting. Finn felt his heart stop.

His voice was shaky as he began. Every eye was on him.

Three words. Kurt has cancer. Just three words.

He took a deep breath.

Three words.

"Hey guys." He paused. "Umm... this isn't easy for me to say. Kurt thought it would be too hard to tell you himself and we both agreed that we didn't want the principal to tell you. I... I don't know much, or anything really, about any of this, but..." He closed his eyes for a moment. He wished he could be anywhere but here. He opened his eyes. "I know this will be difficult to take in..."

Puck became annoyed. "Dude, just spit it out already."

Finn's eyes darted to Mr. Schue. His face was more concerned than anything. His arms were crossed over his chest and he stared, waiting.

Finn turned his head to look at all of Glee, staring up at him. His voice dropped. "Kurt has cancer."

It seemed as though everyone in the room inhaled at the same time. It was more than quiet for a full five seconds, the kind of quiet that only comes from unexpected news, the kind of news that hurts.

Then the panic set in.

"What?"

"It's not true."

"Dude, you can't be serious."

"What are you talking about?"

Mr. Schue appeared suddenly by his side, a hand gripping his shoulder. "Finn?" He said, voice soft, comforting, scared. "Finn, is this true?"

He was unable to do anything but nod.

The questions kept coming and he had no idea how to answer them. Thankfully, Mr. Schue was able to calm the distress. "Alright guys. Alright. Calm down."

He turned back to Finn, hand still on his shoulder. Finn was grateful for his touch. He felt relieved at telling them and even more relieved that Mr. Schue was here. "When did you find out about this?"

"Two days ago."

"And you're sure Kurt wanted you to tell us?"

"Yes. He told me to. No one else knows but Mr. Figgins."

Everyone was quiet, even Rachel, who sat with her back straight, pen clenched in her hand. They were all waiting for answers that he couldn't give. Finn didn't make eye contact with anyone but his teacher. He didn't want to see the looks on their faces.

"He's starting chemotherapy today. He has leukemia."

Mr. Schue's next question surprised him. "Are you okay?"

Was he okay? No. He knew that. Mr. Schue knew that. "I'm fine."

Mr. Schue nodded, saying softly, "Okay. You can sit down now. Thank you Finn."

He followed the simple instruction, trying to avoid eye contact with anyone. But they were all staring at him and it was impossible to block out the lost looks of shock, fear and worry. Rachel said nothing as he sat next to her, feeling as though all the air had been squeezed from his lungs. She tentatively set her hand on his and then carefully linked their fingers together.

Mr. Schue still stood in the front. Now that Finn was out of range of immediate eye contact, they looked to their teacher for guidance. They needed someone to tell them what to do, how to sort out the confusing mess of emotions that had just been dumped over their heads. He ran a hand through his hair and met their eyes.

He sighed and seemed to be gathering his thoughts before he said in a low voice, "I really don't know what to say. I knew as much about this as you all did and I know it's a lot to handle. In light of this news, I'm giving you the day, or a few days, off if you need them from the 'normal' Glee activities. If you feel like writing a song, singing something, or just talking, anything to sort out whatever it is you may be feeling, these are the days to do that. And please don't badger Finn with questions. He's told us all he knows."

Finn felt a surge of relief and admiration for Mr. Schue.

Rachel's hand went up.

"Yes, Rachel?"

"I was wondering if there might be any way we would be able to see Kurt? You know, maybe we could make a card or go sing him a song or something."

"If everyone decides they want to, I can talk to the school and see if they'd let us organize a field trip, or we can work around everyone's schedules to find a day that would be free so we could go and see him. I think that's a great idea, but ultimately that's his call if he wants us there or not."

Not discouraged, she nodded and turned to Finn. "Do you think he'd want to see us?"

He looked up. "I don't see why not, but maybe in a few days or something. It's a lot to take in you know?"

She nodded again and began to scribble in her notebook.

The rest of the period was quiet, with no one working on their original assignment anymore. They talked in small groups or pairs, not really knowing what to say. All Finn wanted to do was get out of there. He could feel the negative atmosphere sucking away the life as if it were a black hole in the universe.

When the bell finally rang, they trouped out, with Finn telling Rachel to go ahead without him and hanging back. He approached Mr. Schue after the last student had left.

"Hey, umm... thanks for you know, helping me out today."

He smiled a little sadly. "No problem, Finn. It must be a lot for you to deal with. How're you holding up?"

"I'm alright I guess. Tired, but it'll get better. I feel like I'm living in this slow-moving dream world and in one second I'm going to wake up and it'll all be back to normal."

"It's never easy to deal with, especially when it happens to someone close to you. I can write you a pass to your next class if you'd like to go talk to Mrs. Pillsbury."

Finn shifted uncomfortably. "I think I'm okay. I kind of want to deal with this on my own for right now you know?"

He nodded, though not entirely convinced. "Okay. Well, let me know if that changes. And you can always talk to me if you'd be more comfortable."

"Thanks Mr. Schue."

"Hey, do you mind having your stepdad call me? Or call Mr. Figgins to update him once in a while? I'm really worried about Kurt."

"Yeah, no problem. I'll let you know in a few days."

"Thank you. I think that will really help put the other kids at ease, knowing somewhat of what's going on. They're all as worried as we are." He paused and clapped a hand on his back. "Alright Finn, you'd better get to class. I know it seems hopeless now, but things can change. Being there for Kurt is will make the most difference right now."

Finn's mouth lifted in the smallest of smiles and then he turned his back, walking into the almost empty hallway, sighing a breath of relief that his next class was close to the rehearsal room. And even though telling Glee had been hard and he'd felt bad for dropping that emotional bomb on them, he could feel the giant knot of worry in his gut begin to unwind and the weight on his shoulders seemed less likely to crush him. He felt slightly better with them knowing. He hoped they would get to go see Kurt, preferably not in the hospital. Maybe he could skip a day at Dalton and he could come to McKinley for a day. That would surely raise everyone's spirits.

He snuck a quick look at his phone. No missed calls or texts. He hoped that meant Kurt's chemo was going well. He made a mental note to stop by Kurt's classes and grab his homework for the next few days. He made another mental note to tell Burt to call Mr. Schue and have Mr. Figgins send out an email to inform

Kurt's teachers, if he hadn't done so already. It was going to be a long day, but it was already halfway over and as Finn slid into his seat just as the bell rang, he kept telling himself that it was almost over.

Almost over. And then he could go home and sleep and try to forget.

He wondered vaguely if Blaine's day was as terrible as his had been so far. He hoped not. But he supposed it could only go up from here.

12. Late Passes and Speeches

Blaine wandered the halls of Dalton, hands in his pockets, bag on his shoulder. He was late already. No need to rush.

He grabbed a white half sheet of paper from a tray in the office and wrote in blue pen his reason for being late. *Car trouble*. That was good enough. He handed the paper to the elderly lady at the front desk, who typed something in the computer and in return gave him a small slip of yellow paper. A late pass.

He had missed first period and his second class was in the back of the school. He had English right now. As he slid into his seat, the eyes of his classmates burned a hole in his back. Or at least, that's what it felt like. He smiled and pulled out his binder. His teacher had taken his late pass and reminded him that he needed to make up the test on Dorian Gray within the next week. Great.

He was so tired. He hadn't really felt all that tired, but now that he was in class, he couldn't concentrate. His thoughts kept drifting back to Kurt.

"There are three prompts to choose from for your concluding essay, including..." The teacher's voice droned on.

Kurt's starting chemo now. I wonder if he's scared.

"... your essay will be graded on a scale of one to nine with one being the..."

I should be with him. I could... well, I could at least be there for him. Sit with him or something. Anything would be better than being stuck here.

"... expecting no less than three pages..."

Maybe I could pretend I'm sick and go back. He sighed. No, Kurt had asked him not to go. *He doesn't want to see me right now.*

He knew this was new and scary and he understood Kurt's wanting to go alone. But it didn't lessen the worry and hurt he felt. As much as he tried not to think about it and focus on the teacher's lecture, he often caught himself staring at the tiny flecks of silver in the black desktop, his thoughts far away. The school had been given a grant last year and new desks had been brought in over summer. His eyes moved from fleck to fleck; small dots in a dark land of nothing.

As slow as the day felt to be moving so far, the bell rang before he realized it and he moved on to his next class.

Math was just as torturous and he was glad to have a free period before rehearsal. Before he had to tell the Warblers. The sun was shining, beating on his back as he sat on the grass in the quad. If it had been a different day, he might have pulled out Dorian Gray and finished the chapters he was supposed to read before he retook the test. If it had been a different day, he might have felt normal. But it wasn't and he had to face it eventually.

He sighed as the bell rang, not having gotten anything productive done. He was still no closer to figuring out how he was going to tell them. Maybe if he just opened his mouth, his brain would do the talking and he wouldn't have to think about it. Maybe.

As he walked to class, he felt as if he was in a dream world. Everything around him seemed normal, but he somehow happened to be moving at a sluggish pace that he couldn't control. He felt as though he were trapped underwater, trying to walk with his atmosphere holding him back, making it harder to breathe.

The warning bell sounded when he was halfway across the quad. He was never this slow. Maybe he really was stuck in a dream world. He would even prefer it, if it meant Kurt would be okay.

A strong hand gripped the door handle. He took a deep breath and stood up straighter, adjusting his bag on his shoulder as he walked with as much courage as he could find, into the room. Eyes turned on him. He had entered just as the final bell rang.

David, Wes, and Thad were sitting in the front table as always. David was standing, about to give an opening speech. Blaine moved as close to the wall as possible, hoping that somehow he could disappear and not have to do this. But Kurt needed him to do this. And he needed to do it for himself.

David began, but Blaine didn't hear a word he said. He was lost in his thoughts. Maybe he should have talked more with Finn. Maybe they shouldn't do this today. Maybe they should somehow get both groups, Warblers and McKinley glee clubs, and tell them at the same time. Maybe Kurt should be here. Maybe he should be with Kurt.

The speech was short and suddenly Blaine realized there was no longer the background humming noise that was David's voice. He looked up.

"Alright, so we're going to practice from the top and-"

People had already started getting up and moving around. It was now or never.

"I actually have something I need to say." Blaine had to strain to make his voice heard. He didn't want to do this. Not now.

David nodded and everyone sat back down as he motioned for Blaine to come to the front.

"All yours Blaine."

He gave a small smile of thanks and made his way to the front. He shoved his hands deeper into his pockets, hands balling into fists and then releasing as he let out the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

He faced the group directly, making sure he stood up straight. People took you more seriously when you had good posture. And he hoped it would stop him from the almost uncontrollable urge to curl up into a ball and scream.

"As many of you, I'm sure, have noticed, Kurt hasn't been here for a few days."

A few heads nodded in agreement. Some looked around as if waiting to see if Kurt would jump out from behind one of the heavy window drapes.

He cleared his throat. "There's a reason he hasn't been here and as difficult as it is for me to say it, he wanted you to hear it from me."

He looked out slightly above the heads of those he spoke to. If he met their eyes, he knew he would lose all composure. He didn't realize how long he had paused until Wes spoke.

"Go on."

He felt his chest constrict and his eyes involuntarily looked down, neck bending forward as he dropped his head slightly. He could feel the tears mist in his eyes and he blinked rapidly. He took a deep breath and raised his head, almost challenging the students sitting before him. His voice was strong. He could handle this.

"Kurt has cancer. Leukemia. I don't know if they caught it early enough, but he began his first round of chemotherapy today. I don't know if he'll be back to school or if..." His voice hitched. "If they can cure him. But he wanted me to tell you."

There was silence. For a full three thuds of his heart, no one spoke. All eyes were glued on him. All he wanted to do was disappear. Suddenly, a hand was on his shoulder.

"Blaine." The voice belonged to Wes. "Blaine, when did you hear about this?"

Their eyes met. Blaine could see the fear in Wes's green irises. "Two days ago."

"And they're sure? They're sure it's leukemia?"

"Blood work came back two days ago."

"My second cousin had leukemia." A voice from the back sounded loudly after Blaine's increasingly whispered statements. "One round of chemo and it was gone. Caught it early."

Wes ignored the comment. "Are you going to see him?"

"After the chemo. Five days from now. I'm going to call his dad after class."

"Let us know what goes down okay?"

Nods and whispers of agreement rippled through the room.

"Does that mean you're going to be gone?" David.

Blaine didn't look at the speaker behind him. "I don't know. If he wants me, then yes, I'm going as often as I can."

Wes turned back to the senior leaders, where they exchanged looks and sharp whispers. Thad stood up and addressed the confused, worried teens in front of them.

"Until we know what's going on, there's really not much we can do. If you believe in prayer, we can hold a prayer circle after rehearsal for as long as we feel it is necessary. Anyone will be welcome, no matter your beliefs. Blaine, if you can keep us updated on anything you deem important, it would make this a lot easier to handle. But until we know anything else, we're going to continue just like we have been. So save your questions and thoughts on this for later. Write them down or something and we can try to deal on a separate day. Agreed?"

Murmurs of consent were enough for Thad to nod and change the subject. "So we're taking it from the top. Get into your beginning places."

Bodies moved in slightly unsure fashions. Blaine stayed where he was. Wes turned to him and dropped his voice so only he could hear. "Hey man, you okay?"

Blaine faced him. "I'll be fine." The words came out of his mouth easily, but he didn't believe them.

"Alright." Wes's face said he didn't believe Blaine either. "You know, you can take it easy if you need to."

He shook his head. "We don't have time to take it easy."

Then he joined the line of boys in the front row. He decided he would go to English and retake that test after school. He wouldn't be able to focus on the book anyway. Might as well get the test over with.

A low hum sounded from the throats of those around him.

Sing.

Sing and don't think.

Sing and don't remember.

Sing and everything will be okay.

13. School Grades and Night Whispers

Since that day he had told the Warblers, Blaine had decided something. He was going to not let Kurt's leukemia change how he lived. He would do whatever he had to see him and be with him and help him in any way he could, but at school, for a few hours each day, he would not let himself be upset. He would not let anyone see any sign of weakness about him. He needed to be strong, if not for himself, then for those around him. If he broke down now, it would be so much harder to drag himself back up.

He had noticed the change. The way his classmates stared at him. Not just the Warblers, but all of his classmates. Anyone he came into contact with. Burt had called the school three days ago, giving the okay to the dean to tell the teachers, and if they needed to, the students. He had done the same thing with McKinley. The Warblers knew. The teachers knew. They may or may not have told their students. But it didn't matter. The news spread like wildfire.

Eyes stared at him. Some were sad, some were confused, some obviously wanted to ask questions. And some did. Questions that were easy to answer or ones that he had no idea how to even begin. Everywhere he looked, it seemed people were staring.

He was currently known as Kurt's boyfriend. That rumor had started long ago and now, it was brought to the surface once again. He was no longer the captain of the Warblers. He was "the boyfriend of the kid with leukemia." It was hard to live up to his decision to be normal at school. Not easy when everyone around you made it so difficult.

He threw himself into his school work. He went to tutorial for classes he understood completely, ones he had even tutored other kids on. He worked the Warblers hard at every rehearsal; so much so that Josh had overstrained his voice and had to not sing for a while or else he could lose his voice for he didn't know how long. That would be bad. So Blaine slacked off on that. Barely. There was always room for improvement. New songs had to be chosen and choreography reworked with the loss of Kurt, for now. Kurt was the only countertenor they had, the only one they'd ever had as long as Blaine had been here, and though it hadn't seemed to make that much of a difference in the chorus, now that he was gone, Blaine found that he was straining to hear that voice. Kurt's voice.

But it had only been four days. He wasn't about to start going crazy now.

So he went through his days, smiling and laughing and if you had seen him, you wouldn't know that this wasn't just a normal day at Dalton Academy.

He had thrown himself into his schoolwork so much that his grades were now all A's. Not that he had magically been able to get bad grades to A's in four days. He was a good student. He had good grades anyway. But now, they were better than good. And there had been a few essays and tests during the four days. That had helped. Some of his grades were even higher than the best. Over one hundred percent. His English grade was now the lowest, a meager 98.4%, all because of the Dorian Gray test. He had retaken it when he wasn't prepared, a stupid move now that he thought about it, and failed miserably. Maybe he could ask for some extra credit opportunities.

Blaine was in his third hour of studying for his statistics test with textbooks, notebooks, and pencils littering his desk when his phone rang. He looked up, rubbing the need to sleep from his eyes, and stared at his phone. It sat, a kind of chrome silver-bluish color, with no ring tone playing loudly to annoy him. It was buzzing, waiting for him to answer. It rang for a while and he knew it wasn't a text, but a call. He reached over and hit the *ignore* button without checking to see who it was.

Back to studying. He didn't have time for distractions.

A random sample of 185 older (over 50) smokers who have tried to quit showed that 111 quit successfully. A second random sample of 220 younger (under 25) smokers who have tried to quit showed that 101 quit successfully. At $\alpha = .01$, is there a significant difference in the rate of-

Buzz.

He glanced up.

Buzz. Buzz. Buzzzzz.

His eyes drifted to the clock on the bedside table. It was 7:19 pm. He hadn't realized it was that late. He had meant to call Burt, like he'd done every day at 4:30. His last conversation hadn't gone well. Burt sounded tired. He didn't blame him. Blaine felt somewhat guilty asking the same questions every day, but he sort of felt like he was living in the dark. He wanted answers as much as they did and he wasn't even close to being able to get them, especially living two hours away in a dorm at school, with somewhat limited availability based on the awful no cell phone policy during school hours. During the last phone call,

Burt had seemed emotionally drained and a bit distant, answering his questions with few word sentences. He swore he had heard paper rustling in the background. Probably those colorful pamphlets with stupid phrases on them proclaiming "So You Have Leukemia, What to do Next" like the ones in neat little stacks in Dalton's guidance counselor's office. Except the headings on those usually read "How to Cope with Depression" and "I Have my High School Diploma! Now What?"

He picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Blaine."

It was Finn.

"I meant to call you. Well, Burt actually, but I didn't realize how late it was. What's going on?"

"They released him. Kurt. From chemo. His doctor said it was going really well, so they let him go a day early. Burt came back to pick up Mom and they're going there now to bring him back here."

Blaine forgot all about studying. He couldn't even remember what an atom was at that moment. And he didn't care. Kurt was okay. Kurt was coming home.

"Finn, that's awesome." He couldn't keep the smile contained and if it hadn't been for the news he had just heard, he would have thought he was going crazy, sitting there at his desk, the only light from his small lamp, smiling hugely in the dark. The relief in his voice sounded unfamiliar even to himself. As if he didn't know how worried he had been until now. But that was how he'd wanted it right? To be normal at school? "That's... that's great. I mean, wait. That's good right?"

Finn laughed. "Of course it's good."

Blaine had already begun to formulate how he was going to get back to Lima. Maybe he could have his parents drive him there in the morning? Or maybe he could call them now? Either way, he wasn't going to school tomorrow. Not when Kurt was home.

There was a pause on both ends of the line, which Finn broke first. "Hey, umm... do you want me to come pick you up? I know you don't exactly live close by and all and I mean, if it were me, I'd want to be here as soon as I could."

He felt a surge of gratitude towards Finn. "If you could, that would be so great."

"No problem. I'll leave as soon as they get home."

Finn hung up so fast, Blaine wasn't sure he heard his small "Thank you," but he really didn't care. In four hours, he would be with Kurt.

It was 8:45 when Blaine's phone rang again. Finn telling him he was in the parking lot. Either there was no traffic tonight or Finn drove like a madman. He decided to go with the no traffic idea and barreled down the stairs to the dorm's exit and walked calmly into the parking lot. Finn's truck was the only one running and though there was no chance of him getting hit, unless Finn happened to see him as road kill, he walked the short distance to the truck's passenger side. He wanted to run. Wanted to, but didn't.

The ride back to Lima was mostly quiet. The small talk ran out in the first twenty minutes and Blaine was too focused on Kurt to even think about how the weather was starting to get colder. To be honest, he hadn't even noticed. Blaine didn't even care that Finn had a driving style that was scarily motivated by testosterone and that the increasing speeds they had taken on the freeway would certainly have killed them had they crashed.

Blaine had unbuckled his seatbelt before even turning onto the Hummel driveway and his hand was on the handle as Finn parked. He jumped out the second the truck had stopped completely and found himself wanting so badly to run to the front door. Instead, he expressed as much gratitude as he could to Finn and knocked on the door. Three short raps.

Tap.

Tap.

Tap.

The door opened. It was Carole, wearing an oversized t-shirt and pajama bottoms. She smiled when she saw him.

"I'm so glad you're here." She hustled the two of them inside and wrapped Blaine in a warm hug. He hugged her back, forgetting, for a moment, about Kurt.

"I am too."

She stepped back, but held onto Blaine's shoulders. "I'm sure Finn told you that the chemo went well. Kurt's doctors are optimistic. They can't say for sure how things will go, but it's really good right now. Burt's with him. He's very tired, weak. Be gentle, not too many questions okay?"

Blaine didn't need to be told twice. "Of course."

She nodded and pressed a hand to his cheek, before letting him go. "You know where he is."

In an involuntary action, he pulled Carole into another hug. He already felt she was like his second mother. "Thank you."

She smiled. "No problem hun."

Blaine turned around just as Burt came down the hallway. Burt raised a hand in greeting and looped over to Carole. He put an arm around her waist and addressed Blaine. "I think he's sleeping now. He's tired and I want you to-"

Carole cut him off. "Honey, I've already talked to him. He's not going to make Kurt sing an entire opera tonight. He just wants to see him."

Burt nodded, eyes tired. "Alright. Sorry. Go ahead."

Blaine didn't need to be told twice. He flew down the hall as fast as he could go without running and stopped just outside Kurt's door, left slightly open. He opened the door a bit further, allowing him room to squeeze through and closed it, leaving only a little crack for light.

He knew the layout of Kurt's room enough now to be able to pick his way to the bed, even when his eyes weren't yet adjusted. When he found the bed, he used his foot to feel how far it was to the wall, following the sheet that hung down, leading him to where Kurt lay. He knelt down at the side of the bed and blinked rapidly, trying to get his eyes to adjust. When they finally did, though it took much too long in Blaine's opinion, he saw Kurt's face turned towards his, eyes closed, curled up in a relaxed fetal position.

Blaine didn't know why he expected Kurt to be changed. Nothing was different, except maybe he was a bit paler than usual, but that was probably just the light. Or lack of light. Kurt's lips were beautiful, soft and pink, and stood out against his angelic face, even in sleep. Blaine had no idea how he could be more attracted to Kurt, but now, his senses seemed heightened to everything about him. The way his chest rose and fell so calmly, the way his eyes moved behind his closed lids in dreaming, the way his mouth twitched slightly every so often.

He reached out a hand to gently brush it along Kurt's cheekbone. But he snatched it back when Kurt began to move. He held his breath. He hadn't wanted to wake him up.

As much as he willed Kurt to stay asleep, to continue in whatever peaceful dreams he had been consumed in, it wasn't enough and his soft blue eyes slowly opened. Kurt blinked so slowly, Blaine wondered if he even registered he was here. Maybe it was some kind of pre-sleepwalking thing? But he was convinced otherwise when Kurt's lips moved.

"Blaine."

The word was small, faint, but Blaine heard it. He smiled.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm here. I didn't mean to wake you. I'm sorry."

Kurt opened his eyes wide, as if he was trying to force them to stay open, and despite the effort, the lids drooped uncontrollably. "I'm so tired."

"Then sleep." Blaine whispered back. "Go back to sleep."

Kurt kept his eyes closed, but mumbled two words before slipping back into his dreamland. "Don't leave."

The corner of Blaine's mouth twitched into a hybrid kind of a smirk and a smile. He leaned over, bringing his lips close to Kurt's ear, unsure if he could even hear him now.

"I won't. I'll be right here."

14. Blankets and Pamphlets

Blaine opened one eye with a low groan. He looked around in the dark, not knowing where he was for a moment. And then he remembered.

He lifted his head. Off the floor. He was on the hardwood floor. It hurt. His neck was stiff and the entire left side of his body was sore. He sat up slowly. Someone had put a blanket on him. And there was a pillow next to his head. He could hear Kurt's shallow breathing from above him. Moving his neck side to side was painful and he did so slowly. It would hurt so much worse if he didn't do anything.

He pushed himself off the floor and carefully stepped to the door, letting himself out. He used the bathroom down the hall, didn't want to wake Kurt. It was quiet in the house. So quiet, he wondered if anyone was up yet. Was it really still dark? They had gotten home around 11 pm last night and it seemed like he'd been asleep for a while.

The creaks of the floorboards echoed in his ears as he made his way down to the kitchen. There was a piece of white paper on the counter. He almost walked right past it.

Blaine-

Help yourself to anything in the kitchen. I'm picking up something for Kurt. Be home soon.

-Carole

He grabbed a glass from the cupboard and filled it with water from the fridge. He didn't realize how thirsty he was until it was empty. The water was cold and woke him up a bit. He wished he could take a shower. But he'd do that later. He took another glass and filled that one with half ice and the rest with water for Kurt. Hopefully it'd be cold when he woke up.

He wasn't hungry; not yet. He tiptoed back up to Kurt's room and placed the glass on his bedside table. He'd grabbed his school bag when Finn picked him up, so he was happy to have his homework as a distraction, but he was dismayed to remember that he had once again forgotten to bring extra clothes. He

made a mental note to bring a few outfits to leave with Kurt next time he came over. And he wrote it down on an actual note too. Just in case.

He took his school bag down to the kitchen and called his parents to let them know where he was and to have them call the school. Halfway through his math homework, the front door opened. He looked up to see Carole shoving her keys back into her bag, which she placed on the counter.

"Blaine, I didn't expect you up yet. Are you hungry?" She said the question as she opened the refrigerator and a few different cabinets.

"Kind of."

She smiled. "I can make pancakes."

He noticed a box of cereal on the counter that hadn't been put away. He jumped up and not wanting to trouble her, grabbed the box and a bowl. "This is fine. Thank you though."

"No problem."

Blaine smiled to himself. He knew where Finn had picked up that saying.

"How did you sleep last night? Or I guess, 'did you sleep' would be a more appropriate question."

The cereal made gentle, slightly echoed ringing sounds as it hit the porcelain bowl. "I actually don't even remember falling asleep."

Carole pulled out a bowl and Blaine passed her the cereal. "Thanks. I should have told Burt to set up the air mattress in there. Where did you sleep?"

"Floor."

She poured her cereal and popped a few pieces into her mouth before topping it with milk. "Honey, I'm sorry you had to do that last night. You should have told one of us. I'll have Burt or Finn set it up when they get home."

"It's really no trouble. I'm happy Finn was able to get me. And even happier that Kurt is home."

She smiled as he scooped a spoonful into his mouth. "Me too."

"So when does he go back?"

"He has three weeks of rest and then they'll start the treatment again. With each round of chemo, we're hoping that the number of white blood cells will be reduced."

"Okay." Blaine said, not really understanding. He'd meant to do a Google search on leukemia, but had been busy with schoolwork that he'd only been able to look up the basics. He made a note to do a more thorough search soon. He didn't want to feel left in the dark. Especially when it involved Kurt.

Another bite of cereal. Carole's eyes widened and she jumped, rushing over to her purse.

"Oh. I forgot. I went to pick these up from the pharmacy. They were filling his prescription when he was released and we wanted to get him home as soon as possible." She pulled out a little orange, white-capped bottle and shook it, hearing the pills rattle around inside.

"What's that?"

"Pills to help with the nausea. Side effect of chemo."

"Side effect?"

Side effect? Why had he not thought of the side effects? That was why Kurt was tired. What else was there?

"Uh huh." Carole ruffled through a bunch of papers and extracted a pamphlet from the pile. She handed it to Blaine.

It was a list of the drugs used to treat leukemia in chemotherapy, side effects of the chemo, and how to treat those side effects.

He read silently, abandoning his cereal, no longer hungry.

Nausea and vomiting.

Fatigue.

Diarrhea.

Weight loss.

Hair loss.

Depression.

Those were listed under "Common Side Effects." He didn't look at the "Serious Side Effects" or "Long Term Complications." He didn't want to see those yet. His heart wrenched. He didn't know if he could see Kurt going through all that. He didn't know if he would be strong enough.

Fatigue will reach its peak at the end of the chemotherapy treatment and should resolve steadily in a period of a few weeks to months, depending on the patient.

Kurt was exhausted. He knew that. So he had one side effect, so far. Blaine handed the pamphlet back to Carole. She must have seen something change on his face because she said, "Blaine, honey, it will be okay."

He nodded, not sure if he was trying to convince her or himself that he believed her words. "Thanks."

Her smile turned sympathetic. She grabbed the bottle of pills and held it out to him. "Can you take these to Kurt and see that he takes them when he wakes up? Dosage is on the side. His doctor gave him some stronger drugs to help delay the nausea, but it will only last a day or so."

He took the bottle from her, trying to smile back. "Sure."

He left his bag downstairs and made the short climb up to the second floor. The door was slightly open, just as he had left it. He pushed it open, wincing when it squeaked, and stepped inside. The bottle was gripped tightly in his hand.

He walked over as quietly as he could and set the bottle down beside the glass of water. Condensation was forming on the glass as the ice melted, sending little ripples of water down the side. He noticed the blanket was still on the floor. He stooped and folded it. There were small holes in one corner and it smelled like too many bonfires and sand. Internally, his heart thudded with gratitude. It was Finn's blanket.

When he turned around, Kurt's eyes were staring at him. He jumped.

"You're supposed to be asleep." He scolded, heart pounding from the slight kick of adrenaline. He knelt down and cupped Kurt's cheek in his hand.

"You're supposed to be here." Kurt countered, voice small.

"I'm sorry. I didn't want to wake you and then Carole came home with some pills for you."

"Don't leave."

Kurt was allowed to be selfish right now. Blaine didn't mind that. "I won't."

He reached over and took the bottle in his hand, turning it sideways to read the tiny print. "It says you're supposed to take two with a full glass of liquid. I got you water. Is that okay?"

"I'm too tired." His eyes shut.

Blaine's face softened. His tone however, did not. "I know you are. But these will help with the nausea later. You want to take these Kurt."

Kurt's nostrils flared and he opened his eyes again. "You're going to make me?"

"Yes."

Kurt sighed and began to sit up. He moved slowly, as if each limb weighed a hundred pounds. Too tired to move.

"Need some help?"

He shook his head as he lugged himself into a somewhat sitting position. Blaine popped the top on the bottle and poured out two round, blue pills, which he placed into Kurt's hand. Kurt set them on his tongue and Blaine passed him the glass of water.

"All of it." He said with a tone that bordered on a command.

Kurt's hand began to shake as he drank. Involuntarily, Blaine reached out and steadied the cup in Kurt's failing grasp until the glass was empty. Kurt shuddered as Blaine set the glass back on the table. The water had been really cold. Maybe he shouldn't have put that much ice in it.

Blaine walked around to the other side of the bed and laid down next to him. He wrapped his arms around Kurt's shoulders. Kurt turned his head, resting it on Blaine's chest, curling up and shivering once or twice more. Blaine held him tighter.

"Thank you." He whispered against his forehead and placed a kiss on the top of his head. "Now sleep."

Kurt didn't need to be told twice. His eyes closed and he sighed with happiness. He didn't care what he had to go through. Not if Blaine would be there for him.

15. Trash Cans and Cars

Blaine had involuntarily returned to school the next morning. Burt had driven him back, saying he would call him if anything changed, that all Kurt was doing was sleeping. But he still felt like he was abandoning him.

Most of the questions had stopped being directed to him at school. No one really gave a second glance in his direction anymore, now that the week-long drama was now old news. Not that he cared. It was nice not to have to talk about the leukemia as if it didn't affect him. As if it didn't hurt him to not be able to do anything about it. At least now, it was easier to go through the day as if he was fine. Not talking about it or Kurt here was a relief.

There was a prayer circle held outside the rehearsal room every day, just as Thad had promised. Every single Warbler was there every day and it made Blaine take things into perspective a bit. He wasn't the only one who cared for Kurt. He wasn't the only one who was worried. He decided against telling Kurt that they held a prayer circle for him. He remembered Finn talking about how Kurt had been when his dad was in the hospital. Kurt was an atheist. And that was okay. But the prayer circle gave Blaine, who wasn't very religious in the first place, something to hold on to. He felt that for a few minutes a day, they were connected, all essentially wishing at the same time that Kurt would be okay. He visualized the prayers as little thought bubbles, little wishes, floating up through the clouds to... Where? He didn't know where. He didn't know if he believed in Heaven or God or anything, but all the same, he looked forward to those times when he would squeeze the hands of the boys' next to him and feel as though he wasn't fighting a losing battle.

One day, after school was over, he was surprised to receive a text from his mom. 'Come to the parking lot' it read. Fearing the worst, he ran over there and stopped dead in his tracks.

His mom was standing on the asphalt, leaning up against the car she'd had for a few years, holding her keys in her hand. When she saw him, she broke away and held out her arms. Confused, Blaine went to her. She held him in a tight hug.

"Oh honey." She released him, but put a hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently.

Blaine's brows furrowed. "What's going on?"

"Well, I heard from Burt that Kurt is sick."

"Cancer." He wasn't afraid of the word. Kurt wasn't 'sick.' If you were 'sick,' essentially all you had to do was take some pills and rest and you'd be fine. Blaine wished Kurt was sick. But this wasn't sick. This was cancer. And he could die. "And why was he talking to you anyway?"

She nodded. "Okay. Cancer. Honey, why didn't you tell me?"

He shrugged, not trying to hide the bitterness in his voice. "You didn't answer my first question."

She looked taken aback. "Oh, well, I'd heard... things. You know, at the salon. This is a high school Blaine. Things don't stay secret for very long."

He looked away. "So you called him? You were spying on me?"

"Please don't think like that baby. I love you. I was worried."

"Worried for me? Or worried that dad had found out that I was in a relationship with a guy?" There was venom in his last words. He hated his father's resentment of his sexuality. It was difficult enough already.

There was a long pause.

"He loves you, you know." His mom's voice was quiet.

"Yeah, right. Not enough to love me for who I am. He loves what he thinks he can make me."

"Honey-"

"Was there a reason you wanted to see me?" Blaine was shutting down. He didn't want to talk to or see anyone.

"Well, Burt told me that it's been difficult for you. Kurt has to stay in Lima and you have school here, and I wanted to do something to help out." She paused, gauging his reactions and when he didn't speak, she

continued. "First, if you'd like to, I have no problem homeschooling you so you can spend more time with Kurt."

The way his heart leapt, despite the anger, was an unsettling feeling. He did want to see Kurt more, but at the price of having to stay at home where his dad was, knowing that Kurt was sick, and where he could be taunted more? Or worse, where his father could get information about Kurt and... do, he didn't know what, and that thought scared him. "You haven't told dad about this have you? There's no way he'd let you bring this up. I don't feel comfortable bringing Kurt into this. No, I don't think I can go back home."

Her face fell. "Okay." Her lack of defense confirmed Blaine's suspicions that she had not told his dad, but it was a generous offer all the same. "You could maybe stay with Kurt. If that would be okay with them. There's a program where you only have to come to school once a week."

He didn't immediately reject that. He'd think about it.

His mom seemed eager to make him happy, as if she was suddenly trying to make up for years of a less than ideal father. "And second, I know it's been hard for you to get back and forth from Lima to here, and with your seventeenth birthday in a few weeks, I figured I'd surprise you early. This is from both of us."

Blaine raised an eyebrow. He didn't understand where she was going with this.

Without a word, she turned around and looked at the parking lot. Blaine looked too. He didn't see anything. Just cars in the lot, like normal. She walked over to the asphalt and stood in between her car and a car next to her, silver and shiny and new. She set a palm on the hood of the silver car.

"This is for you."

It took Blaine a moment to register this. His car? His own car? Involuntarily, he smiled slowly, eyes flicking back and forth between his mom and the car. "Are you serious?"

"Absolutely."

His happy laugh was only half forced as he walked up and hugged her gently. He could see Kurt. Anytime he wanted. He could even be somewhat homeschooled and see him every day.

"Thank you." He whispered.

The next day, Blaine got a call from Finn. Thankfully, it had been during rehearsal, where there are no teachers present, and he was able to step off to the side and take the call.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's Finn. Burt told me to call you. Just to let you know." He sighed and paused, seeming to gather his thoughts. Blaine could picture him running a hand through his hair in frustration. "Okay, so you know the side effects from chemo?"

Blaine felt himself nodding, though he knew Finn couldn't see. He was worried about what would follow those words.

"Apparently, Kurt is really having a hard time with his stomach. The drugs the doctor gave him wore off and those little pills aren't really helping. They can't give him anything else though."

"What's going on?" As much as he appreciated Finn giving him details, right now, he wanted to get the short answer.

"He's so nauseous and started throwing up a few hours ago. I'm worried. He's crying and he keeps asking for you."

Blaine's heart wrenched. Kurt was asking for him and he wasn't there. He decided right then that he was going to call his parents and accept their generous offer of homeschooling.

"I'll be right there."

He'd left rehearsal early. No one blamed him or tried to stop him. Blaine stepped on the gas, hearing the engine rev as it pulsed him forward, faster. Much faster. Good.

The car could not have come at a better time. He had called his mom before he left, thanking her again for the early birthday present. His mom had sounded worried.

"Call me if you need me." She'd said.

He didn't know what he needed. But right now all he wanted was to be able to defy the speed limits and create a new Autobahn in Lima.

The sun was setting when he finally arrived at the Hummel house. He dashed up the steps and found Burt in the kitchen. There was boiling water on the stove and he was in the midst of pouring uncooked spaghetti into the pot. Burt looked up as the door opened, but looked back down quickly and wiped a hand over his eyes before lifting his head again.

"Hey Blaine."

Blaine nodded, noticing the redness in Burt's eyes. He had been crying.

"He's upstairs."

On his way up, he passed Finn sitting on his bed. He rested his forehead in one hand, which he slowly rubbed back and forth, as if he had a headache. Blaine paused. There was an open book on Finn's lap. Suddenly, Finn stood and, grabbing the book by the pages, hurled it on the floor with a groan. He pressed both hands to his head and walked in a small circle, not noticing the person standing outside his door. Blaine hurried past. Finn had looked exactly how he felt. Frustrated, angry, lost.

He pushed open the door with two fingers and saw Carole sitting with Kurt on the bed. Kurt had a blanket hanging off his torso and he sat with his legs dangling off the bed, feet on the floor. He looked up as the door opened. He did not smile.

Blaine stepped tentatively in the room. "Hey." He said quietly.

Carole smiled softly at him. She was rubbing circles into Kurt's back. Blaine moved swiftly to the chair in front of the vanity mirror. Sitting facing them, he propped his elbows up on his knees and rested his chin on his hands. He waited.

Kurt looked bad. Worse, maybe, than when Blaine had sent him home with Finn.

His skin was clammy and pasty-white, eyes red and ringed with tiredness. He noticed beads of sweat on his brow.

Suddenly, Kurt leaned over, away from Carole, and grabbed the trash can that sat by his feet. He threw up twice before returning the trash can back to the floor. Carole's eyes turned sad and sympathetic. She kept rubbing his back.

"It's only been like this for a few hours." Carole addressed Blaine, who had seemed to grow pale himself.

"Can... can't you get him something?"

"We've tried hun. This is the worst of it. Well, it should be."

Kurt turned to face his stepmother and with a voice only slightly wobbly, asked if she could leave them alone for a while. She nodded and her eyes grew sad again before she headed for the door.

"I'll check on you every half hour or so." She looked at Blaine. "Holler if you need anything."

And they were alone.

Blaine stayed where he was for a full minute, unable to look away from Kurt's face. Then he got up slowly and crossed the room in three strides, sitting down next to him.

"Finn called me."

"I'm glad." Kurt paused. "How did you get here?"

Blaine smiled and pulled out his keys, dangling them from his index finger.

"No way." Kurt's astonishment was blatant, even when he was this sick.

"Early birthday present." His smile grew wider.

"April 23." The recitation was automatic.

He laughed softly. "You remembered."

"How could I forget?" Kurt said this like it was common knowledge. Like everyone knew when Blaine's birthday was. There was a long pause and then Kurt asked, "Finn called you?"

Blaine nodded, a bit guarded. There was something off about Kurt's tone. "Yes."

Kurt sighed. "What did he tell you?"

"That you were having a hard time and that you asked for me. Was there something he should have not told me?"

"I told him to call you only for something important."

"And this isn't important? He said you were crying."

"You can't just be expected to come down here every time I want you to."

"Are you saying I shouldn't?" He got a bit defensive before cooling down. Kurt was sick, he was tired. He didn't mean what he was saying. "He was just worried about you. And I would come down here in a heartbeat anyway."

"You have more to worry about than me."

"Well, get used to it because you're my most important worry at the moment." He smiled and was relieved when Kurt returned his glance, smiling softly. Blaine pulled him into a hug, which Kurt reciprocated for a short while, before he pushed him away and grabbed the trash can again. Blaine felt his eyes take on the same sad stare that had consumed Carole's. He felt horrible for Kurt.

When he was done, he set the can down with a metal *clang* and sat up again, but his body sagged slightly. Blaine pulled him into him, not knowing what else to do. But he noticed, with some degree of happiness in this miserable situation, that Kurt's fever was gone.

The rest of the day faded into night and Blaine stayed with Kurt, mixing into a seemingly never-ending cycle of holding him, drifting to sleep for a few minutes and then waiting while Kurt threw up or seemed about to. He'd empty the trash can periodically and try to get him to drink water.

After a few hours of this, Kurt began to break down and Blaine did not blame him in the slightest. He held him while he curled up into a ball and the tears fell as sobs racked his body. He cried and cried and Blaine wrapped his arms around him as securely as he could, wanting Kurt to know he wasn't alone. He closed his eyes and pressed his forehead to Kurt's hair, nuzzling close. When Kurt ran out of tears, Blaine slowly began to unwind his vice-like grip and held him softer, letting Kurt rest his head against his chest. One arm supported Kurt's back and the other methodically played with his hair and rubbed little circles on his clammy, pale forehead. Soothed by Blaine's closeness and comfort, Kurt's eyes slipped closed and for a while, he was able to get much needed sleep.

Blaine felt Kurt's body slump in his arms, all of his tense muscles relaxing. He held him, not moving except for the hand running through his hair for a solid hour, not wanting to jinx this sleeping spell that had come over Kurt.

Unfortunately, Kurt's eyelids began to flutter open much too soon. When he was sure he was fully awake, Blaine whispered, "Hey."

Kurt didn't answer, just stayed where he was, not trying to move at all, blinking languidly in the dark.

"You okay?" Blaine wished he could take back his words the moment they were out of his mouth. "I'm sorry. Of course you're not okay. That was a stupid thing to ask."

"It's fine." Kurt replied, voice weak with his crippling exhaustion and throat swollen and sore from constantly heaving up anything he had ever eaten in his entire life it seemed. "There's never a stupid question. Only stupid answers."

Blaine smiled into Kurt's hair, letting his hand fall slowly from his cheek to his shoulder and then to his chest, where Kurt laced their fingers together.

"Did you sleep at all?" Kurt's question was permeated with worry.

Blaine laughed lightly. "Yes."

Kurt raised his eyebrows. "See, now that was a stupid answer."

"What are you talking about?"

"Your eyes are red." Kurt whispered. "You should sleep."

"I'm here for you Kurt. I can't be the studly heroic boyfriend if I'm asleep." He looked at their intertwined fingers, carefully unlacing them and then putting them back together.

"True. But it would make me feel better."

Blaine laughed. "If you insist."

Kurt's reply of "I do" never made it out of his mouth as he suddenly tensed. Blaine was quick to grab the trash can from the side of the bed and thrust it into Kurt's lap. He gagged, body contracting, but there had been nothing in his stomach and for a long time now, he'd been heaving up bile. When he stopped, Blaine raised the glass of water to Kurt's lips and tilted it until he drank. Blaine set the can back on the floor and put his arms around Kurt's shoulders. He saw a mist appear in Kurt's eyes.

"I'm sorry." His words were mumbled and his head drooped down.

Blaine reached out and held Kurt's face in his hands, gently forcing him to look at him. "Hey." Blaine's tone was strong, but comforting. "Don't be sorry. Don't ever be sorry." He pulled him into a hug.

Kurt wanted to kiss him. But he was so tired.

As Blaine let go and laid back against the pillows, he gently pulled Kurt against him. Blaine's eyes began to close and he let them, no longer fighting the need to sleep, but giving in.

As Kurt willingly let his eyes slip closed again, he smiled to himself. Blaine was holding him, so secure, so warm, and Kurt had wished for this for so long it seemed like. He could hear Blaine's words about being his boyfriend echo in his ears. He'd forgotten to ask for an elaboration on that statement, or at least to reciprocate it in some way, but the sounds of Blaine's rhythmic breathing filled his ears and he decided that it could wait. For a few days at the most. Until he didn't feel like sleeping and was forced to hurl every half an hour. He sighed.

Yep. In a few days.

16. Guitars and Movies

The nausea lasted for five horrible days. Blaine didn't leave Kurt's side the entire time. Carole and Burt came up often to stay with Kurt, though there wasn't much they could do. It was hard for Blaine to see Kurt go through this and he didn't want to imagine what it was doing to them. Finn came up immediately after school for a while before football practice or glee rehearsal every day. He'd offered to skip these activities anytime so that Blaine could sleep, but he'd only taken him up on his offer once and that was because Kurt made him.

Carole had been right when she said that the first day would be the worst. On the fifth day, Kurt was able to keep down the few crackers and extremely watered down juice she brought for him. This was a huge relief to Blaine. Kurt had lost ten pounds since the chemo and hopefully he would be able to get back to eating normally soon.

It was ten o'clock at night when Blaine began to creep downstairs. Kurt had just fallen asleep after making Blaine promise to go to sleep too.

He had taken to playing his guitar late at night. He was staying here more than at the school dorms lately, so he'd brought it with him and left it in the living room. Kurt had been too sick to even want to leave his room and playing helped Blaine relax.

He pulled on a sweatshirt at the edge of the stairs. What Kurt didn't know wouldn't hurt him. His toes sank slightly into the carpet and he heard a small creak as he stepped onto the third stair. He stopped and froze, fingers touching lightly on the railing. He heard voices. Someone was in the kitchen.

He knew Burt and Carole would have no problem with him coming down and playing his guitar. He always made sure to strum lightly and he never sang at night, only hummed, but for some reason, he sat down at the top of the stairs.

He calmed his drumming heart and looked out between the stair railing, left hand wound around one of the smoothly carved poles. They were sitting at the table, both in their pajamas. Burt in a grey t-shirt and the black lounge pants from Nordstrom's that Blaine had gone with Kurt to get him for his birthday. Carole

wore her light blue robe and matching slippers, also a present from Kurt. Carole's back was to him and Burt looked down at the coffee cup in his hands. He looked tired. But he always looked tired now.

Blaine strained to hear their whispered conversation. He felt bad for eavesdropping, but he heard Kurt's name and suddenly he didn't care.

Carole was shaking her head slowly. She slid a piece of paper across the table to Burt, who glanced at it and then folded it back up.

"We can pay that now." Carole's voice was soft.

"I know. But this is just the first one. \$35,000. Kurt has two more rounds of chemo left and hopefully the leukemia will be gone. If not, there's radiation therapy and possibly more chemo and there's a possibility of bone marrow transplants and even if it does go away, he has to take some sort of pills for years after the chemo and there's the possibility of relapse and-" Burt's voice broke. "He's gone through so much already."

Carole reached over and took one of his hands in hers. "I know, honey. I know. There's a lot of possibilities and hardly any concrete answers. We'll do what we need to do. The insurance covers some of it and we'll pay what we can and, well, maybe I could get a second job. Or I'm sure the bank will let us take out some kind of loan. Or we can sell some stuff."

Burt ran a hand over his head. Blaine could see tears in his eyes.

He got up and practically ran back to Kurt's room. His head was filled with the beginnings of a plan. Sure, the last time they'd tried to do a benefit concert, it had failed, in terms of attendance. But this was different. And he was going to make it work.

He stopped outside the white door, and turned instead to the door down the hall. The pulse and ebb of light from under the door jamb was enough to tell Blaine that Finn was awake. He knocked quietly. The light suddenly disappeared, extinguished in a heartbeat.

"I was reading." Finn's voice came from the other side of the door.

Blaine felt a smile appear on his face as he opened the door. "Nice try."

"Oh. It's you. Hey." Finn sat back up on his bed and once Blaine shut the door, he clicked on his X-Box again. "What's up?"

Blaine sat on the edge of the bed, shaking his head when Finn offered him one of the controllers, and clasped his hands together. "What do you think about a benefit?"

Finn's eyes didn't leave the screen and he continued frantically pushing different colored buttons. "That depends on who's benefiting from what."

Blaine laughed. "No. Like raising money."

"Oh. Cool. For what?"

"For Kurt. Do you know how expensive it is to treat cancer?"

Finn pressed a button, pausing the game and turned to face Blaine. The waiting stare on Finn's face told Blaine that he had no idea.

"Okay. Well, it's a lot. I don't know much exactly, but Burt just got a bill for \$35,000 for Kurt's first chemo treatment."

Finn's eyes grew wider. "Doesn't he need like three of those?"

Blaine nodded. "If the cancer goes away with three. He might need more and there's a whole bunch of other things that could go wrong." He tried to keep his voice level on the last part. He didn't want to think about what could go wrong.

"Okay, so you want to raise money for the treatments by doing a benefit?" Finn met his eyes. "Hate to break it to you dude, but we tried that before and it almost ended up costing us more to plan than we earned. Well, except for the bald dude. But I don't think he'll give us..." Finn trailed off, counting in his head, lips mouthing the addition softly. "\$105,000."

"But that was when Schue planned it. No offense, but I think we have a much better chance if someone else handles it."

"You volunteering?"

Blaine nodded. "Yes."

Finn considered this for a moment. "Well, I guess if you want to, yeah, alright. But don't get your hopes up alright?"

Blaine fought the urge to smirk. "You don't have to worry about that. Just bring it up to glee tomorrow. Tell them I'll handle all the planning, tickets, whatever. Have them pick a couple of songs to sing. And remember it's for Kurt, so nothing sad or depressing okay?"

Finn laughed lightly. "Shouldn't be too hard. Alright, you got a deal."

"Good." Blaine stood to leave.

"Hey."

He turned to face Finn.

"You're a good guy you know that?" Finn shrugged. "I mean, with Kurt and all. I never would have thought of that."

Blaine smiled. "Thank you. Don't underestimate yourself Finn. Something means that much to you, you'll always figure out a way."

Three days later and Kurt was more 'normal' than Blaine had seen him in a while. He did get tired easily, but he was able to keep down almost anything as long as he ate it slowly. They spent most of their time practicing new songs or working on old ones. Blaine kept his guitar in Kurt's room now, at his request, and as he leaned back in the rolling computer chair, absentmindedly strumming, for the first time in what seemed like a long time, it seemed as though they were back in the 'old days,' before their worlds were turned upside down.

Kurt was sitting cross-legged on top the covers on his neatly made bed. A laptop was in front of him and he was typing, fingers flying across the keyboard. Blaine smiled at him, still playing.

"Any faster and I'd say you're going to break a world record. Or get carpal tunnel."

Kurt looked up. "My dad shunned the typing class I took over summer. Said it was a waste of time. I don't think so." He paused, linking his fingers together and resting his chin on them, watching him for a while before saying, "Play that again."

Now Blaine paused. "What?"

"What you just played. Play it again."

Blaine bit his lip. "I don't know what I played." He laughed lightly. "Ummm... was it this?"

His long fingers moved down the frets. He watched his fingers as he played, trying to hear what Kurt wanted.

Kurt shook his head. "No. It was softer. Like this." He hummed a short melody.

Blaine closed his eyes, repeating Kurt's hum to himself and seeing the notes in his head before he tried again. With his eyes still closed, he let his fingers move where they instinctively wanted to go, not thinking too hard about getting the notes exactly right. He'd unknowingly played it before, so he figured he could play it again.

On the last note, he opened his eyes. Kurt was staring at him.

"That?" He asked.

The way Kurt's eyes lit up ever so slightly told him that he had been right.

"Yes. That. It's beautiful."

The corner of Blaine's mouth lifted up into something that was more of a smirk than a smile, but it didn't look out of place on his face.

"What are you smirking about?"

"Nothing. Finish your essay."

Kurt's forehead creased. "Whoa there, bossy. I'm almost done."

"Sorry. Hey, tomorrow's Thursday."

"And then there's Friday."

Now Blaine really smirked. "Nice. I'm proud to have a boyfriend with a first grade education."

Blaine noticed the flush that filled Kurt's cheeks. "Really though, Thursday's the day I go to Dalton."

"Oh right, the one day a week thing. So you'll be gone all day?"

"Maybe." He set his guitar down and took his feet off of the edge of the bed, leaning forward. "Would you feel up to going with me? We could just go for a half a day. And you can go to the nurse if you feel tired for as long as you need to. Or maybe just go to rehearsal. You don't even have to sing."

Kurt laughed. "If you're dragging me to school, I am most definitely singing."

"Are you saying you'll go?" Blaine didn't try to hide his hopefulness in his voice.

"Perhaps. I might be able to if I don't finish this essay. Too bad *someone* is making it difficult to concentrate."

"Sorry. Sorry." Blaine held up his hands. "I won't bother you anymore..."

He picked up his guitar again. Kurt smiled and returned to his laptop.

"*Boyfriend*." Blaine finished his sentence as he began to play again.

He watched in almost fascination as the blush reddened Kurt's cheeks again. It was cute. He smiled to himself and switched chords, varying the melody Kurt liked so much. He hoped Kurt would go with him tomorrow. He knew the Warblers were impatiently waiting to see Kurt again. They hadn't said anything as a group at rehearsal, but Blaine could tell. No one from either school had been to visit because Kurt had been so sick, but cards and letters and millions of questions were pouring in from the McKinley glee club via Finn and many of the Warblers had pulled Blaine aside and asked when Kurt was coming back. Kurt had been stuck in the house for too long. It would be good for him to see all of his friends again, even for a little while.

A week later, Finn came home from school with news that the glee students were more than willing to participate in a benefit.

Blaine stood at the counter spreading mustard on slices of bread while Finn pulled out turkey and lettuce from the fridge.

"It's been really busy with practicing for Nationals and all, so I didn't get to bring it up until now."

He knew the feeling. The Warblers had been working overtime and with Blaine going to school once a week, they often spent that day in rehearsal for hours on end. Blaine felt terribly guilty, as he was their captain and he felt as if he was never there. However, they reassured him that as long as he would come to rehearsals every day the two weeks leading up to Nationals, they could overlook his absence. Nationals was in a little less than a month and a half.

"They loved it." Finn was saying as he set down the package of turkey slices and broke lettuce leaves in half. "Mr. Schue even offered to pay the cost of renting the auditorium. If you want to use it. We spent most of the period talking about it. Rachel put Brittany in charge of making posters to advertise it and we'll put a notice in the bulletin announcements too. I wasn't sure what day you wanted it, so we'll fill that in later. They're really excited about this." Finn handed the lettuce he had rinsed off to Blaine, who piled it onto the sandwiches with the turkey. "I think they're mainly happy that they get to do something you know? Something productive that helps Kurt. It's not easy having to have all the information given to them by me, because let's face it, I easily get that stuff mixed up. I once told my mom that my aunt had hiccups."

Blaine looked up, handing him a sandwich.

"She had hives." Finn said and took a bite. "And I know they miss him. Especially Mercedes. I mean, they missed him before, when he went to Dalton, but it's worse now."

"Yeah, I get that. Well, he goes back for the second round of chemo next week, so how about we set it up for the second week after he comes back? As long as the side effects last the same amount of time, we should be good. And if he feels up for it."

"Alright. I'll let them know."

Blaine plated two more sandwiches and set them on the table. "Hey, do you mind if we use Dalton's auditorium? It's bigger than McKinley's and when I talked to the Warblers about it, it sounded like they had a lot of ideas for getting the word out and stuff."

"Oh, yeah. No problem. Man, it'd be great if we could get a lot of people there." Finn smiled and Blaine clapped a hand on his back.

"Thanks for helping out. It means a lot. And tell glee I said thanks."

"We love him just as much as you do dude. Don't forget that."

Blaine smiled at him and went to the foot of the stairs. "Lunch is ready!"

There was a pause and then Kurt yelled back, "Almost done!"

Blaine returned to the table to join Finn, where they spoke in whispers, sharing more details and ideas about the benefit. Their conversation ceased when they heard Kurt's footsteps on the stairs. He slid into his chair and smiling, placed a small stack of paper in the center of the table.

"I believe this is the best essay I've ever written."

Blaine reached over and grabbed the neatly stapled pages, carefully flipping them as he skimmed the five pages.

"Thanks a lot Kurt. Now I need to rewrite mine. I only have three pages."

He picked up one half of his sandwich. "Nah. It's fine. I read it."

"Cheater."

"Only because you left it lying on the desk. If it's that out in the open, you're just asking for me to read it."

"Whatever. I'll be sure to keep my next paper locked in a safe."

Carole entered the kitchen then, opening the fridge and grabbing what was left of the food to make her lunch. "Or you can throw it in Finn's room. You'll never find it again."

Kurt laughed and Finn's smile fell. "Ouch, mom. That one hurt."

"It wouldn't if you cleaned your room." She sang, beginning to put together her own sandwich. "Burt will be home early tonight so I thought it would be fun to watch a movie together."

"I have football." Finn responded immediately.

"Oh honey. Can you miss tonight? I never have all four of my boys home at the same time anymore."

Blaine felt a surge of happiness. He felt glad to have been 'adopted' by Carole enough to be called one of her boys.

Finn looked down at the table, weighing his options. After a while, he met her eyes. "Yeah, I guess I can."

She smiled. "Great. After lunch, go ahead and pick out a movie. Or we can go see one if you'd like that better. And Finn, no gore okay? I had enough of that with Saw VI."

Finn snorted at the memory. "It's not like it's real." He looked over at Blaine. "She had her face hidden behind her hands the whole time. I don't think she looked at the screen once."

"There's no way you'll get me in any theater playing any of those kinds of movies." Kurt grabbed Carole's hand. "I've got your back."

Finn practically stuffed the last bite of his sandwich in his mouth, earning a small laugh from Blaine and a look of disgust from Kurt, as he said, "Yeah, well-"

Kurt cut him off. "Finn, please. Chew. Swallow. Talk."

He swallowed. "Whatever."

Carole set down the section of that morning's paper with the movie times in front of them. "Thank you Kurt." She glanced at Finn. "He's right. Learn to chew honey."

Finn threw up his hands. "Is it gang-up-on-Finn day or what?"

Blaine grinned. "Every day is gang-up-on-Finn day."

"You know, I was just starting to like you. I can change my mind though."

"Hey hey hey. Don't make me separate you two." Kurt chastised. "Get along."

Carole tapped the paper as she gathered up plates from the table. "Alright guys. Burt comes home in three hours. I want a decision by then." She raised her eyebrows. "A *fair* decision."

She left them then, with the paper in the center of the table. Finn grabbed the paper, rustling it as he did so and wrinkling the top half as it folded over. He shook it out to straighten it and quickly scanned the choices.

After no more than five seconds, he crudely folded the paper and said, "Scream 4. No need to look anymore."

Kurt raised his eyebrows. "I believe she said '*fair* choice.'"" He took the paper from Finn, opened it, and smoothed it out on the table, where Blaine read over his shoulder. "What about Water for Elephants?"

Finn snorted. "Are you kidding me? If I wanted to see a chick flick, I just have to turn on Lifetime."

"Fine." Kurt folded his arms across his chest.

Blaine reached over Kurt's head and grabbed the now wrinkle-free paper. He held it out in front of him, eyes raking over the titles. "Hmmm.... What about Source Code? I think it's an action movie, but it's not nonstop gore or scary at all."

Finn looked surprised. "Must have missed that one. I'm fine with that."

Blaine looked to Kurt, who shrugged.

"It's not bad, I suppose."

Blaine smiled. "See? There's always a compromise."

The theater surprisingly wasn't crowded. Burt and Carole sat together in the prime center seats of the middle row. Blaine, Kurt, and Finn sat in the back. Finn leaned away from them, texting Quinn for most of the movie, although he paid attention whenever something blew up. Blaine noticed that Kurt had scanned the theater when they were choosing their seats. There was an old couple near the front, a husband and wife with their two kids off to the side, and paired friends or couples sporadically spread out. There was a rowdy group of teens on the right; Finn recognized a girl from his fourth period and her entourage of friends. She smiled at them when they came in.

"Looking for someone?" Blaine whispered as they sat down.

Kurt blinked. "No."

His response was a bit too quick for Blaine to drop the subject.

"You sure? That girl is cute."

Kurt lightly smacked his shoulder.

"What? She is."

"Blaine." Kurt almost spat the word and the dismissive tone made Blaine shut up.

As the previews ended and the movie began, Blaine glanced at Kurt out of the corner of his eye. Kurt was tired. That was why he was being snippy. He pulled up the armrest out of the way and waited. Kurt looked around, eyes darting back and forth once before he looked at Blaine and quickly shook his head. A bit hurt, Blaine shrugged, but left the armrest where it was.

Halfway through the movie, Blaine moved his hand closer to Kurt's. The second their fingers touched, Kurt pulled away as if an electric shock had zapped him.

Thoroughly confused and definitely upset, Blaine pulled his hand away, crossing his arms over his chest. Kurt seemed to sink back into his chair as if he wanted to disappear. He seemed even smaller and more fragile. His pale hands shook in his lap. Blaine's eyebrows creased and he sat still, no longer trying to pay attention to the movie. He stared at the screen, but his thoughts were far away.

Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. He turned to face Kurt and, with his voice as low as he could manage, he said, "Come with me."

He got up and Kurt followed, whether out of guilt or obligation, Blaine didn't know, but he didn't care. Outside the theater, with the harsh lights burning their eyes, Blaine confronted Kurt.

"What's going on?" He tried to keep his tone calm and concerned, which he was, but he was also hurt and confused.

Kurt looked around and moved to sit on the empty bench a few feet away. Blaine stayed where he was, but when Kurt met his eyes, he found himself walking over and sitting next to him.

"What's going on?" Blaine repeated his question, this time allowing the concern to meld into his words. "Do you feel sick?"

Kurt shook his head. "No." He played with the zipper on the pocket of his jacket, avoiding Blaine's eyes. "I... This sounds so stupid. I'm stupid. I don't even know why I feel..." He paused, searching for a word he couldn't find.

"Feel what?" Blaine prompted, muscles in his hand twitching. He fought the urge to grab Kurt's hand.

"I don't know. I guess I'm still on edge about Karofsky."

Blaine immediately softened. He turned his body towards Kurt. "Hey. I can't imagine how horrible that was for you. But things are different. He's not here. And you have me."

"It's not just him though. There are other people who would want to do the same thing."

"Some people just can't handle the thought of what's not 'normal.' They don't understand and they are sorely misinformed and they need to get over it. Kurt, you don't need to worry anymore. I'm here for you. This is your first time out since chemo. You deserve to enjoy this. Not hide in fear. What can I do to make it better?"

Kurt sighed, bringing his eyes up. "I hate feeling this way. I thought I could handle it. I hate feeling scared. And I hate for you to have to feel responsible for my stupid emotions."

"I won't hold your hand anymore if that'll make you feel more comfortable. But Kurt, you're not stupid and I hate for you to live like this. I care about you. A lot. And you have no problem holding my hand at home, so why is this any different? Sure, people are going to judge, but what does it matter? It doesn't matter."

Kurt raised his chin and sat up straighter. "You're right." His voice was a whisper, but became more confident as he went on. "I don't hate who I am. I've always known who I was. And I was never scared before Karofsky. But he's the one who lives in fear. And you know what?"

"Hmmm?"

Kurt suddenly leaned forward and their lips met. Blaine's heart pounded and he returned the kiss eagerly. Kurt's hands skimmed up Blaine's neck, sending a shiver down Blaine's spine. Much too soon it seemed, Kurt broke their touch.

"I'm glad I have you Blaine."

They smiled softly at each other. "Let's get back." Blaine stood, pulling Kurt up with him. "Don't be afraid of what other people think. You have a right to be who you are, whatever that may be."

A cold wind picked up, brisk and unwelcome, as they exited the theater. Kurt shivered when the breeze blew his hair around his brow. It was dark outside and the temperature had dropped a lot. Thankfully, it wasn't raining yet. April was a tricky month to plan for weather-wise. Hot one day and cold the next, rain was forecasted this week.

Blaine walked next to Kurt, their shoes simultaneously clacking on the ground. Finn's long legs and loping gait made him the fastest in the group, and he reached the car way ahead of the others. Carole and Burt followed behind him, though considerably slower. Blaine and Kurt took their time, and though not annoyingly slow, they walked leisurely. Stopping suddenly, Blaine faced Kurt and unwound his scarf, looping it around Kurt's neck. Kurt's cheeks were tinged with pink from the cold and the soft red material looked nice with his pale skin. Blaine grinned at him and began walking again.

Kurt fell into step with him immediately. Blaine's scarf was warm around his neck and it smelled like his cologne. Kurt breathed deeply, inhaling the comforting woodsy scent. Their fingers linked together and Blaine pulled Kurt close to him. Kurt's feet stumbled a bit on the concrete.

"You okay?"

"Yeah. Just tired."

Blaine smirked. "I wanted to fall asleep too. That movie kinda sucked huh?"

He took Kurt's laugh as his agreement and continued, "I'll take you to see Water for Elephants soon. Just the two of us."

"That sounds nice."

The car ride home, Kurt could barely keep his eyes open and Blaine put his arm around Kurt's shoulders. He leaned into Blaine, scarf still around his neck, and tried to force his eyes to stay open. He sat in a kind of daze, feeling warm and comfortable and rocked by the motion of the car and they were home before he could truly fall asleep.

They got ready for bed quickly and Blaine flopped on the air mattress after grabbing an extra blanket for Kurt and tossing it over him. Kurt was happily asleep in a matter of minutes, his dreams filled with the vivid scenery of the crisp, clear memories of Dalton and the slightly chaotic, but beloved memories of McKinley. He'd thrust the unpleasant memories of anything to do with Karofsky out of his mind. He didn't want to be bothered by the thorn on the rose. In his dreams, the brown-haired, hazel-eyed boy stood by his side and their hands fell perfectly together, like pieces of a puzzle he hadn't known could fit.

17. Running and Plans

Blaine woke to his cell phone buzzing. He jumped and snatched his pants up from the wrinkled bundle on the floor. He thrust his hand into one pocket and then the other, finding his incessantly buzzing phone. Snapping it open, he clicked it off and closed it, glancing over at Kurt, who had obviously not heard the alarm. He rolled back over and sat up, running a hand through his hair, yawning.

Getting up slowly, he cracked his knuckles and grabbed his iPod, a pair of gym shorts, and his tennis shoes from the small, but ever-growing pile of his clothes in the designated corner of Kurt's room. With the pile of clothes in his arms, he stepped over to the large whiteboard hanging on the wall opposite Kurt's bed. He uncapped the marker with his teeth and wrote a quick note to Kurt.

Good morning sunshine. Went running. Be back soon.

B

He chuckled to himself before placing the pen back and heading down the hall. He changed in the bathroom and shoved his shoes on his feet, leaving the laces untied. It was Saturday and he hopped down the stairs, happy that the weekend was finally here. He had plans today. Plans to get the benefit going and he was almost giddy with excitement. It was going to be amazing; he could feel it.

He grabbed a granola bar and downed a small glass of orange juice before lacing up his running sneakers and carefully slipping out the front door, shutting it behind him. He took a deep breath of the cold morning air. It was exhilarating. He sighed deeply and pulled out his iPod, scrolling down until he found his playlist titled 'Stress.' This playlist was reserved for the times when he felt upset or stressed or out of control. And for running.

He started slowly, at a languid jog, but built the pace as the song switched. It felt good to be outside. His feet pounded on the concrete and the chilling wind blew his curls back. The fourth song began and he upped the pace, at a full run now. He could feel his heart racing. He had been around the Hummel's house a lot and he pretty much knew the neighborhood now; the street that had the menacing pit bull, to be avoided, and the one with the huge hill.

He hadn't been running in so long and though he wanted more than anything to run up that hill, he knew it wasn't good to push it. He would surely regret it the next day. Instead, he started longingly at the steep hill for another moment and turned to head back out onto the main street and flat ground.

The cold morning air filtered out when the sun rose higher in the sky. Blaine felt the sweat on his brow beginning to drip down his face. He slowed to a walk, breathing deeply and getting his heart rate down, glancing at his iPod.

"Shit." He cursed and his heart sped up again. He turned on the spot and started in a full out run back towards the house. He'd been gone an hour and half.

His hand grasped the doorknob and he pulled the front door open, barreling into the living room. He stopped, sneakers squeaking on the hardwood floor.

"Hey Burt." He said, slightly breathless.

He looked up from the eggs he was scrambling. "Morning. Want cheese on your eggs?"

He smiled. "Yes please."

Burt sprinkled the cheese on the pile of scrambled eggs and held out the plate and a fork to him. He smiled gratefully and shoveled in the food, burning his tongue as he did so. He ate standing up and leaned against the counter. When he was done, he placed his plate and fork in the dishwasher and thanked Burt again. He just shook his head and muttered something about slowing down.

Blaine didn't hear him as he jogged up the stairs. He didn't bother going slower past Finn's room today; he knew he had gone to pick up Quinn. They were meeting at the Lima Bean as soon as Blaine could leave without Kurt getting suspicious.

His knock was followed by Kurt opening the door. And Blaine knew he was in trouble.

He grinned sheepishly. "Hey."

Kurt narrowed his eyes. "Hey?"

"Hey... handsome?" He offered, shrugging his shoulders. Though Kurt's eyes were narrowed, he could tell he was just kidding around. The scowl hadn't reached his mouth. Only then would he truly be in trouble.

Kurt held out Blaine's cell phone, reluctantly letting him through the door. "I have no problem with you going out jogging, but why on Earth didn't you take your phone? What if you had... I don't know, fallen and sprained your ankle or the Milson's dog bit your curly little head off?"

While Kurt was ranting, Blaine kicked off his shoes and pulled off his sweaty t-shirt. He stood there in front of Kurt, holding his shirt in his hands and let him rant, waiting patiently. When his mouth stopped moving, Blaine raised an eyebrow.

"Done?" He had been listening, but his mind was on other things as he took in the sight of Kurt in his t-shirt and pajama bottoms slung loosely around his hips, hair slightly disheveled in a way that he liked, though he was sure Kurt would disagree.

Kurt looked taken aback and tossed the phone to Blaine before crossing his arms over his chest. "Yes. Just remember next time okay?"

Blaine stepped up in front of him and put his hand up to the back of Kurt's neck, bringing his lips down to his temple and kissing softly as he brought his body closer. Kurt melted and was suddenly aware of Blaine's shirtless body, shining with sweat, pressing against his and the general closeness of him. He had to remember to breathe and when Blaine pulled away, he looked up from under his eyelashes, feeling the corner of his mouth pull down a bit.

"No fair." He said, but Blaine could hear the light laughter in his voice.

Blaine smirked. "Gotta learn how to work the system."

"Am I that easy to manipulate?"

"With me you are." Blaine said, winking. "But to give you some credit, I am supermegafoxyawesomehot, so don't take it too hard."

"Sure, if you think so." Kurt scoffed.

"Oh come on." Blaine whined. "You can't tell me there's not one part of you that doesn't think I'm wantable?"

He laughed, ears still a bit red from their contact. "A triple negative sentence this early in the morning? I'm impressed."

"Yeah, good luck figuring that one out. Oh, and your dad has eggs ready."

He nodded. "Knew I smelt something burning. Go take a shower. You can use my bathroom."

"Thanks. See you downstairs."

Ten minutes later, Blaine emerged from the shower to find Kurt sitting on the bed. A towel was wrapped around Blaine's waist and his hair was dripping water down his back. He grabbed his clothes and turned to Kurt. "What happened to 'see you downstairs'?"

"Did you know that last night was the happiest night I have had that I can remember?"

"I hope not. What about those nights you can't remember?" Blaine smiled.

"You know what I mean." Kurt sounded a bit hurt and Blaine dropped the joking manner.

"Hold on a sec."

Blaine disappeared in the bathroom to quickly get dressed and was out in thirty seconds. He sat on the bed. "Hey. I've told you time and time again not to care what other people think. And last night, you took my advice. When you kissed me in that theater, it was like... like the walls came down and you were able to be you. I've seen the way you act in public when you're with me. You're a completely different person from the Kurt that walks with me in the mall and the Kurt who shares a room with me. I want to see the same Kurt, whether he's in here or out there. You felt comfortable with expressing yourself; you weren't afraid. That's why you had such a good time."

A small smile spread over Kurt's face. "I don't deserve you. You always know what to say."

Blaine let that sink in. Kurt felt he didn't deserve him. "That is the most untrue thing I've ever heard. Don't talk about who does or doesn't deserve who. That's not the point here. We're together and that's all that matters."

"See what I mean?"

Blaine gave him a playful shove. "Go eat your breakfast, you unworthy being that I care so much about."

Kurt was at the door when Blaine called him back.

"Oh, I forgot. I need to work on a project, so I'm going over to a friend's house. Don't know how long I'll be though. I don't know if you already had plans or not. I'm sorry. I forgot to ask."

"It's no problem. Really. I can find something to do. What project?"

"Oh... um... extra credit. Really, it's nothing."

"Ah." Kurt raised his eyebrows, but dropped the subject. Blaine was never a good liar. "Did you eat?"

He nodded and followed him down the stairs. Kurt sat in front of the plate of scrambled eggs Burt placed in front of him.

"Had to reheat those. Hurry up next time Kurt. They're not as good now."

"They're perfect, dad. Thank you."

Blaine leaned over and kissed the top of Kurt's head. "See you in a little while."

Little did Kurt know, this 'extra credit project' would be worth so much more than that.

Blaine pulled into the parking lot at the Lima Bean. He had to circle around a few times to find a spot, in the back of course, but he made it. When he pushed open the door, the tantalizing scent of roasting coffee beans and the sound of happy chatter and milk being steamed hit him.

He'd been here a few times with Kurt, mainly they just went to the coffee shop that was within walking distance from Dalton. When he entered, a large group at the back all turned to look at him. Many hands waved him over and he was greeted with smiles.

"Hey guys!" He gave and received hugs from everyone. "It's so good to see you."

"What took you so long?" Finn said, one hand around his coffee and the other wound with Quinn's.

"Sorry. Traffic."

Santana snorted. "Rookie. If you say meet at nine, you get here at eight-thirty, otherwise you'll never get a parking spot. Especially on the weekends."

"Yeah, and then all the good coffee is gone and they give you ground up dirt and tree bark." Artie laughed.

Brittany mumbled softly, "Do the Keebler elves make the bark? Cause the bark I get at Christmas is like magic."

Santana snorted and patted her hand. "That's because it's chocolate Brittany."

He laughed and sat down. "Thanks guys. I'll remember that."

Mercedes passed him a cup of coffee. "I got you." She said with a smile and Blaine returned her grin. It was hard not to; Mercedes had a smile that was contagious.

"Thank you."

Rachel pulled out her notebook and a pen. She stood. "Okay, well now that we're all here, I would like to say-"

"Hold on." Mercedes held up her hand, silencing Rachel. She turned to Blaine. "How is he?"

Blaine's soft smile reassured everyone in the room. "He's fine. Good. Better than I've seen him in a while."

He didn't want to upset them by telling them that Kurt had his second round of chemotherapy in a few days. Blaine was not looking forward to that.

Mercedes turned back to Rachel, satisfied. "Just need to check up on my boy." She paused and turned back to Blaine, having remembered something. "You tell him he needs to answer my calls or I swear I am going to break down those impressive doors you have barricading that school myself."

Blaine chuckled. "Will do."

Rachel still stood, eyes on the pair. "Can I go on?" She asked, after waiting to see if they would continue talking. Blaine waved his hand in a *go-ahead* gesture and she smiled.

"As I was saying, welcome. I know it's a bit disheartening that Kurt isn't here, as he is a member of our family, but that would ruin the surprise. Today we are going to be making final plans to our benefit. But fear not my fellow glee-clubbers, and Blaine, because we are going to create a show that is going to bring the house down. As you all know, we need to raise money for Kurt's leukemia treatments. I stress, once again, that it is of the utmost importance that he not know anything. This needs to be a happy thing in this dark time. Got that?"

Everyone nodded.

"Good." She smiled. "I would like to start a list, a 'to-do' list if you will. It'll keep everyone on track and on the same page." She opened her notebook to a fresh page and clicked her pen, sitting back down. "Alright, any volunteers?"

Brittany's hand went up.

"Yes?" Rachel felt a bit silly calling on her as if she were in school, but did it anyway.

"I want to make posters. And I want Artie to help me."

Rachel nodded and wrote it down in her book. "Who else?"

"We'll sell tickets." Mike raised his hand, which was intertwined with Tina's. She smiled at him. "Yeah, we can do that."

"Okay." Rachel scribbled some more. "And Blaine is in charge of the Warblers. I'll be handling New Directions, and we also need someone to hand out-"

Blaine cleared his throat. "Um, Rachel?"

"Hmmm?"

"I was actually thinking of asking Vocal Adrenaline if they'd like to do a song or two."

Her hand stopped writing. "What? Why?"

"Well, Jesse was in New Directions when Kurt was. So he got to know him at least a little bit, right? Vocal Adrenaline is huge. And they'll bring in a lot of people."

Heads nodded around the table. Rachel was unmoving. She opened her mouth and closed it again.

"Come on, Rachel. It's a good idea." Mercedes spoke across the table.

"It's for Kurt." Quinn spoke up, surprising Blaine. He'd gotten the feeling she didn't care about much that wasn't her.

Rachel was quiet for a tense moment, when her indecision rendered her uncharacteristically speechless. When she spoke, her voice was soft, but her tone was solid, definite. "It's for Kurt. Anything to make raise more awareness."

Blaine nodded. "Thank you."

Puck, leaning back in his chair, broke the semi-awkward moment by announcing that he wanted to be in charge of making baked goods to sell beforehand.

Lauren, who was sitting beside him with a Lima Bean chocolate chip cookie in her hand, turned. "Alright, Puckerman, here's the deal. You're making cookies. I want in. I just so happen to be a pretty awesome baker and with your skills in the kitchen, we are going to make the best baked goods anyone here has seen this side of hillbilly town." She looked disgustedly at the cookie in her hand. "And they will be nowhere near as dry and artificial as this. Shouldn't even be called a cookie."

Puck looked up at Rachel, and then leaned back farther in his chair. "I don't need to say anymore on that matter."

"Okay..." Rachel said slowly, writing furiously.

She looked up when she was done. "Anyone else have anything to add?" When no one spoke, she continued. "Alright, well, it looks like we've got everything we need. Blaine, has it been finalized that we can use the auditorium at Dalton?"

Blaine nodded. "Had to pull some major strings, but luckily, I'm well-liked there, and Kurt happens to be a favorite among the teachers."

"Great. And did you say you wanted to have it in three weeks or four?"

Blaine thought for a moment. "Umm... probably in three, if that's okay. I know it'll give us less time to prepare, but..." He trailed off.

"No, I totally get it. I'm excited too."

He didn't tell her that the real reason he wanted it earlier was to give Kurt something to be happy about. Other than him, that is. It would be two weeks after he finished the second round of chemo. And he was planning on telling him something very important that night.

He sighed lightly, but pretended to yawn to cover his slip-up of the image of Kurt and his beautiful lips that had just flashed into his head.

"Do we have a song list?"

Rachel flipped to a page in the front of her notebook and tore it out, slapping it down on the table in the middle. Everyone leaned forward at once to read it.

New Directions girls

Warblers

New Directions boys

Mercedes

Finn

Blaine

New Directions

Warblers

"We'll have to add a few songs from Vocal Adrenaline too, if they say yes." Rachel mumbled, seeming to be talking to herself. Then she spoke louder, to the group. "Blaine told me he'd like to do a solo for Kurt and I thought since Mercedes has been kind of his best friend, that she'd like one too. And Finn is his stepbrother now, so are you guys okay with that? Does anyone else want a solo?"

She looked around expectantly. A few shook their heads, but everyone stayed silent.

Then Tina spoke. "I think that's a good thing. You know, to have the people closest to him do solos."

Mike wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "I like it too."

She smiled and Rachel grinned too. "Alright then. Sounds good."

Blaine was a bit surprised that Rachel hadn't given herself a solo. Maybe she was finally letting others have the spotlight. It was a sweet thing to do. Blaine would have to thank her for it later.

"Is this the show order?" Blaine asked.

"Yes. Well, we can change it if you want."

"No... no. It's fine. Can I have a copy of that?"

She smiled and began to write down the order. "Sure thing."

Blaine hid the disappointment in his voice. Truthfully, he had wanted to be the closing number. But he didn't want to sound conceited and ending with the Warblers would probably be more memorable. At least, that's what he told himself.

Blaine's phone buzzed as the chatter around him began to get louder.

How's the project going? -K

Blaine smiled. *Fine. What are you up to? -B*

Kurt's answer came almost immediately and Blaine knew he was anxious. *Dad's making me throw away some of my fashion magazines. Says they take up too much space. He doesn't know I hid them under my bathroom sink. -K*

Sneaky. -B

When will you be home? -K

Soon, oh anxious one. -B

Hurry up. -K

After sorting out most of the planning for the benefit, they sat together for another hour, talking and catching up until Blaine realized his half-finished coffee was cold. They asked a lot of questions about Kurt. It was understandable. Blaine would be worried too if he was in their shoes. But he didn't give away too much information. He wasn't comfortable sharing it. He didn't really know why. Maybe to protect them from worrying more? To protect himself from saying it and hurting more? In his heart, he knew it was the selfish reason that he veiled the truth, dialing down the details. And he felt bad about that. But not bad enough to tell them. If Kurt wanted them to know, he would have called. Or given more specific instructions to Finn.

After a flurry of texts, ever-increasing in demand, from Kurt, Blaine excused himself from the crowded table, promising to keep them up to date with Kurt related circumstances.

"Thank you guys. All of you, for helping with this. It'll mean a lot to him."

A chorus of no problem's and yep's rung up at him and he turned to leave.

It had gotten colder in the two hours he had been here. An unexpected icy wind bit at his nose. He scowled and wished he'd brought a scarf. His cell phone buzzed again. Smiling, he looked at the screen, knowing who it would be.

You coming yet? Or do I need to come over there myself? –K

He quickly replied, *Calm down. Be home in ten minutes. –B*

The car roared to life and quieted down to a gentle hum. He pulled out onto the street as the phone buzzed again. At a stop light, he glanced down.

Tick tock –K

A silent laugh made him grin hugely. Kurt was so impatient. He thought about taking a longer way home just to make him more anxious, but he pictured those soft blue eyes and figured he'd rather not be guilty into feeling bad that he'd been gone.

18. M&M's and Bacon

Blaine held his cell phone in his hand, dialing the number Rachel had written in her curly handwriting on the corner of the song list. He had been a bit surprised when he'd found out Rachel still had Jesse's number in her phone. When Rachel handed Blaine the paper, he'd glanced curiously at the number and then at her. The slight way she shook her head told Blaine not to say anything. Maybe she didn't want a certain *someone* to know she still had his number.

In any case, Blaine was glad that she hadn't completely given up on Jesse because he now had a way to directly connect with the lead singer.

He was sitting on the bed in Kurt's room. Not just any bed though. To his surprise, a few days ago, when he'd walked into the room, he was astounded to see a twin-sized bed. It had been pushed up against the wall where the bookshelf had been, which was now on the opposite side of the room.

"No more air mattress!" Kurt had practically jumped on him, shoving him in the room.

Blaine had laughed and sat on the bed, while Kurt followed him in.

"Sorry it took so long." Kurt said after him and sat down next to Blaine, smiling. "It was inevitable though."

He smiled back at him.

"The bed itself is from dad and Carole, but I picked out everything else."

Blaine ran his hand over the comforter as Kurt spoke. It was so soft, probably Ethan Allen. If they could make a bed out of cashmere, Blaine was sure Kurt would have found it.

His eyes suddenly fell on a small crystal bowl on a table next to the bed, filled with M&M's. Kurt saw where his gaze had gone and smiled. Blaine grabbed the bowl and looked up.

"Moving-in gift. Of sorts."

"Why are they all green?"

"It's your favorite color."

He laughed and popped a few into his mouth. "That it is." He put his hand over Kurt's. "Thank you. This is really great."

"I just wish we could have gotten you a bigger bed. Unfortunately, this room doesn't warrant the space to occupy two queen-size beds. I debated buying one king-sized and tossing mine, but dad said no." Kurt smiled at the memory. "You should have seen his face."

"It's fine. Really. I don't mind." He paused. "Although..." An eyebrow raised suggestively. "If you want to share, I wouldn't object."

A blush crept up Kurt's face, coloring his ears.

Ignoring this, Blaine offered him the bowl. Kurt took a handful of the candy and ate one. Then, he paused, glanced sideways and threw one at Blaine. It bounced off his forehead.

Blaine laughed. "You *really* didn't want to do that." He reached behind him and tugged out one of the many pillows that covered the bed and pelted Kurt.

"Ooof!" Kurt laughed and retaliated by whacking him with another pillow.

"Are we really about to have a pillow fight?" Blaine asked incredulously.

"I'm not above smothering you with a pillow, yes."

The ensuing pillow fight that had followed was one of the most fun times Blaine had had in a while. Also one of the most hilarious.

Blaine now sat on the bed, pressing in Jesse's number, waiting when the dial tone sounded. Kurt was in the shower. He figured he had about fifteen minutes, depending on if Kurt decided to deep condition his hair and which skin cream he used.

Blaine took a breath when Jesse answered. "Hey Jesse. This is Blaine Anderson."

There was a pause on the other side of the line. "Umm... hello? Do I know you?"

"I'm the lead singer for the Warblers. I don't know if you've heard, but Kurt Hummel, one of the New Direction singers, well, a Warbler now actually, has cancer."

"Oh... well, I'm sorry to hear that, I think. Uh, was there a reason you called? Or would you like to tell me how you got my number?"

"I was just getting to that. We, the New Directions and the Warblers, have decided to put together a benefit to raise money for his treatments. I was wondering if you and Vocal Adrenaline would like to perform a few songs."

Another pause. "Oh, um I don't see why not. I mean, I'll have to ask them, but I guess we can come." He scoffed. "And scare you a bit before Nationals."

"Thank you. But, remember, this is a benefit for Kurt. Please don't turn it into a competition." After a moment, he added. "Rachel."

"What about her?"

"She gave me your number."

He seemed surprised. "Oh, okay then. Was that all you needed?"

"Yes. We would like you to have two songs ready to perform in two and a half weeks at the Dalton Academy auditorium. It doesn't need to be anything comparable to Regionals, so keep that in mind."

"Sure. But you might want to go before us, as you may be unable to move from being in a state of shock. Keep *that* in mind."

Blaine laughed. "Sure thing."

As he hung up, feeling very pleased with himself, he heard the doorknob turn and couldn't believe his lucky timing. Kurt stepped out in his pajamas and sat down carefully on his bed, hugging a pillow to his chest. He surreptitiously slid the phone on the table and got up.

"You okay?"

Kurt looked up. "Hm?"

Blaine sat down next to him. "I asked if you were okay."

"Oh. Yeah... yeah, I'm fine."

Blaine raised an eyebrow, but let it go. He sighed and reached over to run a hand through Kurt's hair.

He smiled when he saw Kurt's eyes close and he let out a little groan of pleasure. He loved it when Blaine played with his hair. Blaine knew immediately that Kurt had done the conditioning treatment. He let the soft strands fall through his fingers.

He sighed again and wrapped his arms around Kurt's shoulders. Kurt made a noise of discontent. "Don't stop."

Blaine laughed and resumed toying with Kurt's hair. "You're lucky you're cute."

Blaine woke up the next morning in Kurt's bed. He turned his head to see Kurt lying next to him, covers tangled in his legs, eyes softly closed and mouth open slightly. Blaine rubbed the sleep from his eyes. His stomach was twisted in knots and he had didn't know why.

Rolling over with a low groan, he put an arm around Kurt's shirtless torso and pulled himself closer. Kurt made a soft noise, exhaling deeply, but didn't wake up. Blaine sighed happily and buried his face in Kurt's shoulder.

Blaine laid there for a while, just holding Kurt close, staring in almost a trance as he watched Kurt's chest rise and fall. He pressed his lips to Kurt's shoulder. As they lay there, Kurt seemingly oblivious to the boy who lay beside him, Blaine let his eyes slowly droop. In the halfway state between falling back asleep and staying awake, he heard a knock on the door. He forced his eyes open and looked up just in time to see Finn standing in the doorway.

Still not entirely conscious, Blaine just stared at Finn, who looked startled.

"Oh! Geez." Finn averted his eyes, shifting around uncomfortably and avoiding looking anywhere but up. "Umm..."

"What is it Finn?" Blaine suddenly became aware of how he held Kurt, arm still draped over his shirtless chest, and how that must look to Finn. He snatched his arm back as if electrocuted. "This isn't what it looks like. I swear, we were just sleeping. I-" He trailed off, knowing how flustered he had become and feeling the heat fill his cheeks. Sure, in his mind, he and Kurt were doing much more than just sleeping and his subconscious deciding to make him blush wasn't helping his case any.

"Oh. Well... yeah." Finn still wasn't looking up. "Burt told me to wake Kurt. We're leaving in an hour."

Finn looked all too happy that his deed had been carried out and practically flew back down the hall. Blaine's eyebrows knit together in confusion. Leaving? Where?

His eyes snapped open.

Kurt's second round of chemotherapy was today. His stomach was in knots for a reason. Apparently, his subconscious had been trying to warn him, in addition to making Finn think that when he said 'sleeping,' he meant something entirely different.

Blaine gently shook Kurt's shoulder. "Kurt. Wake up. Hey, Earth to Kurt. Come on, wake up sunshine."

Kurt began to move. Blaine could see his eyes darting back and forth underneath his closed eyelids. Kurt scrunched up his face and rolled on his side, curling into a ball and taking the covers with him.

"Hey." Blaine got up and went around to the other side of the bed and poked him. "Don't start that with me mister."

There was no answer from the lump now completely twisted up in the covers. Blaine knew desperate measures were called for.

He sighed. "I didn't want to have to tell you this, but you leave me no choice." He bent down, put his face close to Kurt's ear and whispered, "I spilled coffee on your Alexandar McQueen blazer."

Kurt's eyes snapped open. "The blue one or the white one?"

Blaine smirked. "Oh good. You're up." He reached down and grabbed a fistful of the sheet in his hand and pulled.

"No!" Kurt tried fitfully to snatch the covers back and was unsuccessful, ending up sitting on the edge of the bed in his plaid pajama pants and no shirt, wearing a grimace on his face.

Blaine tossed him the shirt he'd picked out the night before. "Come on lazy. I smell bacon downstairs and I'm not leaving until you're dressed."

This earned him a glare, but Kurt got up and pointedly seized the rest of his clothes from Blaine's hands, heading into the bathroom. Kurt took a long time getting ready and Blaine suspected it was supposed to make him mad. When Kurt finally emerged, fully dressed with not so much as a single hair out of place, Blaine smiled at him.

"Wasn't that hard you baby."

The daggers in Kurt's stare made Blaine back off a bit. Kurt followed him downstairs and they sat at the table, Finn already devouring a mound of bacon and eggs.

Kurt's eyes fell on Finn's half-finished plate. He reached over and grabbed an apple from a bowl in the center, holding it out to Finn. "Eat this."

Finn's mouth was full off eggs. He rolled his eyes and swallowed. "Why?"

"Because it's fruit. You know, one of the food groups?"

At Finn's blank stare, Kurt told him, "Oh my god, I have no hope for the world. The food groups Finn. Carbs, vegetables, fat, dairy, protein, fruit?"

"I wish bacon was its own food group." He said, munching now on a piece of the meat in question, but he took the apple and at least set it on his plate.

Burt placed a plate piled with breakfast in front of Blaine and asked Kurt what he wanted.

"Nothing, I'm fine."

Blaine looked at him. "You can't not eat."

"Blaine, please. I can't have a repeat of what happened last time."

Blaine's gaze softened. He remembered when Kurt had eaten pancakes the day of his first chemo treatment and the week of terrible nausea and vomiting that had followed.

"I don't blame you. But I still wish you'd eat."

"Tell you what, I'll humor you." He reached over and grabbed the last piece of bacon from out of Finn's hand.

"Hey!"

Kurt smiled and took a bite. Blaine shrugged.

"Well, it's something I guess."

After Blaine finished eating and he brought his plate to the sink, Burt announced that they were leaving. Blaine's stomach dropped.

Burt twirled his keys in his hand and told Kurt he'd meet him in the car. Blaine and Kurt stood inside the house, by the door, while Finn escaped to the safety of his room so as to not have to witness what was taking place.

"You'd better call me."

"I'll try."

"No trying. Do. Every night."

Kurt laughed. "Okay." Then his tone turned serious and he bit his lip. "They're giving me a stronger treatment this time. I assume the side effects will be the same, but just be prepared if they're worse than before."

Blaine tilted Kurt's head up with his index finger, staring deep into his eyes, trying to put so much into that look because he didn't trust himself to speak, afraid that his true emotions would show. He was scared as hell. But he didn't want to worry Kurt even more and pulled him into a tight hug and squeezing his eyes shut, biting the inside of his cheek to keep from letting out a sob of want when Kurt turned for the door.

"See you in six days." Kurt said. "Don't worry Blaine. And I'll know if you do." With a smirk, he was gone.

Blaine was not a patient person. He had no idea what he was going to do for six days, other than worry every minute of the day. After Kurt left, he went upstairs and straightened up the room. Then he began on his long forgotten schoolwork, with upcoming due dates looming like rain clouds in the not-so-far-off distance. It was going to be a long week.

19. Solos and Nightmares

Blaine was a bundle of nerves the entire week. Even Kurt's nightly calls did nothing to lessen his anxiety. They did however, keep it at bay. It was as if upon hearing Kurt's voice and knowing that he was at least still there, all of his fears got bundled up and tossed to some far corner of his mind for however long they were able to talk. The worst part was when he hung up though, and all of the horrible worries were released again to ravage his thoughts.

No matter how much Blaine tried to quiet his mind, countless scenes played out in his head, especially while he slept. None of them were good. Every one of them featured Kurt and they never ended well.

The first day, they talked for the better part of an hour, each of them trying to avoid the topic of chemo or anything to do with leukemia. Blaine could hear the tiredness in Kurt's voice, whether he was emotionally or physically exhausted, he didn't know, but he quickly ended the conversation after that, telling Kurt to try and get some sleep.

That was when the first nightmare began.

He was walking, feet crunching lightly on the leaves. The path ahead of him was clear, the blue sky above and the trees draping with leaves were brightly colored, as if he were seeing them in high-definition. He turned. The wind picked up and blew his hair off his forehead, tickling his back as it seeped through his t-shirt. He hooked his thumbs in the pockets of his jeans and began walking. He didn't know where, but he didn't care. Suddenly, he heard a noise. No, it was more than a noise. His eyes darted back and forth. Where was that coming from?

It was a hum. A high-pitched, sporadic hum that when he tried to focus on it, disappeared entirely, leaving him in silence. He glanced around, then, and seeing no one, he put it out of his mind and kept walking, staring in wonder at the trees.

There it was again. The hum, growing louder, more controlled, as if there had been five people singing in different keys at different times and now they sang together, exactly in sync.

He whirled and this time, the sound did not disappear. He followed the noise, leading him away from the leaf-strewn path and into the trees.

And then he heard a voice in his head.

"No."

It was spoken with a soft tone, as though the person was answering a simple question. His feet carried him on, but he felt himself growing heavier, feeling the weight of some very large problem on his conscience. He wove in and out of the trees, hearing the noise grow in volume and urgency, and then drop back down until he had to strain to hear it. What the hell was it?

With every step, he felt his legs become so heavy he had to really concentrate to lift his foot to take a step.

He heard the voice in his head again.

"No. Don't. Please, don't."

And now the voice was a murmur. He knew that voice. He looked around, turning in a circle around himself.

"What do you want?" He asked.

Quiet.

His head hurt. He pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger.

"Please don't."

"Don't what?" He cried into the air, eyes closed, trying to focus

The voice in his head answered right away, now pleading and afraid, and it scared him.

"Don't let me. Please, don't let me."

He opened his eyes and let his hand fall. He gasped.

He was no longer in the midst of the trees. Or so he thought. They looked completely different, but the same.

Everything was in tones of gray, black, and silver. Fog swirled at his feet. The trees had no leaves whatsoever, their creaking branches seeming to be reaching out. There was complete and utter silence. He'd never known silence could be so loud. His heart pounded in his chest.

He whirled around. Too fast. He lost his balance and fell hard on his back onto the ground. Groaning, he pushed himself up to sitting. When he looked over, he cried out. He felt as though his heart was being ripped.

Kurt was lying at the base of a tree, dressed in a hospital gown. His porcelain skin glowed in the moonlight, making it almost luminescent. His eyes were closed.

Blaine scrambled up, tripping in his haste, and he collapsed at Kurt's side. With shaking hands, he reached out and took his face in his palms.

"No no no. Please, no. Kurt..."

The motionless figure did not answer. Did not move. Did not breathe.

His skin was cold. Blaine shifted to take Kurt in his arms, holding him so tightly against his chest. He hung his head and sobbed, hot tears dripping down his cheeks and chin onto Kurt's closed eyes.

There was a sound. A hushed hum, so soft, as if it was meant for him. Only for him.

He looked up. There was no one. They were alone.

"W-what do you want?" He stammered into the darkness.

The trees had disappeared. The moonlight. Gone. The path. Gone. The leaves. Gone.

He was left in pitch blackness, feeling the weight of the body he held in his arms.

He looked back down at Kurt.

A yell was choked in Blaine's throat as Kurt's eyes snapped open.

They were hollow, those eyes, blue and piercing and icy. Kurt did not move in Blaine's arms, who still felt the weight of the dead man.

"What do I want?" The voice in his head was soft, almost as if spoken to a very small child, a lullaby in the night.

"DON'T LET ME DIE!" Kurt screamed.

The scream of Kurt in his dream melded with Blaine's own scream as he awoke. It was pitch black in his room and he flicked on the lamp beside the bed with a shaking hand. He curled up on his side, trying unsuccessfully slow the rapid beating of his heart. His forehead was damp with sweat and the sheets were tangled up around him. There were white lines where his nails had dug into his palms as he writhed in the nightmare. He bit the skin on the back of his palm hard to keep from screaming again. But a sob escaped his lips.

It was just a dream. Only a dream, he chanted in his head over and over again, praying that if he said it enough, it he would believe it.

The next day, Blaine kept having flashbacks of his dream. He had brought some of his stuff back to Dalton that morning so he could stay there for the duration of Kurt's treatment. Burt had practically forced him to go back. It wasn't that he didn't want to go to Dalton; he did miss it there, but being that far away, he felt as though he was abandoning Kurt.

After the bell rang for lunch period, Blaine strolled to the Warblers' rehearsal room, a path that he knew by heart, memorized from years of walking this same slightly curving brick road. This wasn't any different from the hundreds of other times, but suddenly the trees lining the walk flashed into shades of grey, black, and silver. His heart dropped. He froze.

And he blinked and the color returned. A shuddering breath escaped his lips and he forced himself to keep walking, reaching the door quickly.

He shook his head twice, trying to dispel the images of Kurt lying on the ground that had formed in his mind. Kurt was okay. He had to focus.

He opened the door and found every one of the Warblers already there, some standing, some kneeling or sitting, but they all formed a circle in the center of the room. A warm-up hum sounded, first soft, but growing in volume until Wes brought his hand in a sharp cutting gesture in front of his chest, when the sound immediately ceased. He looked up as Blaine entered and smiled softly, raising his eyebrows to indicate that he should join them.

Blaine laughed and went to stand beside Josh. "I'll never understand how you guys get here so fast."

"Didn't you know we're all ninjas?"

"More like cheetahs."

Blaine smirked. "Or hyenas. Do you guys hear yourselves when you're all together? Sounds like a cackling pack of them."

"Alright guys." Wes brought the attention back to the matter at hand. "We have two weeks until the benefit for Kurt. Last practice was good, but I think we can do better. Do you agree Blaine?"

He nodded carefully, wordlessly.

"Then we need to make it better. David, can you lead them in the scales?"

The tall boy to his right nodded.

"Good." Wes clapped his hands once and broke away from the group. He headed towards Blaine, gently pulling him in to a corner. He put a hand on his shoulder. "Hey man." His voice was low, controlled as if he were addressing someone who was very fragile, breakable, weak. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine." Blaine said through his teeth. He had to force himself to not snap out at him. He was suddenly very annoyed, not something he usually felt, and he didn't like the unfamiliar emotion that seemed to be taking over. He took a breath and started again. "I mean... well, I'm worried, but it's fine."

Wes licked his lips. He looked like he was trying to find words that wouldn't further provoke Blaine. The escalating tones hit their ears as the group began the scales, varying in pitch at David's direction, voices rising as one. "Okay." He finally said slowly.

Blaine pushed a hand through his hair, letting out a small groan of frustration and then calming his voice to a hushed tone. "I'm sorry. It's just... I can't-"

Wes cut him off, squeezing his shoulder and looking him in the eyes. "No one blames you. It may not look like it, but it's been hard on everyone. I can't imagine what it's doing to you."

You have no idea, he thought bitterly, but he just nodded.

Wes glanced at him, as if expecting him to say something else, but when it was clear that that wasn't going to happen, he let his hand fall and said, "So you want to watch this one and see what we need to fix?"

"Sure." He replied quietly and then with more confidence, he said, "Yes."

"Alright then." Wes turned, where the Warblers were just finishing their scales and addressed them in a louder voice. "Okay guys. We're going to try it from the top. Blaine's going to watch this one and give corrections. So listen up."

The group scurried into their beginning formations, and when Wes joined them, they stood tall, eyes focused out to the "audience" while their ears were picking up every miniscule sound, waiting for Wes's cue. In the smallest, hushed sigh, Wes breathed, "Five... six... seven... eight."

A sea of voices rose up, filling the room and then beginning a rolling cannon as designated sections dropped the melody, while the next section picked it up flawlessly. At the end of the cannon, they suddenly fell silent while Wes began the lead vocals, a substitute for Blaine. As one unit, they picked up the next section after the seamless pause, while Wes continued.

Blaine leaned against the wall in the back, eyes darting back and forth, ears pricking to hear any flaw, any missed beat, any off-count hum. There was none. They were perfect, as he knew they would be. They had been working really hard for this. He suspected they might be working even harder than they had for Regionals, which said a lot. They loved Kurt. He knew they did and it meant a lot that they were trying so hard to make this perfect for him.

He watched them as they moved together, sang together, breathed together. Yes, they were perfect. He didn't need to be in this and he decided right then that he would give the lead to Wes. He deserved it. He had been there for the Warblers to fill them in when Blaine was gone, to answer their many questions as best as he could, and to calm them down and keep them focused when Blaine could not. He had really

stepped up and became a leader in every sense of the word and Blaine greatly admired that about him and what he realized he was jealous of. Wes was always able to get everyone's heads back on the right track and able to keep everyone together, even when he himself was having a difficult time. But you would never know because Wes was the type of person to put the needs of others before his own. And Blaine found himself breaking down. He couldn't even talk to them about Kurt because it twisted his insides and made him feel sad, hurt, and angry. He lashed out when he didn't mean to and snapped at those who didn't deserve it, who had just been trying to help. That's what he did under stress. While Wes kept calm, he fell apart. Blaine had been the Warblers captain for two years now, having taken over his sophomore year, when the current senior captain had graduated. And in this moment, he felt that two years had been long enough.

The chorus of voices descended, falling softly, until Wes's voice was the only one left. Then it too faded softly into the background of silence. There was a few seconds pause and then Wes spoke.

"So, what did you think?"

Blaine leaned away from the wall, walking up in the center until he was a few feet from the group, who had not broken formation, but stood in more relaxed postures.

Blaine smiled. "It was great guys. Really great. I didn't see anyone out of place and the timing was perfect."

Wes returned Blaine's grin. "Awesome. It felt good. See what happens when we work as one guys? Don't think about it. Just do it."

"Actually, I do have something I want to change though."

"Oh, yeah. Okay. Go ahead."

He paused. "Wes... I... I don't want to do the lead."

"What? Why? Was it the ending because you can-"

"No. There wasn't anything wrong with the song. It was how you sang it. I don't want to be in this at all. It was perfect the way it was. Wes, I want you to take the lead."

Wes looked stunned. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out. All the Warblers seemed to have their eyes darting back and forth between the two, waiting to see how this would play out. A soloist had never given away their part before. Ever.

"Well, I... I guess, if you feel that way. Are you sure man? I mean, it'll sound better with you."

Blaine shook his head, sure of his decision. "No. It won't. I meant it when I said there was nothing that should be changed. You deserve it. I'm giving it to you."

"Wow. Well, thanks then." Wes turned to the Warblers behind him. "Okay, so we'll just have to change the formation a bit." He scanned the group. "Michael, move down a row. Yeah, so there's four in the front. And then Jared, move over one. Okay. I think that works. So remember that and take ten. Go ahead and eat and then we'll run the second song before class starts."

They all dispersed, though the atmosphere in the room had changed. Everyone spoke in quiet whispers to each other, disbelief in what had just occurred still hanging in the air.

Wes approached Blaine as the last pair left. "Hey, are you really sure about this? Your voice is so much more... I don't know, emotional than mine is. It suits the song better."

"Wes, I know what I'm doing. And this isn't all about your voice in case you were wondering. Your voice is great and you deserve to be in the lead."

"How so? The deserving part I mean."

"You took command of them when I wasn't able to. You kept them calm and focused when they were confused and scared when I couldn't. You're a leader Wes and you haven't been given the chance to show that when we perform. So now I'm giving that to you."

"Thank you Blaine." He said sincerely and then he sighed. "But just so you know, they all understand how hard this has been on you. They don't expect you to be at the top of your game right now. No one's looking down on you because you're stressed and worried out of your mind. Don't deny it," he said at the look on Blaine's face, "because we all know. We're a family Blaine. We know when something's up."

Blaine paused, looking Wes in the eyes. Then he bit his lip and without meaning to say it, the words fell out of his mouth. "Kurt started chemo again yesterday."

Wes's face softened. "I knew there was something else bothering you. Don't beat yourself up alright? There's nothing you can do now."

"That's the problem. There's nothing I can do."

The blond-haired boy smiled sadly. "And you need to accept that. If you keep telling yourself that you're not doing anything to help, you'll end up hurting yourself. This is out of your hands Blaine."

He looked up, feeling the knot in his stomach twist tighter. "It's just so hard not to feel."

"Feeling makes it real. If you didn't feel at all, you would have no reason to be the way you are. I know when you're stressed out, you don't eat and when you're really upset and don't want to show it, you mess with your hair. You keep biting your lips and your eyes are darting back and forth. What are you feeling now?"

"Hurt... angry... helpless... sad... scared..." He sighed heavily. "Lost..."

"That's a lot of emotions for one person to feel. But the reason that you feel all that is because of how much Kurt means to you. It won't get easier, but maybe if you accept that there's nothing that you can do on the medical side of things, it might lessen the stress a bit. That's just what I would try."

Blaine walked up close and pulled Wes into a hug, whispering, "Thank you."

Wes laughed lightly. "No problem."

Blaine made a trip down to Lima that Friday after classes, taking back the things he had brought with him to Dalton. Kurt was coming home on Saturday afternoon.

He had a plan. Knowing the side effects and what happened last time, Blaine was planning to be fully prepared for when Kurt came home. After putting away his belongings, he threw a new load of laundry in the wash, having been shown how to use the washing machine correctly by Kurt a few months ago, consisting of sheets and pillow covers, and stripped his mattress. As the mass of cloth began to soak and twirl in the machine, he ran back upstairs and hauled his mattress into the bathroom, shoving it in between the toilet and the bathtub. It was just wide enough that it wouldn't be squished up against either

barrier and there wasn't much space in between. He smiled and began to clean the room, vacuuming and dusting everything that wasn't too heavy for him to lift or move.

After making the room as spotless as he could with household cleaning supplies stored under Kurt's bathroom sink (he laughed when he saw the huge stack of fashion magazines precariously balanced inside), he switched the load of laundry into the dryer and glanced at the clock.

Helping himself to some lunch, he sat down at the empty dining room table, beginning methodically on a paper for his history class, a textbook lying open next to him. He read the topic of the essay three times before understanding. When he moved on to read the required sections in the book, he found that he had no idea what it was talking about. He read it, and yet, retained no information. A bit frustrated, he finished lunch and started jotting down bullet notes, but when that was done, he had no clear plan as to how to organize them.

He wrinkled his brow, thoroughly annoyed at his inability to concentrate, and sighed gratefully when the loud buzz of the timer on the dryer gave him an excuse to set aside his homework. The load that he carried in his arms was warm and reminded him of Kurt's own warm body next to his.

His foot stepped up onto the last stair and he had a flashback to the dream when he was holding Kurt's body in his arms. It was quick, only delving momentarily into that memory, but it was enough to make his blood run cold. He shuddered once and moved on.

It was just a dream.

Tossing the mound of laundry onto the now spotless floor, he began to make the bed that currently resided in Kurt's bathroom. The sheets and comforter would probably end up stripped and on the floor, especially if he was sick again, but he decided that the thought would comfort Kurt a bit, plus it gave him something to do.

He stepped back when that was done and admired his work. Everything was ready now for Kurt to come home. He could feel a change in the air. It was excited, almost electric. He felt the change in himself too. He felt jittery and anxious the entire rest of the day and it was only when he excused himself from hanging with Burt and Carole to watch whatever movie was on TV, did he truly feel tired.

He almost collapsed onto Kurt's bed, as his now occupied the bathroom, and felt the heavy weight of his limbs sinking into the mattress. He sat up to pull his t-shirt over his head, but didn't bother with his jeans. He didn't care that much. His eyes began to droop and he let himself fall asleep almost instantly, hoping that with a good night's sleep, the stress and worry he was feeling would go away.

He awoke to tense muscles and a sore neck, with marks in his palms and eyes almost glued shut with tears.

What the hell?

He sat up slowly, groaning as the morning sun shined in through the blinds. His head throbbed. He stretched his aching muscles, and the smell of something baking hit his nostrils. His mouth began to water, but he pushed the thought of food aside and took a quick shower instead.

Biting his lip and trying so hard to remember what it was he had dreamed about last night, he fumbled his way downstairs and met Finn at the table, who was wolfing down a plate of waffles.

"Hey man." He smiled up at him.

This surprised Blaine. Finn wasn't one to be so cheery in the mornings.

"I made these for you. Well, for all of us actually. But I couldn't wait." He gestured sheepishly to the half-eaten waffles on his plate. "Those ones are for you." He pointed to another plate on the counter, piled high.

"Oh, wow. Thanks man."

Blaine snatched up the plate and took a spot next to Finn, who spoke as he ate.

"No problem. Hey, are you excited Kurt's coming home today?"

Blaine smiled. So that's why Finn was in such a happy mood.

"Because... well, no offense man, but you look like crap."

His smile immediately disappeared. "What do you mean?"

Finn raised his eyebrows, looking like he just got caught doing something he wasn't supposed to. "Oh, well, nothing. Never mind."

"No. What?"

Finn paused, but at the look on Blaine's face, he lifted his eyes to the mirror hanging in the hallway. Blaine jumped up and stared at his reflection.

Dark circles ringed his bloodshot, slightly swollen eyes. His hair stood up in the messy, not-yet-combed way that was normal for him in the morning. But those eyes. He shuddered, looking away.

"Guess I didn't sleep well last night."

"Well, maybe eating will wake you up. I know that works for me."

Blaine bit back the Kurt-like retort of telling him that he was going to get diabetes, but he slathered syrup onto his waffles and they ate in silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

Normally, Blaine would have tried to make conversation with him, but today was different. Kurt was coming home today.

20. Aliens and Ginger Tea

Blaine spent the rest of the day an agitated mess, even more jittery than he was the day before. He sat on the couch, staring at the door. He knew it was stupid and he was acting as though seeing Kurt was the only way he could live, but he truly didn't know what else he could do. His homework was a long-forgotten, though neatly stacked, mass on the table in Kurt's room, set beside his textbooks. His mind just kept drifting to Kurt and whether he was okay and nothing he did could quell the anxious thoughts.

So now he sat on the couch, where he had been for a good hour, letting his cell phone slide from hand to hand mindlessly, eyes locked on the door. As the day had gone on and it got closer to seven o'clock, Finn retreated into his room to spend the time playing video games instead of waiting. He had long since given up trying to talk to or get more than a one-word response from Blaine.

And Blaine greatly envied Finn. He wished so badly that he could just find *something* to do with himself. Concentrating on anything for longer than a half an hour, like reading, writing, or homework, was almost impossible and were out of the question. It was even difficult to watch TV, as he kept finding his thought wandering and when he focused to get back to whatever show was on, he had missed enough that now he wasn't able to follow the plotline.

He was sure his stony stare would have burned a hole through the door a while ago. It seemed as though he was trying to memorize every line in the white front door as he passed his phone from hand to hand. As the clock ticked and it now became seven-ten, his heart sped up, fearing that his phone would go off and he would hear Burt on the other end, blubbering the worst kind of news. He hated that he even expected it. He was picturing all kinds of the worst scenarios in his head. Car crash. Heart attack. Impaled by aliens.

But as the clock struck seven-fifteen, to his great relief, the door opened and Carole stepped in, a large Burberry overnight bag on her arm. Blaine's phone slipped from his hand and clattered to the floor, where it went unnoticed as he stood. Carole smiled tiredly at him and moved aside, holding open the door, where Burt bustled in after her, holding Kurt to his side, an arm wrapped tightly around his waist.

Blaine's heart jumped. He was here. He was okay. Burt seemed to be holding Kurt up, so much so that his feet fumbled along the ground. Burt locked eyes with Blaine, motioning with his free hand to go upstairs. Blaine nodded and with a last longing glance at Kurt, whose eyes were half-open and drooping, he snatched

up his cell phone and ran up the stairs, waiting at the top. He had noticed that Kurt was wearing a sweatshirt and the sweatpants that Burt had made him bring the first time he went for chemo. He smiled a little, knowing how pissed he would be when he was coherent enough to realize that his father had made him wear those "hideous excuses for pants."

Carole set down the bag at the foot of the stairs and went ahead, moving around Blaine to gently knock on Finn's door. Blaine stood, hand gripping the railing, as the two men slowly made their way up. Burt had his head down and kept whispering to Kurt, giving him a lift to help him up each stair. It was a slow process and Blaine felt his heart speed up in his anxiousness to have Kurt next to him. When they finally reached the top, Blaine took off ahead of them and opened Kurt's door, pulling back the covers on his neatly made bed.

Blaine turned to see Burt carrying Kurt in his arms as if he were a child who had fallen asleep on the car ride home. Maybe Kurt was just too tired to make it all the way. Blaine hoped that's what it was. With a slight groan, he lowered him down onto the bed and quickly covered him with the blanket. Kurt didn't move from where his father placed him; just closed his eyes as if he was so grateful to be back in his own bed again, where he could sleep in peace.

Burt straightened up and nodded curtly to Blaine, who was staring down at Kurt. "Well, that's that. He told you they gave him a stronger treatment this time. Recovery will take longer and he'll be more tired than before. The medicine to hold off the nausea will last the rest of today and tomorrow. Then we're back to what happened last time. You did good Blaine. Taking care of him. I'm proud of you."

Blaine looked up in surprise. He was proud of him? A warmth of happiness began to spread through his body, beginning in his chest and seeping out to the very tips of his toes and fingers. He smiled.

Burt looked around as if seeing the room for the first time. In the glow from the lamp by Kurt's bedside, Blaine's side of the room was visible. It held a small table with a lamp, neatly stacked books, and a glass of water. There were piles of his clothes and shoes on the other side, a Dalton blazer hanging from the blinds on a plastic hanger. And there was a frame for a bed. Just the frame.

"Blaine." Burt said slowly, gesturing to the mass of empty space. "Where's your bed?"

He felt his cheeks grow hot as he sheepishly pointed to the open door of the bathroom. Burt craned his neck and could see the corner of the ready-made bed on the floor.

"Do I want to know?"

"It's for Kurt." Blaine explained softly. "For when he gets sick. I thought he'd be more comfortable closer to the toilet. Throwing up in a trash can gets old real quick."

To his surprise, Burt laughed lightly. "I underestimated you. Again. I can see you've got everything covered. You take care of my boy you hear? We'll be down the hall if you need us."

Blaine nodded as Burt left. And finally he was alone with Kurt.

He realized he'd been too nervous to change out of what he had worn today, so he quickly changed from his jeans and sweatshirt to a t-shirt and plaid pajama pants. As carefully as he could, he put one knee on the bed and then the other, sliding his body up so he was sitting with his legs crossed next to the sleeping form that was Kurt.

He knew he was already asleep. His breathing was deep and rhythmic. He reached out and tenderly brushed his thumb over the curve of Kurt's jaw line. He wanted to hold him so badly. His heart ached for it. But he settled with crawling in under the covers and getting as close as he could without touching him. Kurt needed a good night's sleep.

He sighed happily and for the longest time, he just stared at Kurt, memorizing every curve of his face. Blaine didn't know when he fell asleep, but he was relieved in knowing that the nightmares should end because Kurt was home now. He didn't have anything to be afraid of.

Kurt slept for most of the next day, which was good. He needed all the sleep he could get. Carole and Burt hovered a lot and would check in on them every now and then, mainly to get Blaine out of the room for however long they managed to distract him for. Kurt was asleep, they said. He would be fine without him for a little while.

Blaine felt otherwise, but as they were keeping him under their roof, he obliged and played along while they made him help with breakfast, the dishes, and even Finn's homework before he was allowed to escape back upstairs. There were times when Kurt would wake up, and the first time he did, Blaine thought there was something wrong with him. But to his relief, he realized that he was in that weird half-

conscious state of being asleep and awake and would open his eyes for a few seconds, mumble something, and then fall back asleep.

Blaine never understood what he was saying, but it was funny to watch, especially when Kurt began to drool. He could picture his furious face. *"Those sheets are 800 thread-count! They're ruined!"*

During the night, Kurt was awake enough to have short conversations with Blaine that actually made sense. Blaine didn't know when he fell asleep, but he heard the door open and Burt came in, whispered a few quick words to Kurt, and then he felt the weight in the bed being shifted as Burt helped his exhausted son to the bathroom. Blaine opened one eye as he saw the light through the half-closed door. He heard Burt telling Kurt why there was a bed in the bathroom, but Kurt's answer didn't make much sense. Blaine made a note to tell him again when he hadn't just been hauled out of bed. He closed his eyes when the light went out and heard shuffling on the floor. Then Kurt was laid back down on the bed. Burt pulled up the covers first for Kurt and then for Blaine, who had to avoid jumping at the contact when he was pretending to be asleep.

The next day, Kurt was coherently awake for at least an hour before sighing and closing his eyes again. Blaine sat in bed with him, rubbing his back silently and humming to himself. An hour was good. Blaine had tried to get him to eat some crackers, but he refused. He did drink some water, but that was only because Blaine threatened to stop rubbing his back.

Five hours later, after being in various stages of awake and asleep, Kurt moaned and sat up as quickly as he could. Blaine was ready for this and grabbed the trash can, holding it in Kurt's lap as he leaned over and retched. He set it back on the ground when he was done and Kurt leaned back against the pillows.

"And so it begins." He muttered bitterly.

Blaine pressed a glass of water into his shaking hands, steadying it for him. "I'm ready for this. We'll get through this."

Kurt drank. "Yeah, well you aren't the one who has to spend the rest of the week puking his guts out now are you?"

"No, I'm not." He said softly. "But I have to watch you puke your guts out and that's almost just as bad. Now go back to sleep."

Kurt raised an eyebrow and wiggled back down under the covers. "Don't let me puke on the bed." He mumbled sleepily and closed his eyes.

Blaine moved over to lightly play with his hair, watching him sleep again.

Kurt threw up twice more in the three hours that followed. Then Blaine decided to bring up the bed in the bathroom.

"Kurt, do you remember my bed being in the bathroom?"

"What are you talking about?" He asked tiredly, but Blaine knew he was awake enough to functionally answer this question. He had been too out of it when Burt told him, but now he should understand.

"My bed is in the bathroom."

There was a pause. Kurt blinked. "Your bed is in the bathroom." He stated slowly. "And why is it that your bed is there? Did it get tired of you?"

They both laughed softly. "No." Blaine said, standing up. "It's for you. So you don't have to use the trash can to throw up in." He paused, watching Kurt's face. "Well, it seemed like a good idea."

The more he talked of or thought about this, the stupider it seemed. Why would anyone want to stay in the bathroom?

But Kurt smiled. "That actually sounds good. Help me up?"

Blaine rushed over and took Kurt's hand to pull him up. He snaked an arm around his waist and took most of his weight as Kurt leaned on him. Blaine lowered him onto his bed and they were there for no more than a minute when Kurt leaned against the toilet to throw up. Blaine flushed it when he was done.

"Gotta break it in right?" Kurt said in a low voice, smiling slightly.

Kurt's humor had not been destroyed and Blaine was a bit surprised to see Kurt in a good mood. He had smiled more than a few times since he'd been awake and he was laughing along with him.

Blaine sat on the edge of the bathtub, his guitar in the actual tub, after having made sure there was absolutely no water left and no dripping faucet. Kurt laid back down and stared up at him.

"I'm going back to sleep. Don't let me drool on this pillow." He whispered and his eyes closed before he finished the sentence.

Blaine smiled and watched him sleep, all the while the burning thought in the back of his mind seared, because he knew that this was just the beginning.

The next few days were horrible. It was hard for Blaine to watch Kurt go through all of this, knowing there wasn't anything he could do.

Blaine supported Kurt when he slumped over the toilet at least once an hour now; he wiped his mouth and gave him water; he piled on blankets when Kurt was shivering with cold and pulled them off when he was sweating with heat; he rubbed his back; he held his hand; he got him to eat, however small of an amount he swallowed; he did everything he could think of to help him and yet, he felt so upset that he couldn't do anything else.

Now Blaine was sitting in the bathtub with his guitar on his lap, lightly strumming the melody that Kurt loved. His ears pricked at any noise Kurt made; a sigh or a groan or if he shifted his weight on the mattress. The second day of hell was almost over and Kurt pushed himself up. Blaine was accustomed to this and he jumped up, setting his guitar aside and landing on his knees on the mattress in the same motion, linking his arm around Kurt's waist and putting his other hand on his shoulder. For a tense moment, Kurt just leaned over the toilet, eyes closed, breath coming faster, hands gripping the side of the bowl, his face pale in the agonizing moment before his body contracted and his stomach heaved. He retched, gagging as the acidic bile left his body.

Beads of sweat prickled along his brow and when he was done, he stayed where he was, laying his head sideways on the crook of his arm, breathing heavily and he spat into the bowl and moaned in disgust. Blaine rubbed a hand worriedly across Kurt's arm. When he shifted, Blaine pulled him gently around, wrapping his arms around his waist, holding Kurt to him. He brushed a hand along Kurt's brow, pushing his sweaty hair away from his face. Kurt closed his eyes.

"This is the worst of it." Blaine murmured. "It'll get better."

He received a groan in response. Blaine chuckled lightly. "I know you don't believe me, but it's true. You know, I was waiting until this was bad because I know you hate the taste, but can I bring you something?"

"Anything." Kurt mumbled, clearly willing to do whatever it took to lessen this torture.

"Okay. I'll be right back." He kept Kurt's weight in his arms, but shifted to free himself from holding him, and then pushed the pillows up so they were supporting Kurt's lower back. He sat up and watched Blaine scurry out the door, staring longingly at him.

A chill began to creep up Kurt's body, beginning in his toes and moving with almost a prickle up his legs and to the rest of his limbs. He shivered and pulled the blanket up, curling it in his hands.

However long it took Blaine to appear again, it was too long in Kurt's opinion and the corner of his mouth lifted in a smile. Blaine was carrying a small white porcelain cup in his hands. Kurt looked up at him questioningly.

Blaine sat down carefully next to him, taking care not to spill any of the brown liquid onto the bed or himself. He held the cup out to Kurt.

"Ginger tea."

The way Kurt's mouth turned down in displeasure made Blaine sigh.

"Come on Kurt. It'll taste horrid, but it should help. Better than puking out your guts right?"

Kurt sighed, locking eyes with Blaine so he knew how much he hated this stuff. Blaine just smiled and gave him an encouraging eyebrow wiggle. Kurt was too unwilling to drink what was in the cup to laugh at Blaine for attempting to make him feel any better about this. Kurt brought the cup to his lips and drank slowly. He hated the taste so it would have been better to drink it fast, but if he tried to down it in one swallow, he had no doubt that it would come right back up. Blaine had put at least three tablespoonfuls of sugar into the tea. It was a thoughtful thing to do, but Kurt was sure all the sugar in the kitchen couldn't make it taste any better.

Blaine had to bite back the urge to laugh out loud at the look on Kurt's face. His eyes bulged and he scrunched up his nose when he swallowed.

"Disgusting." He muttered bitterly.

Blaine took the now empty cup from him and placed it next to the sink. "Good. That should help. Wasn't too bad huh?"

The way Kurt's eyes glared at him made him smirk and he sat next to him, wrapping his arms around the smaller boy's waist. Kurt leaned into Blaine's chest and sighed.

"I'm so sorry you have to do this baby." Blaine's fingers moved softly through Kurt's hair.

Kurt didn't answer.

"Do you want to watch a movie tomorrow?"

No answer.

"Kurt?" Blaine looked down at Kurt's head. He was looking down at his fingers that were curled in his lap.

"I'm sorry I made you drink that. You don't have to drink any more of it. I thought it would help..."

Blue eyes met with hazel ones as Kurt raised his head. "It's okay. I actually think it's working." He said and then his voice grew softer and he looked down again. "I know this sounds stupid, but can... can you stay like this?"

Blaine smiled, pressed his lips against the boy's hair and pulled him in closer. "Of course. Don't be embarrassed. I'd do anything for you."

And he meant it.

21. You and Me

"Where are you taking me?" Kurt whined for the millionth time from the passenger seat in Blaine's car.

Blaine laughed in response. "You'll know soon enough."

"But did you really have to blindfold me?" He tugged at the black fabric around his eyes. "I really don't want to die in Area 51 tonight. They're televising the Armani fashion show tomorrow and I can't drool over the trends if I'm being probed by aliens."

"Come on Kurt. Isn't this fun?"

"Ha. For you? Yes. For me? Not so much."

Blaine patted his hand as he pulled into the Dalton student parking lot. "You'll thank me for this later."

He shut off the engine. "Alright. You can take off the blindfold now."

Kurt did so, blinking in the light. He looked around as Blaine got out. Kurt followed suit, giving Blaine a look of annoyance. "Blaine, you dragged me away from my skin care routine, blindfolded me, and drove me at eight o'clock at night to go to *school*?"

He smiled. "Technically, yes. But I promise it's worth it."

"Is it Mr. Worthing wearing a tie that actually doesn't make him look like a choking seal? Because that's the only thing I'd want to be here for."

Blaine took his hand and pulled him along behind him. "Unfortunately, no. But I know you'll like this."

Blaine led him up through the courtyard and to the doors of the Dalton auditorium. They had the largest auditorium in the entire county and they often had touring artists perform here. Blaine opened the door and playfully shoved Kurt inside before following him in.

"Blaine," Kurt sighed as he walked up through the hallway and into the back of the audience, where hundreds of empty movie-theater style chairs sat. He ran his hand along the red velvet as he said, "I don't understand."

"You'll see soon enough." Blaine grabbed his hand again and went up through the stage and behind the curtain.

"Are we even allowed to be here?"

"Why are you whispering?" Blaine laughed.

Kurt glared, though there was laughter in his eyes too. "Well, come on. It's creepy in here at night. And it's dark and it's cold and did you know that the stairwell is haunted?"

"Kurt, I didn't take you as the kind to be scared of ghosts." Blaine put his hand to his chest in mock surprise. This earned a laugh from Kurt and Blaine took a step closer. "Are you cold?"

He looked down and then back up to meet Blaine's eyes quickly. "A little."

Blaine's strong arms wrapped around Kurt's torso in an embrace that came naturally. Kurt pulled him in, putting his head on Blaine's shoulder.

"It's been two weeks since your chemo and you haven't felt sick or pulled a Rumplestiltskin on me in a while, so I thought it would be nice to just hang out."

Kurt pulled back to look at him. "And it's really sweet of you to think of that, but honestly, why *here*? Why school? I mean, surely there's somewhere a bit more... romantic than this isn't there?"

Blaine smiled. "Well, I can't argue with that. But the reason I brought you here isn't just to hang out with me, if I'm being truthful." He looked over Kurt's shoulder into the stage wings, where people had been quietly scooting closer, unnoticed by Kurt. "I invited some friends."

He smiled wider and stepped back as the entire New Directions poured out of the wings and clustered around Kurt, with huge smiles on every one of their faces. Kurt's mouth dropped open slightly and he looked rather shocked. It took him a moment to find his voice as he became immediately engulfed in the swarm of hugs that pressed in on him. There were so many hands, he didn't know whose belonged to

whom, but he really didn't care. His heart beat faster and he couldn't stop smiling as the tears of happiness filled his eyes.

Once everyone was done drowning him, they all stepped back.

"You guys!" Kurt said, smiling at them and then turned an accusatory glare on Finn. "You knew about this?"

Finn smirked, holding up his hands in surrender. "Hey, I was just going with the crowd."

Mercedes linked her hand with Kurt's. "Missed you, white boy."

He blinked back the tears and squeezed her hand. "Missed you too."

"Hey Kurt."

He looked up as Mr. Schuester appeared from the wings. Kurt looked at Blaine in disbelief as Mr. Schue was followed by Ms. Pillsbury. "Blaine, how many people did you invite?"

"Ummm... a few."

Kurt looked around. "Did you all really come here to just 'hang out'? Why are you actually here? And where's Rachel?"

As if on cue, Finn's phone buzzed. He fished around in his pocket before retrieving it and smiled as he read the message.

"They're ready." He announced.

The group all seemed to know what that meant because they all got excited looks on their faces, but Kurt was feeling overwhelmed and confused.

"Who's 'they'? And ready for what?"

Everyone backed up into a straight line spanning the length of the stage, leaving Kurt and Blaine in front in the middle. Blaine put a hand on his shoulder, turning him to face the curtain. "Kurt, this is for you."

The curtains were pulled open, revealing that in the time they had been hidden behind the velvet folds, the auditorium had been silently filled with people. Kurt immediately looked to Blaine, growing pale. The stage lights snapped on, illuminating the spanse of stage, while darkening the audience. Kurt couldn't make out any faces in the dark, but he knew there were a lot of people out there.

"What's going on?"

Blaine held out his hand. "Trust me."

Kurt stared at the outstretched hand and then glanced back at the line behind him. 'Go on,' Mercedes mouthed to him, smiling that gorgeous grin of hers. He bit his lip and took Blaine's hand. He could trust Mercedes. He hoped.

Blaine pushed Kurt down onto a velvet covered chair in the center of the aisle where the second platform of seats were, set slightly higher than the floor level, where the view was best and sat down beside him.

Kurt was painfully aware of the stares that followed him as they had gone to their seats, and even more aware now of the glances that kept being thrown his way. Some were smiling, some looked sad, but all the faces seemed to be waiting for something that obviously had to do with him.

"Blaine, what is going on?"

A small smile appeared on his face and put a hand on Kurt's knee. "It's a fundraiser, a benefit performance if you will. For you."

"Wait, what?"

"All of these people bought tickets for this and all of the money we make is going to you for chemo treatments."

"Are you serious?" He whispered. The house lights had gone down and there was a shadow now across Kurt's face, but he could see the wide-eyed disbelief.

"I wouldn't lie to you Kurt." His voice was soft as two people walked onto center stage.

Mr. and Mrs. Hummel stood together, dressed nicely in respect for the occasion. Burt held a microphone in his hand, which he raised and began to speak. The chatter in the room dimmed before stopping completely.

"First off, thank you all for coming tonight. I know that Carole," he glanced over at his wife, eyes full of a mixture of admiration and amazement in maybe that he still didn't believe what was going on, "and myself, are so grateful for the support everyone here has shown for Kurt simply by being here tonight. And Blaine, please know that we are so grateful for everything that you have done for Kurt, and us as well. You mean more to us than words can say and I personally will never be able to repay you for all that you've done, including putting this event together."

Kurt turned to face the reddening boy beside him. "I knew it." He tried to make his tone sound harsh, but he failed, sounding more surprised than anything and he settled instead for poking Blaine in the side. Blaine smirked and caught the finger that was buried in his ribs, linking their fingers together.

On the stage, Burt waited for the audience's clapping to die down before continuing. "I have never felt more blessed in being able to be a father to two amazing young men."

Burt's eyes had locked onto Kurt's as he spoke and he turned and addressed Finn behind him as well. "You two have changed me for the better, Kurt and Finn, and I don't want to imagine how horribly different my life would have been had it not been for the both of you." He paused and looked out into the audience. "Not to mention how incredibly dull my days would be." There was light laughter from around the house. "Kurt, Finn, I love you both." Another soft pause. Blaine was certain that he was trying to compose himself because he took a deep breath before announcing, "Enough sappy talk from me. Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce the McKinley High glee club, New Directions."

The couple walked offstage, handing the microphone to Rachel, and the glee club boys followed them. Rachel stepped up center stage and smiled. "Kurt, you know how much every one of us loves you and I know that though this has been a horrible thing for you to have to go through, just know that we, well, all of us really, not just the girls, want you to know that we're here for you."

She smiled and stepped back, placing the microphone in its stand. The other girls stepped up to join her, forming a straight line. When the clapping stopped, the music began.

Kurt's eyes welled with tears. He knew this song. They had done "Keep Holding On" before, but now, it was different. Now, it was being sung by just the girls, and for him. He watched intently, trying not to cry. There was no intense choreography, just some gentle swaying and head or arms movements, and it was beautiful.

He stood when the song finished and clapped so hard he knew his hands were turning red. Blaine was right beside him, clapping just as enthusiastically. They had changed the order of the show the day before, evenly spacing out the New Directions, Warblers, and Vocal Adrenaline with the soloists. Mercedes had pretty much made Rachel put Blaine as the closing number, which no one was arguing with. Blaine had kept what he was working on a secret and he hadn't had much time to practice, being with Kurt all the time, but as Kurt hadn't suspected this benefit at all, he thought he was safe, hoping that Kurt would be surprised.

The girls smiled and bowed their heads in thanks, then walked together offstage, while the boys came back on.

Puck grabbed the mic. "This isn't normally something I do, but I just wanted to say that I hope everything goes well for Kurt and his family. We love you man and you have no idea how much we all wish we could sell our souls for you to not have to go through this. Anyway, hope we don't screw this up too much."

Puck laughed and returned the microphone. Kurt laughed with him, and to Blaine, it was the best sound he could ever remember hearing.

Puck motioned to the guys to follow him and they all sat at the edge of the stage in a line, with Artie in his chair in the middle. Their legs dangled off the edge and some rested their hands on their knees or put their palms on the ground behind them and leaned back. With a collective breath, they began. Their voices started off softly, all singing together, then grew to a swelled volume, voices carrying throughout the entire house. The lyrics to "Let It Be" seemed to flow through the audience, creating a peaceful environment and the guys began to sway their bodies side to side, grinning at each other and the onlookers as Artie sang the chorus.

Mercedes was next, singing her soulful "Lean On Me" and her eyes locked onto Kurt's. He was in tears before the song ended, joyful tears though, and he smiled with Mercedes the whole time she sang.

The Warblers entered after Mercedes left, and they all stood tall, forming a tight triangular shape, with Wes as the point in the front. Blaine reached over and took Kurt's hand as they sang, "Breathe," with the solo that he had given to Wes. Kurt leaned into Blaine, who held him as they sang. Kurt's eyes closed and he focused on just hearing the music, concentrating on the lyrics and letting them permeate his mind. He'd heard the song a million times before, and there would still be people who were going to cover the song for years to come, but in his mind, no one could beat the way that the Warblers sang it.

The resonating voices halted, and left Wes singing the last line, carrying the last note out a bit, and then there was silence. The curtain fell and the house lights lifted and people shifted, exiting for intermission.

Blaine grabbed Kurt's hand and led him backstage. He felt jittery and he had no idea why. These were his friends. He had no reason to be nervous, but still, butterflies fluttered around in his stomach, making him uneasy. As Blaine pulled him around a corner, Kurt looked back and saw a large figure by the last row of seats. Kurt's eyes flicked up, trying to get a better view, but then he was yanked playfully forward and he lost sight of the person. He forgot about it in a moment, being greeted by tons of smiling faces in the dressing room.

A collective scream of delight issued from the girls, who ran up and threatened to crush him with the weight of their hugs. He hugged back, trying to fit everyone into his arms at once and ended up in a tangled heap in a mass of giggles and apologizing. Blaine rescued him and then he was being shoved into the guys, as he was clapped on the back, one-arm hugged, and had his hand shaken by so many others, he didn't know whose hand was whose.

He stepped back, taking in all of his friends' faces. His lip trembled, but he forced himself not to lose it now. "I've missed you guys." He said, his voice wavering only slightly.

"You were all amazing. I can't believe how much you've all improved. I feel like I need to go practice more now." He laughed.

"Oh, Kurt, you're just saying that to make us feel special. So were you surprised?"

"Surprised? Are you kidding me? Understatement of the century."

"Well, prepare to be more surprised, Kurt Hummel." Blaine smiled.

Kurt looked up at him, as he said slowly, "Do I want to know why?"

"Then it wouldn't be a surprise silly." Mercedes grinned.

"It's like a surprise birthday party Kurt." Brittanie offered. "You have to wait and see. Just like my birthday last year. It's always on the same day, but I never know who's going to be at my house yelling 'happy birthday' to me."

"How long have you guys been planning this?" Kurt asked.

Mike replied slyly. "A while."

Then the lights in the room began to flicker. Once. Twice. Three times.

"Intermission's over." Rachel announced. "Okay, Santana, go grab Puck and Lauren from the concession stand. I hope their cookies sold well. Kurt, you'd better get back to your seat." She flashed him a smile and straightened her dress.

Blaine held out his arm and Kurt reddened, linking their elbows together.

"They really miss you, you know. The Warblers too."

"I know." Kurt sighed as he settled into his seat. "I miss them too."

The house lights went dark and the curtain was pulled up. Finn stood center stage, with a microphone in his hand. His eyes drifted once over the audience and with a low hum, he began the first verse of "Stand By Me."

Kurt was surprised. This song suited his voice well, but it wasn't something Kurt thought Finn would pick for himself to sing. He wondered vaguely if Rachel had helped him with his song choice and almost as if he read his mind, Blaine leaned over and whispered, "It took him forever to figure out what song to sing. I almost had to choose it for him. But I think he did good. Do you agree?"

Kurt nodded, leaning his head on his boyfriend's shoulder.

As Finn exited the stage, a large group entered. Kurt's head snapped up. Was that... No. No way.

"Vocal Adrenaline?" He whisper-hissed to Blaine as they took their places.

"They wanted to help."

"Fraternizing with the enemy?"

"No. More like... coming together for a good cause."

The group began with slow, methodic partner work, the couples engrossed in each other's touch. Jesse walked out from the right center wing, parting the couples as he walked down on a diagonal, singing the beginning of "Chasing Pavements."

"And I'm that cause?"

"Yes Kurt. It's a compliment. They love you too, you know. Otherwise they wouldn't be here."

"How is Rachel taking this?"

The boys had been separated from the girls, on the left and right, respectively. As they reached the chorus, they ran to each other, girls leaping seamlessly in the air and landing in the arms of their partner, cradle-style, and then being flipped backwards, where the girls landed in a split on the floor.

"She seems to be alright with it. I got Jesse's number from her, so she's obviously still interested in some way or else she wouldn't have kept it. I haven't seen her talk much with him, but when we all came here last night to practice, there were some not-so-covert glances going on."

"Interesting. I wonder if she's going to forgive him. I mean, it seems like she already has. I would have thought that getting egged would have made her second-guess her choice in men, but- wait." Kurt paused.

"Last night? You told me you were visiting your cousin from out of town."

"Guilty." Blaine laughed. "Well, I couldn't tell you where I really was now could I?"

A flurry of skirts and long hair flashed across the stage as their movements built with the song, then began to slow down as they reached the ending, keeping in time with the ebbing beats.

"Blaine Anderson, I'm getting a bit tired of your lying." Kurt blushed. "Even if it was for a good thing."

"At your service, Kurt Hummel." His hand circled in a flourish, making Kurt blush deeper.

Vocal Adrenaline hit their final pose, to a loud chorus of applause. Some people even wolf-whistled, a thing that Kurt despised, but he didn't let it get to him. They were amazing and in spite of the cause that they were here for, he had become a bit nervous as the thought of Nationals flitted through his mind.

"I'll be right back."

"Where are you going?" Kurt pouted lightly.

Blaine chuckled, feeling a certain thrill in how Kurt was so quick to ask why he was leaving. "Bathroom. Can you live without me for three minutes?"

"I don't think so."

He grasped Kurt's hand, smiling. "I'll be right back."

As the crowd quieted down, another group took the stage. Kurt's face turned up into a grin as he saw the entire New Directions take their place.

The second the music began, he inhaled sharply and a huge smile broke out on his face. They were singing "Defying Gravity." The group began to move in synchronized steps, breaking out from the tight clump they had formed, into three lines spanning the length of the stage. As the music built, their movements became larger, more animated, but the message of the song was clear. Kurt knew the song by heart and was sure he could bust out the entire thing in his sleep, but as they sang, breaking off the song into sections sung by solos for every person onstage, he truly felt the meaning. It seemed as though, when each member sung their lines, they would look right at Kurt. And he understood. Tears of love and gratitude threatened to fall, but he made himself hold it together. They were telling him that they would stand by him, help him, and be with him, no matter what, and that this cancer, this disease he had, it didn't define him and he couldn't be beaten. It could never bring him down.

Mercedes stepped up and hit the high belting note, the one that Kurt had thrown so long ago, and though it wasn't a true high F, she held it beautifully and Kurt almost preferred the way that she sang it. He was on his feet and applauding before she finished the note and stayed standing until their voices reached the crescendo, rising together, and then silence fell. There was a moment's pause and then a roar of applause crashed like a tidal wave.

Where the hell was Blaine? He just missed an amazing performance. And the song was almost four minutes long. Shouldn't he be back by now?

Kurt sighed and sat down again. After being hit with surprise after surprise tonight, he wasn't sure he could take any more, but lo and behold, as New Directions left the stage, Blaine walked out. He carried a chair and his guitar. Rachel helped quickly set up the microphone so that his guitar could be heard. Blaine sat down and looked right where Kurt was, knowing that he would be sitting there, mouth slightly open and Blaine knew he might get in trouble for lying again. Might.

He hoped Kurt would forgive him after hearing this. It was difficult to practice when he was always on edge that Kurt would walk in and recognize the song. However, the thrill in knowing that he was the only person who knew what he was singing, as not even the rest of the performers knew, gave him more confidence. He loved surprises.

Kurt hated surprises. Even good ones. He just hoped that this would be the last surprise to happen tonight. He didn't know if he could take any more.

Blaine looked down at his fingers and slowly began to strum. Kurt felt his heart slow, his breathing becoming shallow as Blaine began to sing.

These words meant more to Blaine than he could have imagined. He had wracked his brain for so long trying to figure out what song to play, and then it had hit him, and he had no idea why he hadn't thought of it before. But the lyrics of the song seemed to have been written for this occasion, as it fit everything Blaine was feeling.

What day is it? And in what month?

This clock never seemed so alive.

Time seemed to be speeding up when he was with Kurt and all he wanted it to do was slow down.

I can't keep up and I can't back down

I've been losing so much time

He felt like he was fighting a losing battle, not able to keep up and watch Kurt go through this and keep fighting, and unable to back down in doing everything he could to help him. But he still felt like there was never enough time. Time spent with Kurt was all he had, all he could do, and all he wanted so badly for there to be more of.

Cause it's you and me and all of the people with nothing to do

Nothing to lose

And it's you and me and all of the people

And I don't know why, I can't keep my eyes off of you.

There were so many people who cared about Kurt, but as selfish as it seemed, he knew that they wouldn't be losing as much as he would, if something went wrong. And it killed him to think of it, but his nightmares wouldn't let up and he couldn't get away from the lingering feeling that he was losing Kurt. He cared about him so much, more than anything he had ever had to be anything for, and now, he stared out into the darkness of the audience, knowing that Kurt's gaze was locked on his. And he couldn't keep his eyes off of the beautiful blue-eyed boy he loved.

All of the things that I want to say just aren't coming out right

I'm tripping on words

You've got my head spinning

I don't know where to go from here.

He'd wanted to tell Kurt that he loved him, but he just hadn't found the right way to tell him. He wanted it to be special, because Kurt deserved so much more than he felt he could give.

Cause it's you and me and all of the people with nothing to do

Nothing to prove

And it's you and me and all of the people

And I don't know why, I can't keep my eyes off of you.

As Blaine reached the chorus, Kurt felt his throat constrict. Blaine's voice was pure and so emotionally raw that the idea that this beautiful, seemingly inhuman being, onstage was singing to him, was almost dizzying.

There's something about you now

I can't quite figure out

Everything he does is beautiful

And everything he does is right.

Kurt smiled at the change in the lyrics, from 'she' to 'he.' Kurt felt like he was messing up all the time and the fact that he had no control in the course that this disease had taken, and will take, was almost maddening. Blaine wanted Kurt to know that he was beautiful, no matter what, and that anything he did, or anything he chose, would be okay.

Blaine sang the chorus again and Kurt almost couldn't breathe. He'd heard so many songs over the years, a great deal of them moving him to tears, as seen tonight, but never had a song made him truly breathless. He was unsure if it was the power of the lyrics, combined with the single instrument that made the song so impacting, or if it was simply the person who sang it. Kurt was pretty sure it was both, though more heavily weighted with the latter option.

Blaine's hazel eyes looked down at his shifting fingers again as he played, and he kept his eyes down as he sang the last few lines in a low voice. He had changed the ending, eliminating the last stanza in favor of the lines before it, feeling that it had more of an impact. He looked up as he sang the last line, letting his voice drift off.

And it's you and me and all of the people

And I don't know why, I can't keep my eyes off of you.

Blaine stood when he was done and the audience clapped and wolf-whistled and cheered as the New Directions, the Warblers, and Vocal Adrenaline took the stage together and bowed as one.

Kurt's hands hurt from clapping, but he clapped until they were almost numb, with a huge smile on his face. Burt and Carole reappeared, thanking everyone for coming and as the audience began to filter out the side doors, Kurt stayed where he was, accepting the smiles and claps on the back and handshakes from people walking past.

Not knowing entirely what compelled him to do it, Kurt turned and looked up towards the top of the aisle. In the shadows, just out of his clear line of vision, Kurt saw a large shadowed figure. He barely made out arms crossed in front of the person's chest, and when he squinted to see better, the figure moved away, with Kurt unable to see who it was.

But at that moment, a hand grasped his shoulder and he was spun around to face Blaine. Kurt let out a sigh and threw his arms around him. Blaine hugged him back just as tightly and was almost surprised when he felt Kurt's shaking body give way to tears. Blaine rubbed his back and held him close.

The auditorium was empty now and there suddenly felt like there was so much space around them. Blaine waited until Kurt's crying quieted and then pulled away.

"I hope those are happy tears. Because otherwise, I'm going to have to go beat up an old lady or something," Blaine murmured.

Kurt laughed and then sniffed loudly. "Blaine, you have no idea. This, all of this, it... it's too much. It was amazing. The best surprise ever."

"I'm glad." He smiled, hooking Kurt's arm in his. "Now let's go tell everyone else that. They're waiting for you backstage."

"Blaine, are you trying to make me drown myself in my own tears?" He said as he walked along side him. "Because seriously, it's working."

And his voice was lost in the flurry of voices that swallowed up any surrounding noise. For the second time that night, Kurt was being crushed under a multitude of arms and bodies and this was intensified by the fact that this huddle of crazy also included the Warblers.

Jesse strode up to him as soon as he was free from the mass of people and with a hug and a strong voice, he told him, "I wish the best for you and your family. I don't think I need to tell you how lucky you are to

have friends like these." With a wink, he added, "But don't think this means we'll go easy on you at Nationals."

Kurt laughed. "I wouldn't expect anything different. Thank you Jesse. This really does mean a lot."

Jesse smiled and turned, leading Vocal Adrenaline back to the dressing rooms. After a long time of hugging and laughing and good-bye-ing, the groups went their separate ways. Kurt turned to follow New Directions out the stage door, but was stopped by Blaine.

"Follow me." He said, and Kurt sighed lightly.

"Not another surprise Blaine. I don't think my heart can take it. It's already been wrenched and tear-stained from all of this."

"Just a little while longer."

Kurt gave Blaine a look that said *sure, whatever you say*, but he let him take his arm and gently pull him into the hallway right outside the theater, steeling himself for whatever Blaine had planned.

22. Ebb and Flow

Out in the darkened hallway, Blaine wrapped one arm around Kurt's waist, pulling him into him and resting his forehead on Kurt's shoulder. Kurt tensed at the touch and his heart pounded. His eyes darted back and forth, almost as if he were just waiting for some unforeseen force to ruin this moment. He knew who his mind pictured when he thought of the one person he was scared of, but he tried to put that aside and forced his body to relax. He was with Blaine. At Dalton. He wouldn't be hurt here.

"It's okay." Blaine whispered against his skin and gently kissed his collarbone before lifting his head up to look him in the eyes. "I'm so proud of you."

Kurt smiled sheepishly and reached his arms up around Blaine's neck. They held each other, no longer two separate beings.

"See? Public affection is not that difficult." Blaine grinned at him and clasped his hands behind Kurt's back for a very long, sweet moment.

Kurt relished in it; that moment where they were together and he felt safe. "Does this really count as 'public' though, if we're in an abandoned hallway?"

"It's a start." Blaine smiled again and leaned down to kiss him.

"Why don't you two get a room?" The all-too familiar sneering voice was loud and echoed across the empty hallway.

Kurt jumped, banging his lips against Blaine's in his fright and immediately released his hold around his neck. However, Blaine let go slowly, reluctantly, but still kept a hand wound in Kurt's, squeezing gently.

A figure stepped out of the shadowed hallway that was perpendicular to the one Blaine and Kurt occupied.

"What do you want Karofsky?" Blaine's voice matched his in volume.

Karofsky stepped forward so he was no longer in the shadows. "Oh, nothing really."

"Well, you obviously weren't here for the benefit, so there must be something you wanted if you came all the way out here." He snapped, voice tense. The look on Kurt's face when he saw the bully broke Blaine's heart. It was a look of fear, of pain.

"Don't be so rude. Maybe I did come to see the benefit."

"Okay. Well even if you did, it's over now so now you can leave."

Blaine was aware of Kurt's limp, sweating hand in his, so he squeezed it tighter. Karofsky took a few steps forward, now just a foot away from them and Kurt shrank back.

"You know, I don't think I will." Karofsky turned his attention to Kurt. "Now you got your boyfriend to do all the talking for you huh fag? Too scared to stand up for yourself?"

Blaine took a step forward. "Knock it off Karofsky. Don't talk to him like that." Blaine's voice was dangerous.

"Yeah?" He smirked, staring Kurt right in the eyes. His tone was soft, but hatred poisoned his words. "What are you going to do about it? Are you going to tell your mommy on me? Oh wait." His next words were whispered, menacing. "You can't can you? She's dead."

Kurt's heart dropped and he stopped breathing, shock and terror frozen on his face.

Blaine's fist appeared from nowhere. Karofsky stumbled back and Blaine rushed up, grabbing him by the collar of his jacket and pushing the dazed boy against the lockers. The resounding clang of his body hitting metal in the quiet hallway was like a bomb detonating. Blood poured from Karofsky's nose.

"Don't you ever talk to him like that you sick piece of shit." Blaine got right up in his face, tightening his hold on the jacket. "Whatever the fuck your problem is, you need to sort it out because I swear to God, if you touch him, talk to him, or even look at him again, I'll bust in the rest of your face. I don't care what happens to me. Got that? But you don't *ever* mess with Kurt again."

Kurt stood where Blaine had left him, frozen with fear, shaking and pale. He couldn't make his mouth form the words he wanted to yell at the boy pinned beneath Blaine. Kurt had never seen Blaine like this. He was both terrified and so proud to have someone who cared about him this much. And his heart sank because he couldn't do that for himself. He couldn't stand up for himself. He just couldn't.

There was a tense moment where neither boy spoke. Kurt could hear Blaine's heavy breathing. His knuckles were white on the fabric of Karofsky's jacket.

Suddenly, two big hands shoved Blaine backwards. He lost his footing and fell. Blaine had beaten him in initial strength and surprise, but all the amount of courage in the world couldn't change the fact that Karofsky was a good three inches taller and fifty pounds heavier than Blaine. Kurt watched in shocked horror as Blaine hit the ground, head smacking back on the linoleum floor. His eyes rolled back into his head and he made a noise like a strangled sigh before his eyes closed and he was still.

No one moved for an agonizingly slow second. Then Karofsky took two unsure steps forward and something like fear flashed in his eyes, as if he was surprised at himself for what he had done. But his hands balled into fists at his sides.

Kurt's body abruptly became free from the spell of fear that held him rooted to the spot. He ran forward, landing on his knees next to where Blaine lay, head lolling around as he began to move, eyes slowly fluttering open. The blood poured sickeningly from Karofsky's nose, running over his lips and down his chin.

"Get away from him!" Kurt screamed, tears streaking down his face. "Get out of here! Get out!"

Karofsky smirked. His gums were red with blood from his nose as it trickled into his mouth. He spat onto the ground and looked as though he wanted to keep fighting, but he turned and trudged down the hall, smacking his fist into a locker as he did so. The metallic clang echoed in Kurt's chest.

Kurt blinked rapidly. "No no no no no. Blaine, please no."

He closed his eyes again and groaned in pain. Kurt's hands hovered over him, not sure of what to do. Blaine brought his hands up to his head and pressed them against the back of his skull. Tears fell from the corners of his eyes and he gritted his teeth.

"Blaine, I... I need to go get s-someone." Kurt's voice trembled uncontrollably. He began to get up, but Blaine's hand grasped his arm.

"No. Stay."

Kurt started to get up again. "I need t-to go Blaine. Y-you're hurt."

"No, please. Stay."

Kurt was shaking all over, but he kneeled next to him again. "You b-blacked out. You might have a concussion. M-Mr. Schue will-"

Blaine shifted so he was on his side. He still held his head. He moaned lightly.

"Please, Blaine." Tears made his words hard to understand. "Just let me-"

As if he had been called, Mr. Schuester opened the door leading from the hallway to backstage. "I heard yelling. What's-" He stopped when he saw Blaine on the ground and a hysterical Kurt beside him. "Oh no." He ran to them and kneeled down. "What happened?"

Kurt broke into a sobbing mess and the only words Mr. Schue was able to understand were "Karofsky" and "hurt." He didn't need to hear any more. He leaned over Blaine, gently taking his shoulder in his hand and rolling him onto his back.

"Blaine. Blaine, look at me."

He did so, moaning, "My head. It hurts."

"Shhh... it's okay. It's okay. Look at me. Do you know where you are?"

A moment passed before he whispered, "Dalton."

"Good. Good. Do you know why you're here?"

"Kurt. Benefit."

"Who is the President of the United States?"

There was a pause. "O-Obama."

Mr. Schue looked up, put a hand on a shaking Kurt's shoulder. "Breathe, Kurt. Breathe. It'll be okay. He's okay. It's okay."

He turned back to Blaine. "Can you sit up?"

There was a mumbled answer and he slowly helped him to sit up. "Alright, good."

Blaine groaned.

"Thank God the nurse came tonight." Mr. Schue said mostly to himself and pulled out his cell phone. He had one arm supporting Blaine's weight. A quick conversation passed and he hung up, reassuring Kurt that she would be here soon.

Mr. Schue kept talking to Blaine, asking him simple questions. Blaine answered in low, few word sentences. At one point, he didn't respond to the question, but said he was tired and wanted to go home.

"I know. I know. Soon."

The kind-eyed, older McKinley nurse appeared and knelt on the opposite side of Blaine. "And I almost didn't come tonight. What happened?"

Mr. Schue filled him in on what he had found out, because he didn't think Kurt could answer coherently, and reported that it didn't seem like he had a concussion. She performed some more quick tests, having him follow her finger with his eyes and squeeze her hand, among other things. After a little bit, she asked if his parents were here. Kurt shook his head, but whispered that his were.

"Are you okay to get them for me hon?"

He nodded and got up shakily to enter back into the empty auditorium, running back through the dressing rooms, searching for his dad. In a few minutes, he reappeared with Burt and Carole in tow. He sank down with his back against the wall, watching as the nurse spoke with them, motioning to Blaine every once in a while. Burt became visibly upset, and raised his voice. It was loud enough that Kurt overheard, arms wrapped around his knees.

"That is enough! This kid has it out for my family and I won't just take this! Where is the bastard?" His last sentence was spoken quieter, in more frustration than anything, but Kurt knew he was the type of person to let his temper get the best of him. He was terrified that Burt would go after Karofsky, but there was a part in the back of his mind that hoped he would. He heard Mr. Schue's voice, calm and comforting,

reassuring him that now was not the time to deal with that; that he'd go with him first thing in the morning to talk to Mr. Figgins.

Soon, Blaine was helped to his feet by Mr. Schue and Burt, and Carole took a hold of Kurt's hands, pulling him up. She hugged him to her, her voice soothing in his ear.

"It's okay honey. It's okay. We're going home now. It's okay."

They all walked to the car together. Kurt found out from his stepmother that the nurse had cleared Blaine to go home for the night. She told them to monitor him and take him to the hospital if his symptoms changed. Carole called his parents on the way to the car, but was forced to leave a message when they didn't answer.

Kurt slid into the back seat with Blaine at his side and reached for the seatbelt as Blaine's fingers fumbled to click it into place.

"Let me." Kurt whispered.

Blaine moved his hands away and pressed a palm to his head again. He groaned. "This is going to hurt like hell tomorrow."

"Shhh..." Kurt shushed him softly, though burning with his own questions that he knew would have to wait until tomorrow. "We can talk about it later."

Carole got in the passenger seat of the car. She turned around in her seat and addressed Kurt. "Honey, when we get home, I'll get Blaine some Advil and then I think it'd be best if he slept for now. We'll have to wake him up every hour or so to see how he's doing."

Kurt felt himself nodding. Behind Carole, he could see Burt talking to Mr. Schue. He wished they would hurry up their conversation. All he wanted to do was get home.

Thankfully, Burt opened the door soon after Kurt's thought went through his head, and he said a low thank-you to Mr. Schue before shutting the door and turning the key in the ignition. The car roared to life. Blaine winced at the noise.

"Dad, radio off please. Noise hurts."

They drove in near silence the entire way home. Blaine had fallen asleep almost as soon as they pulled out of the parking lot and he now leaned against Kurt, who held him in his arms. Every once in a while, Kurt could see flashes of the incident behind his eyelids when he closed them. Karofsky yelling. Blaine's fist. Blood. Blaine falling.

He shivered involuntarily with the pain of the memory, so fresh in his mind.

After much too long it seemed, they pulled up at the house and Kurt gently stroked Blaine's cheek. "We're here." He whispered.

Blaine's eyes opened and he sleepily mumbled, "No."

"Come on. You can't stay in the car. I know you don't want to move, but there's Advil in the house." He hoped the temptation of relief would break Blaine's unwillingness to move and he couldn't help but smile when he took Blaine's hand and led him out of the car.

Kurt let Blaine lean heavily against him for the short walk to the front door. Burt opened it quickly and told Kurt to get Blaine to bed. The ascent up the stairs was a slow process, with Blaine gripping the railing and swaying every few steps, and Kurt was comforted by the fact that Burt was following them, a shadow in the dark, to catch Blaine if he fell.

Carefully lowering Blaine to the bed, he steadied him as well as he could. Blaine laid down on his side with a heavy sigh. Kurt quickly pulled off his shoes and socks, setting them neatly on the ground at the foot of his bed.

"Do you want..." Kurt began, motioning to Blaine's blazer and pants, feeling an embarrassing blush fill his cheeks and making his ears hot.

"Later. I just want to sleep." Blaine moaned lightly.

A soft knock was heard on the door and Carole entered with a glass of water and two pills in her hand.

"Here you go, honey." She said and set the pills in Blaine's outstretched hand, waiting until he placed them on his tongue before giving him the water.

He downed a fourth of it and placed it shakily on the bedside table. "Thank you."

"No problem. Do you need anything else?"

"No thank you." Blaine whispered, eyes already drooping.

She nodded and put a hand on Kurt's shoulder. "Your dad and I are going to take turns. We'll be in every hour, just to ask some questions, make sure he doesn't have anything, well..."

"Anything wrong with his brain?" Kurt finished bitterly.

She cast a worried glance at the bed, making sure Blaine had not heard Kurt's comment. "Get some sleep." Carole sighed and kissed his forehead before leaving, shutting the door behind her.

Kurt pulled off his own shoes and socks, placing them beside Blaine's, and removed his Dalton jacket, setting it on the back of the computer chair. For a moment, he watched Blaine sleep. He wished so badly that nothing would be wrong with him. If Karofsky did anything more to hurt Blaine, Kurt would kill him. He felt the rage boil up beneath his skin, rushing the blood in his veins. Karofsky had hurt him, emotionally before and not too bad physically, but still. He had hurt Blaine physically, which in turn hurt Kurt, cutting those emotional wounds even deeper. Blaine had been trying to stand up for him, something Kurt just couldn't seem to do.

So stupid. He thought, clenching his hands at his sides. *If I wasn't so freaking weak, this wouldn't have happened.*

Something in the back of his mind told him that if he had stood up to Karofsky before, it would have been him lying there on the bed with a pounding head, or worse. But he had never intended for anything to happen to Blaine. Blaine was his hero, his knight in shining armor. He didn't want him to fight his battles for him, but he was also too scared to deal with them on his own. And look where that had gotten them. Blaine had gotten hurt for standing up for Kurt. He knew that Blaine would do it again in a heartbeat. Blaine had been there for him when he was hurting and when he was sick and when he was weak. And in his moment of weakness, Blaine had paid for Kurt's inability to deal with his problems.

Guilt now sunk in, chasing away the rage. Bitter tears of resentment for what he had allowed to happen welled in his eyes and he blinked them away harshly.

Crying wouldn't help anything. He bit his lip and sighed quietly. Now was not the time to feel guilty. Blaine needed him here and he had the chance to be the hero. He could be Blaine's hero. Not the sniveling, weak kid with cancer. No, now he could be strong.

He carefully sat on the edge of the bed, sliding in under the covers and letting his eyes close.

All too soon though, he heard a noise by the bed and when he opened his eyes, he could see the outline of Burt kneeling by Blaine, gently shaking him awake. Kurt could hear softly whispered questions from his father and mumbled answers from Blaine and after a very short time, Burt stood.

"Go back to sleep Kurt." He said gently and left.

Kurt rolled over and stared at Blaine's back. In a moment, Blaine's breathing became slower and more regular. He was asleep. Kurt yawned and closed his eyes again. Blaine was asleep, and he would sleep too.

Kurt swore he had just closed his eyes before another sound woke him. This time, Carole knelt at Blaine's side, taking on the same soft tone as Burt, asking questions that Blaine answered quietly.

"Sleep Kurt." She chastised as she left.

Once again, Kurt stared at Blaine's back. He didn't move. After making sure Blaine's breathing came in a normal pattern, he allowed himself to close his eyes.

Soon, Burt came back again. Kurt's eyes fluttered open.

It was going to be a long night.

When Blaine woke next, his head was pounding. His bleary eyes had barely opened when little round pills were pressed into his palm.

"Take these." Kurt's voice was tired, but still held a strong current of demand. It didn't matter anyway; Blaine knew he would do anything for Kurt. Especially if it involved getting rid of his pounding headache.

Blaine did as he was told and drank a few sips of the water Kurt held out for him. He laid back down on the pillows and moved a sluggish hand to the back of his head. He half expected to find the sticky remnants of blood matted in his hair, but there was nothing. Instead, he felt the slick gel and cold sweat coating his curls and the large, sensitive lump that had formed on the back of his skull.

"How do you feel?"

He groaned in response and closed his eyes.

"I'm sorry they had to wake you so many times."

Blaine snorted. "Yeah, well, I'm sure you got the same amount of sleep I did."

Kurt's smile pulled at his lips. "You know me too well." His voice turned concerned and he sat next to Blaine on the bed. "Is it bad though? Does it hurt a lot?"

Blaine exhaled slowly. "No. I mean, it hurts, but sleep did help, I think. My head's only throbbing a little now. Or when I touch it."

"I'm sorry baby." He shifted on the bed, turning more into Blaine. "I'm so sorry."

Blaine sat up slowly. "He's such... I just... when he said that to you..." He sighed. "I wanted to hurt him. I've never wanted to do that to anyone." His voice grew soft. "I made him bleed."

Kurt's mouth opened and then closed again. He didn't know what to say.

Blaine raised his voice as he looked into Kurt's eyes. "He left though?"

Kurt nodded slowly. "I thought he was going to hurt you again. I... I should have done it sooner. I didn't do anything until you were... until he hit you."

"What happened?"

Kurt sighed heavily. "He pushed you. You fell; blacked out for a moment. I yelled at him and he left. He looked scared." He met Blaine's eyes. "That was the scariest thing that's ever happened to me. Seeing you there... I... I didn't know if he had really hurt you."

Blaine was quiet for a moment and then he reached up and cupped Kurt's cheek in his hand. "But he left? And he looked scared?"

He waited for Kurt's nod, before saying quietly, "Then it was worth it."

To his surprise, Kurt's eyebrows lowered, and he pulled away. Blaine was confused now. "What?"

"Are you kidding me? Blaine, he could have seriously hurt you! He wanted to! I saw it on his face! You stood up to him and that is something I couldn't dream of doing because... well, because I'm scared of him, but you saw first-hand why he terrifies me! I admire what you did, but, did you ever think of what the consequences were? You hit him and now he has a reason to go after you and you don't even care. I can't... I can't deal with that."

"I don't understand." The hurt in Blaine's voice cut through Kurt like a knife. "I thought you wanted me to be there for you. I was trying to protect you."

*I can't save you and protecting you is the only thing I **can** do.*

"I never asked you to stand up for me." Kurt said in a low voice, suddenly upset.

Blaine's voice turned bitter at Kurt's tone and his eyes narrowed. "And what did you want me to do?"

"To let me handle this. You're right. You don't understand." Kurt stated. "Dad's talking to Figgins now."

"Do you think that's going to stop this? It's a public school system. He'll get a slap on the wrist and we go back to life at Dalton. Kurt, I know you love McKinley and your friends there, and I love them too, but I honestly think that... that they aren't good for you. That environment isn't good for you. To live in fear? To hide? Even when you're not even at that school? That's not good, Kurt! And I can't watch that happen!" His voice became low. "I just... I think Dalton will be better for you. As long as you keep away from McKinley."

Kurt sat, speechless on the bed and Blaine continued, speaking louder.

"And yes, if you think I was just going to stand there and let him say those things to you, you really need to get to know me better. I don't get why you're making such a big deal out of this. Kurt, you-"

"No!" The smaller boy's voice grew louder with his rising frustration as he interjected Blaine's rambling. "You don't understand! You can't understand! I know how to handle this."

Blaine felt himself tense at being yelled at. He raised his voice to match Kurt's volume. "You think I've never been bullied? You think I've had it easy? You have no idea what I've been through! So don't you tell me I don't understand!"

"How could I have known? You never told me!" Kurt was shocked. He felt as though he'd been punched in the stomach, but the flood gates of his built up anger at the world had already been lifted and they couldn't be stopped.

"Yeah, well you never asked." Blaine glared, standing up to move to the other side of the room by the bookcase.

"I'm your boyfriend!" Kurt said loudly, sounding hurt, not understanding why Blaine hadn't told him something that had obviously hurt him in the past.

"This is a two way street Kurt. It goes both ways and if you want to be with me, you need to start acting like you do and let me help you! You can't do this on your own, believe me!"

A memory flashed through Blaine's mind.

He was thirteen. The anxious-looking, curly-haired boy walked through the halls with his school bag on his shoulder. The last class of the day had been dismissed ten minutes ago. The school had been vacated as if it was on fire and now it was quiet. But he didn't want to go home. Not yet. Not where his father would be home early, as it was Wednesday. Maybe he could sit at the lunch tables and read and not think about having to answer his father's belittling questions about his sexuality. Maybe he could-

A locker door slammed. He jumped, looking around anxiously. As he peered behind him, he saw a blonde-haired junior holding the textbook she'd just taken out of her locker. She turned without looking at him, maybe not even noticing he was there. And she disappeared into another hall, leaving this corridor empty.

Blaine let out the breath he had been holding and loosened his grip on the strap of his bag. He turned back around.

"Hey."

The large senior stood in front of him, so close, Blaine could see the way his pupils shrank as he smiled. Too close. The smile seemed innocent, but Blaine knew otherwise. He began to shake, involuntarily leaning backwards to get as far away as he could; he suddenly found he couldn't move his feet, couldn't run, couldn't do anything.

"Sup fag?" The taller student smiled again, but his grin was only in anticipation of what he was about to do. He reached up and pulled the strap of Blaine's bag off his shoulder, where it fell with a thunk onto the ground. Blaine could feel his heart thudding erratically in his ribs, as if it was trying to break free and run from what it knew was coming.

"Gonna pick that up?" The whisper was a question only in format. Blaine knew it was a command.

After a moment's hesitation, he leaned over. His fingers just brushed the leather, and he was grabbed by the collar of his jacket and forcefully shoved backwards. His feet fumbled, trying to gain his footing, but he was slammed into the lockers. His body tensed, every muscle screaming at him to get away from here, to run, to do something. But he couldn't. His breath came in hiccupping gasps as he closed his eyes tightly, arms instinctively brought up in self-defense, however useless it was.

"Please-"The whispered plea went unnoticed.

"What'll it be today, queer?" A hand was gripping Blaine's forearm so hard, it was going to bruise.

"You're hurting me." He whimpered, the only sound he could make come out of his mouth.

"What?" The yell was shrill and seemed to echo in the hall.

Blaine jumped, heart pounding, and then shrunk back, trying unsuccessfully to close in on himself.

The bully's next words were spoken quietly, and seemed almost louder in Blaine's ears than his yell had been. Because these words meant pain. "Alright then. I'll pick for you."

Before Blaine even had time to blink, a fist was hurled into his stomach, knocking the wind out of him. A sound like a cry mixed with a sob escaped from his lips and he buckled. The hand that had not punched him released the hold on his jacket and he fell like a sack of sand onto the floor. Blaine leaned over, knees drawn into his chest, and wrapped his arms around himself, his right arm throbbing. He took short, heaving breaths,

gulping in the air. It had only been one punch, but Blaine was sure he couldn't move. With his head resting on his knees, he shook uncontrollably, and a single tear fell.

The triumphant laugh sounded from somewhere very close, but Blaine had no intention of looking up. He closed his eyes.

Go away. Just go away.

"See you tomorrow, pansy."

The footsteps echoed lightly as they faded down the hall.

Blaine's eyes closed momentarily at the pain of the memory. Kurt didn't know. And he was too ashamed to tell him. Instead, the anger took over.

"So you *wanted* to be taunted and harassed? Do you really want to go through your life like a scared little kid?" His volume matched Kurt's, whose eyes narrowed further.

Kurt stood up, with narrowed eyes. His voice was hard and so loud he might as well have been yelling. "You think I can't handle myself?"

"You ran away!"

"Only because I had nowhere else to go! He threatened to kill me Blaine!"

"What did you want me to do Kurt? Stand there and let him taunt you, when we both know what's really going on? I'm not going to let him-"

"Excuse me, but *you're* not going to let him?" Kurt screamed, throwing his hands up. "This is between me and him!"

"You haven't done anything about it Kurt! This isn't going to just go away! It isn't between the two of you because you haven't done anything. This is him taking advantage of you! So hell yeah I stepped in!"

Blaine barreled up to him, grasping Kurt's shoulders.

Kurt blinked and pushed him off. "I would have been fine without you."

Now Blaine's expression hardened. "You froze! You wouldn't have done anything. You need to grow a damn backbone and learn to fight back! He's a fucking hypocrite! He's walking all over you, and you're letting him!"

"I don't care! I don't need you there to fight my battles for me! I'm not a child!"

"Oh really?" Blaine yelled back, not caring who heard. Anger seethed through his veins and he couldn't control the rage he felt. He didn't feel anything; not even the horrid pounding in his head. "Because you're sure acting like one."

Kurt looked stunned, as if something heavy had just come crashing down over his head. The flicker of pain in his eyes flashed once and was gone, replaced by a fuming fury, comparable to hatred. He had never hated anyone in his life. And he'd never felt an emotion this strong, this crippling, and he never would have dreamed that this emotion would be directed at the person he loved.

Blaine took advantage of his momentary shocked silence; it was enough. "You're not weak Kurt. I, of all people, know that. But I wouldn't have had to do anything if you didn't just stand there! You need to get that people see us differently than they do the rest of the world. They treat us differently, some worse than others. And you need to learn how to fucking handle it! I learned real quick that if I didn't stand up for myself, no one would and I tried to help you Kurt. I tried, but if you don't want it, then fine. I don't give a fuck! Do you not understand how hard it was for me to see your face when he insulted you? I wanted to kill him! And you did nothing! Nothing! So of course, I stepped in. I knew at least *I* could handle him!"

Kurt was raging, standing there, face blanched and hands shaking in the fists he held at his sides. He strode up to Blaine, so close their heaving chests were almost touching. "You didn't handle him! You got the crap beat out of you and you're telling me that trying to avoid it was wrong? What the hell are you thinking!"

Blaine brought his hands up to Kurt's shoulders, wanting so badly to shake him, to make him understand that he was trying to protect him. He was just so angry and the words he said just came out all wrong and fueled the fire. He never wanted to fight, especially not with Kurt, but now, with his head filled with fuming rage, he couldn't think clearly and he didn't trust himself to speak anymore. He bit his lip until he tasted the bitterness of blood.

Kurt misread Blaine's attempt to calm him down and shoved the hands away, thrusting his palms against his chest and physically pushed him, which, to Blaine, might as well have been a slap across his face.

Blaine's temper flared and he couldn't control his actions or the words that came out of his mouth. "Fine!" He snapped, backing up and away from the slight, tense boy standing by the bed. "If you don't want my help, that's fine Kurt," he moved closer to the door as he raged. "But just think for two seconds, what would you have done if he said those things to me?"

Kurt didn't move. His lips pressed into a tight line of frustration and he crossed his arms tightly over his chest. His eyes were narrowed slits.

"Yeah," Blaine laughed darkly. "Didn't think so."

With that, Blaine turned and snatched up his running sneakers from the floor and threw open the door. As he did so, a tall figure almost fell into him, obviously having been leaning heavily against the door a moment before. Blaine pushed past him, too mad to even care that Finn had been eavesdropping. Not that the whole house hadn't heard him, which, thank god was empty at the moment.

Blaine stormed downstairs and Finn's guilty gaze watched him go, until he slammed the front door behind him and Finn winced. He still stood in the doorway, either too stunned or too stupid to leave, and brought his eyes over to Kurt, who hadn't moved. Bad decision.

"Get out of here!" Kurt yelled, breathing heavily and marching over to slam the door hard in his face. After Finn's heart was done rattling in his chest from the force of the blow, he feared the hinges would need replacing.

The house was eerily silent. Finn stood still for a full thirty seconds later, before retreating to his room and quietly shutting the door. He sat on his bed and sent a text to Mercedes.

You won't believe what just happened. Huge fight. Kurt and Blaine. Blaine left. -F

Outside, Blaine angrily laced up his running shoes, tying them way too tight in his adrenaline-induced strength and set off at a full on sprint, running as fast and as far away as he could get. He didn't care where he ended up at this moment. He just wanted to be somewhere else, and preferably alone, when he came down from this anger-stimulated high.

Inside his room, Kurt sat down slowly on his bed, feeling his hands and his entire body actually shaking with rage. He'd never been this mad. Blaine was gone. He had no idea how to deal with what he was feeling. He'd never meant for it to go this far. His head throbbed and he curled his hands into fists, feeling the nails cut into his skin. When the pain became too much, he slowly, so slowly, released his fingers. He was still shaking, but now, it was because he was so hurt. And angry at himself. Blaine meant the world to him. He was only trying to help and he'd pushed him away. And now he was gone.

With a groan, Kurt threw himself down onto his bed and stared at the ceiling, as if looking for an answer to what he should do. In his heart, he knew. He knew what needed to be done, but he didn't trust himself right now. Anything that came out of his mouth would be fueled by anger and that wouldn't fix what he wanted so desperately to take back.

He felt numb. His eyes burned, but no tears came. He groaned again and rolled over, closing his eyes. For a split second, the silver rectangle that was Blaine's cell phone on the dresser came into his line of vision. But in his post-fight haze, he didn't register what that would mean and felt himself falling, trying so hard not to think of anything at all, but to just sleep, praying that when he woke, his thoughts would be clear.

23. Street Lights and Blue Eyes

Burt Hummel shut the front door behind him and let out an exasperated sigh. Muttering under his breath about the "damn public school system," he set his keys on the counter along with his cell phone, a habit that Carole had been trying to break, and he grabbed a glass and filled it with water from the faucet. He tipped a bottle of pills over and counted out two of them, holding them tightly in his palm and with the glass of water in his other hand, trudged upstairs.

The meeting with Figgins had not gone well. Burt had threatened to sue the school and it was only then that the principal seemed to be willing to do something. And even then, the best he could get out of him was a week's suspension that would go on Karofsky's permanent record, detention for the rest of the year, stripping of his football position and scholarships, and no chance for any awards or recognition at the end of the year. Burt wanted to see the bully expelled but apparently doing anything worse than that was frowned upon by Figgins and his annoying need to give people the 'benefit of the doubt' so of course, nothing else was allowed to happen.

Kurt was sitting on his bed, feeling anything but anger now. He felt drained. He had fallen asleep and when he woke and stared into the mirror, the tear-streaked face stared back at him as if wanting to say, "*What did you **do**?*"

He heard his dad's heavy footfalls on the stairs. He took a shuddering breath and ran the back of his hand across his cheeks again and sniffed. His puffy, red eyes would give him away and he knew it, but it was an involuntary action.

A soft knock sounded as Burt opened the door. "Kurt?" He said as he entered, holding a glass of water. "Hey bud. How's Blaine doing? I figured he'd want some more Advil so I-

He looked around.

"Kurt, where's Blaine?"

Kurt's voice was timid and small. "He's gone."

The suspicion leaked into Burt's words as his eyebrows knitted in confusion. "Gone? What are you talking about?"

"Gone." Kurt felt his chest constrict and the tears threatened again, which he blinked away hastily. He turned from his father and stared at the pattern on the comforter.

He heard the glass being set down.

"Kurt, tell me what happened. Have you been crying?"

He sniffed again and slowly brought his eyes to meet Burt's. He caught one look at the pleading glance in his son's eyes and Burt moved to sit next to him. He put a hand on his shoulder.

"Why are you crying Kurt?" He kept his voice calm, though he was worried. Kurt only ever cried when something really got him upset. And when he cried when he was alone only escalated the situation.

"I messed up dad. I was so stupid. I want to take it back. I didn't mean it. Any of it!" His voice was thick with emotion.

"What are you talking about? Messed up how?"

"Blaine woke up and he was just trying to tell me why he defended me and I took it all wrong and I thought he was trying to fight my battles for me so I got mad at him for doing that because I don't need people standing up for me. I'm not weak and I told him I didn't need his help and it all got out of hand and we were both so angry and I told him that I don't need him and that he couldn't understand anything that was happening and he was just trying to calm me down and I pushed him and he got mad and left and it's all my fault!"

Burt sat still, taking in this rambling mass of information. The hand on Kurt's shoulder tightened and then dropped. "Where did he go?" His voice was low.

"I don't know."

"How long has it been?"

"I... maybe two hours I guess. I fell asleep."

"What did he do before he left? This is important Kurt! Did Finn see him leave?"

"He was outside the door. I yelled at him. I didn't mean it." His voice was small on the last sentence, but after an anxious glance, he spoke louder. "Dad, he was just mad. We both were. He's probably just-"

"Kurt, what did he do before he left?"

"I..." He paused, closing his eyes and trying to remember. "He grabbed his running shoes."

"And he left?"

"I don't know! Finn saw him." Kurt's voice was high with worry. He didn't know what his dad was trying to figure out, but he was sure it wasn't good.

Burt immediately got up and ran to Finn's room, opening the door without knocking.

"What-"

Kurt heard Finn's surprised sentence fragment before Burt cut him off.

"Did you see Blaine?"

"When?"

"After their fight. Did you see Blaine?"

"Yeah. He went out the front door."

Burt stormed out and came barreling back into Kurt's room, muttering "goddammit" under his breath.

"What's going on?" Kurt was beginning to panic.

Burt ran a hand over his head. "Kurt, I know you were upset and you let your anger get the best of you, but that was not the way to handle this. I don't care what he said, you don't take out your anger on someone who just had an injury like that! We don't know for sure if he doesn't have a concussion. It was bad enough for him to get wound up and angry, but for him to go out *running* by himself not even twenty-four

hours after he hit his head hard enough for him to black out? Kurt, we don't know if he's okay! What if he passes out again? What if he gets dizzy and falls? He could get hit by a car! What the hell were you thinking?"

"I... I-" The tears spilled out over his cheeks. "Oh god." He whispered.

"Call his cell phone." Burt ordered.

Kurt's eyes darted over to the silver rectangle that was Blaine's forgotten cell phone and moaned, "I can't! He left it here!"

Without a moment's hesitation, he grabbed a sobbing Kurt by the wrist and pulled him up, yelling to Finn as he moved swiftly out the door.

"Finn! Get out here! You're coming with us."

Finn's scared face as he appeared made it all too clear that he had heard what Burt had been yelling to Kurt. He pocketed his phone and followed them. He'd have to call Mercedes back later. Snatching up his keys and phone from the counter, he ordered the two boys into his car, with Kurt in the passenger seat. Kurt dropped his head into his hands and felt the uncontrollable tears falling into his palms. He would never forgive himself if something happened to Blaine.

The engine roared and he pulled out from the driveway quickly. "We'll start with our neighborhood. With two hours, he could have gotten to Orange. Kurt, stop crying and start looking. Finn, now would be a good time to pray to that sandwich."

Blaine ran, shoes pounding on the pavement, matching the pounding in his head. He had no idea how long he'd been running. It must have been for a while because he could feel the sweat dripping down his forehead, neck, and back. But he was oddly cold. Cold sweat. That's what they called it right? Just like when he'd woken from the nightmare.

He tried to think. Thinking hurt. He bit his lip, never breaking his pace. His throat was dry and his body ached. But he didn't stop. He couldn't stop running. He was going on auto-pilot, not telling himself to run, but just going. His heart banged in sporadic thumps, causing his breath to hitch.

He had been full of rage earlier and now, he didn't feel anything. He felt numb. Kurt just didn't understand.

I tried to help him. I wanted to do something to help him because I can't do anything else. He doesn't understand. Karofsky's never going to stop if he doesn't do anything about it. He can't end up hiding and scared at every noise he hears. He can't just stand there and take those hateful words, because eventually he'll start to believe them, even though he says he doesn't now. He can't not do anything about the emotional beatings because then it'll turn physical and Karofsky could hurt him. He can't end up like me. I let those things happen to me, but they can't happen to Kurt.

His breathing slowed.

They can't.

His heart thudded in a delayed pattern.

Can't... happen... to-

He blinked hard, trying to focus on the sidewalk in front of him. His feet stopped moving. He pressed his forearm to the light pole that was on the corner of a random street and leaned his head down onto his arm. He didn't know where he was. There was a school right next to this street light. Was it an elementary school? He didn't know. But it was eerily quiet now that school was over. The parking lot and the park on either side of the school were quiet. He could feel the blood pounding in his ears, pulsing sickeningly. He closed his eyes, hoping for relief from the double vision that clouded his thoughts. He swayed and hearing only the roaring in his ears, he slumped to the ground, not realizing that he'd fallen until his knees met concrete. With shaking arms, he pushed himself back to sit against the light pole, feeling like his head was going to explode. He held his head in his hands and groaned. He didn't feel like he was in his own body. It was as if he was watching the whole situation unfold from across the street. He wanted to yell at himself to get up, to go back, to do *something* but he couldn't bring himself to do anything. His head hurt so much and all he wanted to do was curl up into a ball and go to sleep. A voice pulled at the edge of his mind, sounding as though it was being screamed from the far end of a traffic-clogged tunnel. Through the rushing, roaring noise in his ears, he could barely hear a cry.

Get up!

He thought it was his voice. He didn't know. The tunnel vision dotted with black stars and he moaned, and he slammed one of his hands down, leaning his weight on it. As much as his mind wanted to keep his bleary eyes open, his body curled up on the ground. He pressed his cheek onto the concrete, heated slightly from the absorbed warmth of the day. The wind blew through his curls and he closed his eyes, still feeling light-headed, like his brain was being tossed around inside his head. He'd just meant to close his eyes, just to rest for a moment, but his world turned black and he felt himself falling, falling, falling deep into blessed unconsciousness where there was no pain.

Though they had initially gone quickly, now Burt drove just at the speed limit, allowing the boys and himself time to scan the surroundings. Kurt was still crying. Finn was glued to the window, eyes darting back and forth.

"Kurt," Burt glanced back quickly. "Kurt, you need to watch the sidewalks. Keep your eyes up."

"I'm trying dad. I can't!" He sobbed, blurring his vision to the point where he could only see random colors before he blinked quickly and his eyes adjusted, only to be filled with tears just as soon as he was able to blink them away. He ran the back of his hand over his eyes again and again until he could see. He tried to keep his thoughts away from Blaine and all of the terrible ways he could be hurt right now that clouded his mind and made him more upset.

"Did he go to someone's house? Who do we know that he's friends with around here?"

"There's no one Finn! He doesn't know anyone over here." Kurt's voice was panicked and thick with tears.

"Where does he usually run?" Burt kept his voice calm.

"I... I think by up a few more streets and then he comes back. By the big hill."

After going up and down more streets, they all seemed to blur into a sickening sameness. Concrete sidewalks, side by side houses, some lit by bright lights inside or filled with a glow from the TV or otherwise dark, trees, plants, the random jogger out with their dog, a child playing on the front lawn with a mother standing outside and talking on a cell phone. So blissfully oblivious. But no Blaine. Kurt stared wide-eyed through his tears, hearing flashes of the fight flit through his mind. He didn't mean it. He didn't mean it.

Something like a silent prayer fell from his trembling lips.

Please. Please don't let him be hurt. Oh god, it's all my fault. Please don't let him be hurt. Please.

His breath began to hitch and he blinked away the tears, eyes raking up and down the sidewalk to the side of him and the street in front of him.

"I don't see anything."

"Finn, son, not helping."

"Drive faster dad. Please. We need to find him. Please."

After another snaking loop through the next round of streets, Finn spoke up. "M-maybe he went to the park? I don't know... it's where I'd go."

Burt sighed. "What do you think Kurt? Should we try there or the next row of streets?"

Kurt let out a hushed breath. "This isn't getting us very far and it's getting darker. Let's go to the park."

Burt nodded and pulled into a driveway, backed out and then continued down the opposite way, now speeding up, no longer trying to spot dark curls around the neighborhood that they knew weren't there. The houses blurred past, making Kurt slightly dizzy. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath and then forced his eyes open, looking out ahead of him.

The street lights on the sidewalk, set a good ten feet apart, casted a glow on the darkening streets. Normally, the light would be a comfort, but now, it seemed to be foreboding, mocking him. One of the lights flickered on and off, with Kurt feeling the flashing behind his eyes, pounding in his tear-congested head.

Burt pulled over and parked on the side of the street. Finn opened the door and jumped out, throwing Kurt's door open as he did so. Kurt flung off his seatbelt and followed them.

His throat felt swollen. He sniffed, hearing Finn calling Blaine's name as he hunted through the small park. The words reached his ears as if spoken through cupped hands, very far away. Kurt's feet sunk slightly in

the grass, trying to get his eyes to focus on the playground and the surrounding hills covered with trees at the top, silently praying that he would see Blaine's curly hair amidst the trees.

Burt was on the opposite side, calling Blaine's name, his voice rising with Finn's. Kurt couldn't make any sound come out. He felt his throat constrict and his tongue move, wanting so badly to call out, to form the words that were screaming in his head, but he didn't know if he could control himself if he spoke. He felt like he was going to fall apart any second, he was just waiting for the moment when he would break down sobbing, with the worst kind of guilt and sadness taking over and he wouldn't be able to move.

He turned slowly, feeling as if he were in a daze, eyes scanning down the street.

And then, he froze. There.

What was that? Under a street light, on the sidewalk, lay a still form. Through his worried haze, he felt a twinge of pity. There weren't many homeless men in Lima. None that he'd seen anyway.

Intrigued in spite of himself, he squinted, trying to see farther. It was definitely a person. Wearing a t-shirt. Who had dark hair. His heart leapt and he took a hesitant step forward.

Blaine?

And still not entirely sure, he took off running. Finn flicked his head up.

"Kurt! Where are you going?" He called, loud enough for Burt to look over from across the park, but not loud enough for Kurt to hear. Or maybe he was too engrossed in what he had seen. Either way, he took off so fast, Burt started running too, though still behind Finn, who had followed almost immediately.

Kurt heard the faint sound of someone calling his name, but he didn't turn back. He ran with all the speed he could gather, arms pumping and sneakered feet striking the hard concrete. He ran under a street light, where it illuminated his pale form for the briefest of moments, before he was surrounded by darkness. His breath came faster in hopeless anticipation. If it wasn't Blaine, he knew his heart would break right then and there. But something told him to keep going.

He passed the fourth street light, full out sprinting now, with Finn on his heels, Burt puffing along behind. Almost there. It wasn't even that far, but to Kurt, it seemed to take a lifetime as his eyes stayed locked on the figure. On Blaine.

Kurt dropped to his knees next to the crumpled heap. He reached out an unsteady hand, moaning in grief.

No no no no.

His hand clasped on Blaine's left shoulder, gently shaking him. No response. His heart sunk, felt as if it dropped into his stomach, and made him nauseous. Finn skidded to a stop beside them and Kurt heard his sharp intake of breath. In a second, he was on his knees too.

Kurt grasped the shoulder harder and carefully pulled it towards him, turning Blaine onto his back. The light fell on his face, showing the pale cheeks that looked sunken, the dark shadows under his closed eyes.

"Bl... Bl... Blaine?" Kurt's voice was small and shaky. Finn looked over. He'd never seen Kurt this heartbroken. He didn't know what to say. He didn't even know if he could speak at all.

Burt caught up with them as Blaine began to move. His eyelids fluttered and opened minimally, squinting in the bright light of the street lamp he had passed out under. Kurt cradled the back of Blaine's neck and head in both of his hands as the boy on the ground began to moan.

Finn took a staggering step backwards as Burt gently pushed him aside.

"Blaine!" Kurt's voice was stronger now, but tears spilled out from his eyes.

"Finn, go get the car." Burt commanded, tossing the keys to him. Finn caught them and stared wide-eyed, frozen on the spot for a long second, before turning and running back down the street.

Burt's voice was calm, strong, and comforting. "Blaine. Blaine, can you hear me? Try to open your eyes son."

Somewhere in Blaine's clouded haze, he locked onto those words. His pupils twitched back and forth behind his eyelids and he slowly opened them fully. Burt leaned over, staring straight into Blaine's eyes and shading his face from the glare of the yellowed light.

"Good. Alright, can you move?"

A low groan sounded from Blaine's throat. But he nodded.

"Okay. We'll go slow okay?"

Burt tucked a large hand under Blaine's head and wrapped an arm around his torso, gently lifting him up until he could get a better grip. Kurt sat back on his knees, silent tears streaking down his face. Burt moved his left hand from his torso, moving it around to support Blaine's head and then switched it with his right arm, cradling Blaine's neck in the crook of his elbow.

"You okay?"

Blaine's eyes opened again and he nodded slightly, though he looked like he wanted nothing more than to go back to lying on the concrete. Finn parked the car next to the curb, leaving it running.

Blaine's head was throbbing. All he wanted to do was go back to sleep. His eyes kept closing. He tried to force them open, but it just made his head hurt more, so he stopped trying. He could hear Burt's voice, muffled by the buzzing in his ears.

"Don't go to sleep on me Blaine. Wake up son. Squeeze my hand."

He felt a warm hand in his. His mind told himself to squeeze the hand immediately, but it was as though the message got lost along the way. He had to concentrate in thinking only about the hand and moving his fingers. Eventually, he squeezed Burt's hand, only for a moment, and then his fingers went slack. It took too much effort to follow the command.

"Alright. Okay. Can you stand?"

He didn't know the answer to that. But apparently Burt wasn't waiting for an answer because Blaine felt himself moving without doing anything. He was lifted gingerly to his feet, fully supported by Burt. He wished right away that he had never left the safety of the ground. He immediately became nauseated and unbearably dizzy, the roaring in his ears intensified, and his legs gave out with a weak sigh. In a swift motion, Burt gripped his shoulders tighter, and swung him up into his arms, as if he were a child.

He didn't dare open his eyes because he knew he would throw up if he did, but the light-headed feeling of being moved without seeing where he was going was almost just as bad. He could hear far-off voices. It hurt too much to concentrate on what they were saying, but he noted that the voices seemed to be getting clearer, less fuzzy.

The strong hands left him and he tensed, but when he did not fall, he relaxed slightly. His head was on something soft. He felt a pair of trembling hands roaming on his arm, unsure of what to do. He risked the consequences of opening his eyes and looked up into a boy's face. Those blue eyes were so full of worry and... something else. Pain? Guilt?

He wished he could do something to make it go away. He hated to see that beautiful face looking so upset. Someone must have really hurt him to make him look like that.

"Kurt." The whispered word, feather-light, left his lips before he could think of what it meant. The boy whose lap his head was in responded to this and his blue eyes softened, beautiful lips moving slightly, as a hand was pressed lightly to his cheek. His touch felt good. He closed his eyes.

Someone was talking on a cell phone. It was much too loud in Blaine's opinion and though he wanted to scold the person for yelling, he decided he could deal with that later and felt himself being rocked in a gentle motion. Sleep wouldn't be such a bad thing after all. The hand on his cheek had moved down into his own hand, squeezing just enough to be a constant reminder that he couldn't slip all the way into unconsciousness, no matter how tempting it seemed.

The next thing Blaine remembered, he was being half-dragged somewhere. Strong arms held him up and he lifted his head, blinking in the harsh light. It was loud in here. There were a lot of people and he didn't want to be in here, wherever *here* was. Other hands grabbed him.

No.

He tried to move his limbs to push the hands away, but he found that his arms were shaking with the effort. And the hands that held him were too strong. He could feel fingers digging into his forearms. His forehead wrinkled and he mumbled, "Get off."

He could hear a male voice talking to another male, the latter whose voice he recognized. He was pushed back into a chair that began to move.

Wheelchair. No.

There was another voice, a female's voice. "Thanks Andrew. I'll take him from here."

Then she was talking to him, in a strict-sounding tone. "We're here to help you okay honey? Do you know where you are?"

What?

He looked up. His eyes found her face. She had curly black hair tied up in a loose bun, with tendrils of curls spilling out from around the hair tie. Her eyes searched his face.

He made his mouth form the words. "Who are you?"

"I'm a nurse sweetie. Do you know where you are?"

Nurse? Hospital. Great. Maybe they'll let me sleep here.

She tried again. "Can you tell me your name?"

This one he could answer. "Blaine."

"Blaine? Alright Blaine, can you tell me how you ended up here?"

The boy. With the blue eyes. Blue eyes. Crying.

He closed his eyes and thought. There was wind. Blowing through his hair. He was flying? No, no not flying. Running. Running from what? Running from... blue eyes. The boy with the blue eyes. Kurt. That was his name. Kurt.

"Kurt."

"Kurt? Who's Kurt hon?"

"M-me." A small voice came from the boy he hadn't known was following them.

"Are you his brother?"

"No. No, I'm his friend. His... his boyfriend."

These words took a moment to sink in.

Boyfriend.

"Okay. Blaine, what were you doing before you passed out?"

"I... I was running."

"Running? Okay." Her words became harder to hear. She was turning away, talking to someone behind him. "Is he a runner?"

"Yeah. He runs a lot."

"Has he ever passed out before?"

"He got hit. Yesterday. There was this guy and... and Blaine got hurt. His head hit pretty hard."

"Hit? Hit on what?"

"The ground. He blacked out for a second, but the school nurse said he was okay to go home as long as he rested."

They turned a corner and went down a hall, entering a room. Blaine's head perked up.

Bed.

"He may have gotten a concussion. Did he seem normal after? Anything different about his personality?"

"He had a bad headache, but he went to bed after he took Advil and he seemed to be okay."

The nurse put the lock on the wheels of the chair and put her hands under Blaine's armpits, lifting him to his feet. A tingling rush went through his legs, but the nurse moved him with ease, obviously having dealt with transferring people from wheelchairs to beds for years. He felt the bed underneath him and when he was lying down, she pressed a button on the side, lowering the head of the bed until he was only slightly sitting up. The dizziness began to subside when he was laying down.

She turned to face the boy who was talking. "Why was he out running? He should have been resting for at least twenty-four hours."

"Well..." The boy's pale face turned crimson. "We had a fight and he left. When he gets upset, he runs. It calms him down." His voice was small and full of self-induced grief. "I started the fight. It was stupid and I knew he was hurt, but I just..."

"It's alright." The nurse's tone was softer now, in trying to prevent Blaine's obviously distraught boyfriend from crying. "The doctor will be here soon and we'll get him checked out and fixed up okay?"

The boy sniffed and nodded.

"Blaine? You still with me? Hey, look at me."

He forced his eyes open, not realizing he'd closed them. Something of a sheepish look appeared on his face. A hand was on his arm.

"Do you need anything?"

He shook his head, and then, as an afterthought, he added, "Sleep."

She nodded. "That's normal hon. The doctor will be here soon and then you can sleep all you want."

That sounded good.

She turned away from him. "Try to keep him awake okay? Is it your dad that's checking him in?" When Kurt nodded, she said, "Alright. I'll get the doctor and let you dad know he can come in. If you need anything, just press the red button on the side of the bed."

"Thank you."

She patted his hand and left.

Kurt let out a deep breath. Blaine turned his head to see him walk slowly towards the bed. He stopped just before his jacket brushed the sheet of the bed. He rocked back on his heels and then met Blaine's eyes.

"Hey." He smiled slightly. His hand twitched. He lifted it, as if he wanted to move it onto Blaine's, but then he set it down on the edge of the bed.

Blue eyes. Crying. Kurt. Smiling. Boyfriend. My boyfriend.

"Hey."

"How are you feeling?"

"Like death." He paused. "So do you apparently."

Kurt almost looked shocked. "Do I?"

"Yes... Kurt." The word took a while to form on Blaine's tongue as he searched his brain.

The boy looked down, ears reddening. He brought his hand to his hair self-consciously, disregarding Blaine's stumble over his name.

"But who wouldn't right? After this I mean."

Kurt's head lifted. They laughed. "Yeah, I guess so."

There was an awkward pause.

"So... we had a fight?"

Kurt looked at him quizzically. "Yeah. Our first fight ever actually. You don't remember?"

He tried to think. He really tried, but his thoughts were fuzzy when he tried to think back. Kurt took his long pause to mean that he didn't remember.

"Was it bad?"

Kurt took a shuddering breath. "Yeah. I said a lot of things I didn't mean. I shouldn't have said anything. I was just... so angry. Not at you. At the world, everything."

Blaine put his hand over Kurt's. "I don't know how I could get mad at you."

Kurt's mouth trembled into a small smile. "You say that now. But when you remember the things I said, you might not be so forgiving."

"Well, I assume that I said things I didn't mean either. But just so it goes on the record, I forgive you."

His hand curled around Kurt's fingers. He smiled internally. He was getting his coordination back. Kurt squeezed his hand.

"Can I go to sleep now?"

Kurt laughed lightly. "Not yet. Just wait a little longer."

"Stay with me?"

Kurt looked back, feeling a presence behind him. Burt stood in the doorway, with Finn at his side staring intently at the floor.

"Dad, how long have you been there?" Embarrassment flooded his words.

"Not long. He's all checked in. The doctor should be here in a few minutes." He nodded towards Blaine.

"Stay with him Kurt. We'll be right outside."

Blaine had to stay in the hospital for the rest of the night. The doctor came in a little while after Burt had sent Finn home to get some sleep. Dr. Matthews asked Blaine a lot of questions, checked his pupils and hand-eye coordination.

"Hmm... a little sluggish." He announced of Blaine's ability to touch his nose and then the pen he held in front of him. "That's to be expected though. And he's a bit dehydrated. This should help."

He inserted an IV line into the vein in Blaine's wrist. He winced as it went in and then relaxed.

Burt stood off to the side with Kurt, an arm around his son's shoulders.

"There doesn't seem to be any serious injuries. Most likely a slight concussion. I'll have a nurse check in on him every hour and I'll have a prescription filled that you can pick up tomorrow for his headache."

"Can I stay here?" Kurt spoke up, eyes hopeful.

"I'm sorry, but unless you're immediate family, visiting hours end at 10. Have you been able to reach his parents?"

"No. I'll keep trying." Burt replied, voice stern and Kurt knew he was going to call them all night if he had to.

"If you can't reach them by the time visiting hours end, since he's a minor, you can stay. If he wants you to." He said, writing something on a chart. "Do you need anything else?"

"No. Thank you."

"Okay. Just let a nurse know if you need anything."

As he left, Kurt rushed up to Blaine's side as if he'd been thrown on a sling-shot.

"Does that mean I can sleep now?" Blaine whispered wearily.

Kurt laughed softly. "Yes." He took hold of his hand, linking their fingers. Burt pushed a chair up next to Kurt, telling him he was going to try to call Blaine's parents again.

"You okay Kurt?"

"I'm fine dad."

He nodded stiffly and left them. Kurt sighed, tracing his thumb in little circles on Blaine's palm and beginning to hum as he saw Blaine's face relax into sleep.

It was a long time before Kurt fell asleep with his head on the edge of the bed. Burt had gotten a hold of Blaine's parents, but convinced them to not come down to the hospital so that Kurt could stay with Blaine. Kurt had no idea how his dad talked himself out of that one, but he got to stay, so he wasn't questioning anything. He was worried though. Blaine didn't remember the fight and he seemed to not remember him

either, at least a little. He'd stumbled over his name. That would go away though right? It had to. If Blaine suffered any more because of what he'd said to make him go out running, Kurt told himself he'd never forgive himself.

He didn't know how long he'd been asleep, but when he woke, it was still dark outside. He looked blearily around the room. Burt was snoring in a chair by the window. There was a blanket around Kurt's shoulders and he knew his dad had put it there. His back was stiff from staying in that position for so long, slumped over his and Blaine's clasped hands. He wondered what woke him. He wasn't a heavy sleeper, but he usually didn't wake up during the night. Something must have caused him to be pulled out of his dreamland.

And then he felt it.

Blaine's hand jerked in his, clenching and releasing, twitching. Kurt opened his eyes wider, trying to get them to adjust in the dark. He noticed that Blaine's other hand was moving too. His whole body seemed to be struggling against unseen horrors, but in slow-motion.

"Blaine?"

He knew you weren't supposed to wake someone when they were sleepwalking, but did that same principle apply when that someone was having a nightmare? He heard mumbling. Blaine's lips moved. At first, Kurt thought he'd woken up, but when he saw his eyes were closed tightly, he leaned forward, trying to hear what he was saying.

Blaine groaned softly. Then he began to whisper in fragments.

"No... Don't..."

Kurt's eyebrows pulled down in concern. Was he dreaming about passing out again? Or maybe he was dreaming about the fight, telling Kurt not to push him. Kurt's heart wrenched.

"I know..." These words were spoken with urgency, laced with broken pain. "I know..."

His hand twitched again and he whimpered. Then the nightmare passed and he was still, the muscles in his face and hand relaxing.

Kurt's heart was pounding. What was he dreaming about?

The lighted clock by Blaine's bedside said that it was five-thirty in the morning. Not as early as he thought. Kurt was wide awake now and he knew there would be no going back to sleep. He sighed and gently pulled his hand from Blaine's, flexing the fingers that had fallen asleep, trying to rid them of the tingling sensation.

He sluggishly made his way down to the cafeteria. Normally, he wouldn't touch anything that this place cooked with a ten-foot pole, but he needed coffee. Now. He handed the overly happy cashier two neatly folded dollar bills and sat at a table in the back with his drink. He wrapped his hands around the cup, feeling the warmth spreading through his fingers, watching the steam rise for a while and then checked his phone. Finn had called twice. Mercedes, Rachel, and Artie had all texted at least once each. And there was a voicemail from Carole. He licked his lips and replied to the texts first, then leaving a text for Finn as well, and then calling his stepmom. He knew she'd be up. She answered quickly and Kurt told her as well as he could remember what the doctor had told him. He promised to call her if anything changed and told her that they hoped to be home around nine.

The coffee was bitter. He cringed, adding sugar and cream until it was somewhat bearable. He took another sip and pocketed his cell phone, ready to head back to the room.

When he opened the door, he saw Burt was up. It was six, the normal time he got up. Blaine was still asleep.

"Hey bud."

"Hey dad." He said sleepily. He wasn't used to being up before seven-thirty. Then his eyes widened. "Oh, I should have gotten you coffee. Do you want me to go get one for you? It's terrible, but there's caffeine in it. Somewhere."

He smiled, stretching his arms above his head as he stood. "Thanks, but I think I'll go. I need to walk around before I get stuck like this."

Kurt snorted and placed his coffee on the small rolling tray, resuming his place beside Blaine.

It was eight-fifteen before Blaine was discharged. Dr. Matthews came back and did some more of the same tests he did yesterday, though he seemed pleased with the results.

"Coordination is much better. Pupils look good. He seems to be having a bit of pre-injury amnesia, but I wouldn't doubt that it should sort itself out after he gets some more sleep. Bring him back here if you notice anything different in his symptoms at all. Otherwise, just have him get as much sleep as possible. He has a slight concussion, so he should take off of school for a few days. As little brain activity as possible so he can heal. He should be back to normal in a week or so."

Burt headed down to the pharmacy to get the prescription filled, while Kurt followed Blaine down to the hospital entrance.

"I don't understand why I have to be in a wheelchair. My legs are fine." Blaine grumbled.

"Hospital protocol." The nurse grinned at Kurt. "This is the fun part of my job. People get so mad over this little thing. Especially guys. It's actually quite entertaining."

Burt met them at the front entrance with a paper bag in his hand, nodding at them as he went to get the car.

"Up you go." The nurse pulled Blaine's arm around her shoulders and helped him to the car. Kurt had to resist laughing when he saw Blaine's face. He was glad that his boyfriend had the sense to not say out loud what he was thinking at this moment.

Kurt slid in the seat in the back next to Blaine and buckled him in, receiving a glare.

"Oh come on you baby. It's not that bad."

Blaine's eyes narrowed and then he sighed. "Ow."

"Don't do that."

"Thanks. I'll remember."

"Sorry." Kurt let Blaine lean into him, putting an arm around his shoulders and trying not to smile the whole ride home.

Kurt helped Blaine out of the car and into his room, despite the mumbled dispute.

At that moment, Blaine tripped on the carpet, pitching forward slightly until Kurt held him upright. "Au contraire, mon ami." Kurt couldn't stop himself and smiled.

"Shut up Kurt. That was a lucky coincidence."

Kurt grinned as Blaine pulled the covers of Kurt's bed up to his chest. They had moved Blaine's bed back to where it belonged, but Kurt liked the idea of Blaine in his bed. And Blaine wasn't objecting any.

Blaine's eyes drooped almost immediately.

"Sleep." Kurt commanded, placing a soft kiss on his temple. "I'll be here when you wake up."

The next few days were odd for Kurt. Not that he didn't like it; it was just... *odd*.

He held Blaine in his arms while he slept, rubbing circles into his back and playing with his hair. It felt good to not be the one who needed taking care of now. Even though Kurt knew it wouldn't last, he relished in it now.

Blaine had been making progress and was able to remember what happened before he passed out. They had started that conversation a bit slowly, both feeling guilty and embarrassed.

"I'm so sorry Blaine. None of this would have happened if it wasn't for me getting upset over nothing. I didn't mean anything. Not a word of it." His lip trembled.

"It's not a big deal, really."

He sighed, blinking away the tears. "Always the chivalrous one. Blaine, it was a big deal. I freaked out over nothing and you got hurt because of it. And you're right. I didn't stand up for myself. That led to you getting hurt in the first place." He sighed heavily, looking down. "I'll never forgive myself."

"Kurt, please don't beat yourself up over this."

"It's hard not to."

"I forgive you. Even after remembering what you said to me." He smiled lightly, using the words Kurt had told him earlier. "I know you didn't mean it. I didn't mean anything I said either. Kurt, I don't think you're a child. You're the most mature person I know."

"I told you I was fine without you. But I'm not. I'm not. Blaine, if you weren't here, I don't know where I'd be. I'd... I'd be lost." He stared in Blaine's eyes, feeling his throat constrict, his voice almost a whisper, drenched in guilt. "I pushed you."

"And I'm sure I deserved it."

"Why are you not letting me take any of the blame here?"

"Because I can't expect you to do what I thought you should do. You are Kurt Hummel, not Blaine Anderson. You're your own person and I love that about you. You did what you thought was right and what would be less apt to cause trouble, whereas I, as you can see, did the complete opposite in initiating the trouble and look where that got me." He smiled. "I could learn a few things from you. And I know I would be lost without you too. You've taught me so much Kurt and I don't want to know what my life would have been without you."

"I know you were just trying to protect me."

"Maybe I was. Well, I know I was. But I'm sorry for doing that."

"Don't be. You did what I couldn't. It ended with less than favorable results, but I envy your courage Blaine."

Blaine smiled and reached up to brush his hand along Kurt's cheek. Kurt closed his eyes.

"Just testing my hand-eye coordination." Blaine whispered.

Kurt's eyes opened. "You're such a liar."

"If I was, would I tell you that you are beautiful, even if your hair is sticking up on one side?"

"Yes, you would. Because I know you would never let me go out in public with any kind of hair malfunction."

"Good thing we're not in public."

Blaine's hand was still on Kurt's cheek. He pressed his hand over Blaine's, keeping his palm where it was and leaned forward. Blaine raised his chin and placed a soft kiss on Kurt's lips. Kurt smiled into the kiss, running his other hand through Blaine's curls.

Blaine deepened the kiss, which Kurt reciprocated eagerly, until his eyes opened wide and he pulled away.

"What?" Blaine whined.

"You need to take your pills." Kurt looked around, hunting through his meticulous room until he found the little orange bottle.

Blaine pushed himself up on his elbows. "You stopped that for a bottle of pills?"

"Not just any pills." Kurt stated as he popped open the cap and poured two of the pink tablets into Blaine's hand. "These ones taste like bubblegum."

"Yay?" Blaine rolled his eyes and chewed the chalky medicine, which he chased down with the glass of water on the bedside table. "Ugh. Just because I'm seventeen doesn't mean I have to be treated like a little kid."

"Oh, but it's fun!" Kurt laughed. "Time for your nap."

"Shut up." Blaine groaned and threw a pillow at Kurt. But he sighed and rolled over, tucking his arms up underneath his pillow as he closed his eyes. He felt Kurt side beside him and a hand on his back. He relaxed immediately when Kurt began to trace circles into his back.

"I hate this."

"Hate what?"

"Being helpless. Having to sleep all the time. God Kurt, I don't know how you stand it." He instantly colored. "No, I didn't mean that. You're not helpless. I-"

Kurt chuckled. "I know what you meant. Honestly, seeing you is the only thing that kept me from going crazy sometimes."

Blaine rolled over onto his back and pulled Kurt down next to him.

"It's nice though." Kurt said, tucking his legs up and taking Blaine's hand. He stared down at their fingers. "I like taking care of you." His mouth lifted in a small smile.

Blaine raised their intertwined hands and gently kissed their fingers.

"Now go to sleep." Kurt whispered.

Blaine made a face, but then sighed and closed his eyes when Kurt's other hand reached up to stroke his cheek.

Kurt hadn't noticed if Blaine had had any more nightmares since the hospital, but every time Blaine went to sleep, he was worried. He didn't know if he would have another nightmare and they seemed pretty bad, so he didn't want to bring it up. Sometimes, nightmares seemed so real and they were difficult to talk about.

If it happened more frequently, then he would talk to him about it. But for now, he let Blaine drift off into his hazy sleep, noting the way that Blaine pulled their clasped hands in closer to his chest. Kurt scooted closer, their foreheads almost touching. He was sure Blaine could feel how close he was and he wanted so badly for him to open his eyes so he could kiss him. He told himself to be patient. He would kiss him soon enough, when he didn't have a concussion, and when Kurt could kiss him the way he wanted to, without any limitations.

He smiled, closing his eyes as well. They stayed that way for a long time.

24. Pajamas and Klaine

"I want to go back to Dalton."

Blaine almost choked on the water he was drinking. "Excuse me?"

"I've been thinking and... I want to go back."

It had been a week since Blaine's concussion and he had made a full recovery, as predicted, and no longer had to rely to Advil or sleep to feel better. He just had to take things slow for a little bit. And try not to get a second concussion. But as he wasn't planning on getting hit any time soon, he figured he was good. Unless Karofsky threatened Kurt again. That was a separate case entirely. Blaine had a very good reason to hate Karofsky, but now he had another reason. He ran a hand to the back of his head, subconsciously rubbing the fading lump in a way that had almost become a habit.

"To Dalton?"

"Yes, Blaine. How hard did you hit your head again?"

"Shut up Kurt. I heard you." Blaine sighed. "Any particular reason?"

"I miss them."

Blaine softened and the corner of his mouth twitched in an empathetic smile. "I know you do. I do too."

"So?"

"So... so I'm just-"

"If you're worried about what happened... last time we went to Dalton, you don't have to. Be worried, I mean." Kurt sat down next to him at the dining table and plucked a grape off Blaine's plate. "No one there is going to hurt me. Hurt us. It's the only place I've felt safe." Kurt nudged his arm. "Other than with you of course."

Blaine smiled and chased away the apprehension that flooded his mind. "You know what?" He picked a grape off the stem and held it between his thumb and forefinger. "That sounds like a good idea. You're all caught up on your schoolwork right?"

Kurt raised an eyebrow. "Oh please. We both aced those essays. So, yes?" Kurt leaned forward hopefully.

Blaine grinned. "Yeah. Yeah, I want to see them too." He paused, twirling the grape in his fingers. "Open your mouth."

Kurt returned Blaine's grin and got up, backing away behind the counter. He rested his elbows on the granite and put his chin in his hands, opening his mouth. Blaine aimed carefully, then tossed the grape in the air. Kurt's eyes followed it and he jerked his head to the side, snatching the fruit out of midair, catching it in his mouth.

"Your turn." Kurt said after he'd swallowed.

He slid the plate over and Kurt chose his weapon wisely, yanking it from the stem. "Ready?"

Blaine tilted his head back. Kurt threw the grape up, where it curved in an arc and descended. But Kurt had overthrown and Blaine leaned back in his chair. He stretched out his neck and kept leaning. Too far. The chair tipped over and Blaine landed sprawled on his back on the floor with a little scream of surprise.

Kurt was at his side in an instant. "Oh my god. Blaine. Oh god. Please tell me you didn't hit your head again. Blaine, say something! You're crying. Oh my god, I knew you hit your head. Don't move! I'll get Finn."

Blaine bit his lip, tears squeezing from the corners of his eyes. He was shaking. Kurt moved, but Blaine snatched his hand, pulling him back down.

Blaine's mouth twitched and then he couldn't contain himself anymore. He burst out laughing, the tears falling. Relief washed over Kurt and he would have laughed too if he wasn't still somewhat in shock. Blaine laid back, laughing so hard, he clutched at his stomach. He had to fight for breath and when he could finally speak, he let Kurt pull him up to sitting.

"You missed." Blaine wiped the tears from his eyes. "Kurt, I'm fine and the next time I almost turn my head into scrambled eggs, for the love of god, do *not* get Finn."

"Sorry." Kurt's face broke into a smile and he clutched dramatically at his heart. "Do you have any idea how much you scared me though? You almost gave me a heart attack."

His apology was written on his face and Kurt melted. "Puppy dog eyes are so not your style." He sighed. "But it's so cute."

Blaine grinned and located the forgotten grape on the ground. He looked at it and then tossed it at Kurt's head, where it ricocheted off his cheek, bounced once on the floor and then rolled out of sight.

Kurt grimaced. "So, Dalton?"

Blaine sat up on his knees and kissed the top of Kurt's head. "Dalton. As long as your parents agree."

And Kurt smiled then, knowing that there wouldn't be much of an argument.

The following Sunday, Kurt Hummel strode up the hallowed hallway of dorms on the second floor, hearing his footsteps echo on the floor. He had a large backpack on his shoulder and a Burberry overnight bag on one arm. Blaine had a bag slung over his shoulder and he carried a duffle bag in his arms. As Blaine struggled with the door and finally flung it open, while almost pitching himself forward onto the floor, Kurt stood and watched his boyfriend with a smug smile.

"Little help please?"

Kurt grinned wider and trotted in after him, setting his stuff down on the bed and then went to grab the duffle bag from him. He placed the bag at the foot of the bed and straightened up, whirling around and stretched his arms in the air. He took a deep breath and tilted his head back.

"Oh, Dalton. How I've missed you."

Blaine's snort interrupted Kurt's reunion and he glared. "Sorry. What is it that you're doing?"

"Can't you smell it?" Kurt was too happy to be back to be annoyed at Blaine. Blaine wrinkled his nose.

"What are you talking about?"

Kurt took another deep breath. "It smells like wood and fabric softener and old books and success and love and-"

Blaine stopped him with a laugh, wrapping his arms around his waist. "I'm glad that you're glad to be back."

"Why didn't I do this weeks ago?"

"Mmmm.... Because you loved being with me?"

Kurt pursed his lips, mock thinking. "Oh wait, I remember." He said lightly. "I was puking my guts out." He untangled himself from Blaine, who just sighed. The largest of Kurt's bags was opened and the clothes inside neatly folded. Kurt set to work organizing them how he wanted in the closet drawers and on hangers, sorting by outfits, which was something Blaine could never do. Kurt picked out all of his outfits a week in advance and Blaine never understood how he managed to do that. He could barely decide what he wanted for breakfast.

Kurt began to hum as he sorted, leaving Blaine to shove all of his clothes in a random drawer. He wanted this to get done fast. Ignoring Kurt's groan of disapproval, Blaine told him lightly that he was going down for coffee and would be back soon.

However, once reaching the end of the hall, instead of turning left, he veered to the right, down another hallway of dorms. As he stopped in front of the eighth door down, he smiled and knocked twice.

A brunette boy opened the door at once, with a smile that matched the one on the boy standing outside his door. Blaine was enveloped in a bear hug that almost made him topple over.

"Geez!" He groaned and barely had time to take another breath before he was pulled inside.

It was pitch black in the room. He couldn't see anything. The hands had left him and he was rendered blind, as his eyes hadn't adjusted fast enough. "W- what... David?"

He reached his hands out and took a tentative step forward. And the lights snapped on.

He jumped, eyes burning in the sudden light. He pressed a hand to his eyes. "If that light is off again when I take my hand away, I am leaving and I will not be back."

Blaine counted to five in his head, took a breath, and slowly removed his fingers one by one. Standing in front of him in David's dorm, was the entirety of the Warblers, all beaming at him with identical smiles on their faces.

"Guys?" Blaine stared in disbelief, mainly at how they got all of them into David's dorm.

He didn't need to take another step forward as he was suddenly surrounded by so many hands and bodies and faces and voices.

"We missed you!"

"Blaine, you're back!"

"Finally!"

"Now we can really start rehearsals. We're going to kick ass at Nationals!"

"How's Kurt?"

"Where is Kurt?"

"Is he here?"

Blaine's head spun trying to keep up with all the conversation. "Whoa, guys. Everyone calm down." He held up his hands in surrender and they all backed up a few steps.

He smiled at them. "I've missed you too. I've been really busy. Well, we've been busy. Kurt has too." A blush filled his cheeks as he saw Josh's raised eyebrows. "No, not like *that*. He's here. In our dorm. But please don't go barging in there. I'd like to not give him a heart attack on his first day back." His gaze turned questioning. "Not that I don't love every one of you, but why are you all here?"

Wes smiled. "We knew you'd go to mine and David's dorm or Jeff's first. Since ours is closer, we piled everyone in here. And we were right." He shrugged, as if it was obvious.

When the chatter quieted down, Jeff asked quietly, "How's Kurt?"

They steeled themselves for Blaine to get emotional, as was understandable, but he grinned. "He's great. I know he really misses you guys. Shall we bombard him with Warbler love?"

"Not quite yet Blaine." Wes said. "It was actually luck that you didn't have Kurt with you when you came here. We were planning to hide behind the couch if you did."

Blaine looked behind them at the medium-sized leather couch that sat in front of a flat-screen TV and smirked, realizing how impossible that was and how funny it would have been to see it attempted.

"Anyway, seeing as how luck is on our side and Kurt is not with you, we can go on with our intended message: Bring Kurt to the choir room at eight tonight."

Blaine's mouth fell open a little in disbelief at the anti-climactic sentence. "That's it? I mean, no offense guys, but couldn't you have sent me a text or something? Or, you know, just have Wes tell me?"

"Ah see, but that's where you're wrong." David grinned. "It is of the utmost importance that Kurt not know why he's going to the choir room at night and if we'd sent a text, you surely would have been nosy and probably shown him the text to see if he knew. As for not having one person tell you, well, you saw how much fun it is to surprise you. And we kind of couldn't wait until tonight to see you."

"And why is it that Kurt is going to the choir room at night?" Blaine was slightly uneasy about this. Terrible flashes of them being hit by a million water balloons or locked in the room all night traveled through his mind. Though he wouldn't mind that last one so much.

Thad answered his question. "Then it wouldn't be a surprise now would it?"

"Come on you guys." Blaine almost whined. "Why can't I know if it's a surprise for *Kurt*? You don't trust me?"

He looked around at the faces surrounding him. His tone was blatantly flat. "You don't trust me."

"Not that we don't trust *you*, per say, but that we don't trust you *with* Kurt."

"Alright. Whatever. I told Kurt I was going to get coffee and if I come back without it he'll be suspicious. So, if you'll excuse me..." He started backing towards the door.

They followed him, pressing in closer. He groped around for the knob and twisted when he felt the cool metal in his hand.

"Eight o'clock!"

"Don't forget!"

"See you then!"

"Missed you!"

"Miss you now!"

"Missed you ten seconds ago!"

Blaine slipped out the door. "Alright, alright. I'll see you then." He heard laughter from inside and shook his head, hoping that whatever it was they were planning was worth it.

"Where are we going? Blaine, this had better be important. I'm missing valuable moisturizing time."

The dark-haired boy beside him smiled and pulled his hand, but didn't say anything. He knew Kurt would recognize the route.

And sure enough, as Blaine led him through the tree-lined path, Kurt's voice came from beside him. "Why are we going to the choir room?" He paused in thought and then struggled to keep up with Blaine as he had fallen behind. "Honestly, I know you're excited to be back here, I know, I am too, but couldn't practice wait until tomorrow? You know, when we *actually have practice?*"

"Sorry, but I'm in the dark about this as much as you are. Just trust me okay?"

"And I'm supposed to trust you when you have no idea what we're doing out here? Have you lost your mind?"

"Maybe." Blaine muttered under his breath, unheard by Kurt. He was going on a wild goose chase set down by the Warblers. But he trusted them, for the most part, so he kept going and kept pulling Kurt along with him.

He braced himself as he laid a hand on the doorknob, hesitantly pulling the door open.

No water balloons. No yells. No attack of flying monkeys.

Kurt poked his head in, looking around and then stared back at Blaine. "Are you going in or not?"

Blaine took a tentative step in, feeling Kurt's hands on his back, pushing him all the way in and shutting the door behind him.

As soon as the door clicked shut, Wes appeared from the door leading to the room that housed the musical instruments and microphones, only the latter of which the Warblers ever practiced with. Wes strode to the center of the room, Blaine's eyes following him.

"Hey Wes!" Kurt ran up and hugged him, and by this time, all of the Warblers were emerging from the room. Blaine wondered briefly how all of them had fit into that little room and then he decided that he didn't care and didn't want to know. They surrounded Kurt the same way as they had surrounded Blaine earlier and he felt a twinge of sympathy. Blaine put a hand in Kurt's and gently pulled him back from the throng of boys, all smiling and talking and not doing anything out of the ordinary so far.

Blaine began to relax. Maybe they really just couldn't wait until tomorrow to see Kurt.

Wes stepped up and the other boys began to fall into formation in two lines, leaving a single space open for him.

"Kurt," he began, grinning. "As you know, we've missed you. Or, if you didn't know, well, now you do. And there's really not much more to say, but I hope you like it."

Wes stepped into formation and Kurt and Blaine took a few steps back, the realization falling into place. They were going to sing to Kurt.

Blaine saw Wes's hand move, counting out the beats and then Wes began to sing alone.

Hello world, hope you're listening

Forgive me if I'm young or speaking out of turn

But there's someone I've been missing

And I think that they could be the better half of me

Wes smiled lightly at both of them as he sang, but Blaine knew that this song was for Kurt. Only for Kurt. The Warblers began a soft hum as Wes took up the couplet.

They're in the wrong place trying to make it right

But I'm tired of justifying

The entire group sang the chorus, their voices melding together seamlessly.

So I say to you come home come home

Cause I've been waiting for you for so long for so long

Right now there's a war between the vanities

But all I see is you and me

The fight for you is all I've ever known

Their voices faded and Wes sang the line alone.

So come home

Kurt's throat constricted. They were singing for him. He had missed them so much. And they were telling him to come home. This home. His home and the only place he'd never felt scared.

I get lost in the beauty of everything I see

The world ain't half as bad as they paint it to be

If all the sons and the daughters stop to take it in

Well hopefully the hate subsides and the love can begin

Beside him, Blaine squeezed Kurt's hand, feeling the a wave of gratitude washing over him. He'd never been more proud of them, or more proud to be able to call himself a Warbler. He truly knew what it meant to have a family and that they were a family and not just because they'd spent the last few years putting up with each other, creating new song arrangements and having 'study' -read 'party'- sessions at their various dorms throughout the years. No, it was because, even when things got bad, they were there for each other and they stood up with you.

But until then, come home come home

Cause I've been waiting for you for so long for so long

And right now there's a war between the vanities

But all I see is you and me

And the fight for you is all I've ever known

Wes's voice again picked up the last line an almost memorizing smoothness.

So come home

And then there was silence and Blaine dared to look at the boy beside him, whose silent tears were threatening to spill over. He blinked and successfully fought back the water works.

"Told you it would be worth it." Came Thad's voice from the back.

"Cut it out dimwit!" Someone hissed. "Can't you see he's having a moment?"

Blaine's hand squeezed Kurt's and when he could speak, he looked up with watery eyes and addressed the group, who waited with expectant glances. "You didn't have enough fun making me cry my eyes out at the

benefit and now you have to do it again?" He smiled with trembling lips and sniffed. "That was amazing. I can't... there's no words to explain how much I love you guys."

Kurt stumbled forward, half-blinded by happy tears and was pulled into what could only be explained as the largest bromance hug he had ever experienced. Blaine followed, putting his arms around the two Warblers nearest him, grinning from ear to ear.

Laughing, they all pulled away after a long moment. Blaine realized he'd put his arm around Wes, as the blond Warbler turned to him and said, "So, were you surprised?"

Blaine just shook his head in disbelief. "Do you even need to ask?"

"Just checking. Glad you're back man. Glad both of you are back."

Blaine smiled, looking over at Kurt, who was being bombarded by eager questions from the rest of the group with a soft blush filling his cheeks. "Thank you. That song really did mean more than you know."

After a while, Blaine had shooed away the Warblers, telling them that they both needed to get sleep before school the next day.

"Just because you guys can stay up all night and still be alive for class doesn't mean all of us have that ability." He laughed and pulled Kurt out the door.

"Bye Klaine!"

Kurt paused, just outside the door, and stuck his head back in. "What?"

Blaine's face appeared beside Kurt's. "*Klaine*? Really guys?"

David just smiled and turned back to the others, who were sneaking glances at how the couple would react to their new nickname. Blaine sighed and let the door close.

"Klaine?"

"David's idea of a joke. Kurt and Blaine. You and me. Klaine. "

"Oh." Kurt smiled. "Well I think it's cute."

"Yeah, well it could have been worse." He elbowed Kurt lightly in the ribs. "They could've gone with Blurt. Imagine the disaster that would've been."

Kurt fell into step beside him, hand gripping at his arm. "I think I underestimated their craziness."

"Well, sometimes craziness can lead to genius. Kind of like when you don't get enough sleep and can somehow write an amazing essay in twenty minutes the night before it's due?"

Kurt grinned. "I think that is more like madness. But same principle." He paused. "I'm getting better though. Procrastination used to be my one terrible downfall, but I wrote that last paper the week it got assigned."

He lifted his chin proudly and Blaine leaned down and kissed the top of his head as he opened the door to their dorm.

"And what about the French conjugation worksheet?" Blaine said, knowing that the paper sat untouched in Kurt's bag.

Kurt colored. "That's a different case. Besides, have *you* finished it?"

The boy beside him smiled and tossed a pillow at him. "Touché."

Kurt snatched the pillow out of midair and resisted the urge to throw it back. He was so not about to return to the epic pillow fight a while ago that had ended with him begging for mercy as Blaine had towered over him, pillow held locked and loaded in his hand, laughter in his eyes.

Setting the pillow on his bed, Kurt dug through his meticulously organized drawers for his beloved silk pajamas. Blaine pulled his sweatshirt over his head and yanked on a plain black t-shirt. He disappeared into the bathroom to change his pants and brush his teeth.

Kurt was still digging in the drawers when he came out and began to fold his sweatshirt, a habit he had unwillingly picked up from his boyfriend. "What are you doing?"

Kurt didn't answer, but rifled through another drawer, slamming it closed in frustration. "Blaine, please tell me I packed my pajamas."

Blaine frowned. Pajamas. He didn't remember seeing Kurt's pajamas. He had reminded him to pack them. Right? He joined Kurt in his search, but after ten minutes of unloading all the drawers and putting them back in order, they had to conclude that Kurt had left them at home.

"I guess you'll just have to go commando until we get Burt to send you some." Blaine said seriously and then bit his lip to keep from laughing at the look of horror that crossed Kurt's face. "I'm kidding. Relax. You can borrow mine. I have an extra pair."

Kurt sighed in relief as Blaine handed him a navy blue t-shirt and black lounge pants.

"I like that color on you." Blaine remarked from on his bed when Kurt emerged from the bathroom.

Kurt looked down at the shirt on his chest and grinned, sitting cross-legged on his own bed. "It smells like you."

Blaine sneered and pulled the covers up. "I hope that's a compliment."

"The best." Kurt responded, covering himself in the blankets. "Thanks for letting me borrow these."

"No problem. Boyfriends share right?"

"Right. And I'll share everything but you."

He heard Blaine's low laugh and smiled, folding his arms under his head. There was silence and Kurt listened to the creak of the mattress as Blaine shifted into a more comfortable position. Kurt closed his eyes, taking a deep breath as he felt the smile disappear. Blaine's nightmares had been getting worse, more frequent. He didn't know what made him say it, especially now, but the words fell from his lips before he could think about them.

"How long have you been having nightmares?"

There was a pause, a bit too long to be Blaine simply registering the question. Kurt's heart pounded in his chest.

"I'm not having nightmares." Blaine's voice was too soft, too careful, too cautious to assure Kurt he was telling the truth. Kurt turned onto his side and stared at Blaine, who was lying on his back, making a point not to look at Kurt.

"Blaine, please don't lie to me. You haven't been sleeping well and I-"

"Since when did 'nightmares' become the definition of 'not sleeping well'?"

Kurt took a deep breath. Blaine didn't like to talk about things that were bothering him, especially not with Kurt. For some reason, he thought it made him seem weak and no matter how much Kurt tried to tell him that he didn't care, it still took convincing until he would open up.

"Blaine, please?" Kurt sat up.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Blaine was staring at the ceiling.

So this was how it was going to be.

"I saw you." Kurt said softly. "That night... when you were in the hospital."

That got his attention. Blaine looked over, pain in his eyes, but did not say anything.

Kurt stared at his hands in his lap. "I- It... it scared me Blaine. You were... your hand was twitching, like you were trying to hold onto something. And you were moaning. And you... mumbled."

Blaine closed his eyes momentarily. "I didn't mean to scare you."

"Of course you didn't. You can't control what you do or what happens in a nightmare." He paused, unsure of how to ask without offending him. "What... what were you talking about?"

"What do you mean?" Blaine knew what he would ask, but he hoped that Kurt would question him about something else.

Kurt moved from his bed to the edge of Blaine's. Blaine scooted over, allowing Kurt room to lay down beside him. The dorms at Dalton came equipped with two full-sized beds, something all of the inhabitants at the school were glad to have, not only because they allowed a lot of room to spread out when they slept,

but also because they provided ample space to create tents and barriers during pillow fights, which occurred at least once a week, not to mention a nice place to study, with lots of room to pile books, or in Blaine's case, music sheets.

Kurt sighed and said, "I think you know what I mean Blaine."

Blaine hadn't met Kurt's eyes. He didn't really want to know what he'd said, but he knew Kurt wouldn't rest until he'd made sure he was okay. "Kurt, I'm fine." He whispered.

"Baby, please. Just tell me. Do you have the same nightmare every time?" Kurt put his palm on Blaine's cheek and turned his face towards his. Blaine didn't resist and carefully met his eyes.

"It's not good Kurt."

"Okay."

Blaine bit his lip. "What did I say?"

"You mumbled. You said, 'no' and 'I know.'"

Blaine's brow furrowed slightly as if he was trying to place why he'd said that. And then his face relaxed and he said, "Oh."

Kurt's hand fell from his cheek and he slipped it into Blaine's hand. "What happens in your nightmares?"

Blaine was silent for a while and Kurt was worried he'd made him mad. But then Blaine squeezed Kurt's fingers lightly. "It's not the same every time. Very similar, a few differences maybe, but it always ends the same."

Kurt nodded encouragingly.

Blaine closed his eyes, felt Kurt's hand in his, and softly began to tell Kurt what he saw in his dreams. "I'm usually walking on a path, sometimes it's a bridge or a ledge, and it's always beautiful. Gorgeous, like I'm seeing everything in these fantastic colors and I feel so happy. But then I hear these whispers, in my head, and I start walking towards where the voice is leading me to. The voice is sad, speaking in fragments, saying 'don't let me.' I ask what it means, and there's no answer. It just keeps repeating. Whenever I step

off the path, it's okay for a little while, and then, it's like I blink and everything changes. The colors all disappear, so everything is grey and black and the voice gets more urgent and says, 'don't let me.' And I can feel every gust of wind and the thumping of my heart and it's like I can't move and all I can hear is that voice." Blaine began to struggle to keep his words from running together as his throat closed and he felt a wave of shame come over him, for being unable to convince himself that these dreams weren't real. "And I look over and I see... I see you." For the second time that night, his eyes filled with tears, but now, they were tears of a different kind.

Kurt's hand squeezed in Blaine's, but he felt his stomach drop at Blaine's tone.

Blaine looked away, not meeting Kurt's eyes, seeing the memory vividly in his mind. "You're... you're lying on the ground, in a hospital gown, and you're not... you're not breathing. You're so pale and cold and I hold you in my arms and the voice is in my head again."

Kurt felt the tears form in his eyes.

"I ask the voice what it wants, and your eyes open and you scream, 'Don't let me die.'"

Blaine's voice broke in pain and tears spilled down his cheeks. Kurt's arms were around Blaine before he knew it and he held him so tightly, letting Blaine cry into his chest.

"Baby." He murmurs. "Oh, baby, I had no idea. You didn't tell me. I didn't know."

When Blaine's shaking began to subside, Kurt lifted his tear stained face. "Blaine, honey, why didn't you tell me?"

"I couldn't." He hiccupped. "It was so real. It is real."

"No, no, honey, Blaine, it's just a dream." Kurt stroked his hair. "Just a dream. I'm here. It's okay."

Blaine began shaking his head. "No it's not a dream. I... it is real."

"What do you mean?" Kurt's tone was worried.

"I can't save you. No matter what I do. I can try and try and I will never be able to save you."

An overwhelming realization hit Kurt and a soft cry fell from his lips. He pulled Blaine into a long hug, his mind racing.

Blaine didn't want to lose him. He was having nightmares, losing sleep, worrying that he couldn't do anything to save him. That's what he meant, when he moaned in his dream. 'I know.' He was saying that he knew he couldn't save him. That he was watching him die and couldn't do anything about it.

Kurt pulled away and pressed his palms to either side of Blaine's cheeks. "I had no idea this was affecting you this much. You never told me. Has this been happening since I told you?"

Blaine shook his head. "No. The first one happened on the first day you started the second round of chemo."

"It's been that long? Geez Blaine, I wish you would have told me. Are they getting any better at all?"

He looked up, telling him softly, "When you're here, I don't get them as often."

Kurt stroked his cheek. "Okay. I'm here now. Alright? I'm here and I'm not going anywhere tonight."

Blaine nodded as Kurt snuggled down into the comforter. "Come here." He whispered and Blaine wiggled down close to him. Kurt pulled him into him, holding him tightly and letting him cry until his sobs turned to shaky breaths and he finally quieted and fell asleep.

As Blaine cried, silent tears fell down Kurt's cheeks into the dark curly hair, unseen by Blaine. His insides twisted in knowing how much pain Blaine was in. This was obviously distressing him and Kurt spent so long trying to figure out how to make him feel better, but as Blaine's ragged breathing began to turn into soft, regulated sighs, he had gone through at least four different plans, he knew none of them would ease Blaine's mind at all. None of the plans put his mind at ease either.

It scared him that he had no answers to this, that he couldn't help Blaine. And as he drifted into a troubled sleep, his arms tightened around Blaine's body. To no one in particular, he found himself repeating a single sentence over and over, wanting more than anything to take away any doubt, pain, or worry that would ever cross Blaine's mind. He felt terrible for taking Blaine away from Dalton for any period of time, for him having to sit up with him for hours while he puked, for him even having to go through his life with any worry at all. He knew Blaine did all of this without a complaint and he would do it all over again in a heartbeat because that's just the kind of person he was. And Kurt loved him. He loved him so much.

Don't let him suffer. Don't let him suffer.

25. Songs and Stories

It had turned colder in the days that followed. It was windy, cloudy, and the sky was grey. It was cardigan and jacket weather; Kurt's favorite kind of weather. He leaned against the doorframe with a mug of hot chocolate in his hands. He stared into the cup, watching the steam rise. His shoulders were clad in soft white cashmere, a blue scarf wound around his neck that brought out the color of his eyes. Chewing his bottom lip, he sighed at the cup in his hands. He really had wanted hot chocolate earlier, but now, the thought of the sweet drink just turned his stomach.

Blaine looked up from the book he was reading. "You know, in some places, it's considered rude to stare."

Kurt smiled, lifting his eyes and lowering the mug. "And in some places, I actually care about what's considered rude. Especially when it concerns inanimate objects. What are you reading?"

He lifted the book, moving his hands to show him the cover.

"Harry Potter?" Kurt raised an eyebrow. "Haven't you read those eight times already?"

"Don't question the lure that is Harry Potter. And actually, it's nine times. However," he shifted from where he was sprawled out on the bed, closing the book and setting it on the table, "seeing as how you look so adorable right now, I think I can resist the temptation of spells and flying broomsticks."

While saying this, Blaine had been moving closer to Kurt. He put his hands on Kurt's arms and stared into his eyes, leaning forward. Kurt smiled softly.

And Blaine leaned down and took a drink of the hot chocolate in his boyfriend's hands with a loud slurp.

"Hey!" Kurt cried and jumped back, avoiding being hit with some of the steaming liquid that had spilled onto the floor. Blaine straightened up with a goofy smile on his face, licking his lips. Kurt glowered and smacked his cheek in annoyance. "Blaine, this is cashmere! If you wanted some, you just had to ask!"

A sheepish grin replaced the laughing smile. "Sorry. I'll get you a new one."

"Ugh." He groaned, pressing the half-full cup into Blaine's hands. "You can have it. I didn't want it anyway."

Blaine moved to get a towel, but Kurt had already reappeared from the bathroom with a roll of paper towels and began to clean up the spilled drink. Blaine shrugged and sat on the bed, taking a sip, trying to hide the concern in his voice. "You haven't been eating much lately. Are you okay?"

"It's fine." Kurt's tone had turned tense and Blaine knew he didn't want to talk about it, so he reluctantly changed the topic.

"So what do you want to do tonight?"

Kurt looked up, balling the paper towels in his hands, grimacing as he threw them away.

"We could take a walk." Blaine called after Kurt.

He appeared in the doorway and walked over, sitting next to him. "And have my hair possibly ruined by the forty percent chance of rain? No thank you. We could go sit in the lounge. I think Thad said the fireplace is lit now."

Blaine grinned. "And have them crowd it trying to roast marshmallows?"

Kurt shifted. "Okay, bad idea. Library?"

"I thought you didn't want me to read." Blaine lifted his chin towards the discarded Harry Potter book on the table. "How about a movie?"

A smile spread across Kurt's face. "I like that idea."

"I promised I'd take you to see Water for Elephants."

"Hmm.... As exciting as that sounds, I think I'd rather stay in. I'm feeling kind of tired."

A look of concern immediately crossed Blaine's face. He took a few steps closer and brushed his fingertips on Kurt's jaw line. "Okay. And what would you like to see?"

As Kurt thought, his eyes gazed around the room. His heart dropped when he saw his open journal on the desk. Had Blaine seen it? Had he read it? He curled his hands tightly, keeping his eyes locked on the book, scared that it would disappear when he looked away. How could he have been so careless? He'd always kept them hidden and then to just leave it *lying open on his desk where anyone could read it?*

"Kurt?"

He flicked his eyes back up to Blaine. "The Princess Bride. But... umm, I think I loaned it to Wes, so..."

"No problem." Blaine smiled. "He's right down the hall. I'll go ask him."

"Thanks." Kurt plastered a smile on his face and watched him leave.

The second Blaine was out of view, he shot forward and snatched the journal up, sending the pen clattering to the floor in his haste. He dropped to the ground by his bed and pulled out a small ebony, wooden box. Opening it carefully, he sighed with relief to see that the other two journals lay undisturbed. He picked up the red one and set it beside the forest green one that he had just rescued. The dark purple one was thinner, as almost all of the pages had been ripped out. Underneath the purple journal lay a stack of letters, all neatly sealed and organized with a single word written on the front of everyone. A pile of stiff, unused envelopes were tucked on the side. He set the red journal back inside, and he'd picked up the green one when he heard Blaine's voice as he came back into the room.

"He said he- hey, what's that?"

Kurt slammed the lid back on the box and shoved it under his bed, standing up quickly. "Oh, nothing."

Blaine's eyes narrowed slightly in suspicion. "Okaaay. Well, Wes has no idea what you're talking about. Are you sure you gave it to him?"

Kurt looked around, heart pounding a little. "Oh, well, maybe not. " His eyes landed on the bookshelf, where the movie lay on top of his favorite books. "Found it!" He cheered and held up the DVD like a prized trophy.

"Wanna start it now?"

Kurt grinned and popped it into the DVD player. Blaine grabbed the large blanket from the closet and hopped up on the bed. When Kurt joined him, he threw the blanket over the two of them as Kurt pressed play.

"Wesley is so romantic." Kurt commented tiredly as the movie was ending, even though they'd had this discussion before. "Although how Buttercup didn't recognize his voice is beyond me. I'd know your voice anywhere."

Blaine glanced over and tightened his hand in Kurt's. "You okay?"

Kurt blinked slowly and snuggled in closer, eyes glazing over the rolling movie credits, not bothering to turn it off. "Just tired."

He smiled down at him and then paused, hand twisting nervously in the blanket. "Hey, Kurt?"

"Yeah?"

"There's something I've been wanting to tell you, but I wasn't sure when would be the right time."

"Okay." Kurt sat up, noting the way Blaine's eyes were darting around in an adorable anxious way. "And is now that right time?" He hit stop on the DVD player and the room was quite suddenly silent.

Blaine nodded and got up off the bed, returning a moment later with his guitar. He took a deep breath and let it out shakily, strumming his fingers lightly against the strings. "I wrote this for you and I want you to really listen to the words okay?"

"Okay," he said softly. He could tell this was really important to Blaine.

Blaine took another breath and moved his fingers to the frets, beginning the song carefully. Then he raised his eyes and his voice rose with the melody.

I've been alone

Surrounded by darkness

And I've seen how heartless

The world can be

And I've seen you crying

You feel like it's hopeless

I'll always do my best

To make you see

Kurt knew right then and there that, as cliché as it seemed, no song he ever heard would make him feel like this again, as loved, as achingly breathless as this.

Cause baby, you're not alone

Cause you're here with me

And nothing's ever gonna bring us down

Cause nothing can keep me from loving you

And you know it's true

It don't matter what'll come to be

Our love is all we need to make it through

Blaine began to smile as he sung, for the time being, not feeling worried or anxious. Nightmares still invaded his dreams, as he knew by the tale-tale nail marks on his palms and the sore body he woke with every day. But he hadn't woken up screaming and Kurt hadn't said anything since that night he brought it up, and Blaine hoped that meant that he was gaining control of these nightmares. Being with Kurt seemed to help. Kurt made him feel so happy, so *alive*, despite everything that was going on and it seemed almost as if their lives were back to normal, being at Dalton. He'd written this song on the back of a napkin one day in the coffee shop, the lines scribbled quickly, but the words had flown so easily and he sang with the

most amount of emotion he'd had in a while, truly feeling the words and what they meant. He'd known he loved Kurt for so long and now he could finally say it. His fingers moved with ease along the frets and his voice became slower on the next lines.

Now I know it ain't easy

But it ain't hard trying

Every time I see you smiling

And I feel you so close to me

Tell me

That baby you're not alone

Cause you're here with me

And nothing's ever gonna bring us down

Cause nothing can keep me from loving you

And you know it's true

It don't matter what'll come to be

Our love is all we need to make it through

Blaine's voice suddenly shifted to a gravelly, rough sound that sent a shiver down Kurt's back. It was the sexiest he'd ever heard Blaine's voice when he sang.

Now I still have trouble

I trip and stumble

Trying to make sense of things sometimes

I look for reasons

But I don't need 'em

All I need is to look in your eyes

And I realize

Blaine held the last note, his voice dragging on the high pitch that made Kurt's heart skip a beat. Okay, *this* was the sexiest he'd heard Blaine's voice. Color rushed up to Kurt's cheeks. Damn. Since when had he been this affected by a song?

Baby you're not alone

Cause you're here with me

And nothing's ever gonna bring us down

Cause nothing can keep me from loving you

And you know it's true

It don't matter what'll come to be

Our love is all we need to make it through

The fingers began stroking softer on the strings, slowing the melody. Blaine took a breath and after he played the last note, he spoke the last lines with Kurt still in disbelief at how Blaine's voice made him feel, a goofy smile on his face that he knew he couldn't stop if he tried.

Cause it don't matter what'll come to be

Our love is all we need to make it through

Kurt's smile matched the one that appeared on Blaine's face. He set aside the guitar.

"What did you think?" He asked quietly, obviously still nervous in wondering how Kurt would embrace the song.

"Blaine, that... that was the most amazing, sweet, beautiful thing I've ever heard. Ever. And your voice, god, your *voice*..." Kurt sighed, unable to finish, unable to think of a word that was fit to describe the sound.

Blaine blushed, adding to the already adorableness of his entire being. "Did you listen to the words?"

"Of course I did."

"And?"

"And I think that every other guy in the entire world is crying right now because they will never know what it's like to have the best boyfriend ever."

Blaine's hand found Kurt's. "Kurt..." he said slowly. "I love you."

He smiled, feeling a happy warmth fill his veins. "I love you too."

Their lips met for a kiss that was so soft, but so full of meaning, that it paled in comparison to the other kisses they'd shared. And inside, the little voice in his head was screaming, jumping up and down and laughing with glee.

Blaine Anderson loved him and he'd never felt so happy to be alive.

Kurt was not ashamed to say that they cuddled that night after the movie. And it was great. Nothing had really changed in those moments when they'd said 'I love you,' but all of their feelings were now out in the open, which Kurt was all too glad to have and to have Blaine return those feelings. He couldn't count the number of times when he'd almost said that he loved him. He'd had to bite his tongue and then his brain screamed at him to stop. He didn't know why he didn't say it. Maybe it was because somewhere in his subconscious mind, he thought that maybe Blaine didn't feel the same way. Maybe this was all a dream and he would wake up and go back to being shoved into lockers and slushied. Maybe he just didn't think that he was lucky enough to have someone like Blaine love him. Maybe Blaine was just simply helping him through this like any other boyfriend would. And kissing him. Whatever the reason, it was stupid now that

Kurt thought about it. He kind of wished he'd said it sooner, but he realized that he was absolutely perfect with how it had happened. They'd been together for three or so months, but to Kurt, they might as well have been together forever. He knew that Blaine was his other half, his soul mate. He'd never believed in that kind of stuff before. And then he met Blaine.

Blaine's song was unbelievable. Blaine was unbelievable. And Kurt lay there, with Blaine's arms around him and his fingers wound with his boyfriend's, listening to Blaine's steady breathing, feeling his chest rise and fall against his back, he smiled.

He felt it. A twitch. Kurt shifted a bit, snuggling up to go back to sleep from the half-conscious world between asleep and awake.

He heard it. A moan. Kurt's eyes opened and he turned his head to look at the clock on the bedside table. 3:30 AM.

Another sound. A whimper. Kurt turned over, rubbing his eyes, making them adjust in the darkness.

Blaine was in the middle of a nightmare. Kurt's heart thudded. Crap.

Should he wake him up? These nightmares were bad. He didn't know what to do.

Blaine moved around more, his ragged breathing coming faster. He began to speak, in a low voice laced with pain that tore through Kurt as he listened with his own heart pounding.

"Don't... I don't... want... No. Kurt... don't..."

Blaine's eyes moved frantically behind his closed lids, limbs beginning to flail. He whimpered again, followed by the low moan of someone whose heart was breaking. Kurt reached out a shaky hand and the moment his skin touched the moaning boy, Blaine latched onto Kurt's arm, squeezing, nails digging into his wrist. Kurt bit back a cry, terrified that he'd made the dream worse. Blaine was gripping onto him like he was trying to pull him back, as if Kurt had fallen from a cliff and Blaine was the only thing that kept Kurt from plummeting.

"No." Blaine's voice rose in panic. "Don't. No! Please!"

And he let go of Kurt's arm and actually thrashed in his nightmare. Kurt was frozen, feeling so helpless, and he couldn't move. And then Blaine began to scream. A high-pitched, broken scream and Kurt knew where he was in the timeline of the dream. Kurt's heart wrenched. It was time to end this.

He pushed his arms out, hands pressing down on Blaine's shoulders. He only thrashed more. "Blaine, wake up. Please, wake up!"

Blaine's hands struggled blindly against Kurt's, nails scraping. He still screamed. Kurt felt the hot tears falling from his cheeks. Why wouldn't he wake up?

In desperation, Kurt put his hands on Blaine's chest and straddled him as his legs began to kick. He pressed his body down against his, trying to control the crazed flailing, bringing his hands up to hold down Blaine's arms. He leaned over, feeling Blaine's heaving chest rise and fall in sheer terror, putting his lips right at Blaine's ear.

There was a flurry of running steps outside, pausing every few moments as the people who made them listened at each door and then continued on. Kurt heard them stop outside their door, paused at they listened and then, "It's here!"

Other steps rushed up and they began to pound on the door.

"Kurt!"

"Blaine, what's going on?"

"Open the door!"

"Please don't be hurt."

"Someone say something in there!"

It was hard for Kurt to even focus on what he was saying now. His lips were mouthing the words and he said them into Blaine's ear, raising his voice as much as he could without hurting him.

"Blaine! Blaine, it's Kurt. It's me. Wake up Blaine! Please wake up!"

The pounding on the door grew louder and someone mentioned something about getting a teacher.

Kurt pressed his hands to Blaine's face, almost yelling at him now. "Wake up!"

And suddenly, Blaine's eyes snapped open. The screaming stopped. Kurt moaned in relief. The pounding ceased. They listened. The door handle twisted.

Kurt leaned over him, hugging him tightly, panting, though he felt like he shouldn't be out of breath like this. Blaine's chest heaved in breathlessness and he felt the tears on his cheeks that he didn't know he'd cried.

"It's okay." Kurt's shaky voice was in his ear again. "You're okay. It was just a dream."

Blaine began to sob, his weak arms locking behind Kurt's back as Kurt held him. Kurt moved his hand to push back the mop of sweaty hair that threatened to fall into his eyes, his pale face gleaming.

The pounding began again, though less insistent now.

"Kurt. Blaine. Someone open this door or we're getting the Dean."

Blaine's arms tightened around Kurt's body. He didn't want him to leave. Kurt pressed his face into Blaine's shoulder. "I have to. I'll be right back. I won't let them come in okay?"

He unwound himself from Blaine's form and slipped off the bed, running silently to the door. The second he had the door cracked, multiple people shoved their way through. Kurt struggled to keep his balance and closed the door quickly. He saw four shapes in the darkness.

"Get out." Kurt begged, but his pleas fell on deaf ears.

"What the hell is going on?" Wes hissed.

"Who was screaming?" Jeff looked around, hands held up as if he were ready to fight off an intruder.

"It sounded like someone was being tortured in here." David said, not knowing how close he was to the truth.

"If this is your damn idea of a joke, then you've got some serious shit coming your way. I thought we kept the pranks reserved for the day." Thad grumbled.

A small sob escaped Blaine's lips, no matter that he'd been biting the blanket to keep from making any noise. All five pairs of eyes turned to the bed. Thad flicked on the light, sending the room into a brightness that no one wanted their eyes subject to after being used to the dark.

Blaine's eyes were still full of fear and he wasn't able to duck under the blanket fast enough. The four boys rushed up, surrounding the bed. Kurt pushed his way through, raising his voice.

"Guys! Stop okay? It was a nightmare! He was having a nightmare. Give him some room. Back up!"

"Blaine was screaming? That must've been one hell of a nightmare."

"Please, just go okay? This isn't-"

"Don't you tell us that this isn't any of our business Hummel! He's our friend too!"

Kurt didn't know what to say. He knew that if any their situations were reversed, he would want to know answers too. And he was so tired. He just wanted everyone to leave. He sighed and looked down at Blaine's form, still under the blankets. Kurt sat on the bed and put a hand on his covered shoulder, feeling the shaking and hearing the hollowed breath as Blaine was trying to control himself.

"Blaine?" He whispered, moving his hand up to the boy's head. He gently pulled back the blanket. Blaine's eyes were closed, sweat shone on his forehead. "Blaine, sit up okay?"

He opened his eyes slowly and did as he was told, sniffing loudly and rubbing at his tears, embarrassment making his cheeks hot. Kurt faced him, with one palm pressed on his cheek.

"Look at me." Kurt ignored the other boys in the room. "Blaine, honey, are you okay?"

After a moment's pause, where Kurt saw Blaine's eye swim with tears, he nodded. Kurt returned his nod. "Okay." He wrapped his arms around him and held him close.

Kurt kept his arms around Blaine's shoulders, but pulled his head up to look at the faces surrounding them, as David spoke.

"Jesus, Blaine, do you have these a lot?"

He took a shaky breath and replied, "Sometimes."

"This is the worst I've seen it." Kurt explained. "I've never had to wake him up before."

Blaine took a breath and then seemed to find his voice, feeling Kurt's arms tighten protectively around him. "Guys, thanks for... for you know, making sure we weren't getting killed, but can you maybe leave?"

David grimaced in disapproval. Thad opened his mouth, but closed it quickly.

"Alright. Yeah, let's give them some space guys." Wes began to herd the group out the door, speaking softly. He paused in the doorway, turning back. "Hey, umm... if you need anything, just come over. We'll leave the door unlocked. I don't care what time it is. Got that?"

Kurt nodded gratefully and glanced down at Blaine. "Thank you Wes."

Wes smiled a little sadly and quietly shut the door. Kurt let out a long breath and leaned his head against Blaine's, running a hand through his hair.

Blaine sighed and then pushed himself off of Kurt, hanging his legs off the bed and hung his head in his hands. Kurt drew his arms into himself, unsure of how to help. They sat, neither one saying a word for a long time. Then Kurt slowly got up and crawled over on his knees behind Blaine. He tentatively brought his hands up, sliding them along his back. When Blaine did not flinch away, he pushed his fingers down onto the tense shoulders. Blaine sighed again, but this time, it was in content.

"Geez Blaine." Kurt commented as he worked, gently massaging the tight muscles under his hands. "Remind me to never let you get stressed out about anything ever again. Or your shoulders might just tense up into your neck and stay there."

Blaine just leaned his head back and a soft '*ah*' fell from his lips. Kurt kept rubbing at the tender spot, digging his thumbs in.

He leaned his head forward and placed a soft kiss on his neck. He felt Blaine relax under him, his muscles slackening and he let out a low, breathy moan.

"I thought you said they got better when I was here." Kurt whispered slowly, broaching the subject carefully.

Blaine sighed. "I know."

"Do they get worse when I'm here?"

"No, no Kurt. God, no." Blaine's reply was rushed. His hands tensed at his sides. Then he spoke quieter. "I don't know what makes them worse."

"This one was really bad wasn't it?"

From where he was behind Blaine, he couldn't see his face as he stroked his hands softly on his neck and shoulders, but he could tell that Blaine's face had changed. He pictured nervous fear in those beautiful hazel eyes.

"I'm sorry. I... I shouldn't be-"

Blaine cut him off with a shake of his head. "No. You're right to be curious. Yes, it was. It was really bad." A hand reached up and covered the one on his shoulder. "I was screaming."

It wasn't a question. An ashamed statement.

"No." Kurt said too quickly, in his rushing need to make Blaine feel better. "Well, I mean... no, you did. You did scream Blaine."

Unfazed, Blaine asked, "How badly?"

Kurt pressed his forehead into Blaine's unruly curly hair, squeezing his hand lightly. "It broke my heart to hear you scream like that."

A broken sigh came from the still form beneath him. And then Blaine got up, turning around on his knees to face Kurt. "Please, Kurt," he said seriously, eyes turning stony, "the next time that happens, wake me up. Right away."

"I promise." Kurt whispered and wrapped his arms around his neck, pulling him close and inhaling the scent of him.

The adrenaline that had filled his veins less than ten minutes ago was dissipating fast. He'd been tired so much lately now, and as much as he wanted to stay awake, Kurt felt his eyes begin to burn and his limbs grow heavy. Blaine felt it too, with Kurt draped over his shoulders and pulled away from their embrace. He pressed his hand to Kurt's cheek and the younger boy leaned into his touch and closed his eyes.

"Go back to sleep Kurt." Blaine whispered and he laughed a little at the way Kurt's eyes snapped open in rebellion, but began to droop again immediately.

"I'm not..." He mumbled, but Blaine was lowering his hand, with Kurt leaning heavily on him and having no choice but to be led softly to the pillow.

"Sleep."

Kurt opened his eyes widely, as if he were forcing them to stay open, and said, "You're not okay Blaine. I can't... you need me to..."

"Kurt," he cut him off with a gentle sigh, "what I need is for you to get as much sleep as possible so you don't bite my head off tomorrow morning when you get mad at me for doing something stupid because you're tired. I'll be fine okay?"

The blue eyes narrowed. Blaine didn't believe himself either, but he wasn't sure what else to do. *I'm scared as hell to go back to sleep because I keep seeing you dying every time I close my goddamn eyes* wasn't really what Kurt needed to hear.

Blaine wrapped his arm around Kurt's waist and pulled him in close, nuzzling his face into Kurt's shoulder. He felt Kurt sigh and clasped their hands together. He could swear he heard Kurt mumble, "Could never be mad at you," and he felt their hands being intertwined tighter.

Blaine didn't go to sleep for a long time after that, contenting himself with listening to Kurt's even breathing and getting as close as he possibly could to the boy beside him, willing himself not to go to sleep. In his dream, Kurt was a cold, still body and as he hugged the warm form closer, he yelled at his mind that *this* was real. That Kurt was with him, alive and breathing and everything that Blaine loved.

Not realizing that his eyes had closed, Blaine awoke the next morning, sweating from being so close to Kurt the entire night, and not caring at all. He hadn't dreamed; there had been no more nightmares as he slept.

Kurt felt Blaine's movement and rolled over. His eyes were red. Probably from lack of sleep and what he went through last night. Blaine felt immensely guilty.

Kurt stretched out his neck and lightly kissed Blaine's nose. "You didn't have any more nightmares?"

"No." Blaine shook his head, happy at the relief that appeared on Kurt's face.

"Are you still tired?"

"Yes, but," Blaine's eyes shifted to the clock on the bedside table, "we have class in an hour."

"Are you sure? We can skip today, if you need to."

"You can't miss any more school."

"I'll tell them I don't feel good and you're taking care of me."

"Kurt..." He ran a hand through his unruly hair. "I can't have you falling behind because of me. And I need to go to class too. That presentation is due next week and we have midterms coming up."

"Ugh. Don't remind me." Kurt groaned and pushed himself up off the bed. "Maybe I can sleep through finals..."

"Come on you baby." Blaine grinned and rubbed his tired eyes, quickly changing his pajama pants and t-shirt for his Dalton uniform. He could hear Kurt grumble about having to cut his moisturizing routine short as he trudged into the bathroom and he smiled affectionately.

Blaine grabbed the bottle of gel from his nightstand and stood in front of the mirror by the door. In a methodic routine that had become automatic, he squirted a large amount into his palms and ran his hands through his hair.

He'd finished plastering down his hair when Kurt emerged from the bathroom without a hair out of place. Kurt stood against the doorway, a hand on his hip.

"I wish you wouldn't do that."

Blaine turned. "Do what?"

Kurt gestured to the bottle of gel in his hand.

"So you like me looking like a poodle?" Blaine snorted.

The corner of Kurt's mouth lifted into a smile. "A cute poodle."

Blaine set down the gel and wound his arms around Kurt's waist, feeling the soft material of the sweater he wore against his skin. Blaine gently bit down on his lower lip and then hesitantly leaned forward and pressed his lips against Kurt's. Kurt sighed contentedly and felt his body go weak at Blaine's touch. Blaine deepened the kiss and Kurt was pushed backwards until his back was up against the wall. Kurt's hands tightened around Blaine's neck and he pulled him closer, whining a bit when Blaine pulled away.

"I'm going to have to give you compliments more often." Kurt said, raising his eyebrows suggestively.

Blaine grinned and quickly kissed his nose. "We have today, then tomorrow. And then it's the weekend. Two more days and then we'll be free."

"And when is winter break again?"

"After finals. Two weeks from now."

Kurt's mouth puckered in disgust. "Why do Dalton finals have to be so ridiculously difficult?"

"They're notorious for flunking more students than any other private school in this county. That's just the tests. That's not including if the teacher doesn't like you."

The color drained from Kurt's face and his arms slackened around Blaine's neck. "You didn't tell me that! Why have I not been studying night and day for the past month? I'll never be able to catch up, I'll-"

Blaine held Kurt closer, breathing softly in his ear. "Relax. I'm kidding." He pulled away to look into Kurt's eyes. "You'll do fine. Yeah, the tests are hard, but it's nothing worse than anything you've already had to do."

A blush now crept up Kurt's cheeks, though the doubt shown in his eyes. "Are you sure?"

Blaine unwound one of his hands from around Kurt to point at his face. "Come on Kurt. Does this face lie?"

Kurt narrowed his eyes at the puppy dog look that Blaine was sporting. "Not that again Blaine. It doesn't work."

He looked away, trying to avoid glancing anywhere but Blaine's eyes. Not hesitating, Blaine followed him, moving his face in front of Kurt's wherever the taller boy turned his head.

Kurt bit his lip, trying so hard, but in mere moments, he cracked, grasping Blaine's face in his hands to stop him from copying his movement again. "Alright! Alright, you win. But," he removed a hand and pointed a long finger at his nose, "do not think for one second, Blaine Anderson, that this means that your stupid sappy eyes will work on me every time, because you've got another thing coming."

"Point taken." Blaine wrinkled his nose and rubbed his chin where Kurt had held him still. "But, Kurt Hummel, you should know that I have a secret."

Kurt put a hand on his hip and looked up with a bored expression. "Do you now?"

"Yep."

And Blaine turned away, knowing that this would infuriate Kurt. He smiled to himself and began to gather his books for the day's classes. Sure enough, Blaine could hear the light, annoyed tapping of Kurt's foot against the floor. He could picture the indecision on his face, debating about whether or not to broach the subject.

"What kind of secret?"

Blaine grinned.

Check.

"Oh, just a little secret." He turned around to face him.

"Secrets were made to be told. Spill it."

"I'm sure it wouldn't interest you at all." He smiled sweetly, seeing the impatience on Kurt's face.

"And what makes you think that?"

"Well, it might make you a bit *jealous*."

"Oh please, do you really take me for the jealous type? Besides, what could possibly be so secret in your life that could ever make me jealous?"

Check mate.

Blaine turned his gaze to a serious mask, looking down as if nervous, though Kurt knew it was all fabricated. "I'm in love."

Kurt let out a theatrical gasp. "No, not in love? How horribly vain of you."

"Yes." Blaine sighed, equally as theatrical. "It is true. For the first time in my life, I am in love."

"Ah." Kurt leaned up against the doorframe, crossing his arms over his chest.

"He is my Romeo, my Prince Charming, my love."

Kurt raised his eyebrows, feeling his ears turn warm with embarrassment. "And are you going to have to rescue this lover from a tower? Or will you be the one needing to be saved?"

"Neither. He shall be waiting for me atop a gallant white horse with giant feathered wings. In the forest. My journey shall include crossing a desolate, colorless leaf-strewn path that would detour even the strongest of men who do not wish to have all of their happy thoughts retracted from their minds. I shall be nearly drowned in the lake of tears cried by the lost souls who wander this earth looking for their true love, but I overcome, knowing that my love is close. The last hurdle almost kills me." Blaine sighs dramatically, feigning tears of sympathy for his hero's almost-demise. "I must face a figure, hooded in long black robes. No mortal has ever seen the face beneath the billowing folds of fabric. This figure tries to

make me forget what I am doing, tries to make me turn around and go back, fills my head with horrible, horrible pain. And I almost do go back. Almost." Blaine smiles triumphantly. "But, I see my love on the white horse just beyond the cloaked being and I rush forward, where my love grasps my hand and pulls me up onto the horse with him."

"And we ride away into the sunset?"

"Who's telling the story here?"

Kurt smirks and sits down on the bed. He's tired, but he doesn't let Blaine see that. "Sorry."

"And we fly off through the clouds, following a rainbow that leads us into a magical land, where the woodland fairies welcome us. They dance around us and throw flowers and my love and I are never bothered by anything bad ever again."

Kurt can't help the laugh that escapes him. "Okay, if you wanted people to know you were gay if I wasn't around, you could just tell them that story. Seriously, follow a rainbow to meet the magical fairies?"

Still enjoying the dramatic gestures, Blaine puts a hand to his chest in mock offense, his jaw dropping. "Or I could leave the damsel in distress without any help on the chemistry final."

Kurt stood, voice now serious. "You wouldn't."

"Wouldn't I?"

Blaine's light-hearted smirk fell from his face as he happened to glance at the clock. "Shit. Kurt, we're going to be late!"

And he grabbed Kurt's hand and pulled him out the door, with just enough time for Kurt to snatch up his school bag, feet pounding on the ground as he ran alongside Blaine.

Magical fairies indeed.

Kurt glanced up at Blaine as they ran, and his mind wandered. He wondered what his journey would entail and if he would be able to face the cloaked figure on the bridge.

It was just a story. He swallowed, hoping to soothe his dry throat. And the picture of his knight in shining armor with curly black hair made him smile. Well, he'd gotten something good out of this story so far. He could only hope that this fairytale had a happier ending than the one that kept filling his mind, the one that he couldn't stop seeing, the one that scared him so badly.

26. Library Books and Rain

The library. That was where Kurt had wanted to spend the better part of a Saturday afternoon. Blaine could think of plenty of other things he'd rather be doing, most of them involving Kurt in various forms of undress, but he *had* told Kurt they could do anything he wanted today. So, library it was.

And he had to admit that the Dalton library was amazing. The early weeks of December were cold, but inside, it was an entirely different world. It was a short walk to the library from the dorms, but by the time they got there, their cheeks were flushed with cold and Blaine had to pry his numb fingers from around Kurt's.

"You should have worn gloves baby," Kurt frowned after stashing his own gloves inside his bag and began rubbing Blaine's hands in his own to try and warm them. "Why didn't you tell me you were so cold?"

Blaine flexed his fingers and smiled when Kurt began to slowly kiss his knuckles. He tucked his hands into the front pockets on his boyfriend's jacket, pulling him forward. Kurt's arms wound around his neck and he placed a soft kiss on Blaine's frozen nose.

"Next time." He whispered.

He would have stayed like that forever, feeling the enveloping warmth of the large, open room. However, he cleared his throat and looked up, indicating the area around them.

"Library. Right." Kurt said, slowly and Blaine could tell he didn't want to move any more than he did. The taller boy's eyes raked over the surroundings, taking in the large staircase in the middle of the room that led up to the second story. The entire first floor was filled ground to ceiling, wall to wall, with rows and rows and many shelves, of books. There were so many books. Kurt knew he couldn't read them all no matter how much sleep he gave up, lost in whatever world the characters of the book he read occupied.

Kurt took Blaine's hand and led him excitedly up and down the rows, eyes scanning for genres he liked. He stopped suddenly, with Blaine almost running into him, and reached out, plucking a book from the shelf. He turned and Blaine held out his hand, accepting the book without looking at the title. Kurt smiled at him

and their adventure continued. Kurt had avoided the section of autobiographies and anything to do with textbooks, but that still left them a lot of ground to cover. Eventually, Blaine had to stop him.

"Kurt, my arms are going to fall off."

"Oh, geez. Sorry." Kurt grabbed half of the large stack in Blaine's arms. "I didn't know I had grabbed so many."

"It's fine." Blaine laughed. "Let's go upstairs okay?"

Kurt nodded and followed in the sure steps of his boyfriend, making the walk up the crimson carpeted stairs something else to enjoy. His eyes wouldn't stop drifting to stare at Blaine's butt as he walked and he chewed on his bottom lip thoughtfully. Blaine had a nice butt. A very nice butt.

Blaine picked a table in favor of the many large chairs surrounding the upstairs fireplace so that they could spread out more. He plopped down and Kurt did the same, sitting opposite him. Kurt began to set his books out in neat piles. Blaine stared around his stack and eyed the titles. He grinned when he saw the first Harry Potter book on the top and reached up to yank it down.

"Read this." He said excitedly, pushing the book in Kurt's hands. "Read it now."

Kurt tilted his head and held out the other book, Jane Eyre, moving his hands up and down as if weighing them.

"Oh, come on!" Blaine practically begged. "You've never read them. And having not read Harry Potter is kind of like treason. You'll love it."

Kurt's eyes glanced over the cover and then he flipped it over, reading the summary. "It's about a boy who goes to a wizarding school?"

"And he has this lightning bolt shaped scar on his forehead. Come on Kurt. There's spells and this dark lord named Voldemort and there's moving stairs and magic wands and witches and wizards and magical beasts."

Blaine was clearly obsessed. But Kurt raised an eyebrow as he set aside the large, boring-looking book in his left hand and opened smaller, filled-with-awesome book in his right. Blaine smiled up at him.

"If you don't like it, there's something wrong with you."

Kurt snorted. "You're not giving me much of a choice are you?"

"It wouldn't be this way if you had read them in middle school like the rest of the world."

"And maybe that was because I was beginning to deal with who I am and the start of the years of harassment." He said nonchalantly, eyes scanning the page.

Blaine paused. Oh.

"Sorry. They're kind of how I... dealt with everything. It was a way to escape."

Kurt looked up. "Escape what?"

Blaine let out a long breath. He'd never told anyone this before and he didn't expect that it would be now, but he was with Kurt, in the quiet of the library, and he felt safe. "Middle school was hard. I had friends, but I had known for a long time that I was... different than everyone else. I was just beginning to understand and accept that what I felt even had a name. Being gay in middle school, it wasn't like here, where people accept you. I know you know that. It seemed like all my friends were getting girlfriends, however trivial their relationships were, it *was* middle school after all. But I was just never into... that. I wasn't attracted to girls. I did some research, because it wasn't like I could talk to my parents about it. They'd been planning my wedding day since I was little. Me in a black suit, her in a big, poofy white dress. That was their dream. But it wasn't mine. I was scared at first, but I wanted someone to know. I *needed* someone to know. So I told Matt, my best friend since elementary school. I thought I could trust him. I thought he wouldn't care. I thought he would accept me, maybe even help me get up the courage to tell my parents. But he didn't."

Kurt just stared, his fingers clenching on the book because he knew what would happen next just based off of Blaine's tone.

"I still remember the look on his face. He frowned and he asked if I was kidding. I said no, that this was the most serious thing I've ever said to him before and he just... went off. He said that our friendship had been a lie and that he had wasted those years being friends with a fag. He was convinced from that moment on that I'd wanted to... do things to him. That I'd wanted more than friendship. And it wasn't true. I never saw him as more than a friend, but that's what he believed and I know it was just because he was scared and it

was a lot to take in, but I haven't talked to him since and as far as I know, he still feels that way." Blaine said sadly. "I lost my best friend after that and things just got worse. He told all of my other friends of course and made me out to be some monster who was going to jump on any one of them at any moment. I felt abandoned and on top of having to deal with the fact that I was gay, I had my friends ripped out from my life and in middle school, your friends are kind of all you have. I spent a lot of time in my English teacher's room. She let me eat lunch in there every day and I think she knew what was going on, but she never said anything about it. One day, when I went in her class, there was a book on my desk and a note inside it. It said that she thought I would enjoy this and that being different can make you great, in your own way, even though some days it feels like you're stuck in a cupboard under some stairs." Blaine smiled at the memory. "It was the first time in a long time that I felt happy. I read that book so many times the pages started falling out. So I saved up my money and bought a new copy, along with the second and third ones. They were my sanctuary and when I read them, for a while, I wasn't in the classroom that smelled like printer ink and old books, sitting with the only teacher who took pity on me. I was in a world of spells that could make your enemies barf out slugs and friends who didn't care that you were a gangly, dark-haired guy with uncontrollable hair who just wanted to fit in, where anything could happen, and I could fly." Blaine looked up, blushing slightly when he realized how much he'd been rambling, though he knew Kurt was listening to every word. "And as silly as it sounds, I wanted to live in a castle. When I left middle school, I originally didn't want to go to some 'snobby, rich kid' school. But Dalton was the closest thing I could find to a castle and then I found out about the no-bullying policy and when I went to visit the campus, I fell in love with everything about it. My parents could afford tuition and I made up some story about how I wanted to get better prepared for college and how Dalton offered all these accelerated programs and the amount of kids who got into Ivy League schools. And they agreed and my first day here, I knew that I was going to have a new life, a new beginning. After what happened with Matt though, I wasn't in a rush to announce that I was gay. I spent a while lying low and getting the feel of the campus and the students who lived there. I met Wes in history and he introduced me to David and they were my first friends here. I just felt immediately comfortable with them, like I didn't have to hide. I told them soon after that that I was gay. It was a big decision because if they rejected me like Matt and my other friends had, I would truly have no one and I don't want to think about what would have happened if they had. I told Wes first and it was really like a dream. I hoped and prayed with everything that I had that he didn't hate me. And I swear to you, it was like something from a movie, where everything is going terrible for the main character and then, suddenly, one event changes everything. And that was it. He didn't laugh, he didn't call me names, he didn't leave. He accepted me for who I was and he saw *me*, and not just the fact that I liked boys. I truly believe that he saved me. Because before I told him, I was in... in a dark place and I remember telling myself that if he reacted as Matt had, that I couldn't take it anymore and I planned to kill myself, or at least seriously injure myself trying. It's awful to think about, even now. But I could not have

asked for a more understanding, more *true*, best friend. He was with me when I told David and it was the most liberating feeling in the world to have not just one person, but two who didn't care that I was gay. Wes and David were both in the Warblers as freshman, which is kind of rare and when they found out I could sing, they encouraged me to audition. Well, force me to the door and shoving me in before I could run away was more like it, but when I saw my name on the list posted the next day, it was the closest feeling I'd ever had to flying. You know what it's like with us. The Warblers here are a family and them taking me in, teaching me, and giving me somewhere to feel alive was the greatest moment of my life at that point. I had somewhere to belong, a home. And I finally found it. A place where I was wanted, no matter who I was. For the first time in my life, I didn't feel so alone." Blaine smiled. "I guess you know the rest. I was made captain my sophomore year and given the soloist role not long after that. People looked at me differently. I was on top, I was popular. I didn't even know that that could have existed for me. To go from being harassed and eating lunch in a teacher's room every day to being at the top of the school in the span of a year and a half was unbelievable. I still don't believe it sometimes. But that's Dalton for you. Sometimes I think this 'castle' really is magic. I mean, it brought me to you. And it all happened because of Harry Potter."

Blaine folded his hands together and rested his chin on them, his elbows on the table. His lips formed into a small smile and Kurt knew he was done with his story. Kurt was silent for a moment, taking in all of what Blaine had just told him.

"Thank you for telling me." Kurt said, unable to raise his voice more than a whisper. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Blaine, you know that you mean more to me than anything? And I'd do anything for you. I hate that you had to go through all of that."

"You're the only person I've told that to. It kind of sounds weird, I mean, wanting to live like Harry Potter. But I knew you'd understand. I meant to tell you sooner, but there never really was a good time, but the library seemed an acceptable place."

"Wes and David would understand too."

"I know. But I might tell them. Maybe."

"You should." Kurt smiled and held out his hand, which Blaine covered with his own. He raised their intertwined hands up and Kurt kissed Blaine's fingers, as he had done earlier. He kept his eyes locked on

Blaine's and he saw the flash of desire that lit up his hazel irises, knowing that that same stare was in his eyes as well.

"It's nice here." Kurt said as he curled his hands around the book. Blaine nodded his agreement and one by one began to organize the stack of books next to him, eyes glancing over their titles again. They were silent for a long time, Kurt beginning to find a new place in his heart for the Harry Potter series as he quickly finished chapters three and four, and Blaine beginning to absentmindedly skim through one of the other books Kurt had picked, letting his eyes look up every so often to stare at the absorption and fascination on Kurt's face.

The fire was beginning to die down when Kurt looked up at the small laugh that emanated from the boy across from him. Blaine was holding up a thin green book.

"Goodnight Moon?" Blaine had an eyebrow raised and Kurt marked his place in the book he was reading and snatched the other one protectively.

"Nostalgia. My mom used to read this to me."

Blaine nodded understandingly. "Mine was 'The Cat in the Hat.' Or 'Green Eggs and Ham.' I never could decide."

Kurt looked down at the two books in his hand and fished out a thin navy blue library card from his bag. "I can always read those ones later," he smiled and helped Blaine move the unread books over to a cart printed with 'return' in large, scrolling gold letters.

There were laptop-sized black screens built into the wall every few feet and Kurt pressed a button on the bottom, when it came to life and opened a new window, where he entered in the barcode set of numbers on the inside of the front covers of the two books before typing in the string of numbers on his library card. The books were now his for two weeks.

He tucked them in his bag and rejoined Blaine at the edge of the stairs. Kurt was happy. So happy. He felt like skipping down the stairs. As they got to the bottom, the weather made itself very clear behind the glass-paned windows.

"Crap." Blaine muttered to no one in particular. It was pouring. "I knew we should have taken the car."

Kurt tightened the bag on his shoulder and buttoned up his coat around him, reaching over to button Blaine's as well. "A little rain never hurt anyone." He smiled and practically shoved Blaine's hands into his own gloves. Blaine tried to resist.

"You need them. The flu's going around and if you get sick, I'll blame myself for letting you go without gloves."

"You don't get sick from the cold silly. You get sick from being around people a lot more because it's cold. So as long as you're not sick, I'm fine. Now stop being a baby. I love the rain!"

And with that, he pulled Blaine outside. The warmth and enveloping comfort of the dry library was gone in a flash as the freezing rain began pelting them immediately.

"Woah." Kurt stopped. "I didn't realize it was raining this hard."

"Well, we're here now. Might as well make a run for it." Blaine gave him a lopsided grin and took off.

"Wait!" Kurt cried into the darkness. A bolt of lightning lit up the sky and he saw the back of Blaine as he ran, not hearing Kurt's cry. He locked onto that point, even as the sky went black again and he ran forward, squeaking in surprise when the thunder boomed, seeming to come from all around him. And suddenly, Blaine was there, arms wrapping securely around Kurt's waist, pulling him close.

The rain poured, soaking every inch of their clothes and running in little streams down their faces. And Blaine's lips were on his and Kurt could taste the slight sweetness of his kiss, mixed with the cold water that fell on them and ran between them. Blaine's left arm around his waist brought him closer and his right hand pressed against the back of Kurt's neck. Kurt's hands tangled in the curly hair and pulled him in, relishing in the closeness, but being overcome with a need to get closer. He felt Blaine's tongue slid experimentally on his lower lip and Kurt trembled.

It was still pouring rain and they were both completely soaked and Kurt didn't care. All he could feel, taste, touch, smell, was Blaine. He could feel the heat his boyfriend's body through his drenched clothes. Blaine pulled away and smiled at him.

"I love you." Kurt said. "I love you. I love you I love you I love you."

Blaine kissed him again, then angled his head to the side and in Kurt's ear, softly returned Kurt's statement. Kurt looked up at him, not wanting this moment to end, but also beginning to realize how freaking cold it was out here. Blaine felt him tremble again, though both of them knew it was no longer from content.

"Let's get inside." Blaine said, in a voice that had turned husky and with his arm still wrapped around Kurt's waist, began walking briskly to the ornately decorated front doors of the residence hall.

They ran inside, sneakers squeaking on the floor as Blaine followed Kurt upstairs to their dorm. With a look of disgust, Kurt peeled off his Dalton jacket, hanging it over his arm.

"Give me your jacket. I'm sorry about this."

Blaine smiled, loosening his tie. "Kurt, don't be sorry. They're just clothes." Kurt frowned at 'just clothes' and Blaine continued, "I've always wanted a kiss in the rain."

Kurt blushed and Blaine pulled the jacket from Kurt's arms.

"I've got this. You're shivering. Go take a shower. I can't have you getting sick." He said, ignoring Kurt's earlier explanation that it wasn't the weather that made people sick, but Kurt wasn't one to turn down a hot shower.

Kurt gave him a grateful smile and handed Blaine his tie. Blaine took the stairs down to the laundry room and filled out the card for their clothes to be dry-cleaned. That was another perk about living at Dalton, besides the Beauty and the Beast-esque library. Hanging Kurt's jacket and tie on a hanger, he left it in a small room on the side of the laundry room and pulled off his own jacket, leaving it on a separate hanger. He loosened his tie and pulled it over his head. But he paused with the tie in one hand and the hanger in another, thought for a moment, and then carefully folded up the tie and slipped it in his pocket. With a smile, he hung up his jacket alongside Kurt's and dashed back up the stairs, passing Thad on the way.

"Hey man, you get caught in the rain?"

He laughed. "Yeah."

"Sucks. Hey, if you and Kurt want to come to my room, we're planning on renting a movie."

"Thanks, but we actually have plans."

"Oh, alright. Well, in case you change your mind, just know that we have popcorn and hot chocolate."

He thanked him again and strode down the hallway, stopping at the door. With a knowing grin, he pulled the tie from his pocket and looped it around the doorknob before quietly knocking.

"Come in."

As he entered, he heard Kurt chastise, "You know, you do live here. You don't have to knock."

He was rubbing a towel in his hair, staring at him with his beautiful blue eyes. Blaine just shrugged and closed the door.

"Aren't you cold? You should get out of those wet clothes." Kurt's voice came from the bathroom and then he emerged wearing his pajama pants and a soft black t-shirt that Blaine recognized as one of his own. He smiled and waited until Kurt was close enough, then grasped his wrist, pulling him into him, and then wrapped his arms around his back.

"That's my t-shirt." He said into Kurt's shoulder.

Kurt smiled against Blaine's chest. "Is it? Sorry. You want it back?"

"It looks good on you." Blaine could smell the scent of Kurt's shampoo in his still-damp hair. Tangerines.

The boy in his arms sighed. "You smell like rain. I like rain."

"Just not when it pours on you huh?" Blaine chuckled.

Blaine's wet curls were stealthily dripping down his face and Kurt reached up to brush the water away from his eyes. Blaine closed his eyes the moment Kurt's hand touched his face. When he opened them, Kurt was closer. There was a tense moment of hesitation, where Kurt pulled back and a look of naïve apprehension flashed in his eyes, and then Kurt's tentative lips were on Blaine's and Blaine was kissing him gently, so gently, and then he felt Kurt sigh into him, so he deepened the kiss, bringing one hand up to the back of Kurt's neck.

Kurt pressed into him, pushing them both back against the door and Blaine held him tightly, pulling him up closer. Blaine pulled away for a moment because his lungs were screaming for air, and even then, he made sure they were only centimeters away from each other. He closed his eyes briefly, and felt Kurt's hands reach up to fumble with the buttons on his shirt. Blaine laughed quietly and closed his hands around Kurt's. He looked up, hands frozen on Blaine's collar.

"Come here." Blaine let go of his hands and moved to sit up on the bed, patting the space beside him. He leaned up against the pillows and waited.

The corner of Kurt's mouth lifted in a wicked smile and he loped over, gracefully hopping up beside his boyfriend. A moment's pause and then Kurt rolled onto his side, his fingers pulling at the buttons again. Blaine smiled in amusement and laid there as Kurt began to kiss his neck, while simultaneously trying not to yank the buttons from the fabric.

Blaine let this go on for a little while and when Kurt had yet to undo the first three buttons, he stopped him.

"Let me." He whispered and reached up to push the third button through the stitched opening, all the while locking eyes with Kurt. As he reached the last closures, he could practically see Kurt's heart racing, see the longing in his eyes and the way he swallowed nervously.

When the very last button was free, he removed his hands and sat up, bringing a hand to cup Kurt's cheek. The younger boy looked up at him from under his eyelashes, which Blaine found irresistibly cute. Blaine leaned forward and pressed his lips lightly down Kurt's jaw line. He heard Kurt's sharp intake of breath and he smiled again. He gently nudged Kurt's lips with his own and paused, pulling away just enough to make Kurt open his eyes.

He stared into those beautiful pools of blue for a long heartbeat, until the fire lit and Kurt was pushing him backwards. Blaine scurried back, pressed his body against the pillows and Kurt's lips were on his, hungry, aching in longing. Their legs became tangled together, Blaine's hands running through Kurt's oh-so-soft hair, Kurt with his hands on Blaine's chest.

They explored every nook, cranny, crevice they could find. Kurt's hands ran up and down Blaine's chest and around to his back, under his shirt, which, in the next few moments, ended up on the floor. Normally,

that would have annoyed Kurt to the point of him getting up and folding it, but now, he really could care less. Blaine pulled off Kurt's t-shirt and threw it aside, lips dragging on Kurt's jaw.

Blaine held Kurt's head in his hands so securely, as if he didn't want him to move. Kurt's lips shifted with Blaine's as if they had been made for his to fit with, and as he gently sucked on Blaine's lower lip, Blaine felt his hands fall from Kurt's head, moving weakly down Kurt's back. A low moan was drawn from Blaine's throat and Kurt pulled away.

"You like that?" He whispered in Blaine's ear.

Blaine's hands had landed on Kurt's hips and Kurt could feel the guitar-calloused fingers gripping lightly.

"Yes." Blaine breathed back.

Kurt grinned, feeling his self-consciousness and initial fear dissipating quickly. He felt safe with Blaine; he didn't have to hide anything; he could be himself.

Feeling completely at ease, Kurt shifted so he was straddling Blaine. He looked into those hazel eyes and noticed Blaine's pupils were blown out with desire. And he knew his would be a mirror image.

With a sigh, Kurt leaned down and placed his lips at the curve of Blaine's jaw, then began to slowly draw down his jaw and to his neck. Blaine let his head fall back against the pillows as Kurt reached his collarbone. Kurt's mouth found the hollow spot on the right side and he began to suck softly. Blaine tilted his head to the left, allowing Kurt more access, and small moans of pleasure began to fall from his lips.

His hands gripped Kurt's hips tighter and Kurt smiled, loving the sounds that Blaine was making and overjoyed that *he* was the cause.

The hands on Kurt's hips suddenly pulled him in and Kurt's breath caught in his throat. He had to even remember how to breathe as Blaine's hips met his. Kurt told himself to relax and felt his muscles unwind under Blaine's touch. As Kurt brought his lips back up to lock onto Blaine's, Blaine gently began to push Kurt's hips down, creating an entirely new sensation that he craved. Instinctively, Kurt rocked his hips against Blaine's and they both moaned softly.

After a little while, Kurt pulled away and then leaned his forehead against Blaine's collarbone. One of Blaine's hands reached up and ruffled through Kurt's hair. Kurt looked up, still in Blaine's lap. A small grin was on Blaine's face.

"God, Kurt. Do you have any idea what you're doing to me?"

"I hope that's a good thing." Kurt laughed, slightly out of breath.

Blaine looked at him pointedly. "That's a *very* good thing."

Kurt suddenly seemed to realize where his hands were and quickly pulled them off of Blaine's chest. He turned shy and a faint blush colored his cheeks.

"Can..." He bit his adorably pink lip. "Can I ask you something?"

"Anything."

His eyes darted away and then back again and his voice turned very soft, as if he were embarrassed. "I want *you* to kiss *me*."

Blaine's brows pulled down for a second in confusion before he sat up on his elbows. "Alright Aladdin, but you still have two more wishes left."

"Two?"

"Yes, two. And they can be anything you want."

Kurt sat back on Blaine's thighs, having not moved from his position. "I don't need two more wishes."

"And why is that?" Blaine asked while slowly leaning forward.

Blaine heard Kurt's exhale and then, "Because I already have you."

Blaine reached his hands up to hold Kurt's head, twisting his legs out from under Kurt. He sat up on his knees and leaned over Kurt, kissing him lightly and then almost immediately deepening the touch. Kurt let

his head fall back, where Blaine took advantage of the expanse of pale skin on his neck, just begging to be kissed.

He wrapped one arm around Kurt's waist and carefully moved so that Kurt was lying on his back on the bed and Blaine hovered above him. Kurt immediately pulled Blaine down into him and crashed their lips together. Blaine's mouth fell open slightly and Kurt's mouth moved with his, sucking on his lip again.

Enjoying the sensations this caused, but still wanting more, Blaine gently slid his tongue along Kurt's lower lip. Kurt pushed his hand into Blaine's dark curls, bringing him even closer. His hands roamed all over Kurt's body and he picked up the pace, leading to them nipping, sucking, and kissing every inch of skin they could reach. Blaine rolled his hips into Kurt's and Kurt's sighs gave way to moans.

Their hearts beat rapidly, flushing their cheeks and making them breathe faster. Blaine's hands traveled down Kurt's sides and he pressed one hand to Kurt's lower back, firmly pushing his hand up, so Kurt's back arched. Their hips connected again and Blaine groaned. Kurt's hands tensed on Blaine's back and he could feel Kurt's nails digging into his skin, which he oddly didn't mind.

Blaine wanted him. He wanted him so badly. He kissed along Kurt's collarbone, tongue tracing in the grooves.

"Kurt..." He whispered.

Blaine's hand moved from around his lower back to his stomach. He felt Kurt's shiver tingle down his body and goose bumps arise on the soft flesh. His hand rested lightly on his stomach for a moment and then his thumb traced the button on Kurt's pants, his other fingers reaching under the fabric just slightly. He felt Kurt stop breathing.

Blaine received a little whimper in response to where his hand was.

He raised his head from where it had been resting against Kurt's shoulder and looked into his eyes. Where before there had been desire and even a mad hunger, fear now clouded those beautiful eyes. His stomach clenched into a knot of uncertainty.

"Kurt, breathe." He whispered, moving his hand away from Kurt's stomach and up to his face. He caressed Kurt's cheek with his hand, watching as Kurt's eyes closed and he followed Blaine's command.

Blaine stroked his thumb along Kurt's cheek. "Look at me."

Kurt did so, his eyelids fluttering open and hands now trembling on Blaine's back.

"We don't have to." Blaine murmured. "I want you to feel comfortable with me. With this. If you don't want to, that's fine."

Kurt sighed deeply, indecision shown clearly on his face. Blaine leaned down and so softly, kissed his cheek, then the tip of his nose, and then his lips, before lifting himself up and flopped over to lay beside him.

Kurt twisted so he was facing Blaine. "I'm sorry." He whispered, eyes staring down.

"Don't be. I should have asked how far you wanted to go."

Kurt met his eyes. "I think we both knew we weren't going to stop and talk about where this was going. I should have told you that I'm not... not ready." Kurt rolled onto his back with a groan. "I feel like I'm letting you down. Like I'm letting *me* down. Blaine, I've never wanted anything more in my entire life than I want you." He turned his head.

Blaine propped himself up on his elbow and rested his cheek in his hand, watching Kurt.

"I want you so badly, but I just... I can't." He sounded defeated, angry at himself.

"Kurt," Blaine's voice was comforting. "Kurt, you're not letting anyone down."

He pushed himself up and sat back against the pillows. Kurt sat up too, noticing that Blaine was staring intently at the now rumbled comforter. He was thinking about something. Kurt waited, breathing slowly in an attempt to calm his racing heart.

"Did... Have you ever noticed that since you told me you had cancer, did you ever realize that you don't really get to make your own decisions anymore? The doctors and nurses tell you what you can and can't do, which Burt and Carole follow meticulously, Karofsky makes it so you can't go to McKinley without feeling scared," he eyed Kurt. "Don't tell me that that's not what you feel, because I can see it on your face whenever someone says his name." He softened his tone. "And you have me telling you what to do all the time because I don't want something to happen to you."

He looked up into Kurt's stunned eyes.

"Why are you telling me this?"

Blaine sighed softly. "I want you to feel comfortable making your own decisions. So tell me what *you* want, Kurt."

"Wh... what do you mean?"

"What do you want me to do?"

Kurt's brows furrowed. "I... I don't..." He sighed in frustration, pushing a hand through his hair. Tears pricked at his eyes. "I don't know."

Blaine bit his lip and cocked his head to the side. "How about this?" He scooted closer, sitting up on his knees. "Now close your eyes."

With a hesitant glance, Kurt let his eyes slide closed.

"What do you hear?" Blaine's voice came from his right.

What did he hear?

"Listen. Tell me what you hear."

Kurt swallowed. "I hear... the rain. Someone running down the hall. That someone getting yelled at for running down the hall. Your computer humming. It's charging right? Umm... my heart pounding in my ears."

"Okay. Now what do you see?"

Kurt began to open his eyes, at which Blaine reprimanded, "Nope. Keep them closed."

"But how-"

"Closed. What do you see?"

Kurt kept his eyes closed though he didn't like it. What did he mean what did he see? He saw darkness. He wasn't understanding where Blaine was going with this. And then, from behind his closed lids, he began to see flashes.

He saw himself, holding hands with Blaine, walking tall and proud to have this amazing unearthly being love him. He wanted to shout from the rooftops that he loved Blaine Anderson.

"I see you." He whispered.

He could almost feel Blaine's smile in the darkness.

"Can I open my eyes now?"

"Nope. What do you feel?"

Kurt's lips pursed together. Feel. What did he feel?

"I feel that this bed is really soft and probably very wrinkled. I feel..." Kurt's hands reached out blindly in the dark, but he knew where they would end up. He smiled as he heard Blaine's sharp intake of breath as Kurt's fingers touched his skin. His hands became enveloped in Blaine's. The hand that wasn't holding Kurt's gently slid up Kurt's arm.

"Goose bumps." Kurt whispered and Blaine laughed silently.

He brushed the back of his hand along Kurt's jaw line, where so many kisses had landed tonight.

"Heart beating faster."

Blaine lightly ran his thumb along Kurt's soft lower lip.

"Fingers tingling. Heart stopping."

Kurt sat still for an agonizing second until Blaine's thumb stopped at the edge of his lip. Then Kurt could feel Blaine's breath on his mouth and a moment later, Blaine placed a soft kiss on his lips.

When Blaine pulled away, Kurt involuntarily made a noise of discontent.

"Hot guy lips." Kurt said and opened his eyes. Blaine laughed and looked down quickly before meeting Kurt's eyes again as Kurt asked, "So what was that for again?"

"Well, asking you what you heard and saw was to take away the 'heat of the moment' so to speak so that you could think clearly. Asking you what you felt was supposed to make you tell me what you really wanted. But torturing you with kisses was just too much fun." He smiled a bit sheepishly.

Kurt raised his eyebrows.

"Okay, back on a serious note. I'm asking you to make a decision. Your own decision. Take out whatever it is you think I want you to do. What do you want?"

That question again.

With their faces inches away, Kurt stared straight into Blaine's waiting eyes and told him, with as much strength as he could, "I want you to kiss me."

Blaine smiled. "That I can do."

And he dragged his hands up Kurt's back and tilted his head back, kissing him deeply.

Yep, that he could do.

27. Blankets and Fear

The next few days were worrying. Kurt had been acting different. He was quiet, reserved, and when Blaine tried to ask if he was alright, he'd dismissed the question with a simple, "I'm fine," and a smile and changed the subject.

He was tired. Blaine could see it in his eyes and the way he moved. He was slower, not by much, but it made a difference, at least to Blaine's eyes. Blaine made sure that Kurt was showered and in bed by eight every night, so that he was sure to fall asleep by nine, hoping that he'd get more sleep. It had seemed to help. Kurt had been happier, more alert. But Blaine caught him yawning and just looking sad when he thought Blaine couldn't see.

Kurt was stubborn. He had made **that** very clear many times, especially when Blaine had tried to get him to "just try" a sweatshirt on and *wear it outside*. Blaine knew he wouldn't tell him anything unless he was relentlessly prompted. Kurt was also fully aware that Blaine was scrutinizing his every move, though he tried to make it unnoticeable, and Kurt didn't want to give him any reason to worry. He was worrying enough. The nightmares were a sure sign of that. And Kurt knew Blaine would want to know anything that he was feeling, physical or emotional, but Kurt just couldn't bring himself to tell him. He could see the tired circles under Blaine's eyes and the way he'd been wearing his hair, sans gel, though he wasn't sure if that was just because Kurt had said he'd liked it that way, or if he was just too tired to care.

He'd been cuddly. Blaine didn't mind, and enthusiastically welcomed it at first, loving the adorable way that Kurt would fall asleep in his arms. But when he was still tired, almost falling asleep in some of his classes, no matter how much sleep he got, Blaine had the nagging feeling that something was wrong. And he didn't want to admit it to himself. Kurt couldn't get sick. He *could not* get sick.

Kurt began coughing. Small, barely noticeable coughs at first that Kurt hid behind his hand. But then, they got worse fast and when he'd cough in class, people turned around to see who it was. And Blaine had to accept that Kurt had caught something, no matter how much he didn't want to. After school that day, Blaine had tried to get Kurt to call his dad, to tell him that he might have gotten sick, but Kurt soundly refused, smiling softly and telling him that it was nothing and a call would only make him worry for something that wasn't even a big deal.

The next day, Kurt didn't wake up with his alarm. Nor did he wake up when it went off again. Blaine gently shook his blanket-covered arm, softly singing in his ear, something that always made him smile. Kurt rolled over to face Blaine, but when he opened his eyes, Blaine knew that whatever he'd caught had hit him hard and fast. Kurt's eyes were glassy and bloodshot and he blinked up at him slowly. Blaine let out a strangled groan and ran his hand along his forehead. He was hot. Not just warm, but hot, feverish.

"No Kurt." He breathed. "No baby. You can't be sick."

"I'm not." Kurt tried, but his voice was hoarse and he winced.

"What's wrong baby?"

"Throat hurts." He whispered.

"What else?"

"I'm cold. My head hurts."

Blaine nodded, his strong hand running over the blankets, tracing the curve of Kurt's body.

"You're not going to classes today. I'll tell Wes to let our teachers know. Don't worry." He said quickly upon seeing the flash of fear on Kurt's face. "I'm staying with you."

After sending a text to Wes, he began to dial Kurt's home number, but stopped when he heard Kurt's small voice. "No. Call him later. Stay with me."

Blaine turned his head, and though a phone call would only take a few minutes, depending on how many questions Burt asked, he couldn't resist Kurt even if he tried. He pulled off his blazer, peeled back the covers, and slid in beside his boyfriend, pulling Kurt up next to him, holding him tightly.

He began to cough, deep, wheezing coughs that wracked his body and scared Blaine more than anything. Blaine wound his arms tighter around him, protectively, and Kurt curled into him, the heat radiating from his entire body. A cool hand brushed against Kurt's forehead, the damp heat of the skin burned. The fever was new, in comparison to what symptoms he had yesterday.

"My head hurts." Kurt whispered.

"Do you want something? I can get Advil." Blaine offered softly.

"No. Stay with me."

And he did. They stayed like that, entangled in each other's grasp, Blaine with his face buried in Kurt's neck, softly humming soothing melodies in his ear, Kurt gripping at his boyfriend's hands, breathing heavy sighs before he fell into a restless sleep. Blaine did not move for a while. His hand ran through Kurt's hair and he noticed with a sinking heart that it was thinner than it used to be. Kurt's whole being had gradually gotten thinner, but for some reason, it had never seemed real that Kurt could lose his hair. He knew chemo was harsh on the body, god, he knew that, but Kurt's hair was beautiful; it almost defined him. It was something Kurt took great pride in and Blaine knew how devastated he'd be if it was suddenly gone. Blaine decided he'd shave his head too, if Kurt ever lost all of his hair. Some days, Kurt had been done getting ready much earlier than Blaine and it suddenly occurred to him that maybe that reason was because he hadn't wanted to look at himself, to see his thinning locks. And other days, he took much longer, and Blaine realized that he must have been taking the extra time to look at himself, perhaps to run his hands through his hair, relishing in that feel, knowing that eventually, it would be gone. On those days, he'd had slightly red eyes when he emerged from the bathroom. Blaine had thought it was stress or simply emotional turmoil, and he'd comforted him as best he knew how, but now, it hit him full force that Kurt might have been crying because of the thought of losing his hair. Blaine softly groaned with his face in Kurt's shoulder, muffled by the clothes he wore. *Baby, why didn't you tell me?*

"I love you." He whispered against the warm skin of Kurt's neck.

Blaine had let his eyes slide closed, comforted by his boyfriend's warm body in his arms and the scent of him and his soft, even breathing, and just *him*. He'd meant to call Burt, he really had, but suddenly, the world had seemed so small and all he wanted was to lay curled up beside this beautiful angel that he loved and have nothing disturb them. In the back of his mind, he was screaming that this was selfish and stupid and he should have been smarter than this, to just go to sleep when Kurt was obviously sick, he knew, he *knew*, that this could lead to something serious. But his mind had emptied of everything logical, and he was quite lost in the overwhelming feeling of comfort and love and trust and he was a teenager after all. His wants were simple: he wanted Kurt, he wanted love, he wanted sleep. And as teenagers often do, he thought not of how he was going to get there and the consequences of those actions. Currently, he was three for three and that was enough. He didn't stop to think about what might happen if he let the outsider in this equation linger for longer than it should have. They could just stay together, rest for a bit, and then

he'd call Burt. It wasn't serious and Kurt deserved to have this moment of peace, of feeling secure and safe, just the thing that Blaine wanted when he was sick. And Blaine was going to give that to him.

Blaine feels Kurt move, shift. His eyes open and he wonders briefly how long ago they'd closed. He tightens his grip around Kurt's waist.

I'm here. It's okay. I'm with you.

Kurt groans. He's so warm, the heat from his body making Blaine sweat, but he doesn't pull away. If anything, he gets closer. Kurt is shivering.

No baby. Please.

Blaine's fingers reach up to gently brush the strands of limp hair away from Kurt's forehead. He trembles as Blaine runs the back of his hand down his cheek. Kurt swallows. He's breathing shallowly. He's miserable.

Blaine slowly sits up, trying to disturb him as little as possible. When he sees Kurt look up at him with glassy eyes, he slides out from behind him, quickly tucking the blanket around him so as little heat escapes as possible. He kneels beside the bed, eyes searching Kurt's face. Kurt just blinks languidly, as if in a dream.

"Anything worse?" Blaine whispers.

Kurt shakes his head.

Ow.

Oh.

His voice is small as he says, "My head."

Blaine nods. "Okay. Do you want to take something?"

"Just... just water."

He reaches over and takes the half-full cup of water from the table by the bed, lifting it to Kurt's lips. Kurt wants to take it from him and drink it himself, but he's quickly finding that his muscles seem uncooperative at the moment. He frowns.

Blaine sets the cup back when Kurt's done. "You sure you don't want anything?"

He nods automatically.

Ow. Bad decision. Maybe he should take something. But by that time, Blaine is up and he doesn't feel like asking him.

His eyes glance down and he sees his boyfriend's back is to him and he can make out the glow of his cell phone, illuminating the expanse of wall on the opposite side of the room. Kurt looks away. Light hurts.

His head really is pounding. Blaine begins to speak softly into the phone. He really wants that Advil right now. Maybe he can just get up and get it without bothering Blaine.

Yeah, he'll just go get it himself. He has cancer and he's sick and maybe he forgot to throw his water bottle in the recycling bin last week, but he's not bedridden. And he likes the environment.

With a determined spark in his eyes, he firmly tells his muscles to cooperate. He almost smiles when he his arms flex as they push him up, feeling the muscles ripple under the skin. God, he just feels so weak. Is this what it's like to be old, when your body gives out before your mind does?

A small, satisfied grin passes over Kurt's face as he stands, admittedly a bit wobbly, but he gains his footing as he crosses the short distance to the bathroom. The cheerleader in his head is doing a victory dance, but that happiness is short-lived. Almost the moment he makes it to the bathroom, the room begins to spin. What the hell?

He grips the countertop. His breathing quickens, then slows. Closes his eyes. Okay. He's here. In the bathroom. Not on some kiddie ride at the fair. He's here, where things don't spin.

After a moment, he opens his eyes. Nothing's spinning. Alright, we're good. Why was he here again?

Oh right. Advil.

He reaches out, finds the mirror with his palm. He can see his reflection even in the dark.

Light. It takes him all of two seconds to decide that he doesn't care about the light switch on the wall. The lights can stay off for all he cares. All he wants is to get rid of his pounding headache.

He can still hear the comforting sound of Blaine's soft voice in the other room. He obviously hasn't noticed that Kurt's no longer in the bed. Got to hurry. He'll be mad if he knew Kurt was up. Can't make him mad.

Kurt opens the cabinet, fingers fumbling around the contents inside until he finds a little bottle with ridges on the lid. Got it. He pops off the top and pours what he hopes is the right amount of pills into his hand.

He swallows slowly. He brings his hand up to count out two pills and put the others back into the bottle. Things seem to be happening very slowly. His mind is fuzzy.

Advil. Headache. Blaine.

Hurry.

He feels his heart begin to race, his hand that holds the pills is trembling and if he could just find some water...

A heat spreads through his body. It's not the nice kind of heat either, the kind like you feel when you're sitting in front of a cozy fireplace. This heat is uncomfortable. Too hot, too fast. He feels like he just ran a marathon, his heart is pounding so fast. He's hot. Too hot. His vision begins to blur, or is that just the darkness pressing in on him? Should have turned on the light.

Bed. Need to get back to bed.

He tries to lift his leg up, take a step. It's like his muscles have all turned to jelly. He can't move them. So weak. So tired. His throat dries and he breathes faster. Spots appear, white ants in the blackness of his surroundings. More ants, spots. An army of ants dance across his vision and there's a roaring in his ears. Should have stayed in bed. His fingers have this weird tingling, prickling sensation that makes him want to shake his hands to get the feeling to go away. The roaring gets louder. He's breathing shallowly, quickly. The room is spinning again.

Blaine.

He thinks he says it. Does he say it? He doesn't know. He can't hear over the roaring in his ears.

And then, nothing.

"Sorry to call so late, but, well... Kurt didn't want me to tell you until later and I know I should have called, but..."

Come on Blaine. Spit it out. It's not going to get any easier.

"What is it Blaine?"

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger. "Kurt's sick."

"What do you mean sick? How sick Blaine?" Burt's voice had gone from jokingly apprehensive to cold with real worry in two seconds flat.

"Well, it... I think it's a cold, maybe the flu. It's been going around. Josh had the flu a week ago. He's better now though. Uh, but I've been making Kurt take vitamins and making sure he goes to sleep early and not... going... outside..." His words trickled away as realization hit him hard. His eyes widened. Oh shit. The rain. That night, coming back from the library. He let Kurt get soaked and... and this was his fault. His fault Kurt was sick.

"Blaine? Son, you still there?"

Burt's voice in his ear snapped him back. He tightened his grip on the phone, heart thudding slowly. His eyes stared at the ground. How could he have been so stupid?

"Yeah. I'm here. It just... it hit him really hard and he's exhausted and he has a fever and he's coughing and pale and sweating, but he's so cold..." He bit his lip, made himself stop talking. He could handle this. Deep breath. "I'd really like for him to go to the doctor. School nurse is more convenient, but she can only do so much, especially with..."

With the cancer. He shuddered involuntarily.

"I can drive him up there if you'd like."

Burt sighed heavily. "Alright. How soon can you leave?"

"I can go right now. As long as he's up for it."

"Get him down here as soon as you can. I'll call his doctor, see if he's able to come in. Can I talk to him?"

"I think he's sleeping right now, but I ca-"

As Blaine took the phone a few inches away from his ear as he towards the bed, he hears a new sound.

Plink.

What the hell was that?

Plink.

His brows furrowed. His eyes darted to the bed. The empty bed.

Thud.

A sickening sound like a bag full of sand hitting the floor seemed to echo in the silence.

The phone slipped from his fingers as he turned all the way around and ran to the bathroom door. In the dark, he could see a form sprawled out on the ground. He flicked on the light, his heart racing.

In his immediate fear, he felt as though he were in a daze. He moved too slowly, he couldn't breathe. The sudden flood of brightness burned his eyes, but he didn't care, or didn't notice, except for the way that Kurt's body was illuminated, making his heart sink.

He dropped to his knees, cradled Kurt in his arms, and a shaky voice that even he hardly recognized was speaking softly, hurriedly, panicked.

"Kurt. Kurt, wake up."

He moved a hand over the soft brown hair without realizing that he did.

"Kurt, wake up. Please, wake up!"

His whole body was shaking in panic. He was close to tears, blinking them back harshly as he cradled Kurt closer.

Fuck. Fuck. This can't be happening. No. All his fault.

And a voice, strong, insistent, and filled with the worst kind of fear was emanating from the forgotten phone on the ground.

"Blaine! What's going on? Blaine!"

He began to shake the unresponsive boy in his arms.

God, no. This can't be happening.

"Blaine!"

28. Heart Aches and Masks

Blaine's eyes were bleary, burning with a need to sleep, but he couldn't close his eyes. He couldn't. He wouldn't let himself close his eyes, not when he didn't have any information about Kurt.

Blaine had never been this scared. The adrenaline that was coursing through his veins had lasted a while, until he'd gotten to the hospital, and now, it was like everything had just been drained out of him and he was beyond exhausted.

Kurt's eyes fluttered open and Blaine took a shuddering deep breath as he held him tighter to his chest.

"Kurt? Kurt, can you hear me?"

The boy's eyes glazed around the room, as if trying to focus on where the voice was coming from. His chest was moving slowly and he tried to lift his arm, but it was like all the muscles had decided not to listen to what his brain wanted them to do. He swallowed, felt a hand on his cheek. A cold hand. He was so cold. The ground was cold. He was cold. He shivered, the dizziness receding. He stared up at the worried hazel eyes.

"Kurt?"

He looked so scared. Kurt blinked and whispered, "Blaine."

The boy who held him suddenly looked so relieved, the tense worry flowing out of his body and he slumped over, still holding him tightly, and pressed his face to Kurt's shoulder. He took deep breaths. There were tear tracks on his cheeks.

"Oh thank god." He said, slightly muffled by Kurt's shoulder.

"Blaine?"

He pulled away, composing himself quickly. "Do you feel dizzy? Sick at all?"

Did he? Kurt thought about that for a moment. "I'm tired. My... my arms feel like lead."

Blaine nodded, as if this was normal. All Kurt wanted to do was sleep. "Okay." Blaine looked over his shoulder, muttered a curse under his breath. "I'll be right back okay? Right back, I promise."

He was leaving him? "No. Don't..."

Blaine's eyes held hurt and pain at Kurt's voice. "I need to get the phone. I'll be right back. Two seconds, baby."

Kurt felt himself nodding, even though, no that wasn't okay. He wanted Blaine's arms around him for as long as he lived.

But Blaine was true to his word. After he'd been carefully lowered to the cold ground, he hardly had time to internally complain about the temperature before Blaine's arms were around him again. He spoke into a cell phone, holding his keys in one hand.

"Burt, he.... No, no, he... he passed out... Yeah, he's talking to me. Should I... Yeah, I can do that. Sure... The one on Main?... Okay, I'll see you there... No, I won't let him... Yeah, I'll call you when we get there... Call me when you're almost there... Okay. Bye."

Blaine slid the phone into the waistband of his gym shorts and pulled off his jacket, wrapping it around Kurt, as he had begun to shake.

"Alright baby, we're going to go to the hospital. I'm taking you there. Hold onto me okay?"

Kurt felt his arms being pulled around Blaine's shoulders and he focused his attention enough to be able to hold on. He was so tired. He kept telling himself not to fall asleep, but he was fighting a losing battle.

Kurt was lifted up onto his feet and Blaine held him around his waist, but Kurt could barely lift his feet. Blaine frowned, then told him to stop. He held the keys between his teeth and lifted Kurt up into his arms. He rested his head against his shoulder, grateful to not have to trust his own feet. Blaine held him easily and carried him.

Kurt was so light in Blaine's arms. How had he not noticed how thin he was getting? He groaned at how much he had been unobservant of.

It was easy to get down to the lobby area, but he was worried about the swirling snow outside. He had slipped his feet into his worn pair of tennis shoes before leaving and now he realized that they had no traction whatsoever and if he fell or dropped Kurt...

A soft moan came from the boy in his arms and Blaine felt the adrenaline pulse through him like fire.

"It's okay baby. I'm not going to let you fall." He whispered as best he could with the keys in his mouth and clutched Kurt tighter, as if hoping to transfer some of his own body heat to him, as the fever and weakness was making him tremble. Blaine stepped outside, leaving the warmth and comfort of the lobby, and ran as fast as he could to the student parking garage.

His shoes sunk into the layer of snow and his toes were already going numb by the time he reached the garage. He was holding Kurt so tightly, he worried he would leave marks on his flushed skin, but he told himself that there was no way he was going to drop him. And Kurt clung to him as best he could, burying his face in Blaine's shoulder, completely miserable and so weak and tired.

He managed to grasp the keys with one hand, while still keeping Kurt held securely, and pressed the unlock button, pulling open the door and delicately placing Kurt inside.

"Lay down. Let me know if you feel sick or anything. Anything okay?" He said hurriedly as he started the car.

His heart was pounding for the entirety of the car ride to the hospital. He kept listening for any sound that would tell him if Kurt was not okay. Kurt coughed, he moaned, he sniffed. The tense moments where Kurt drifted in the half-way point of sleep and made no sound at all made Blaine's heart skip a beat.

"Kurt, wake up. Wake up baby. Please, you can't go to sleep."

This became Blaine's mantra on the way to the hospital. Burt had told him not to let Kurt fall asleep. And he wouldn't.

The hospital on Main was close to Dalton, but it seemed so much farther with the combination of half freaking out over Kurt, the still falling snow, and the adrenaline that made him feel any speed he took would be too slow.

He parked in front and jumped out into the cold white snow, the wind whipping his curls around his face. Lifting Kurt into his arms again, he shut the car door with his hip and walked as fast as he could without worrying he was going to do a face-plant into the ground.

He got the attention of a nurse, who took one look at Kurt and got a wheelchair. The last thing Blaine wanted to do was let go of him, but he surrendered his boyfriend to the chair and followed along after the nurse, spouting out his symptoms and making sure that they knew he had leukemia.

She nodded, asking him more questions, and then stopped, where another person took Kurt and wheeled him around the corner, out of sight.

"No, wait. Where are you taking him?"

"He's going to have some x-rays done and I'm calling for a doctor to see him as soon as possible. I'm sorry, but you'll have to stay in the waiting room. You'll need to fill out some paperwork and-"

Blaine spluttered, "Wait. X-rays? For what?"

"Chest x-rays. Now please, I can't let you past this point unless you're immediate family. Are you family?"

"I'm his boyfriend, but-"

"Then you'll have to wait in the other room. You said his parents were coming?"

"Yes, but-"

"Please inform the nurse at the front desk when they get here."

And she turned and disappeared down the hallway, where they had taken Kurt. Blaine opened his mouth to call after her, but he shut it quickly, knowing it wouldn't do any good to argue. Instead, he turned and dragged his feet back to the waiting room, filled about halfway with people, all looking anxious to some degree.

He sighed and sat down in one of the light blue, plastic-y fabric covered chair. Now Kurt was alone. He was sick and probably scared and Blaine was out here, stuck and unable to even see him.

He covered a sob with his hand and closed his eyes. He felt the tears coming, but he blinked them away. Not the time to let his emotions rule him. He sent a text to Finn to tell Burt that they took Kurt back and then began to fill out the tedious paperwork to get his mind off of formulating plans to be allowed back with Kurt.

He'd taken his time with the papers, making sure the answers he knew were correct and leaving those he didn't know blank. The kind-looking nurse with a long black ponytail took the papers, saying his parents could finish them when they got here.

And that's why he was now sitting on the uncomfortable chair, his stomach in knots, praying that Burt and Carole would get here soon. He leaned back, staring straight up at the ceiling and had unwillingly closed his eyes for no more than a few minutes when he heard voices he recognized.

His heart leaped with relief as he saw Burt practically shoving his way to the front desk, Carole hurrying along behind him, and Finn walking slowly, a tired, nervous look on his face.

Finn saw him first.

"Blaine!"

He sat up as Finn ran over to him and stood as Finn grabbed his shoulders, searching his eyes.

"Is he okay? What happened?"

Blaine stumbled over his words, trying his best not to worry him even more. "I really don't know. He's been sick, but he thought it would go away and it didn't and he passed out so I brought him here and the nurse took him back, but I haven't seen her since. I don't know what's wrong."

Finn's face fell. He sunk down in the empty chair next to Blaine and put his elbows on his knees, resting his head in his hands.

Carole came over to them, an unreadable expression on her face. "Boys, stay here alright? They're taking us back to see him and-"

"Mom, I want to see him."

"I know honey." She lightly touched Finn's cheek.

"They said family can see him." He pressed.

"They did, but I just feel like it would be better if you stayed with Blaine, and we'll come get you both when-"

"But Blaine's family."

Blaine felt his heart stop. Finn's voice was sincere, no hint whatsoever of dishonesty in his words.

Carole looked like she wanted to just pick them both up and demand that they be allowed back, but she said, "Please, baby. Just stay with him. We'll get you when it's okay. I promise."

They watched her retreating form as she was lead behind the white double doors with Burt.

The doors swung shut and Blaine let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. They were both silent for a long time, before Finn spoke.

"He... he's going to be okay isn't he? It's just like the flu or something right?"

Blaine blinked slowly, not sure how to respond, and not wanting to. "I don't know Finn."

"It's, I mean, they'll just give him some drugs and let him sleep here for the night and he'll be fine in the morning right?"

It was like Finn was trying to convince himself that his stepbrother would be okay. It was heartbreaking.

"I don't know Finn." Blaine whispered, feeling chills prick up his arms.

The sun was rising when Burt and Carole finally came out of the doors. Blaine, who had refused to let his eyes close since arriving at the hospital, had his head on Finn's shoulder, who rested his own cheek on his hand, eyes closed and snoring softly.

Blaine's head snapped up and he stood, causing Finn's eyes to open. He strode over to them, Finn right behind him, and Carole took his hands in hers. Finn just stared at Burt, so many questions burning in his

eyes. Blaine did not want to make eye contact for fear that he was about to live his horrid nightmare. He swallowed hard against the lump in his throat and met Carole's eyes when she began to speak in a soothing tone.

"Kurt's sick. They did some chest x-rays and those confirmed that he had pneumonia-"

"But they can give him medicine or something and he'll get better?"

She shook her head slightly. "No Finn. Pneumonia is very serious, especially to Kurt. His body can't fight off infections, that's what leukemia does, and his white blood cells are outnumbered to the virus."

"What's going to happen to him?" Finn looked worriedly from his mom to his stepdad and back again. Blaine couldn't do anything but stare at Carole, willing that she would say that he was going to be okay.

"They're going to try and treat it as best they can. And we're going to let them do their job and pray for the best."

"I want to see him."

Burt put a hand on Finn's shoulder, squeezing securely, as Carole tried to explain this as best she could without upsetting him.

"Honey, he's tired. Soon though, when he's feeling better." She turned to Blaine. "He's been asking for you. If you want to, and if you're quiet, we can take you to his room."

Blaine's expression didn't change. If anything, it fell a bit from the agonized plea coming from Finn.

"I'll be quiet Mom. I promise. I won't make a sound. I just want to see him."

"Finn, please." Carole's voice sounded like her heart was breaking at having to tell Finn he couldn't go. "Blaine?"

He nodded quickly, never taking his eyes off of Carole, who turned and took his hand, leading him through the doors. He didn't risk looking back. The look on Finn's face would have driven the guilt deeper into him and he couldn't handle that right now.

Instead, he focused on the winding floor in the too-white hallways, feeling his hand grip a little tighter in Carole's. She began to slow down and squeezed back, a soft, sad smile on her face.

"They said only ten minutes. I'm sorry you can't stay longer." She pressed something into his palm. "Here, honey. Just as a precaution."

It was a cloth facemask. He smiled at her. "Thank you."

"I'll be waiting here. Just come out when you're done, or I'll come get you when time's up."

She backed away to sit in a chair on the opposite side of the room and he turned to face the open door. His heart thudded menacingly in his chest and he realized that it felt as though his legs were made of lead as he entered.

The first thing he saw was the blue blanket spread out on the bed in the center of the room, machines blinking and humming on either side. There were a couple chairs in the corner, a sink on the wall underneath a whiteboard with a few pieces of paper, probably charts, and *Kurt Hummel* written in green marker, with the name of his doctor underneath.

He forced his legs to carry him forward, glancing at the clock near the silent, dark TV as he slipped the mask over his nose and mouth.

Kurt was curled on his side, the blue blanket falling in gentle folds around his body. The pale skin seemed to glow under the fluorescent lights and his chest rose and fell in a steadied rhythm.

Until he began to cough. His eyes stayed closed as he brought a hand up to cover his mouth, deep, rattling coughs wracking his body. It sounded horrible and it almost sounded like he had trouble breathing. Blaine was rooted to the ground with fear, and he almost turned and ran to get Carole, but then the coughing subsided and his entire body relaxed, sinking deeper into the bed.

Blaine approached him carefully, pulling up one of the chairs.

Kurt opened his eyes as Blaine scooted the chair close. Blaine smiled at him, then remembered the face mask and said, "Hi," placing his hand on Kurt's feverish cheek.

He saw a small smile appear on Kurt's face. "Hey," he said, voice weak.

"They're only letting me in here for ten minutes," he saw Kurt's smile fall, "but that's good because then you can get some sleep."

"I want you with me."

Blaine bit his lip. It hurt him to have to tell Kurt he couldn't stay. "I'm sorry baby. I would if they'd let me. I'd stay with you every second."

Kurt closed his eyes, beginning to breathe steadily. Blaine ran his hand through Kurt's hair, knowing how much it calmed him down.

They stayed as close as possible to each other, Blaine just playing listlessly with Kurt's hair, glad to see that he was falling asleep. He needed the rest.

Blaine lost track of how long it had been, hypnotized by the light sounds of Kurt's sometimes rattled breathing. His heart jumped whenever Kurt's breath hitched even in the slightest amount. But he never woke. He must be so tired. And Blaine was tired too. He didn't know how he was even keeping his eyes open, but he did, and he was even angry to have to go back. If they let him, he would stay with Kurt all night, never sleeping, if that meant he could stay.

He let out a noise between a groan and a sigh as he realized that he didn't know where going 'back' was. The last place he wanted to go was Dalton, as odd a thought as that was, and he didn't know if the Hummel-Hudson family would be going back to Lima. Finn had said he could come over any time, but he couldn't help but feel a bit like he would be intruding if he asked to stay. But where else could he go?

He was pondering this thought as Carole stuck her head in the door.

"Blaine, honey, I'm sorry, but it's time."

He nodded half-heartedly and carefully pulled his hand away from Kurt's hair mid-stroke. Suddenly, his wrist was caught in an unexpectedly strong grasp. He gasped and instinct made him flinch, but he relaxed almost as soon as he tensed.

He ran the back of his hand along Kurt's cheekbone. "I have to go. I'll be back as soon as they let me okay?"

The miserable look that appeared on Kurt's face told Blaine that this wasn't okay. He felt his heart aching painfully as he grasped Kurt's hand in his own and leaned over, touching their foreheads together. He couldn't kiss his cheek like he wanted to because of the mask, but he hoped that this gesture was enough.

"I love you."

Kurt smiled tiredly, clutching onto his hand. "I love you too."

"Get some sleep alright?" Blaine said as he reluctantly pulled away. "I'll see you tomorrow. I can't have a zombie for a boyfriend and I hear deep sleep is the best kind for your skin. So if you turn all green and have an appetite for human flesh, I'll know you didn't get much sleep."

Blaine winked and was relieved to hear Kurt's soft laugh as he headed towards the door. He turned and saw Kurt's eyes following him.

His heart gave another painful squeeze. Kurt looked so small and, unintentionally, scared in the glare of the hospital lights. He blew Kurt a kiss, which he was sure would have normally earned him an eye-roll from him, but tonight, Kurt just smiled.

And Blaine followed Carole into the hallway, where he took off the mask and tossed it in the trash.

"Better use this hon."

He stuck his hands under the self-dispensing hand-sanitizer Carole pointed to as she asked, "I told the boys to get checked into the hotel. They took Finn's truck. Burt's going to get Finn situated there and then he's coming back here. I know you have your car and Dalton's not that far away, but did you want to stay with us? You're more than welcome any time, in our home or hotel room."

He looked up, rubbing his hands together and feeling the odd chill that came with the sanitizer drying instantly on his palms. "That'd actually be great. Are you sure?"

"Honey, I wouldn't ask if I wasn't serious."

"Thank you." He smiled, unsure how he wasn't cranky right now. Sleeplessness usually got him a one-way ticket to grouch town.

She returned his smile and motioned for him to follow her down the halls again. They were quiet until they reached the lobby.

"Thank you." She said sincerely and Blaine was caught off-guard by her change in tone. "I don't want to worry you, but this really is serious, according to his doctor, and I... I'm just so glad that you were there with him. I don't want to think about what would have happened if he was alone."

"I-It was nothing really. I mean, it was scary as hell, but he's here now and he's..." He trailed off. He was going to say 'okay,' but he didn't know if that was true. He closed his eyes briefly and held open the door for Carole. "He's here now."

"All the same, thank you. So much. I really am sorry that you can't stay. I'll talk to them tonight and see if they'll let you stay longer tomorrow. Kurt, he... he really draws a lot of strength from you, you know? I'm so glad that he has you."

Blaine tried to give her a comforting smile, but it felt weak and plastered on.

"Are you sure you're okay to drive? I could take you to the hotel in your car and ride back with Burt."

He shook his head. He felt like enough of a burden already. "No, it's okay. I'm fine. Thank you though."

She looked him up and down, as if gauging if what he said was true. Finally, she let out a sigh and said, "Alright then. It's not too far. Do you know where the Comfort Inn is?"

He knew, but the lie fell from his lips before he could think about it. "I think so, but it's kind of hard to tell in the dark."

"No problem. Just follow me."

They got into their cars, Carole in the lead, while Blaine followed behind. He did know where the hotel was, but he wanted so badly to just not think, and was grateful to have Carole to mindlessly follow.

The drive was short and Blaine clamored out of his car, said what he hoped were convincing thank-you's to Carole, received a one-armed hug from Burt as he passed him to switch seats in the car with his wife, and watched as they drove away.

He slid the key into the electronic lock and waited for the blinking light to turn green before he opened the door. They had rented two rooms; one for Blaine and Finn, and the other for themselves.

He tried to be quiet, expecting Finn to be asleep, as he himself felt like he would have made a nice, comfy bed out of the asphalt if he didn't get to a real bed in the next five minutes, but what he found instead surprised and troubled him.

Finn was sitting on the edge of one of the beds, elbows on his knees, still wearing the same clothes he'd been in when he left. A suitcase lay unopened on the floor by the table that held a dark lamp, phonebook, and city directory.

Blaine shut the door and set the key on the table. "Finn?"

"He's not okay is he?"

The tone of Finn's voice, so dark and un-Finn-like made him furrow his brows in worry.

"He... we don't know. Pneumonia is dangerous."

"How was he, when you saw him?"

Blaine moved over to the other bed, removing his snow-damp shoes and pulling his slightly dry sweatshirt over his head.

"He was tired. Pale, I guess. He's had a fever for a little while. The coughing's new. That was pretty bad. But he talked to me and he smiled and he even laughed."

Finn didn't answer, just stared down at his feet. Blaine didn't know what to say. He knew Finn was still upset about not getting to see him and Blaine knew how he'd feel if their situations were reversed.

"I guess I'll see you in the morning then." Finn said in a low voice, laying down and clicking off the lamp by the bed.

"Yeah." Blaine clicked off the other lamp and pulled up the covers, feeling goose bumps rise all over his body as the soft fabric hit his cold skin.

Blaine barely closed his eyes and he was deeply asleep, dreaming of a porcelain-skinned, light-haired boy who beamed at him with a wide smile and bright blue eyes, no trace of sickness anywhere. They laughed, held hands, kissed, and when he awoke early the next morning, muscles stiff and sore, he would try to remember what he had been dreaming about because it was a good dream, the best one he remembered having in a very long time, but he had been so deep in sleep that he never was able to recall it.

29. Peacoats and Cashmere

It had been three days since Kurt was admitted to the hospital with pneumonia. Finn was allowed to see him the day after he was diagnosed, which was a great relief to the teen. Blaine could see how protective he had become of his stepbrother and in a way, it helped to ease his own fears. Blaine didn't want to leave Kurt's side for anything, but when he saw that Finn was almost the same way, he became more relaxed with leaving Kurt. But just for a little while.

Burt had called Dalton the day that Kurt was taken to the hospital and both he and Blaine had been allowed to miss school for however long they needed to, which took a great deal of stress off of Blaine's shoulders. He didn't want to think about the mound of assignments that would be awaiting him when he got back, but for now, he pushed the thought to the back of his mind. He had more important things to worry about. Finn had been excused from classes too.

Blaine had called Wes the day after he spent the night in the hotel room with Finn, before they went back to the hospital. He surprised himself by waking up early. He had been so exhausted, he thought he'd have slept later, but he was glad to have his internal alarm go off and rouse him from his sleep because he was able to call Wes before classes started. That conversation had been quick and though he knew Wes was dying to know details and ask questions, his best friend knew better than to force him to spill what was going on. Blaine simply told him that Kurt had pneumonia and was being treated, that they wouldn't be back at school until he got better, not to tell anyone but the Warblers if he must, and that if he wasn't busy later, if he wouldn't mind dropping off some of his clothes. Blaine was nowhere near the fashion diva that Kurt was, but even he felt kind of gross wearing the same clothes two days in a row. Kurt had once changed entire outfits four times in one day. Just before Wes hung up, Blaine had another thought and asked him to bring a few things for Kurt too, but they were specific items and to a clothing novice like Wes, he would need some help. Blaine would have to be on the phone with him while Wes walked in Kurt's closet, listening to Blaine's instructions on what to grab. That conversation hadn't gone as well as he would have liked.

"There should be a white peacoat near the back..."

"Should I know the hell a peacoat is? Does it have feathers or something?"

"That would be a peacock Wes." Blaine laughed. "And no. There's big buttons down the front and a collar. I think there's front pockets too."

And it just got worse from there.

"Blue sweater. Blue sweater. Blue sweater."

Blaine listened to Wes's mumbling for a little while as he thumbed through what must have seemed like a million sweaters hanging in intimidating rows, and then he tried to help.

"It has a v-neck and it's cashmere so you should know it when you touch it."

Wes sighed. "Is it going to bite me? Because honestly, that's the only way I'm going to know what it means that it's cashmirror."

Blaine grinned and but he covered his mouth with his hand and held the phone a few inches away until he could talk, hoping to muffle the laugh.

"Cashmere. Okay let's try this. Just feel. It'll be really soft."

He heard the light clang of hangers being shifted.

"Blaine, everything here is soft."

"It's super soft. Really soft. Like a cloud or... or a pile of... softness."

Wes snorted. "Yeah, real helpful Blaine."

"Okay you know what, just find the blue sweaters."

"That I can do." A pause. "Geez. There's like eight of them."

"Now look at the labels. Cashmere."

Another pause, longer this time. Blaine could hear Wes muttering 'cashmere' to himself as he looked. There was a cry of victory and then, "I think I found it!"

"Awesome. Knew I could count on you."

"I must be your best friend because I would not be navigating the perils of Kurt's closet for just anyone."

Blaine smiled. "That's nothing. You should see his closet at home. And there's no one else I would trust with Kurt's clothes. Just make sure they get here in one piece okay? A snowy mud stain on anything will not be good. For me, you, or him."

Wes had brought the clothes down packed carefully in two of Kurt's suitcases that Wes had stumbled upon in the closet. Blaine had only been gone for one day, but it was still nice to see his friend.

Wes stayed for a while and even talked to Kurt while he was awake. Kurt had brightened at the sight of his familiar favorite pieces of clothing and he had excitedly thrown on the cashmere sweater. After a little while, Kurt's eyes slipped closed and he fell asleep, arms snuggled into his chest as if he were hugging a long-lost friend.

"He'll sleep well tonight." Blaine laughed as he led Wes out in the hall. Visiting hours ended in fifteen minutes. "Thank you for coming. I know it's a lot to ask, especially with the snow."

"It's not a problem Blaine." He clapped a hand on his back. "And he did seem happier with that sweater. I'd do anything to help and this was just an easy thing to do."

He smiled. "Where have you been all my life? Things would have been so much better if I had known you earlier. Kind of sucks that I just met you freshman year."

"Yeah, but then we'd probably end up being like an old married couple and go through those fights that people who've known each other for years have. And that would really suck."

There was a pause as they walked, shoes squeaking on the white hospital floors. There was a light green tile every few feet and Blaine found himself subconsciously stepping on the tile with his right foot every time.

"I have to ask..." Wes's tone had changed and Blaine knew he was about to question something that he thought may or may not make him upset. Blaine flicked his head to look at him, not really wanting him to continue the sentence. "Regionals is in three weeks and we've been practicing every day, as you know, and even when you were at Kurt's house. We're good, but if we want to beat Vocal Adrenaline we need to

really work hard before these three weeks are up. And even New Directions. You saw how they were last year. We need to beat both of them if we want a chance at going to Nationals at all. And, honestly, we need you Blaine. If we can't have Kurt, we need you. I know that sounds incredibly selfish and feel free to hit me if you need to, but I'm serious. I really don't think we stand a chance without you. All I'm asking, is if you would be able to come to rehearsals two or three times a week? We can fill in the hole for the other four or five days, but we really need you there. If, I mean, well, you'll always be part of the Warblers no matter what, but I guess what I'm asking is... are you going to Regionals with us?"

Blaine had gotten slower as he walked while he listened, and now, he stopped completely. He had completely forgotten about Regionals. Crap. What was he going to do?

He couldn't leave Kurt. That was something he wasn't willing to negotiate. If Kurt was out of the hospital and as healthy as he could possibly be, then he might think about it. But it would come at a cost. He knew he would be worrying the entire trip, even if it was only two hours away at the McKinley auditorium.

I don't want to think about what would have happened if he was alone. That was what Carole had said to him yesterday. And what if he did leave and he did faint again? What if he really was alone and something bad happened? Blaine would never forgive himself.

"I'll... I'll think about it." He really did want to go to Regionals, but the timing really was awful. If it was any other time.... "I can't leave Kurt. Not when he's still in the hospital. His doctor said he should be cleared to leave by the end of the week, but that's cutting it close. That only leaves two weeks until Regionals." He switched tones, putting a smile in his voice. "What do you even need me there for? You guys are awesome on your own. And Wes, you were made soloist for a reason."

"I still don't think I deserve it Blaine, you're-"

"Don't even finish that sentence. Whatever you think I am, I'm not."

"Why did you pick me?"

"You're a leader Wes. I was having a hard time with things and I just... couldn't step up anymore. It was really hard trying to be everything that they all thought I was and still stay this concrete, unwavering, have-all-the-answers person and not freak out over Kurt's leukemia. I knew that you could be the person

that they looked up to when I wasn't around or if I started to fall apart. Plus," he said with a grin, nudging him lightly in the ribs, "you're voice is awesome."

Wes looked a bit more convinced, but still apprehensive. "Well, if that's what you think I am, then okay. But that key is still yours if you want it."

Since the beginning of Dalton, every soloist had been given a small golden key that would unlock the choir room. It was meant so that the person who had been given the honor of soloist would have somewhere quiet to practice whenever they wanted, as long as the room wasn't being used. It was more of a symbol of power now, as Dalton had become more prestigious and upped the school's academic reputation with rigorous lessons, but the key was still a high honor to have bestowed upon you. When Blaine stepped down as soloist, Wes had been given a shiny new key. Blaine had kept his, mainly because no one had asked for it back, though he didn't have a reason to use it now. It rested on his keychain along with his car key, Dalton dorm key, and the never used, but there for emergencies house key.

"Thanks Wes. But you earned that key. It's yours now."

Wes smiled at him a bit sadly and then the nurse at the front desk cleared her throat loudly and Blaine looked over at the clock. Visiting hours had been over for ten minutes. They hurried down to the entrance and Blaine hugged him, promising to call within the next few days to let him know how Kurt was doing.

"I'd come back to visit, but Warblers practice is every night for hours and with homework, I'm not going to make that promise that I'll be able to come."

"It's okay. We both know the Dalton stress."

Wes clapped him on the back again, smiled, and took off in the heavy snow to find his car. It had been nice to see him, but now Blaine had a new worry on his mind. Was going to Regionals worth what he would have to give up?

It had now been three days and Blaine still had no answer to his question.

When he entered Kurt's room, Carole was sitting by his side, humming softly as she read a magazine. It was late in the evening and Blaine had returned from sitting in on the Warblers rehearsal. He didn't have a

concrete answer as to whether he would be going to Regionals, but Wes had been able to convince him to go up for a few hours and give critiques.

He brushed the snow off his jacket and hurried into the, if not glaring, warmth of the hospital.

"I told Burt to go get some sleep." Carole spoke in a normal volume and Blaine flinched slightly at the sound in the quiet room. He cast a worried glance at Kurt, but the cashmere-clad boy never stirred. He had only surrendered his sweater to be washed and wore it constantly. Blaine had been in momentary shock at first. Kurt had never worn anything two days in a row, even with it being freshly laundered. If the gritty, odorless hotel detergent even counted as 'freshly laundered' that is. There were plenty of washing machines at Dalton and Blaine had offered to do all of their laundry, but Burt wouldn't have it.

"We can live on hotel washing machines for a few more days. You're not a house maid. Kurt wants you here."

Carole spoke, seeming to read the worry on his face, and snapped him out of the memory. "He's out like a light. We can talk normally. He'll be fine."

Blaine sat down opposite her.

"You should go get sleep too. You're as bad as Burt."

He sighed. "I just feel like if I leave, something is going to happen."

Carole reached over and covered his hand with hers. "Things will happen even if you are here. Bad things don't wait to happen until you're gone. But he's getting better. I think it's safe that you went and got some sleep. You've been here all day."

He was about to point out that she had been at least in the hospital all day too, but suddenly he didn't feel like arguing. He squeezed her hand, then got up and stood over Kurt's bed. His hand lightly traced his cheekbone and he leaned over and whispered, "I love you" into Kurt's ear.

"See you in the morning Blaine." Carole said as he made his way out the door.

He nodded and his fingers curled around his keys. He drove in silence to the hotel, grateful that for now, the snow seemed to have stop falling.

Kurt seemed to be responding well to the treatment they were giving him, whatever it was. Blaine really didn't care. Kurt could eat redvines and jellybeans wearing some g-unit bling atop a talking lion, in a spacesuit to go to Mars if that's what it took to make him better.

But Kurt now had more energy. At least, he didn't want to spend half the day sleeping like he did before. Kurt, Finn and Blaine played cards, watched movies, and pretty much did whatever Kurt felt up to.

On the fifth day, the four of them had been lounging around in Kurt's room. Blaine hadn't been able to take his eyes off of Kurt. They hadn't been able to be alone in a while and he felt selfish in asking such a request.

Blaine felt like kissing Carole's feet when she tactfully shepherded her husband and son out the door, leaving the two of them together. He flashed her a look filled with gratitude as they left.

The moment the door clicked closed, Blaine practically ran to the bed and in his excitement, almost jumped on top of Kurt.

"Ooof! Hey, a bit of a warning next time alright?"

Kurt scooted over to allow Blaine more room, who felt an unfamiliar blush fill his cheeks. "Sorry."

Kurt shimmied down in the covers, which Blaine pulled a bit more tightly around him before wrapping his arms around his boyfriend. Kurt turned his head and gave him a smile that made Blaine's entire body tingly and happy. Blaine pressed a soft kiss to his cheek and Kurt snuggled up into his arms.

"I've missed this." Blaine breathed against his neck, sending a shiver down Kurt's spine.

"Me too."

And they laid together, breathing together, just being together, until the nurse was forced to wake Blaine, as family visiting hours were over.

The next day, Kurt had an odd request.

"Will you read me a story?"

Feeling the quizzical expression on his face, Blaine tried to look like this question wasn't the most random thing he'd heard in a little while.

"Umm, sure. Want to wait until night though?"

Kurt nodded, though he seemed a bit unhappy at the idea of having to wait.

It seemed like the day would never end, but finally, night fell and they were alone.

"What did you want me to read? It was stupid that I didn't ask earlier. I don't have anything with me to read to you..."

He was planning on picking something up the next morning, but Kurt shook his head. "No need. I had Finn bring me some from home."

Blaine followed to where Kurt was pointing. A plain bag sat on a chair, lumpy in odd shapes that could only be a book.

Blaine grinned. "Is it a puppy?" He moved over to the bag and stuck his hand in slowly, as if unwrapping gold. "Puppy, puppy, puppy," he chanted, and then withdrew his hand. "A book?" He scoffed. "Gross."

Kurt smiled at his dramatic performance. "Oh come on. It's a good book. And the hospital doesn't allow animals."

Book in hand, Blaine sat next to him on the bed and only then did he look at the cover.

"Goodnight Moon?"

He noticed that the book itself was faded, much different than the one that Kurt had checked out at the Dalton library, as it was worn on the edges and smelled slightly musty, as if it hadn't been opened in a while.

"My mom bought this for me when I was born." Kurt explained. "She read it to me every night. After she died, I would read it to myself, as a means of coping and comfort I guess, but it never was the same."

Blaine was silent, now holding the book as though it really was made of the most precious material in the world. "Kurt, are... are you sure you want me to? It was your mother's and I... I couldn't..."

"I want you to."

He met Kurt's eyes and when Kurt took the book, opened it, and placed it in Blaine's palms, he knew he couldn't refuse.

Blaine cleared his throat and Kurt settled back into the pillows, leaning his head against Blaine's shoulder as he read.

Blaine kept his eyes focused on the pages, gliding along the words, turning the pages with delicacy.

"...Goodnight stars. Goodnight air. Goodnight noises everywhere." He finished, realizing that his voice had become a whisper. He shut the book slowly and turned his head to look at the boy who still leaned on him.

Kurt's eyes were full of shining tears, but he smiled as he met Blaine's gaze.

"Thank you," was all he said, but Blaine didn't need any more words than that. He gathered Kurt up in his arms and just held him until he fell asleep.

The next day, Kurt began coughing again. Nothing that seemed bad, but it was still worrying to Blaine. Kurt insisted he was fine and told him that if he was going to keep asking him if he was okay, that he would have him kicked out.

"I'm fine. Stop worrying and sing with me."

The past few days, Kurt had really begun to miss singing, so Blaine sang with him. They would sing two or three and it always seemed to lift Kurt's spirits and Blaine couldn't deny that it made him feel better too.

Blaine had to leave early today, which he wasn't too happy about, but he had promised the Warblers that he would watch their rehearsal again tonight. The snow had also picked back up, which made him want to go even less, but he felt terrible about finally telling Wes that he wasn't going to go to Regionals with them and he wanted to make it up in some way. He hadn't told Kurt yet that he wasn't going. He wasn't quite ready for that conversation. Or rather, he wasn't ready to be chastised and possibly threatened by Kurt until he went. He had made up his mind that staying with Kurt was more important than going to Regionals and nothing was going to change that.

They got halfway through the song and Kurt began to cough again. Blaine stopped, automatically hovering over him as he wheezed. When Kurt could breathe again, he took a drink of water and made Blaine step back.

"I'm fine. Let's try it again."

"Kurt..." Blaine began, but he was silenced by Kurt's hand in the air.

"Again."

Blaine began to sigh and was about to let Kurt get away with that. But then he thought that stubborn Kurt was still Kurt and Blaine could be stubborn too.

"No."

"No? What do you mean no?"

"You're not singing again."

Kurt opened his mouth, but the look that had appeared on Blaine's face made him groan and press his lips into a fine line of annoyance.

"It's just one song Blaine. It's not going to kill me."

"You're still sick. I'm not taking any chances."

"I'm almost better."

Blaine crawled in next to him. Kurt crossed his arms pointedly across his chest.

Blaine waited.

Kurt sighed.

And he leaned into Blaine's open arms.

"You win. But if I can't sing, I want to hear you sing it."

"Okay."

"And I want you to read me Goodnight Moon again."

"Okay."

"And you need to promise that you won't leave early tomorrow."

He smiled. "You drive a hard bargain, but I accept."

And Blaine took a breath and sung softly to him, their arms loosely draped around each other, Kurt curled into Blaine's body, his head resting on his chest.

Kurt smiled as Blaine finished the song.

"Your voice is unreal. Sometimes I wonder how I got to be so lucky to have you as a boyfriend."

Blaine tightened his grip. "Funny. I was just thinking the same thing."

"I can't sing Blaine. Stupid cough remember?"

"But you're still unreal, cough or not. You ready for the story?"

At Kurt's nod, Blaine pulled out the book and read. Unconsciously, his voice began to soften and as he came to the last page, he found himself whispering again.

He closed the book and placed it on the table by the bed, carefully untangling himself from Kurt's relaxed hold. His eyes were closed and he was breathing in the rhythmic pattern that told Blaine he would be asleep very soon. As he pulled the covers up, he leaned over, and whispered in Kurt's ear as he had every night.

"I love you."

Kurt smiled and opened his eyes a fraction. "I love you too," he whispered back.

Blaine lightly kissed his forehead and then pulled away.

"See you in the morning." He said as Kurt's eyes closed again.

And he headed out to his car, just like he did every night, not knowing that that was the last time that he would talk to Kurt.

30. Silence

The Warblers had had a good practice. It was as if Blaine's mere presence in the room made them do better. Thankfully, because they did so well, Blaine's critiques were few and things that didn't require a lot of redoing, so Blaine was satisfied and Wes was happy enough to let them go in an hour, instead of the two or three that he had planned on. Blaine was very happy about that. He'd passed Burt, Carole and Finn on their way up to see Kurt as he was leaving. He knew Kurt would just be sleeping, but it felt more comforting to have someone there with him. Glancing quickly at the clock, he said his good-byes and was pulled into a quick hug by Wes, who told him to tell Kurt that he was going to have to go to Regionals with Blaine to watch. There would be no excuses allowed because Wes was confident that they were going to at least place top three. Blaine smiled at him and said he'd tell him, and then he pulled his coat more tightly around him, wound up his scarf, and headed out into the snow.

Unfortunately, the good practice did not parallel the weather outside. Snow was everywhere. It was late in December, so it was to be expected, but still. Christmas was in one week and Blaine had been so wrapped up in everything that had been going on, he'd completely forgotten that Christmas was this close. Groaning to himself, Blaine cranked up the heat in his car and backed out slowly, though he knew there would be no other cars in the lot. His windshield wipers went into overdrive as he left Dalton, the thick-falling snow not letting up. He hadn't even gotten a single present for Kurt. In a fleeting surge of guilt, he felt like the worst boyfriend in the world.

Maybe a new scarf. He loved scarves and was always complaining that he didn't have one to match the canary yellow coat he'd found a while ago and hadn't been able to be talked out of buying. Blaine had laughed when he came home with his shopping bags full and proudly strutted around in the yellow coat that could only look good on him. He'd made Blaine try it on after he laughed and Blaine quickly regretted his moment of weakness in laughing at Kurt.

"I meant it in a good way," he grumbled as he stood in front of the full-length mirror, clad in the yellow coat that made him look like a banana with an afro.

Kurt appeared beside him and wound an arm around his waist. Blaine turned to face him and sighed.

"Am I forgiven?"

A devilish look had appeared on Kurt's face as he grinned. "Not yet."

He turned Blaine around so they were both looking in the mirror. Suddenly, in his reflection, Blaine saw Kurt's arm snake out from behind his back and by then, it was too late to do anything because Kurt's other arm held him around the waist tighter. There was a bright flash and it was Kurt's turn to laugh as he released his hold on Blaine, who stumbled back and put his hand over his eyes.

"Kurt, what the hell?" he moaned, trying to sound like he was mad, when in reality, they both knew he wouldn't get upset over this.

He heard Kurt's laugh again and he opened his eyes, seeing Kurt leaning against the dresser, a hand on his hip, and by the fingers of the other hand, he held the strap on which dangled a camera. The boy not forced to wear the banana coat had smiled.

"Now you are forgiven."

It was awful driving in this snow. Nothing but seeing Kurt would make him attempt this. He'd thought about just going back to the hotel, but he remembered he had to tell Kurt what Wes said and he just really didn't feel like sitting in a cold, empty hotel room by himself, which was what was bound to happen because he wouldn't be able to fall asleep. Plus, he kind of wanted to find out if there was anything else that Kurt would want for Christmas. The only colors he could think of at the moment that went with canary yellow were white, black, very dark grey, and navy blue and he could get Kurt a scarf any time. He wanted this Christmas to be special. It was their first Christmas as a couple after all. And he loved any excuse he could find to make Kurt feel extra spoiled. Maybe he could take him out to dinner somewhere nice. Somewhere that required dressing up, as Blaine knew Kurt loved to do. Then maybe they could see a play, share some hot chocolate and hold hands and kiss until their frozen lips were warm again.

Blaine smiled. Yeah, that plan was a lot better than a scarf.

He pulled into the hospital parking lot, thankful for the covered parking garage and got out, brushing off as much snow as he could from the windshield that had survived the wipers before he left. He licked his lips, realizing how dry the weather had made them and thought that he ought to have chapstick with him. Nothing he could do about it now though. He made a mental note to stop by the gift shop in the morning to see if they had any, as the shop had closed at nine.

Without needing to think of where he was going, Blaine let his feet carry him the familiar path to Kurt's floor, mind still wandering on whether there were going to be any tickets left for that play. It was a week before Christmas after all.

He was engrossed in his thoughts and so, he didn't notice right away that something was wrong. He pushed open the door that led to the hallway where Kurt's room was. He looked up, and all thought of presents and plays was drained from his mind.

A single, high-pitched beeping noise filled the hall. Just one noise.

Flatline.

His heart dropped and he broke into a run.

Not Kurt. Not Kurt. Not Kurt.

It was all he could think as his heart pounded in his chest. He almost ran into Burt as the family was bustled out into the hallway. Blaine craned his neck, desperately looking as best he could through the door before he was pushed away by Burt as a nurse politely forced them down the hall. There were so many people. All around Kurt's bed. He hadn't been able to see Kurt. Too many people.

The whining noise seemed to grow louder in Blaine's ears the farther he was forced away. The nurse was saying something to them, but all Blaine could hear was that single note.

Then they were in a room, the nurse said something else, and the door closed and it was suddenly so quiet. Blaine sunk into a chair in the unnaturally empty waiting room. It was eerie. It was creepy. It was haunting.

He registered Finn sitting somewhere near him, the shock and horror frozen on his face.

"He... he was just... he was talking and then he stopped and I turned my back for one second and he was fine and then... then he started breathing really fast and it sounded like he was underwater and he... he tensed up and his hands balled into fists and then he just... his eyes rolled back in his head and he just went limp and... and..."

Blaine knew Finn was rambling because he was still in shock and he was so scared, but Blaine just wanted to scream at him to shut up.

Finn finally did stop talking and then it was so quiet in the room. Burt and Carole hadn't moved from where they had ended up by the door. They were holding each other, silent tears streaking down Carole's face, both staring intently at the door, as if they could will Kurt to just throw it open and strut through, parading around in some new outfit and singing at the top of his lungs.

It was so quiet. It was much too quiet. Blaine wanted to scream and cry and kick and hit anything and everything, just to make some noise. The silence seemed to be pressing down on him, threatening to crush him and there was nothing he could do.

There wasn't anything he could do. He felt so useless, sitting there on the artificially plush chair, not able to do a damn thing but wait. And wait. Wait for what?

He had left Kurt and he had been fine. Had something seemed off at all?

He wracked his brain, trying desperately to remember.

The cough.

Kurt had been coughing. He hadn't been able to finish singing. He had wanted to, but Blaine hadn't let him. Said he wasn't taking any chances. Hadn't let him sing.

All he wanted to do was sing. Blaine hadn't let him.

He bit his lip hard, wanting to draw blood, feeling the pain as his teeth ground down on his lips, cracked and chapped. But there was no blood, not enough anyway. He tasted the metallic sting, bitter and not enough. He lifted a shaking hand to his mouth and ran his finger across his lips. There was no red stain on his finger and he had a fleeting moment of disappointment.

Kurt had been almost asleep when he left. He was gone little more than an hour. But it had taken no longer than that for everything to fall apart.

He couldn't lose him. He couldn't. He loved him. Doesn't that count for anything?

Both of them hadn't had easy childhoods. Both of them had had to find a way to stay strong and proud of who they were, of being gay, even when it seemed like the world was against them in every way possible. They'd both been picked on, harassed, teased, shoved into lockers. They'd both gone to Dalton, seeking refuge and what they'd found had been more than either of them could have ever hoped for. They'd found caring, acceptance, equality, love. Love for the Warblers, love for singing, love for the warm environment around them, love for each other. They'd found each other. It had finally seemed like they'd caught a break. And even when Kurt was diagnosed with leukemia, they'd had each other to make it through the times when it seemed too dark to keep going. Both of them had known that this cancer was serious, that there was a chance of things going badly. But it had always just seemed like 'going badly' would be a longer stay in the hospital, maybe a longer recovery process. Blaine had never thought, or maybe just never wanted to think, that Kurt could die. He'd said it before, told others in moments of worry and fear. But it had never really sunk in. He'd never processed that it could happen. Life was finally fair and they were both happy, even when things seemed bad. It couldn't end like this. It couldn't. Life could not be so cruel. Not when Blaine had finally found the person that he trusted with his everything. Not when Blaine had gotten used to having someone to kiss and hold hands with whenever he wanted. Not when Blaine had fallen in love so deep he didn't know that he could ever resurface. Not when Blaine had found Kurt.

It couldn't have been more than a half an hour, but it felt like Blaine sat, unmoving, jaw clenched, no trace of tears, saying every kind of silent prayer he could think of, hoping, wishing, begging, for so long. His heart was pounding in his chest, his palms were sweating, and he could feel a sickening heat spreading through his body, though his hands tingled and he suddenly felt cold.

The door opened.

He stood, much too fast, and felt the blood rush from his head to pool near his feet. He fought the tidal wave of dizziness that threatened to make him pass out.

He didn't know if it was Kurt's doctor who stood there. He couldn't recall the face of the man who'd been treating Kurt for the past week. But this man was wearing a white coat and he looked like a doctor should, calm and collected and official. He shut the door quietly and took another step in the room.

There was an agonizing silence and then he spoke. He addressed Burt, not meeting the eyes of the distraught teenage boys who were too frozen where they stood to move any closer. But it was silent in the room, and the doctor's voice would have carried even if he spoke in a whisper.

Blaine didn't understand much of what he said. He didn't really need to. It was doctor's terms and fancy names, but they all meant the same thing. The way the man in the white coat spoke was what mattered. He kept his face in a neutral expression and the tone of his voice never changed as he explained what had happened. He spoke calmly, clearly, in a practiced way that made Blaine want to throw up because he'd only ever heard that tone taken by someone when they had to say something that was going to be hard to hear.

"... continued CPR for twenty minutes with the use of an AED..."

Blaine's eyes bored into the doctor's face, begging for this not to be true.

"... no pulse..."

It couldn't be true. This couldn't be happening.

"I'm sorry Mr. and Mrs. Hummel..."

No. Please, god no. Not Kurt. No.

"There was nothing more we could do."

This couldn't be happening.

31. Alone

No no no no no no. Please, oh god, Kurt. No.

That's what should have been going through his mind. He should be crying. Screaming. He should be.

But he didn't.

Wasn't.

Something like a choked sob, wracked with so much pain, fell from Carole's lips and she grabbed onto Burt, holding him and immediately burying her face in his shoulder. Burt stood still, absolutely pale, his eyes locked on the doctor's. His eyes swam with tears and his mouth opened, where he gaped, as if he couldn't breathe. Finn sat back down, letting the air *whoosh* from his lungs. A gasping cry was heard from behind the hand covering his mouth and he squeezed his eyes closed, the tears falling as his body began to tremble.

And Blaine didn't. He didn't cry. He didn't scream. He should. Should, but didn't.

Instead, he calmly strode out the door without looking at any of them. They needed their space; to be together as a family now, however broken it may be. He didn't feel anything. He didn't let himself feel anything. He was the reason Kurt was dead and he didn't deserve to be with them now.

He walked down the hallways, through the endless maze, until he found the elevators and stopped at the cafeteria. He bought a coffee and carried it to a table in the corner, away from the people. The doctors in their lab coats, the nurses and attendants in their scrubs, the husbands and wives and friends, and him. The coffee was scalding hot and he watched the steam rise and curl into smoky clouds, feeling the cold, hard plastic of the chair on his back, hearing the buzz of chatter around him, smelling the disinfectant and the bitterness of the coffee, seeing the dull, eighties colored flecks of blue in the light green tabletop.

It was a full half an hour before someone came to get him. By that time, the inhabitants of the cafeteria had been cleared out and replaced with new ones. Blaine was staring at the untouched coffee cup on the table, the steam having long been gone, now cold.

"Blaine?"

He looked up. Finn stood by the table, body still shaking with uncontrolled tremors, red-ringed and swollen eyes still glazed with unshed tears.

"They're- they're... with him now. I-if you want, you can go and s-say..." Finn broke off, closing his eyes and biting his lip hard to keep from letting out the sob that threatened to break his entire composure.

Goodbye.

That's what Finn was trying to tell him. That he could say goodbye.

He nodded without knowing he did, and wordlessly got up to follow the teenager back the long route he'd come. Blaine had never seen Finn so broken. He doubted he'd ever see anyone this broken again.

Until he saw Carole and Burt. It was heartbreaking. He stopped in the hallway, physically unable to move in the presence of this much pain. He could see into the room, through the open door, where Carole sat, sobbing in a chair, looking like she might not be able to stand. Burt was hunched over the bed, a hand placed on a person lying on the bed unseen from Blaine's view, his cries echoing in the hall. Blaine froze as Finn collapsed in a chair in the hallway, turning pointedly away until he could no longer see the door in any part of his peripheral view, looking like he might lose it again.

He didn't know how long he stood there, but eventually, Burt straightened up and led his wife out of the room with his arms wrapped around her shoulders, staring ahead with a tear-stained face. He set her in the closest chair facing away from the room and walked up to Blaine. A surprisingly strong hand fell on his shoulder. Burt swallowed hard and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Take as long as you need," was his whispered advice, the only thing he could think of to say.

Blaine could only nod and when Burt released him, he walked forward, feeling his heart beat faster. He paused at the door, hand gripping the frame and let out a shaky breath before taking another step.

Even in death, Kurt was beautiful. Agonizingly beautiful. All of the tubes and wires had been removed, the blanket folded neatly at his stomach. His arms laid out on top of the blankets, head resting gently on the pillow, eyes closed. Now, he could be sleeping.

Blaine stared down at him for a very long time, not daring to move, watching Kurt's chest for any, *any*, sign of movement at all. But the color stayed drained from his face, his cheeks sunken and hollow. Finally, he brought a hand up and so slowly, he stroked his fingertips against the porcelain skin of Kurt's jaw. It was cold.

He moved the hand back to his side, swallowing against the lump that had formed in his throat. Before he knew what he was doing, he leaned over and brushed his lips to the unmoving, unfeeling lips of the man he loved.

This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. They were supposed to see the world together, with an apartment in New York, and performing in front of thousands of people. Then, later, when they got older, they'd move into a house somewhere, with a big backyard with the greenest grass anywhere, with a hammock and lemonade. They would adopt kids. As many as Kurt wanted; Blaine really didn't care; they would be loved and cared for and they would be theirs. They would be happy. They were supposed to be happy. They were supposed to live their lives fulfilling their dreams. They were supposed to be together. Blaine loved him. He'd never loved anyone before. And just when he'd thought that his life was going to be perfect, it had all been snatched away. This wasn't how it was supposed to be.

He straightened up. And he couldn't take it anymore. With one last longing stare, he whispered, "I love you Kurt Hummel and I always will," and turned his back to walk out the door.

He stopped and turned to the family that sat huddled together in the cheap hospital chairs, holding each other's hands and talking to a nurse. Carole looked up as he came into view, nudging Burt lightly. He matched her gaze and Burt's eyes softened. He held out a hand, stiffly beckoning him towards them, to grieve with them, to be with them, to be comforted and loved and feel safe.

And he shook his head.

Turning away quickly, he walked back down the hallway and made it to the elevators when Finn caught up with him.

"Hey." Finn cautiously grabbed his arm, but when Blaine didn't pull away, he tightened his grip. "You don't have to go this alone."

Blaine raised his eyes. "I know." He whispered and realized then just how shattered his voice sounded.

Finn released his arm, looking scared and sad and the way his voice sounded almost child-like with the confusion as to why he wanted to leave was almost painful. "Just... just come back with us and we can figure this out okay?"

"Thank you Finn." He pressed the 'down' button on the elevator, retracting his finger slowly, watching the button glow orange. Finn wouldn't understand. "I just need to be alone okay?"

"Where are you going?" His voice was low, worried.

"Dalton. I'll leave my cell phone on, but let Carole know I won't be returning her calls until tomorrow."

"Blaine..."

The elevator made a whirring sound from behind closed doors and with a light, cheery *ding*, the metal doors slid open.

"I'll be okay. Just please tell them that I'll be okay." His words were flat, void of any emotion.

He stepped inside, eyes locking on Finn's. The teen stared at him, not knowing what to do, but fully aware that there was nothing he could say or do to change his mind. So he nodded, which Blaine returned curtly, saying, "Thank you," as the doors closed.

He strode out of the hospital as fast as he could get away with, without running, got in his car and began to drive. The glare of the sun was gone now that it had set, leaving only the gloomy grey clouds, darkening to black in the beginning of the night. A light layer of snow covered the ground. Blaine cranked up the heat, hands gripping the wheel and drove in silence. He thought about turning on the music to drown out his thoughts, but he realized that he hadn't been letting himself think since the doctor had come in the room and he figured that for a little while longer, it would be good to not feel. As he drove, flecks of snow began to plaster his windshield, swiped away by the wipers on the window, but the downfall became heavier as he came nearer to Dalton. It was full on snowing by the time he pulled into the covered student parking lot.

Sighing, he turned off his lights and for a moment, just sat in his car, feeling the heat being sucked away and the coldness invading, until he couldn't stand it any longer and got out. The snow crunched under his worn tennis shoes as he walked, the wind picking up and cutting through his thin jacket. He didn't realize it had been snowing like this. All he'd seen for the past week was the white-washed walls and glaring

lights of the hospital. Pale fingers gripped his jacket closer and he bent his head against the wind, walking briskly. He didn't know where he was going. He'd originally planned to go to the dorms, but he let his feet carry him and when he stopped outside the ornately decorated doors with the large plaque out front, he knew that this was where he wanted to be when he broke down, because he didn't know how much longer he could force himself to not feel anything.

The choir room. He pushed open the doors, which by some miracle were open. He did have the key on him, the one that he'd had since he'd been awarded the soloist role. The small gold key had been given to him so he could practice when he felt like it, but he hadn't been here by himself in a long time. Wes had been given a key just like it when he became the new soloist, with Blaine as the alternate. He still had the key; he didn't know why he kept it. In any case, he was grateful the door was unlocked. He didn't know if he could get his numb fingers to fish it out from his pocket, let alone use the key. The doors fell shut with a soft click and he took a deep breath once inside, almost feeling as if he could inhale the thousands of songs that had filled these walls since Dalton had been built.

He shuddered and with his feet dragging on the shining hardwood floors, Blaine slowly walked to the center of the room. His legs wouldn't support him anymore and he collapsed to his knees, with a soft groan, catching himself on his palms. For an aching moment, his heart just pounded in his chest and his mind yelled at him to not think about it, to protect himself, to not feel this hurt. But he heard a voice and it took him a second to realize that it was himself that had spoken.

"Kurt."

And then he couldn't hold it in any longer.

Deep, shuddering breaths wheezed from his lungs and his trembling fingers spread out against the floor. Tears flowed, hot and stinging, from his closed eyes as he began to sob. He brought his arms up to wrap around himself, pressing so tightly against his ribs.

He cried, not knowing he could feel this kind of pain. He wasn't even sure this pain was real until it was tearing through him. He felt like he was being torn apart from the inside. Crying out, he said Kurt's name louder.

And he screamed. Just screamed, loud and long, not caring who heard, no matter that the walls of the Dalton choir room had been built to be sound-proof, and no one could hear him anyway.

His screams slashed the silent air around him, rebounding and filling his ears where the roaring of the blood in his head hadn't already drowned out all sound. Bending forward, he pressed his forehead to the cold ground and his sobbing yells became agonizing.

This pain would kill him. He knew it. He was prepared to die right then and there, but the relief that death would bring was not so graciously bestowed upon him. His heart would never be whole again. And he was left to feel this incredible pain as long as he lived, radiating in his veins, in his bones, in every pore. He knew this would kill him.

His fingers dug into his skin and he welcomed this pain. This physical pain that would take away from the emotional scars that were slowly being slashed into his core. He couldn't catch his breath and a shattered sob broke through clenched teeth. The tears still poured, going unnoticed now, down his cheeks and onto his shirt.

As his screams turned to moans, he felt his body beginning to shake, tremors wavering horribly down his spine. His hands shook and he clenched them, leading to the dull ache in his muscles. When his moans quieted to sobs, and then finally to shaking breaths, he felt the fire in his throat and heard the hoarse, raw way his voice sounded when he tried to talk. Damn. That was going to hurt like hell in the morning. But he didn't care. He couldn't even think about the rest of tonight, let alone the morning.

Shakily, he pushed himself up, breathing ragged and rough, and stood on unsure legs. He couldn't stay here any longer. It was too quiet, too haunting. Taking a deep breath, he forced himself outside into the cold, where the snow was no longer falling, but he assumed *dumping* would be a more appropriate word. Had he not walked this path every day for so many months, he was sure he would have gotten lost in the swirling snow, but his feet took him to the front doors of the resident dorms without him needing to think about it and he entered, feeling like he stuck out desperately, something he had never felt before at Dalton.

The snow on his jacket and in his hair began to melt right as he stepped into the lobby. The large fireplace was decorated with holly, glistening candles, and silver, red, and gold streamers. There was a huge pine tree, reaching up to the ceiling and it too was meticulously decorated. It was bright, cheery, *happy* here. The warmth surrounded him like a million hugs. And he hated it all.

The throng of boys lounging in front of the fireplace lay sprawled out in comfy red chairs, laughing at some joke, their Dalton blazers all crisp and neatly pressed, which contrasted horribly with his soaked and

wrinkled, thin cotton jacket. One of them, a kid with dark brown hair in layers ending just by his eyes, looked up. He stopped smiling.

Blaine turned his gaze and wrapped his arms around himself again, hurrying away. The laughter was gone now as the boys all followed him with their eyes. The blond haired kid looked like he wanted to say something, but he did not move upon seeing Blaine's expression.

He crossed paths with other boys along the way to his room, some of them he knew, but he avoided every gaze, and they knew better than to try to talk to him now. He wanted to run. He wanted to run so badly, away from the assuming stares, the sympathetic, worried glances, but he couldn't. He was numb. He could barely tell himself to put one foot in front of the other. His jacket was soaking now, the slush sliding from his curls down his forehead and neck. When the elevator doors opened, it was all he could do to make it to his room. He stumbled down the hall, feeling a wave of emotion rush over him. Throwing open the door, he staggered into the bathroom, not bothering to shut the door, letting it swing closed slowly. His knees gave out and met the cool tile with a crack. Ignoring this stinging in his knees, he gripped the sides of the toilet, hanging his head over the bowl. His stomach clenched and then heaved, and he was sick, the bile burning in his already sore throat.

When he was done, he laid his head in the crook of his arm and spat into the bowl, breathing shallowly. His eyes were blurry with tears, though he no longer cried.

"Kurt."

His whispered voice was hoarse, so terribly broken. He swallowed hard, trying to dispel the overwhelming reflex to vomit again. As much as he willed the haunting image to leave his mind, when he closed his eyes, he saw Kurt, lying there on that hospital bed, the life gone so quickly, the touch of his cold skin. It was as if he kept reliving that terrible moment, when he'd first seen Kurt after he'd died.

And Blaine hung his head and threw up again.

After that time, there was nothing left in his stomach to expel, and he moaned weakly, slipping from the toilet onto the floor. His cheek pressed against smooth, cold tile and his eyes closed. He couldn't move. He was so weak, muscles trembling with any attempt at movement, a black haze slowly spreading through his vision. And he welcomed it.

In the blackness, he would feel no pain, physical or emotional, and when he felt the dizzying sensation of his world tipping sideways, he groaned, the nausea creeping up again, so close to the relief of the darkness, and unable to meet it. He actually prayed for it. He squeezed his eyes closed tighter and his fingers grasped at his clothes, trying to hang on to anything he could while he felt like he was falling. He took rasping deep breaths and suddenly, he was lost into blissful unconsciousness, curled in a crumpled, soaking heap on the bathroom floor.

Thump.

Thump. Thump.

Thud.

Blaine's eyes flickered open. His head was pounding. He was so exhausted in every way imaginable.

Creak.

He didn't look up. He wondered vaguely if he even could. Not that he wanted to, as if that would have made a difference. But he heard footsteps in his room and he didn't even care who it was.

"Oh god." A sigh came from somewhere above him, Blaine assumed the doorway to the bathroom, and a moment later, someone was kneeling next to him. He felt a hand on his shoulder, his name whispered soundly.

He didn't answer and instead, opened his eyes, meaning to glare at the intruder, but all he could do was look up and there must have been fear and aching sadness in his eyes, because Wes leaned down and bundled Blaine up in his arms and held him close. Blaine's eyes felt almost swollen shut and he had trouble keeping them open. The light burned.

And his throat hurt so badly. His stomach heaved again.

Oh no.

He scrambled out of Wes's arms and turned his head to lean over the toilet. His hands gripped so hard at the sides of the bowl, beads of sweat pricked on his brow and the sensation of needing to be sick overpowered, and he gagged, but nothing came up. Wes's strong hands rubbed on his back until he stopped heaving and sagged wearily against the toilet.

He felt a hand grip his arm, pulling him up. Wes took most of his weight and they clumsily staggered to the bed. The blond haired boy removed Blaine's shoes and socks and pulled off his snow-damp jacket and pants and Blaine's foggy mind wanted to tell him that he could undress himself, but his muscles wouldn't cooperate to push away his hands. And he was so tired.

Blaine rolled on his side and Wes covered him with the blanket. His eyes closed and Wes moved to sit in the armchair by the window, waiting, watching, listening. When Blaine began to shiver in the hazy dream-like state before sleep, without thinking, he grabbed the blanket from the other bed too.

Kurt's bed.

Kurt's blanket was tucked around Blaine's body, and when he knew Wes had returned to the chair, he turned away from him and his fingers fumbled at the fabric, bringing it close to his face. He gripped the blanket up to his nose, inhaling the scent of Kurt. Silent tears fell from his cheeks. And he fell asleep, clutching the blanket as if his life depended on it.

Blaine tossed and turned in a fitful sleep that night. Wes watched over him anxiously, his head flicking over at every whimpered cry or heavy breath. But he never touched him. Blaine needed sleep, as much as he could get, even if that sleep was invaded with noxious dreams. There was a period where Blaine fell into the stage of REM sleep, where he was quiet and still, his breathing evened out and Wes sighed in relief, his own tired eyes beginning to burn, but he did not close them.

Wes ran a hand through his hair and got up, wincing as the chair creaked, and practically flew to his dorm once he was out of the room. His dorm was not large by any means when compared to the other dorms; however, all of the Dalton dorms were big when compared even to public colleges, but every Warbler seemed to have crammed themselves in. The news had spread fast apparently and Wes was not surprised to see them there. They sat shoulder to shoulder on the bed, a few took up the couch and the armchair, and the rest sat cross-legged on the floor. Every face looked up as Wes entered and they moved aside to

give him room. He sat down heavily on the armchair and held his head in his hands. For a long moment, no one dared to breathe, every face painted with the same expression of upsetting fear and disbelief.

It couldn't be true. The person that had called the phone that Wes had tucked in his pocket was not Finn. The slim silver cell phone didn't have a picture of Blaine and Kurt's smiling faces as the background. The way that Wes looked was just because he was tired. David had seen Blaine in the hall and he just assumed. He made the whole thing up. It couldn't be true. It was a terrible rumor. It wasn't true.

Wes slowly dropped his hands and lifted his head. Every stiff body in the room moved forward unconsciously in an effort to hear him better. He raised his voice as best he could and shakily said, "He's asleep."

He swallowed and closed his eyes, feeling the tears burn. "I... I think he's sick. Well, he was sick. He threw up. He..." Wes took a breath, clenching his hands into fists at his knees. "I found him in the bathroom. I think he passed out. It was like... like he didn't even register I was there."

He bit his lip, almost afraid to tell them, afraid because it would be giving them another reason to worry. Blaine had been the strong one; he had let them know it was going to be okay, even if he didn't feel that way himself. "He's having nightmares. Nothing like before, not yet. I don't know how much worse it's going to get."

His voice broke, angry at the amount of torture his friend was going through, and feeling like he wanted to just curl up and cry at the reason why Blaine was so heartbroken.

A pair of scared eyes turned to him and with a small voice, David whispered, not wanting to know the answer, but unable to help the question falling from his lips. "Does that mean it's true?"

Wes heard own his soft moan and he dropped his head in his hands again, not able to stop the tears this time.

No one needed any other explanation. The rumor that Kurt's cancer had taken a turn for the worse seemed like something that would happen to a person in a movie. They hadn't wanted to believe it. It didn't seem fair. He was only seventeen.

The boys stared at each other with worried, pain-filled faces. And it seemed to hit everyone at once.

Arms wrapped around shoulders, heads bowed with tears streaming down faces, hands clenched, cries and sobs echoed quietly in growing numbers. Some stood still, silent, not moving. And someone sunk to the floor, a great sigh escaping trembling lips.

After a while of this, Wes stood up quiet suddenly, wiping the back of his hand over his eyes.

"I need to go... stay with Blaine." He murmured. "Don't say a word. Stay here. He... he'll tell us to let other people know when he wants to; it's bad enough that all of you know. But do not let anyone else know. And do not go in that room unless I specifically tell you to." His eyes briefly turned cold and hard with the seriousness of the silent threat. He knew before he looked away that no one would dare enter Blaine's dorm.

He nodded, more to himself than anyone, and took a few steps forward. They parted like the Red Sea and holding his head high, he tried to look braver than he felt. He really had no idea what to say to Blaine, but he had been his friend the longest and he knew Blaine better than anyone. He knew what he was about to do would normally piss off the curly-haired soloist. He hoped that now was going to be an exception.

Not bothering to knock, Wes pushed open the door and let himself in, staring as the crack of light on the floor let in from the open door grew smaller and smaller as he shut it. Letting his eyes adjust, he stood there, silent, his hypersensitive ears picking up every little sound. He blinked and slowly felt his way back to the comfy red chair, listening to the tearful moans that had begun to imitate from the shape on the bed.

His heart clenched. He had no idea the pain that Blaine was going through, but he knew that it did not, could not, compare with what he felt. He was so sad, so angry, so hurt, but Blaine's pain was a whole other ballpark. A new ballpark in an entirely different state. He knew Blaine loved Kurt. He'd told Wes many times in late-night visits to each other's dorms, and even just in their normal conversations, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, and in the way he acted around Kurt. Wes thought that Blaine might have even confessed his love for Kurt to him before even Kurt knew. And he couldn't even think about how he would feel if their situations were reversed.

Eventually, the boy's moans turned to periodic soft cries. And soon after that, his heavy breathing stopped. He stopped making any sound at all. Wes's eyes snapped open at the sudden silence. He stared at the bed and saw the shape curl up. He was awake, no longer in his horrid dreams, but forced to live this waking nightmare.

Wes stood and took a hesitant step forward as Blaine shifted, pushed himself up, and sat with his legs dangling off the edge of the bed, the blankets tangled around him. He was still so pale, his hair a mess, eyes puffy and bloodshot. He stared down at the floor, head hanging forward. Wes stopped, brought his feet together, and waited.

After a long time, Blaine spoke, voice low and hoarse, weak from screaming. "Why are you here?"

Wes bit his lip. "I... I found you. I wanted to make sure... you were... okay."

"And what made you think I'd be okay?"

Wes knew the venom in his words wasn't directed at him, but it still hurt. "You were sick. I had to make sure you didn't, I don't know, didn't get hurt."

"Well it's too late for that isn't it?" He spat and looked up, seeing the shock on Wes's face and actually feeling glad that he caused him to look that way.

"Blaine, I know-"

"Don't tell me you know how I'm feeling. Don't you dare."

Wes nodded weakly.

"Who told you?"

He pulled out the cell phone from his pocket, holding it out in front of him. "Finn. I left my music in the choir room and when I went back to get it, this was on the floor. I... I shouldn't have answered it, but he just kept calling and I didn't know where you were. You weren't supposed to be back yet. And he... he told me."

Blaine laughed darkly, a sound that scared Wes more than the nightmares had. "So you're here to what? Comfort me? Tell me it's going to be okay?"

"Tell me what you need me to do." He took a few more steps forward, stopping just in front of where Blaine sat.

He looked up at the dark-haired Warbler and narrowed his eyes. "Bring him back." He snarled and stood up, leaving Wes open-mouthed and more lost than ever, barging into the bathroom and locking the door.

Wes dragged his feet back to the chair and sat, waiting. He heard the water rushing from the faucet and a little while later, turn back off. He did not move until he'd gone five minutes without hearing any other sound from the bathroom. Then he stood and knocked softly. When there was no answer, he pushed against the door and found that it opened easily.

He craned his neck around the door and let himself in. Blaine was on his knees in the middle of the floor, staring at his hands in his lap. Wes let out a deep breath and kneeled next to him, reaching out a hand.

His fingers met the still snow-damp cotton of the t-shirt Blaine wore and Blaine pulled away. He moved until his back met the wall and brought his knees up to his chest, wrapping his arms around his legs.

Wes took in this reaction and instead of forcing Blaine to open up to him, he lowered the lid of the toilet and sat down on it, resting his hands on his knees.

"I'm not going to say that I know how you feel, because I don't. I can't even begin to imagine what you're going through right now. But Kurt was my friend too and this is hurting all of us. We're all hurting, we're all in pain and we're all confused because we don't know how to deal with this. The closest I've had to this kind of thing was my second cousin. Drunk driver. She was twenty-eight. And I was seven when it happened, so I don't really even remember her or... that day. But that can't compare with this. It doesn't even come close." His voice had gotten lower and now he almost whispered.

Blaine looked up. "Does that mean everyone knows?"

Wes nodded carefully, knowing that 'everyone' was reserved to the Warblers. "They figured it out. They're all in my dorm right now. I'm sorry. I didn't want them to know until you wanted to tell them and-"

"No. It's better that they know. And not from me because I don't think I could've told them anyway."

"Blaine, I..." He hesitated, eyes darting around for a moment before meeting the dark-haired boys' gaze. His voice was a true whisper now as he felt the tears beginning to prick in his eyes. "I'm sorry."

Blaine looked pointedly at the ceiling, blinking harshly to dispel the tears. "I'd do anything." His voice was small and his hands around his knees clenched. "I'd do anything if he... if he didn't have to-" He broke off,

swallowing hard and brought his gaze down to his hands. "I'd give up singing forever. I'd go back to my old school and never set foot here again. I'd be straight. If I had to go my entire life never knowing he existed, never holding his hand, never even knowing him as a friend, never... never loving him, I'd do it. Wes, I'd die if that meant he could live."

He pressed his face into his knees, the uncontrollable tears falling. Wes bit his lip, feeling the tears in his eyes becoming harder to ignore, and blinked once, allowing the tears to fall, streaking down his cheeks as he got up and once more kneeled beside Blaine. He reached out and wrapped his arms around him, holding him so tightly as Blaine buried his face in Wes's shoulder without a second thought. Blaine sobbed into Wes, his hands gripping at the material of Wes's t-shirt in a frantic need to feel *something* other than this unbearable hurt. And Wes pulled him even closer, the tears forgotten as he tried so hard to hold Blaine close, to hold Blaine together, as he knew he felt like he couldn't do it on his own.

"I know." Wes murmured and he knew that Blaine would stay true to any of his offers. He'd give up his entire life in a heartbeat, and it killed Wes to watch his best friend suffer. "I know you would. I know."

And Blaine cried, until he felt like his swollen throat might just close up entirely and he would suffocate, which, in the back of his mind, he thought he might not mind so much. He slumped into Wes, who kept holding him and began to rub his hand on his back. And that just reminded Blaine of when he did that for Kurt when he was sick, and when Kurt did that for him when he was in the hospital. And he bit back a sob. His cries quieted and Wes pulled away slowly, feeling Blaine's hands tense at his back in the need to have someone there. Wes lightly gripped Blaine's shoulders as Blaine's hands fell away from his body and onto his lap and he was silent for a while until Blaine met his eyes.

"Are you hungry at all?" Wes asked, addressing him carefully, like one might speak to a small child.

He shook his head.

"Are you sure? You haven't eaten in..." Wes glanced at his watch. "Blaine, its been almost ten hours since... you got here." Wes caught himself just in time before he mentioned Kurt's name. He sighed. "You need to eat something."

"I'm not hungry."

"Would it help if I ate with you? Or brought you something? You don't have to go out there."

"I don't want anything."

Wes knew that Blaine just wanted to be alone, but in all honesty, he was scared to leave him by himself. Blaine was in a dark place and was still feeling so many emotions, most of them overpowering hurt and exhaustion, and he was worried Blaine might do something to hurt himself, intentionally or not.

"Okay." He thought for a moment and then gently loosened his grip on the boy's shoulders. Blaine sighed and sat back on his knees, wrapping his arms around his own waist tightly. Wes pulled out his cell phone and sent a text to David, knowing he was still in the dorm.

He's upset. Doesn't want to be around anyone. -W

David's reply came almost instantaneously.

Understandable. I feel awful. You coming out? -D

No. I'll stay with him. You guys can leave. Just don't come here. -W

It's Saturday. I'm not going anywhere when Blaine needs me. -D

Another text followed that one quickly.

No one else wants to leave either. We want to help. Just tell us what to do. -D

Wes bit his lip. He should have known none of them would want to leave and that they'd want to do anything they could for him, especially David.

Thanks. I'll let you know, but now, he's just needs time. -W

Okay. Please, let me know if anything... changes. -D

His hand clenched around his phone. David wanted to know if he was going to do anything that could end badly. Losing someone was never easy, but when it was someone your best friend, someone you loved on an intimate level, it was shattering.

I'll keep an eye on him. I won't let him do anything. -W

I know you won't. Take as long as you need. Does the school know? –D

Not sure. They'll tell them when they're ready. –W

Blaine looked up, eyes bloodshot and watery, face pale. He was still shaking. He looked sick; he looked broken.

"I'd... I'd like to take a shower now." He said in a wavering voice.

Wes tilted his head, gauging him, and then replied, "Okay. Fifteen minutes and I'll come check on you."

Blaine began to push himself up off the wall, hands splayed against the smooth surface to steady himself.

"I don't need you to-" He closed his eyes momentarily and opened them quickly, "babysit me. I'm fine."

The blond-haired boy nodded in agreement, but only to stop Blaine from getting mad. Wes moved to the shower and turned the knob, adjusting the spray of water until it was warm, but not hot, then pulled out a towel from the cupboard and set it on the sink. With a small smile that he hoped was reassuring, Wes left him. Blaine met his gaze, but did not smile. The door shut with a soft click and though Wes had promised himself that he would not leave Blaine alone, he quietly ran from dorm 237 across the hall to 254, letting himself in and closing the door behind him.

The scene that met him was one of tense anticipation. All fourteen pairs of eyes turned to stare at him, mixed emotions in everyone's gaze. David stepped forward, close to his best friend.

"Wes?"

His voice was soft, cautious, and he reached out a hand to rest on Wes's forearm.

Wes looked down, tears still sparkling on his eyelashes and he didn't bother wiping them away. He heard his name again.

"Wes?"

He looked up. The hand on his arm gripped tighter, pulling him out of his trance. David's eyes held fear, the only place that showed any emotion. His face was set in a stony calm. Wes blinked once and suddenly David's arms were around him. Wes did not cry, not again, but he let himself slump into the arms of his

best friend. He had to be strong for Blaine, but he could find comfort and he could let himself be weak here.

Neither boy said anything for a long time and then Wes pulled away, straightening up to glaze his eyes around the rest of the Warblers.

Blaine stood in the shower, letting the water run over him. He just stood. Everything hurt. He briefly wondered if he could drown in a shower, but he remembered the drain and no, the water wouldn't do that.

He didn't remember how he got on the ground. He must have sat down, but he was there now and he knew he wouldn't be able to get back up. Tired eyes stared at the wall in front of him as he huddled in the corner, the water pouring down his naked body. He hated everything. Why was Kurt dead, while he was still alive? Kurt had never, *never* done anything to deserve this. And Blaine had taken care of him. He'd tried. But it hadn't been enough. He'd gotten sick. Infection. Not your fault, they'd say. You couldn't have done anything, they'd croon. But he'd promised to protect him, and he hadn't. He said he loved him, but it hadn't been enough. And that's what lovers did. They'd be there for each other. Always. So why had Kurt been taken away? What had he done to deserve this? Was it because they were gay? Was it because Blaine was finally happy? Was it because Kurt was an atheist? Was it because torturing Kurt's family with losing his mother and almost losing his father wasn't enough? How could the world be so cruel? Maybe there was no point in living. Maybe this was hell.

The water had begun to get colder. And he didn't move. He wrapped his arms around himself and laid his cheek against the cold wall. Maybe if he stayed here long enough, he'd figure out the reason that Kurt laid dead on that hospital bed and he was here, alive, but not really, unable to move in this dream-like state of torture, praying that when he woke up, it would all go back to how it was supposed to be.

Everyone was in various stages of grieving. Some still cried, some looked lost, some seemed angry, and on others, a mask of calm covered their real emotions, hiding them from the world.

"I don't know if there's anything else we can do." Wes said softly. "He's hurting and I don't know how long it'll be before he's anywhere near ready to see anyone. I really think he needs to eat though because he hasn't eaten since he got here and I'm sure he didn't eat for a long time before that, but he said he didn't want anything. I don't know though. He should eat right?"

The heads around him nodded.

"Well... okay, maybe someone could bring something in a little bit? I really don't care what. I'm going to call Finn after this. Blaine's in the shower right now. I'm assuming he'll want to sleep after he gets out, but I'm going to try and get him to eat."

Wes's voice had been getting smaller as he spoke and he knew it would be a waste of time to try and get Blaine to eat anything, but he knew if he didn't, he'd feel guilty for not at least trying. David sensed that Wes was not wanting to talk anymore, so he cleared his throat and spoke aloud to the group.

"Okay guys. It looks like that's all we can do for now. If Blaine wants to see us, he'll ask. Wes is going to get more information from Finn soon and he'll text it to me, which I will relay to you all if you care to hear it. For now, everyone wipe your tears and head down to the lounge. I'll say we have an emergency Warblers meeting or something so no one will bother us. But in case people see us, we can't look like we just went through hell and back, no matter how true that might feel right now. We need to be strong for when everyone else finds out, which they will when Ku-" David took a deep breath. "When his family is ready to tell everyone. Blaine needs us to be strong for him. Alright?"

Mumbled agreements rippled through them and David opened the door, shoos them out and telling them he'd meet them in a little bit. When they were gone, David turned to Wes.

"Are you okay man?"

Wes met his eyes and let out a deep sigh as he sunk onto the couch. "I just don't know what to do. He's... he's so... broken. I can't watch him suffer like this. It's heartbreaking. And it still hasn't really sunk in you know? That he's gone." His voice was a whisper now. "I mean, we all knew it might happen, but..."

"It never seemed like it could happen to him." David finished and Wes nodded.

"It's not fair. They loved each other. Blaine told me he loved him. I could see it. The way he acted around him, the way he talked to him, the way he held his hand so proudly. It... it's not..." he sighed. "Love like that doesn't come around very often. And now he's gone."

David moved to sit next to Wes, put an arm around his shoulders and squeezed gently. "It's going to be tough on everyone. But Blaine is going to need a lot of time and a lot of help to get through this and we're going to do whatever we can and whatever he needs us to do. Our main priority right now has to be that we make sure he doesn't hurt himself. Depression is a hard stage to get through and it'll take time, but you need to make sure he's not going to do anything to hurt himself. You. He trusts you. You need to do this Wes. If you need to sleep or anything, text me and we can switch off, but I know he's not going to react well if I'm there, so it'd be best to do it when he's sleeping and when he wakes up, I'll have you come back."

"You're his friend too-"

David shook his head softly. "You're the one who found him. You're the one who's been with him this whole time. He needs some sense of stability right now and switching off people is going to feel like abandonment. You said he was taking a shower?" At Wes's nod, he immediately said, "It's been long enough. He could be done by now. Go back and just let him do what he needs to do. Be there for him. But try to get him to eat something. I'll have some of the guys bring up some stuff and leave it outside of the door. Now go."

"David, you should be doing this, not me. You know so much more about this than I do..."

He shook his head again. "I look like I'm fine, but inside, I'm a mess and I know that if I take one look at the pain that I'm sure is on his face, I'm going to lose it. It was hard enough seeing my grandma deal with depression when my grandpa died. You're strong Wes. Stronger than me and I know you can do this. I'd get a teacher or something, but if it were me, the last thing I'd want would be a teacher trying to get me to deal with this. It'd feel like depression therapy." He met Wes's eyes with something that hadn't been there before. Voice a whisper, the desperation flashed. "Please. You're all he has right now."

Wes nodded, determination pulsing through his veins. He was going to get Blaine through this. At least until everyone else knew. He was sure that when news got around, the school guidance counselor would be the first one at Blaine's door and then he could get the help he needed. But for now, Wes was going to be the person he could count on, even if he didn't realize it yet.

He stood up and both boys nodded and went their separate ways. Wes pushed open the door and went straight to the bathroom, knocking quietly. The water was still rushing, but he didn't hear any other sounds. Not good.

He nudged the door open and stuck his head in. Blaine's clothes were strewn on the floor. The steam had fogged up the mirrors and the sliding glass door of the shower. He could see a figure on the floor in the shower. Oh god.

"Blaine?" His voice squeaked in panic and his eyes darted back and forth. Upon receiving no answer, he rushed up to the door, pressing his hands on the glass.

"Blaine!" He said it louder. There was no way he didn't hear him now. "Blaine, are you hurt? Say something!"

No answer.

That was it. Modesty be damned. Wes slid open the shower door and reached in to turn off the water, but not before it had drenched his upper body. The water had turned cold. He grabbed the towel by the sink and unfolded it, quickly wrapping it around Blaine's naked form.

"Can you hear me? Oh god, I never should have left. Blaine, please! Listen to me! Do you know where you are?"

Wes held Blaine close, bundling the towel up around him and he realized Blaine was shaking. How long had he been sitting under that freezing water? A strong hand gripped Blaine's jaw and turned his face up. Blaine's eyes reluctantly followed until he was forced to stare at the brown eyes looking back at him.

"Answer me. Blaine. Can you hear me?"

His words sounded far away. He was so tired. But Blaine nodded. Relief washed over the blond-haired boy's face.

"God, what the hell were you thinking?" Wes mumbled, ebbing panic making his voice crack, his heart thudding back into a normal rhythm. "Can you stand?"

After a pause, Blaine murmured, "Yes," and Wes wrapped one of his arms around Blaine's waist, pulling him up and leading him out of the bathroom. He lowered him gently onto the bed and began to rifle through drawers, yanking out underwear and pajama pants. He held them out.

"Do you need help?" He asked, voice unwavering. In any other situation, he would have thought he was crazy to dress Blaine, but now, he just didn't care anymore.

Blaine's answer came in a quiet, "No," so Wes moved to the other side of the room and faced the wall, waiting until he heard confirmation that it was okay to turn around.

"Do you want to talk?" Wes asked when Blaine was lying in bed.

"There's nothing to talk about."

Wes sighed. A moment later, a knock was heard and he got up quickly to answer it. As he expected, no one was there when he opened the door, but what he wasn't expecting was the amount of food that had appeared on Blaine's doorstep. There were countless plates piled high with what looked like one of everything from the Commons and a note was on the floor.

Sorry about all the food. They really want to help and we didn't know what he wanted.

Despite everything that was going on, Wes smiled at the gesture and grabbed a bag of breadsticks because he knew Blaine liked them, a bottle of water, and some cookies before retreating back into the room.

"You need to eat something." He told the still form on the bed, holding out the offerings. "And if you don't want this, then there's plenty other choices outside. But, please, Blaine. You need to eat."

"Not hungry."

"Blaine-"

"Please don't start. I can't eat. Not when he's..." He closed his eyes in pain and when he spoke again, his voice cracked. "Not when he's lying dead on some table. I can't get it out of my head."

Wes lowered his hands, sitting in the armchair closest to the bed, where he could still see Blaine's face. He broached this subject carefully, but if he could get Blaine talking, it was a good start. As much as it hurt, it

was better to have those emotions be shared. Keeping them bottled up inside could lead to disaster. "Can't get what out of your head?"

"Him. Every time I close my eyes, I see him on that goddamned bed and I just... I keep thinking that this is all a dream. Like I'm going to wake up and he'll be here. Like my heart hasn't been torn out. I'm never going to... I'll never see him again. He's gone." Blaine stumbled on a choking gasp and he closed his eyes. "Kurt's dead."

Wes's heart wrenched at the blunt statement.

"Don't tell me it's not my fault. I prayed every damn day. I would have given anything. I would have done anything. But I didn't do enough."

Blaine knew in his heart that what he said wasn't true. He had done everything he could and Wes knew that. Hell, he knew that, but he was hurting so much that he had to blame someone. And it was easiest to blame himself.

"Blaine," The word was almost a whisper. "He loved you. He told me. Many times actually. I know you'd have done anything. And he knew it too. It's going to be hard, but you'll get through this."

Blaine kept his eyes closed and Wes heard a soft sob.

"I'll be right here if you need me for anything. Anything. And David will be here too."

Wes let Blaine be after that, let him sleep. When he heard the quiet sounds of Blaine's rhythmic breathing, he got up and grabbed the towel from the dorm floor and hung it up to dry after running it over his damp hair. He gathered Blaine's clothes and folded them and when he got to the pants, he felt a significant weight. His hand fished in the pocket and pulled out the cell phone that he'd given back to Blaine. The screen flashed. His eyes darted to the phone. He'd meant to just put it on the bedside table, but a new window popped up and he read the text before he could stop himself.

Blaine, please call me. Mom and Dad are so scared that something happened to you. I'm scared. Call me. I can't hold them off much longer. -F

This intrigued Wes. He looked above the screen and saw a flashing icon on the top. He clicked a button.

14 missed calls.

16 missed texts.

3 voicemails.

It wasn't right to read any of the other texts, but he had to put Finn's mind at ease, or at least calm him down. He closed the bathroom door halfway so he wouldn't disturb Blaine and pressed the call button. He waited.

"Blaine!" The answering voice had spoken before the first ring had even ended.

"No, this is Wes. Is this Finn?"

"Yeah. Why do you have Blaine's phone? Where is he?"

"He's sleeping. I saw the text and thought I should call."

"He's at Dalton?"

"Yeah."

"Good. I thought... maybe he, I don't know." He broke off in a shaking breath. "Do... do you... I mean, have you-"

"I know. Finn, I'm so sorry."

There was a short pause. Wes heard sniffing and when Finn spoke again, his voice was thicker.

"Yeah."

"Blaine's having a hard time. We all are. The Warblers figured it out. They're the only other people who know. Are your parents going to call the school?"

"I think so. Maybe in a day or so... when, you know, when they're not... when they can think again."

"Is there anything you can tell me?"

"I don't know. I mean, I'd like to talk to Blaine."

"I can tell him to call you when he wakes up, but there's no guarantee that he'll actually do it."

"Yeah, alright. Umm... thanks."

"Yep. Just... hang in there okay? Things will get better."

"Yeah, okay." The sigh was heavy. "So have him call me?"

"Sure thing."

He hung up quickly, moving to what was now his 'go-to' chair near Blaine's bed, feeling as though he had invaded some private moment. But at least Finn knew Blaine was safe.

Wes was worried. Blaine had been almost unresponsive when he first found him, and again in the shower. It had to be depression and he knew Blaine was in pain and probably some sort of shock. It hadn't even been twenty-four hours since they'd found out. He knew it would take time before Blaine would even begin to be okay again, as David had said. Maybe he should tell the guidance counselor about this....

Blaine had fallen asleep quickly and the room was steadily growing brighter as the sun began to rise. Wes's eyes were burning. God, he needed to sleep. He blinked slowly. And again, more slowly. At every blink, his eyes stayed closed for longer intervals, hoping he'd get rid of the stinging sensation. His eyes slid shut again and he slumped in the chair. And then... nothing.

Wes opened his eyes, blinking in the harsh light leaking through the windows. He moved slowly, sleepily and then his gaze landed on the bed. The now-empty bed.

Fuck. He shot up, heart stuttering into overdrive as he stared at the place where Blaine should have been. It was late in the afternoon.

God, could today get any worse? Wes silently cursed, mostly in frustration at himself. He'd been trying to fix things and it just seemed like everything was going wrong. He knew he should have let David stay with Blaine earlier; he should have called the guidance counselor in as soon as he knew what had happened; he should have let someone else handle this instead of trying to do it all on his own. He knew he couldn't handle this, but he'd tried to anyway and look what happened.

He groaned and checked the bathroom and upon seeing it was empty, went out into the hall. The first thing he did was quickly call David, telling him to meet him alone outside. A few seconds later, David appeared and pulled Wes aside.

"Dude, what happened?" His eyes held worry.

"Have you seen Blaine?"

"No. Why?"

"He's..." Wes ran a hand over his hair nervously. "I fell asleep. I don't know how long I was out, but it was a while and when I woke up, he was gone. He's not in his room."

David sighed. "He couldn't have gone very far. Should we have everyone search?"

"God, I don't know. What do you think?"

"Dalton's big, but not that big that we need everyone to look." David stuck his head in the door and told the gathered Warblers to spend the afternoon however they wanted. He knew that they would all stay there, together, but he wanted to give them the option. He turned back to Wes. "Let's go. Check the choir room first. I'll take the library. Go to the Commons after that and call me if you find him."

Wes nodded and started walking hastily, almost flying down the stairs. He wanted to run, but he made himself walk. No need to draw attention to himself, never mind that his Dalton blazer was discarded on the floor of Blaine's dorm and he was sure his hair was a mess.

Luckily, he didn't need to go very far. The choir room was empty and on his way to the Commons, he spotted a boy with dark hair sitting under a large tree, easy to spot in the snow-covered grounds. Wes should have been cold, but adrenaline was coursing in his veins and he did not feel the brisk air around him. There were groups of people outside today, throwing snowballs or sliding down random hills with

makeshift sleds. He breathed a sigh of relief and called David, who said he'd meet them as soon as he could, but Wes interrupted and asked him to meet them in the lounge in half an hour.

Wes slowed his gait and walked over to where Blaine sat, his back up against the tree. He barely acknowledged that Wes had lowered himself down beside him. Wes didn't say anything, didn't look at him, just sat in the snow without a second thought. He stared straight ahead, as Blaine was. It was a rare sight to see the bright sunlight, especially after the downpour of snow the day before.

It seemed to be a long time, but Blaine sighed deeply and turned his head towards his friend. Wes looked over at him, and then his eyes fell on the object in Blaine's hands.

"Goodnight Moon."

Blaine cleared his throat. "Yeah. It was Kurt's favorite when he was little. His mom read it to him."

Wes felt his gaze soften as Blaine's eyes briefly closed when he said Kurt's name.

"How long have you been out here?"

"A while." Blaine mused, as he ran his hand over the smooth cover of the book, the warm colors glossy in the reflective sunlight. The icy breeze picked up, blowing dark curls around Blaine's face. He looked up, staring through the naked, claw-like branches to the clear grey sky.

"Blaine," Wes began softly, starting to shudder at the cold. He was dressed in only his white button down shirt, tie, and uniform pants. And Blaine's outfit was no better suited for the weather. "You should get inside. It's cold out here."

"I can't do this Wes." He sighed after a pause, ignoring the request to go inside.

"I know." His hand closed over Blaine's, set on the hard surface of the book. "No one's expecting you to. Not yet at least. You're allowed to be sad Blaine. You're allowed to grieve."

Blaine was silent after that. But then his hand tightened around Wes's. With an encouraging smile, Wes returned the grip, wanting him to know he was there for him. "You have all of us Blaine. We're all here for you. For however long you need."

"There's just so much I feel right now," he said slowly. "So many... emotions. It's like they're all pressing down on me trying to get out and I don't know whether to cry or scream or run away or not think at all or laugh because I think I'm going to explode at any moment."

A sympathetic look came over Wes's face. "It's a lot to deal with. No one blames you for anything."

Blaine looked down, running a hand up and down the book cover affectionately.

"I'm so sorry." Wes said, his voice strong and sure. "I can't even tell you how much I miss him right now."

Blaine closed his eyes. The wind blew harder, making their hair fly around their foreheads.

"Thank you Wes." He spoke gently, not knowing how he could possibly be this calm. He shouldn't be calm right now. But it was like he had cried all his tears and screamed until he didn't have anything left, and right now, he just felt numb. "I miss him too. I miss him so much."

In the silent moments after that, the peace of the abnormally sunny snow day began to disappear. The snow started to fall again in a mild, lazy drift.

"I'm going to go inside now." Blaine said, getting up as Wes followed him up.

Wes nodded. "How long has it been since you've eaten anything?"

He shrugged, but did not refuse food as he had before.

"Alright. First thing's first, we're getting you some food. Any preference?"

"Whatever you're having is fine."

Wes gave him a lopsided smile. Finally he could get that boy some food. He followed Blaine through the softly falling snow back to the lobby of the dorms. Blaine needed time. He expected that; they all knew that. He knew that Blaine knew that, but it was still hard to see him like this, so broken, and Wes had no idea how to even begin to pick up the pieces. Putting them back together was going to be a whole other story.

The administration knew that day. Burt had called the school. And the news had spread fast. Someone had found out from a teacher, or someone had noticed the Warblers were huddled together in the single dorm or heard a snippet of their conversation and figured it out.

Everyone knew Kurt was sick.

No one had expected him to die.

But it didn't matter how everyone found out. They knew now and in the next few hours, it had seemed that a haze had spread over the school. There were no students outside, which was normal when the dark sky was a prelude to a full-blown snow storm. But now, it just seemed like the school had fallen under a spell. The majestic buildings were covered in a light dusting of white, as though the buildings themselves were ghostly. Students milled around in the lounges or the hallways, not really knowing what to do or say to each other. Everyone had known Kurt, whether as friends or classmates or just as 'that Warbler,' but they all knew his face, had all heard his name.

Blaine sat in the large red chair directly in front of the fireplace, his Dalton jacket hanging open on his torso, his tie loosened and limp. He stared into the crackling, jumping flames of the fire that created a dizzying kaleidoscope of orange flashes on his pale face. His warm, hazel eyes seemed grey and dull in the low light. People avoided him like the plague. They stood pointedly in little groups away from the fireplace, whispering as if they thought he couldn't hear. He wasn't paying attention anyway, but he didn't have the energy to tell them that he wasn't going to yell at them just for being near him. Then Wes and David joined him, sitting in chairs on either side of his.

They talked to each other and to him and he mainly listened to their witty conversations, not feeling ready to talk about anything really. If he did reply, he spoke softly in short, one-worded fragments, and soon they stopped asking him questions or waiting for his opinion and they turned the conversation to each other, but didn't leave Blaine. Eventually, all of the Warblers crowded around them, talking and laughing and being their normal fun-loving, albeit a bit crazy, selves. Blaine stayed out of the way, feeling that he needed to stay, that his presence was required, even if all he did was sit there. He didn't want to be there, but at least, if he was out in semi-public, then he wouldn't get forced to be around people who could 'keep an eye on him'. The Warblers kept throwing covert glances in his direction, which he avoided as best he could. He felt bad about ignoring them, especially because it was the one group of people that he would have wanted to be around, if he hadn't not wanted to just curl up into a ball and sleep forever.

The grand, intricately decorated gold clock hanging above the fireplace struck 5 P.M. Two short gongs rang out. The sound echoed in Blaine's ears like a death toll. He blinked, refocused the blurring light from the fireplace in his eyes. He could hear the conversation of the other boys, dimmed to a buzz. There was a movement he saw out of the corner of his eye. Or rather, a *not* movement. Wes had stopped talking to the group. Blaine was almost painfully aware of the way he stared at him, a soft expression on his face and sadness in his eyes.

Blaine turned his head slowly, barely glancing up at Wes.

"You're tired Blaine." He stated softly.

Blaine didn't respond to that. He didn't feel tired. He felt numb.

Wes stood and put his arm around his waist, gently dragging Blaine up, who went without protest. The Warblers glanced at them, but something in Wes's face made them not say anything, and they went back to their conversations.

"Come on." Wes said, using the same tone that he might use to address a child.

Blaine followed, letting Wes's secure grip lead him along the path he'd traveled for years to his dorm. And truthfully, he was glad for the comfort of Wes's arm around his waist.

As they walked down the long halls, Wes's voice was in his ear. "I thought you might want to get away from them for a little bit. Well, not *them* themselves, but *them* in general. It must be hard to be around people right now."

"Thanks." He replied as they entered Blaine's dorm, grateful for the observance of his best friend.

Wes leaned against the doorway as Blaine moved carefully to sit on his bed.

"You should know I talked to Finn. I found your phone when I was cleaning up and there were a lot of missed calls and I knew Finn wanted to at least knew you were okay... I did it without thinking. I know I shouldn't have done it without asking you first, but..." He trailed off lightly and then picked it back up. "I told him you'd call when you're ready. I don't want to rush you or anything, but it sounded important."

Wes couldn't see Blaine's face, so he didn't know if his gaze changed. But the voice that answered was steadily controlled. "I'll call him. Thank you."

"Do you want any food or anything? I can get something from the Commons."

He shook his head. "No. That's okay."

A disbelieving look passed over his face. "Alright. But know that I'm not going to let you starve. I'll bring you something in a few hours." Wes straightened up, hands in his pockets. "I can stay with you. If you'd like."

Blaine took a deep breath. If someone was going to stay with him, he would have wanted it to be Wes, but as much as he wanted the company, he equally felt the desire to have everyone leave him to himself. "Thank you. But I'd just like to be alone right now."

Wes nodded empathetically. "Call me if you need anything." His gaze turned serious. "Anything Blaine. I mean that."

And then he was gone, the door closing shut behind him.

He needed to call Finn. He really did. And if he didn't do it now, he didn't know when he would. He just wanted to sleep and he was sure that he would forget about Finn's call when he woke up, so reluctantly, he picked up his cell phone and dialed.

"Hey."

Caller ID had alerted Finn to who it was, but the tired, cautious tone he used was unfamiliar to Blaine. It made this situation all the more real and it made him want to just hang up and throw his phone out the window.

"Hey. Wes told me to call."

"Yeah." He paused and when he spoke again, his voice was even softer. Blaine heard rustling noises in the background and then the telltale *click* of a door shutting. Finn was retreating to his room and Blaine's sensed heightened. This couldn't be good if Finn was hiding.

He didn't speak; he waited for Finn to start, though inside, he was screaming at himself to yell at Finn to just spit it out. The sooner this was over, the sooner he could go back to not feeling.

A sigh came from the other end of the line. And then he spoke. "I went home a few hours after you did. Mom and Dad stayed for a long time. I just couldn't be there anymore. Are you okay?"

The sudden question surprised him. No. He wasn't okay. And he knew Finn was just trying to help, but his dancing around the topic was beginning to perk Blaine's recent short fuse of annoyance. "What did you need to tell me?"

"He... he had a... a will, I guess that he made at some point; I don't know when, but he did. And he wanted to be... to be buried next to his mom. It's not far from our house and they're having the... funeral arrangements made for next Saturday." By this point, Finn's voice was thick and he was having a hard time getting through the sentences. Blaine didn't stop him; just let him say what he needed to. He could hear it in his voice that he was openly crying. And Blaine steeled himself. Finn was breaking.

But he couldn't.

Not yet.

"I know you don't want to talk about this, but it would mean a lot if you maybe could sing something at the..." He trailed off.

Blaine froze. He couldn't even think about that right now.

"Just... just think about it okay? He told us so many times how much he loved your voice." He stopped and after a while, Blaine was about to say something, but Finn began again, "My mom said you're welcome here. Any time you need to. Door's always open. For anything."

"Yeah. Okay. Thanks Finn."

Silence on the other end, and Blaine imagined Finn nodding. "Well, okay then. So call if you need anything? And my mom really wants to see you. She feels like we pushed you away and... we didn't mean it Blaine."

"Of course you didn't. Tell her I just needed some time alone. Tell her that okay? And tell her thank you and I love you. All of you. I'll come over on Friday okay?"

"Mhmm." Finn sighed. "Thanks. See you then."

"Sure thing. Bye."

And the conversation was over, ending as easy as if he'd called and asked if he could borrow his headphones.

The funeral was next Saturday. One week before Regionals. Three days before Christmas. Three days before what was supposed to be their first Christmas together.

Blaine set his phone within reach on the bedside table, stripped off his very wrinkled Dalton jacket, tie, and shirt, slipped off his shoes and socks, and laid his pants out over his jacket. He crawled into his bed after turning out the light and laid there for a moment in the dark. Then he was overcome with a sudden desire and moved off the bed.

He strode carefully to the bed opposite him, feeling his heart pound with every footstep. He reached out and brushed his hand along the comforter, bed neatly made courtesy of housekeeping. Anger flared through him in the thought of someone else having touched this bed. But then it was gone and he pulled back the covers, settling himself in with a delicacy he didn't think he could have possessed right now.

He pulled the blankets up to his chin, feeling the soft fabric lying gently over his boxer-clad body, feeling the coldness of the sheets that had not been used in a while settle on his skin and send a chill up his spine. He swallowed hard and turned his head, face down into the pillow, where he inhaled deeply, trying to take in any scent at all that was Kurt. He smelled tangerines, like his shampoo. He smelled the cologne he sometimes wore. He smelled his own cologne, as he had laid here with Kurt before. And the tears welled in his eyes and he cried, feeling the hole in his chest being etched out deeper. He clutched at the blankets around him. Kurt's blankets. Praying that somehow, he could feel closer to him. That he wouldn't feel alone. He cried and he was alone, utterly alone, and eventually, he fell into an exhausted sleep, lulled by the familiar scent of Kurt around him, imagining that those scents wrapped around him were Kurt's arms, and that he was protected and loved and that Kurt was with him.

Tonight, he did dream.

He was surrounded by snow. It was cold. He frowned, realizing he was only wearing a t-shirt and jeans. Looking around revealed that he was alone, other than the huge pile of snow he seemed to have been dropped upon. There were random trees with bare branches that reached out into the dark sky. He didn't know where he was. It was cold and he just wanted to be somewhere warm.

He walked, on and on and on. Forever. He was never going to get anywhere. He was going in circles. He was hopelessly lost. Can you get lost if you're already technically lost? It didn't make much sense that he'd get lost if he didn't know where he was in the first place. Right?

He was shaking. He was so cold. His body was freezing up, muscles uncoordinated and every movement jerky. He swallowed, licking his dry lips, watching as the white cloud puffed out in front of him when he released a deep breath through his nose. His arms wrapped around himself.

And eventually, he couldn't go anymore. He dropped to the snow-padded ground and sat in a huddled mass for a while, before lying down, shivering uncontrollably in the white snow. His breath came shallowly, weakly, as fatigued lungs tried desperately to provide him with oxygen, and his heart pumped feebly to distribute icy blood to his organs. He was dying. He could feel it.

He closed his eyes.

Took a deep breath.

And from behind closed eyelids, he could sense movement.

His eyes fluttered open.

No.

This couldn't be happening. Could it?

His slowing heart faltered at the sight.

Kurt was walking towards him, feet crunching lightly in the snow, leaving soft footprints in his wake. He was smiling, wearing his favorite navy blue cashmere sweater and black jeans with black boots. He knelt down beside Blaine and pressed his hand to the boys' cheek.

And Blaine was immediately warm. The snow was gone. Well, the coldness of it was. It was still there, surrounding him, but now, it was no more bothersome than grass on a summer day.

"Kurt?" He whispered, lifting his head up.

The boy above him smiled and removed his hand, offering it to Blaine, who took it willingly and let Kurt pull him up.

Kurt's arms wrapped around him and pulled him into a hug. Blaine held him so tightly. And Kurt's soft laugh was in his ear.

"I miss you."

And Blaine buried his face in Kurt's neck, breathing in the scent of him as if he'd had to hold his breath for a hundred years. "I miss you too."

After a long time, (or was it only a moment?) Kurt pulled away and wound Blaine's fingers in his own. He led him surely through the unfamiliar snow-covered lands. Eventually, they came upon a simple wooden bench in the middle of seemingly nowhere, as if it were waiting for them. Kurt stopped and sat down, pulling Blaine down with him, who refused to give up his hand, keeping it intertwined with his own.

Neither boy spoke. Kurt stared a bit shyly at Blaine, head tilted slightly to the right. Then he reached up and pressed his hand to Blaine's cheek again. Blaine clutched at his wrist, keeping the hand where it was. He met his eyes, licked his dry lips.

"How am I supposed to live without you?"

Blaine's voice was small and his heart thudded when he heard Kurt's voice, warm and angelic, the best sound he'd ever heard, answer him.

"Oh baby, if I knew, I'd tell you. But it'll get easier."

"Why... how... are we in heaven? But you're an atheist, right? This doesn't make sense."

"You're right. I am. So no, I don't believe in heaven. But do you think we are? Do you think we're in heaven?"

He paused, brow furrowed. He lowered Kurt's hand, but threaded their fingers together so tightly. "I don't know anything anymore. Are you happy here?"

His answer was carefully thought about before he spoke. "Wherever 'here' is, if you're not there, then no, I'll never truly be happy. But I'm happy for the time I got to spend with you. For the time we had together."

"I don't understand." Blaine's voice hitched. "Why did you have to die?"

Kurt's gaze softened. "You're asking a lot of hard questions baby."

Blaine looked down. "I can't live without you. I can't do anything. I can't focus, I can't eat, I get mad at everyone, all I want to do is sleep. I need you."

Kurt's arms were around him again. He pressed a kiss to Blaine's temple and pulled back to look him in the eyes. "I love you. Always remember that. I love you. I loved you. I still love you. Nothing can change that. Not time, or distance, or even if I'm not there. I love you."

A sob escaped his lips, and he forced himself not to cry. Instead, he pulled Kurt closer and kissed him, hard and aching and needy. Kurt kissed him back with just as much passion as he felt, as he wanted to be able to give.

They pulled apart after a long moment, their foreheads pressed lightly together. Blaine closed his eyes.

"I love you." He whispered, his hand wound tightly in Kurt's.

He could feel Kurt smile.

In his sleep, he did not feel the dried trails of tears on his cheeks, or the hole in his heart that still throbbed painfully, or the fact that his fingers were still clenched in the blankets, holding a hand that was no longer there.

He turned over, taking the blanket with him, and unknowingly began to mumble.

"Kurt," he whispered, feather-light and aching on his lips. "I feel you."

In his dream, Kurt was there. In his memories, Kurt was there. In his hopeless prayers, Kurt was there.

But when he woke, all Kurt would be was a shadow, a breeze of the wind, a ghost. And he would be alone.

Okay, the world could go ahead and kill him now.

He slept for longer than he had in what seemed like months. By the time he woke from the dream, he realized that it was noon. He had missed dinner and now breakfast by a few hours.

Wes had been here. As he slid out of the warm covers, a blanket that had not been there when he fell asleep tumbled off the bed. There was a foil-covered something on the table with a note taped on it. He stumbled slightly, oddly groggy after so much sleep, and argued with himself for a while as to whether he was going to turn on the light.

After much debating of burning retinas and actually being able to read the note he held, he braced himself and flicked the light switch. His head no longer pounded, but now, he felt so weak, as if he had just gotten over being very sick.

Holding the note up, he read the quickly scrawled handwriting of not Wes, but David.

David, not Wes.

David had been here.

David had covered him with the blanket.

He needed to go see everyone. He didn't know if he could handle that. But (he glanced at the clock again) it had been past a full twenty-four hours since...

He sighed deeply and read the note again, having not taken in any of the words written on it the first time.

Blaine-

When you wake up, eat. I know it doesn't feel like it will make any difference, but trust me, it will. We all understand if you would rather be alone, but we all would really like to see you. We'll be in Wes's dorm.

-David

Peeling back the foil revealed a turkey sandwich cut in half, without tomatoes. He hated tomatoes. And there was one of every kind of cookie that the Dalton Commons had baked that day. He really didn't feel like eating, but as he felt like crap already, he didn't think that it would hurt.

Once he bit into the sandwich, it seemed to trigger a domino effect, with his stomach immediately beginning to growl so loud he wondered if the next room wouldn't be able to hear. He hadn't even known he was that hungry and he was suddenly so grateful that David had thought to bring him food, though he knew that if asked, he would have declined.

And David was right. Not that he expected him to be wrong, but it just didn't seem logical to him that eating would lessen the gaping hole in his chest. He did feel better. A bit better. Enough to convince himself that he should go see everyone. And he did want to.

With a soft sigh, he began to go through his closet, pulling out his Dalton blazer and button down shirt, laying them carefully on top of a neatly folded pair of slacks. He chewed on his bottom lip, staring down at the familiar pile of clothes on his bed. Gently, so gently, as if touching something so delicate that it would break, he brushed his fingertips against the stiffly pressed cuff of the stark white shirt, lingering slightly on the smooth round button where the cuff was folded over.

He closed his eyes briefly and then turned away from the bed, heading into the bathroom. His brow wrinkled when he caught sight of his reflection under the harsh luminescent lights. He looked awful. He felt awful, but for some reason, it hadn't occurred to him that he might look as bad as he felt. Maybe somewhere, he felt that if his face didn't give away what he was feeling, that it might be easier to pretend that he was okay. However, that was not the case.

Bloodshot, dark-circled eyes stared back at him, under a mess of unkempt curly hair that stuck up in all directions. He looked exhausted, he looked sick. He groaned. It was going to be harder to hide than he thought.

Cold water ran from the faucet in a steady stream into his cupped hands, which he splashed onto his face, running his wet hands through his hair. Tugging a comb through the hair helped to tame the curls on his head somewhat, combined with the smallest amount of gel, nowhere near the amount he used to use. He

brushed his teeth and then straightened up, blinking at himself in the mirror as he rubbed the heel of his hand over his eyes, as if he were trying to grind out any trace of tears or restless sleep.

In the end, he figured he looked better now than he did before, even with the stubborn dark circles under his eyes, and in truth, he felt a little better. Flipping off the bathroom light, he strode out, moving purposefully to the closet, ignoring the waiting stack of clothes.

He closed his dorm door lightly behind him, feeling out of place wearing dark jeans and a hooded, faded grey sweatshirt in favor of the Dalton uniform, which he left lying on his bed. Kurt had told him before that as far as *sweatshirts* go, which he had continually sneered at as if the word left a bad taste on his tongue, he hadn't minded that one. Blaine shrugged into the jacket, nestling his hands in the pockets, feeling the soft fleece against his skin.

A deep breath left Blaine's lungs and he pushed himself off the wall, planting one foot in front of the other, feeling his heart pound in his chest as he traveled the short distance to Wes's dorm.

His hand clenched the cold metal of the doorknob, which he turned at an almost comically slow pace. He seemed to realize how slowly he was moving when the knob was all the way turned and as in a haste to fix it, quickly opened the door, almost tumbling inside.

The light chatter inside the room immediately ceased when the door flew open, revealing Blaine as he stumbled in. Josh, closest to the door at that moment, threw out his arms in a clumsy attempt to stop him from falling. As Blaine was caught in Josh's grasp, a small gasp of surprise escaped his lips and when Josh was sure that his friend was not going to do a face-plant into the ground, steadied him and then released his hold.

A blush of embarrassment colored Blaine's cheeks at that less-than-perfect entrance. The silence in the room seemed to be pressing down on them, casting nervous glances at each other and back at Blaine.

"Sorry." He murmured and looked down before bringing his eyes back up to the surrounding faces spread around the room.

David got up from the chair he was in and went over to Blaine, stopping before him and asking, "Did you eat?"

"Yeah."

"Good." David turned and faced the silent group, all staring, waiting for someone to tell them what to do.

Blaine stared too, stared out into the faces of the people that he'd gotten to know as family, some of them, he even considered more than family. He swallowed, not knowing what to do. His heart was going into overdrive and he could feel the blood pounding in his ears, wondering vaguely if they could hear it too.

The question was written on everyone's face, but no one dared to ask it. *Are you okay?* Blaine bit his lip, eyes locking onto Wes, the only person in the room who he felt comfortable with meeting eyes with at the moment.

Wes smiled at him and swiftly crossed the room next to David, grabbing Blaine's hand in a secure grasp and pulling him forward.

The two Warblers who occupied the couch got up the second he was close enough to their 'personal space' bubble and Blaine opened his mouth to tell them they didn't have to move, but in a second, Wes had pulled Blaine down on the couch next to him and began a conversation with him. On his part, Wes spoke with no hitch whatsoever; he was talking to him as easily as ever. Everyone else in the room seemed to follow them with their eyes and then slowly began to return to their previous discussions, though Blaine felt like he was still being stared at.

No one knew how to act around him. This hit him quite suddenly, meshing with the tense atmosphere. He barely responded to Wes's now one-sided conversation about possibly changing the piping on the blazers next year. He could feel himself starting to panic, and he internally yelled at himself. Why couldn't he just act normal around them? They were his friends, his family. He should feel comfortable here. So why did his breathing suddenly quicken, his fingers start to tingle, and the blood roar in his head so loud, he couldn't hear what Wes was saying?

He took a few gasping breaths, saw Wes's face change from calm friendliness to immediate worry. His hands clenched.

"I need to go," he mumbled, without knowing if he said it aloud. He really didn't care at this point. "I need... I can't be here. I shouldn't have come here."

He got up, felt every face in the room turn to stare, and bolted for the door in an almost frantic fashion, reaching for the doorknob as if it were the last solid thing on earth. His head spun dizzily, he felt disoriented, like he was trying to run through water.

The door fell shut behind him and he dropped, palms just catching him on the way down. It opened almost immediately. He didn't look up. He couldn't look up. He felt like he was going to throw up.

Wes was on his knees next to him, gently, but firmly, grasping his shoulders. "Are you okay?"

His worried voice sounded very far away. Blaine closed his eyes, his rapid breathing making him even more dizzy.

"Blaine? Blaine?" His voice was closer now. Blaine opened his eyes, looking to the side and he noticed Wes had his cheek pressed to the ground, trying to look at him. Heat spread through him, an uncomfortable, constricting heat.

"Blaine, breathe. Focus on me. My voice." A hand appeared on his back, rubbing slow circles. "Breathe. In. Out."

He closed his eyes.

"In."

He followed. *In.*

"Out."

Out.

In.

Out.

Nothing was spinning anymore. He swallowed, licked his dry lips.

In.

Out.

He pressed his hands into the plush carpet.

"In. Out."

Wes felt Blaine calming down. He kept rubbing his back, speaking softly. After a little bit, he stopped talking, letting Blaine breathe without his command and when he did not hyperventilate again, he asked, "Blaine?"

He turned his head, frightened tears steadily streaking down his cheeks. The hand returned to his shoulder and gently pulled him up and he was immediately enveloped in strong arms that clasped around his back, holding him securely to Wes's chest. His head dropped forward onto Wes's shoulder and he had to remember to breathe again the way Wes wanted him to. He felt their chests move in unison. Blaine slumped in Wes's arms, exhausted. He became aware of a voice close to his ear.

"Can you hear me? Blaine?"

He was shaken gently. He swallowed and lifted his head up, the simple action feeling like it took so much effort. But Wes held him by the shoulders and he did not worry about falling over, as he would have been more than happy to do at this particular moment. Becoming a dust bunny on the Dalton carpet was not something he was opposed to, seeing as how he felt like death warmed over.

A hand softly smacked his cheek, refocusing his gaze on the face in front of him.

"Jesus, Blaine." Wes breathed. "I don't know if I can take much more of this. I need to get you help. I need to tell someone."

"No." Blaine was surprised at the intensity his voice held, even as crappy as he felt. The strength of the word itself seemed to instill a momentary power in him and he backed away from Wes, scooting until he sat up against the wall. He hugged his knees to his chest and laid his head on his knees, looking so small and scared and lost that Wes let out a small moan of pain.

Wes crawled over next to him, mirroring his posture, but keeping his head up. "Blaine," he whispered, "please. I can't watch you suffer like this. I mean, no offense, but you've scared me shitless so many times I just..." he sighed. "The bathroom, in the shower, I thought you were... god, I don't know. I thought you

were really hurt. And then when I couldn't find you and you were by that tree? And the panic attack now? I... I love you man, you know that, but I just don't know if I can do this anymore. I can't take this. Seeing you like this. It's... it's tearing me up that I can't do anything about it and I think I've done all I *can* do."

Blaine had been trying his best to glue his eyes at anything that wasn't Wes, but he could tell by the involuntary facial expressions that he heard what he was saying. When Wes paused, Blaine closed his eyes, a soft sob falling from his lips.

"I just..." Wes continued, in an even softer tone if that was even possible. "I know you love Dalton, and all of the Warblers love you more than you could know, but I just think that it would be better, for you, if you... I don't know... talked to someone? Or maybe went back to Lima? Just until... after the funeral."

A small sound, audibly filled with pain, came from the boy next to him. Wes waited, let his words sink in. When Blaine finally turned his gaze to meet his eyes, Wes had to bite his tongue to keep from moaning at the agony that was written on his face.

"I can't go back."

The words came from such a place of pain that Wes felt his heart skip a beat, thudding achingly back into rhythm.

"Blaine, you-"

"I can't go back." Fresh tears were welling in his eyes, the eyes that were swimming with the kind of agonizing hurt that no one in their life should ever have to feel. "I don't... I don't have anyone Wes. I can't go home because my dad hates who I am, hates me, hates his own son and my mom won't even stand up for me. She chooses him over me every time. I can't go to Lima because I couldn't stand to see those looks on their faces again." He closed his eyes at the memory. "When they found out that he was... that he was gone, I can't... I can't even explain it. It was like their worlds collapsed, like they had nothing to live for anymore. And I caused it. I let him go out in the rain. And he got sick. And then he got an infection. And he died. And it was because of me." The tears were flowing down his cheeks, and Wes was sitting in such stunned silence, not able to take his eyes off of his friend, that he didn't notice he was crying until he felt the cold drops land on his chest.

"I can't stay here because..." he took a shaky breath, "Did you see the way they acted? I can't even be around them because they don't know how to act around me anymore. I'm a mess. And they stared. They stared and I couldn't handle it. Because they all want to ask me how I'm doing, tell me that they're sorry, try to make me feel better, and all I want to do is scream in their faces. They don't deserve that. They don't deserve this." He gestured weakly to himself. And he laughed darkly, quietly, and dropped his gaze to his knees. "And the one person who knew me, loved me, accepted me for who I was, the one person that I can truly say that I've loved so deeply that it physically hurt to be away from, is dead. He's gone. Kurt's dead and I killed him. I don't deserve to be alive. I just... I don't... I want to die Wes."

His voice broke and he hung his head into his arms and sobbed. Wes could only sit frozen in shock.

When he finally found the words to speak, his voice was barely over a whisper and tears welled in his eyes. "Blaine, you... you can't think that. I-Is that what you think? That you... are the reason he died?"

The choked sob was enough of an answer for Wes.

"Oh, Blaine." He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "It... What happened, it wasn't your fault. You can't beat yourself up, thinking that you... killed him. It was not your fault, you hear me? No one could have stopped this. You don't even know if he got the infection because he got sick from the rain, do you?"

Blaine's sobs quieted. He didn't look at Wes.

"Blaine, this is no one's fault. No one's." He lightly squeezed the still-shaking boy's upper arm. "And you're not alone. We are all here for you. It's just... they're just still kind of shocked and trying to process this."

"They were fine downstairs. When they're alone with me, they-"

"Stop. Stop right there." Wes looked into his eyes, a fierceness shining in his green irises. "They were not fine earlier. I told them that they had to not draw any attention to you because, well, I figured you wanted to be alone, but I didn't want you to be alone. They're worried Blaine. Same as me. We're all worried that-"

"That what? That I'd yell at them? Maybe cry on them?" Blaine's voice was harsh, contrasted sharply with Wes's whispered words.

"That you'd do something and hurt yourself or..." he sighed. "Or kill yourself."

"What?" His head snapped up.

Wes responded slowly. "Well, I mean, losing someone is always hard, but we all knew how much you loved each other. And if I lost Hillary, I... I don't know what I'd do. I don't want to think about it. And I think some of it's my fault. The reason they're so worried. I didn't want to tell them anything because I didn't want to say something that you didn't want them to know. When I went to the dorm, I was... well, I was pretty shaken up and I think that made them jump to conclusions and when you were missing, I panicked pretty badly and I'm sure David told them. There's a part of me that yells at me to not leave you alone, because I'm so scared that maybe you aren't ready to be left alone and I'll come back and you'll be..." He trailed off, taking a deep breath, and then continued, "They're acting like you're going to just drop at any second. And they shouldn't, but it's hard to only receive information from one person, especially when that person is me. They expect me to not break down; ever since I became the soloist, they almost expect me to be as resilient as you. And I still don't think you understand how much they all idolize you. You are the strong one, the one who never backs down, never gives up, never lets anything get to him. And I'm having to pull your unresponsive form out of the shower? They're freaking out. Rightfully so, but, any one of them would probably act the same way if the situations were reversed."

Blaine sniffed and then sneered, "Are you telling me I need to not grieve for Kurt? Because that's the exact opposite of what you told me earlier."

"No, no. God, no." He corrected quickly. "They've just never... experienced any of this you know? Not first hand at least. And they don't know how to handle it. We all need time to grieve. This won't be easy for any one. We all need to realize that and help each other through this." He looked down, then back up. "And I really do think that it would help if you went to Lima. I know they're not your closest friends, but... being with his family might help. You... you're all going through the same thing and it just seems like they could help you better than we can. Because seriously Blaine, at this point, I'm so close to telling the guidance counselor that you need help."

Blaine's eyes blazed at that.

"I know you don't want that, but I'm telling you right now that I'm not going to sit around and see you do this to yourself. It hasn't been even two days since Kurt died and the pain isn't going to go away for a while, but you can't try to go through this on your own. And we love you, we all do, you know that right? And I know we can't help you in the way that you need. That's why I'm telling you to go to Lima. We're not

abandoning you, we're not 'passing on the burden' so to speak if that's what you think. They can help you so much more than we can. I'll even call them for you. Kurt's parents. You need their guidance right now."

"They'll hate me."

"They won't. Blaine, they won't. I swear to you they won't. They want to see you. I know they do. Finn told me they all want to see you. They're worried too."

Blaine was silent.

"I can't do anything about the way you feel about your father, but you have to know that you have a family that loves you. You have us, and you have Kurt's family." He paused. "How long has it been since you looked at your phone?"

Blaine bit his lip, but turned towards Wes, instead of away as he had expected. "I don't know."

Wes nodded. "Okay. Look at your phone. Or I will if you don't want to."

"It's in my room." He whispered.

Wes gripped Blaine's upper arm and pulled him up. "Let's go."

Blaine walked with somewhat shaky legs with Wes to his room. He pulled away from Wes's attempt to help keep him steady, keeping his eyes focused straight ahead and when they got to the room, he went right to where his phone was, sitting forgotten on the dresser.

He glanced down at the screen, much too bright in the dark before Wes turned on the light.

5 Missed Calls

8 Missed Texts

1 Voicemail

He let out a soft groan and gripped the phone tightly in his hand.

He heard a voice behind him, soft and strong, somehow instilling a strength in him that he didn't think he had left.

"You can do this."

At the light grip of Wes's hand on his shoulder, he hung his head and took a deep breath.

A moment of self-doubting washed over him, of worry and fear. He had run away, he hadn't been able to face them.

They were going to hate him, when they found out what he did. That he was the reason Kurt got sick.

The hand that held his cell phone began to tremble. He vaguely heard Wes's soothing voice again over the pounding of his blood in his ears.

Biting his lip hard, he pressed *call* and waited.

One ring.

Two rings.

"Hello?"

Deep breath.

"H-hey. It's... it's Blaine."

"Oh, yeah I recognized your voice."

"Oh. Umm..." He looked to Wes in desperation as his heart beat faster. What if they told him he was never allowed in their house ever again? What if they never wanted to see him again? What if-

"It's okay." Wes mouthed and gave his arm another gentle squeeze.

"I wanted to know if... if it was okay if I, umm... if I came over? I-I know I said Friday, but I just really..." he felt his throat constrict, "... really need to... to-"

"No, that's fine." The voice was gentle, and not at all the lashing hatred that he had expected. He had a quick thought where he formed this idea in his mind that Finn had been told to be nice to him by Carole, but Finn wasn't yelling at him for killing his stepbrother, no matter how much Blaine thought he deserved that, and it was almost a relief to have this empathetic voice on the other end of the line. "Please come over. My mom almost drove out there yesterday to get you, but she was worried that you'd get mad at her. I... we need you here Blaine."

His heart gave a grateful thud and he had to work at getting his voice above a whisper. "Thank you."

He heard the soft smile in Finn's voice as he said, "No problem. So you're coming tomorrow?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, I'll let them know. And Blaine, I... I'm glad you're coming."

He laughed lightly, an odd thing that he hadn't felt in a while. "Me too."

With a low sigh, he hung up and turned to face Wes, who hadn't left. He registered the grounding feeling of Wes's hand on his shoulder.

"Thank you." He said gratefully to him and the Warbler smiled and threw his arms around him.

"Good. This is a good thing, Blaine. It's going to get easier."

And somewhere in the unconscious part of his mind, his shattered heart began to mend. Just one tiny crack, sewn back together. Just one. But it was a start, a beginning. It would take a long time to heal, and maybe it never would be fully reassembled, but he took a breath, feeling the air fill his lungs and then dispel again, and he felt that, maybe, sometime, somewhere, things would begin to be okay. Just maybe, he would be able to get through this.

32. Together

He did not want to go to Lima. He really didn't. He felt like just curling up into a ball and staying in his room forever. But that was not what he was going to do.

No, he was going to Lima. He repeated it over and over in his head, so he wouldn't psyche himself out and not go. He had to go. He fully believed Wes when he said that he was going to make him sit down with the guidance counselor. And he did not want that. This was the lesser of two evils. So he was going to Lima.

Finn had taken it upon himself to bring the suitcase of Blaine's things at the hospital with him when he went back to Lima. Whether he did it unintentionally or knew that Blaine would eventually be staying there, he didn't know, but Blaine was grateful for not having to spend much time packing. He shoved what little belongings he felt like bringing into a duffle bag. His eyes raked quickly over the clothes in his half of the closet, trying so hard not to look at Kurt's side, to see all the clothes he would never wear.

They were going to have to come and take his things out of the dorm, take everything out of the dorm that belonged to Kurt. He tore his eyes away from the closet. He couldn't think about that right now. He was supposed to be trying to not think like that.

Tossing his single bag carelessly into the car, he began the drive to Lima and drowned out all outside thoughts the only way he knew how. He turned up the music until it pulsed in his ears, until he could feel his very heart thum with the beat. He didn't even care what the music was, as long as he was not left in silence.

The drive was mostly freeways, so it didn't make him feel bad that he would be deafening the other drivers like he might if he had had his music up that loud on a residential street. He did, however, turn it down to a more tolerable level when he exited the freeway.

The nervousness that had coiled into a ball in his stomach began to tighten as he drove onto the Hummel's street. Finn had said they needed him here. He said that Carole had wanted to drive up and get him. He was needed. He was wanted. But he just felt like he shouldn't be here. He wanted to be with them, he did, but it just felt like he was intruding on their crisis. He wasn't with Kurt for very long on a scale of time, they'd been official for less than half a year, and he hardly felt like that gave him any credit with which to

be with his family now. But deep down, he knew that Wes was right. They could help him better than his friends could. And he did need help. He realized that, but it was just so hard to not listen to the voice in his head that shouted negativities and made him feel hurt, angry, sad and scared.

He swallowed as he gingerly walked up the porch steps, trying hard to not let his fear show on his face. He got to the front door when the voice in his head began to whisper.

They're going to hate you.

Finn was lying. They never wanted you to come here.

You don't deserve their comfort or love. You killed their son.

He moaned lightly, half believing those words that filled his thoughts. He pressed his forehead against the door, fighting with himself if he wasn't going to just get back in his car and drive to Dalton after all. And he thought of Wes's face, when he'd told him that he didn't think he could take much more of Blaine's actions. That he'd scared him. Blaine had seen right then what Wes was dealing with, having to grieve for Kurt while being the leader the Warblers needed and also having to try and put Blaine back together. And he'd felt horrible, realizing what he'd been putting Wes through, without even knowing it.

He couldn't go back. He had to do this.

Straightening up, he smoothed out the wrinkles in his light green t-shirt, took a deep breath and knocked.

He was face to face with Burt when he opened the door. Instinctively, he shrunk back a bit, wincing slightly in preparation for the yelling that he was sure would greet him.

Instead, he found himself wrapped in the arms of the burly man.

Burt had been friendly to him, had accepted him into their home when Kurt had been with him, and even when Kurt wasn't there. Blaine had made sure that he was always polite with Kurt's father and he'd been thrilled when Burt had even gone as far to make him feel like he was a part of the family. Which was why he had expected Burt to be angry at him, because he thought that Burt might think that his efforts had been wasted in trying to make him feel welcome, now that Kurt was gone.

But as Blaine relaxed into the arms of this man he had grown to know and become to think of as almost a father figure, he found not hostility, but love. Blaine had been terrified that they would not accept him again and he would have nowhere else to go. And he saw that he should have never had that thought cross his mind. They were his family.

Burt released him and ushered him into the house. It was a bit warmer here than at the frozen fairytale-esque Dalton Academy, but Lima was still covered in a light blanket of snow and it felt good to get out of the crisp winter air.

A welcoming heat encompassed him the moment the door was closed and for a moment, he stood by the door, unsure of what to do. His eyes raked over to the couch, where Finn sat, looking like he wanted to do something, but didn't know what. His face was not at all the light-hearted, 'normal' Finn, but rather, he looked as though he hadn't slept in a thousand years. Carole leaned up against the doorframe, hands clasped in front of her. She smiled as Blaine came in, her swollen, red eyes making contact with his.

Burt had moved over to the couch and sat himself next to Finn and Blaine shifted uncomfortably. Carole broke the silence and approached him swiftly, saying, "Blaine, honey, take off your coat. Do you want anything to drink?"

He shrugged out of his jacket and scarf, laying them out over the back of a kitchen chair as he shook his head. "I'm fine. Thank you."

Carole looked like she wanted to hug him, but her hand squeezed his shoulder lightly and she nodded to the available armchairs in the living room. He gave her a small smile of thanks and followed, letting her take the chair closest to the couch, where her husband and son resided.

"I was getting worried Blaine. We all were." Carole said, her tone soft and hesitant, though still motherly in worry. "I know it hasn't been easy, but... are you okay?"

Blaine was caught off guard by this question. He'd been avoiding it at Dalton and didn't think that he'd be at all ready to face it, especially by admitting it to other people.

"I... I'm fine." He said, not holding her gaze the entire time, and he sensed that Carole did not believe him. He didn't believe himself, because the words sounded false even to his own ears and then he reconsidered. They were his family. He didn't need to lie. They were all feeling the same emotions and if he was going to

begin to get help, he needed to start being honest, especially with himself. "No, I..." he started slowly and then sighed, letting his eyes drop to stare at the carpet. "I'm not okay. It... I..."

His eyes darted back and forth, trying to find the words. He felt guilty, not wanting to tell them what had happened, feeling like his pain couldn't possibly compare with theirs, at losing a child, and he didn't want to make them feel like he was trying to get sympathy.

He bit his lip so hard to stop it from trembling and out of the corner of his eye, saw Carole turn to Finn.

"If you don't want to be here, you can go to your room if you'd like sweetie." She spoke in the same tone that she had used with Blaine. "Or you can stay. It's your choice. Nothing changes, either way."

Finn looked up, perhaps grateful that he'd been given a way out, and then his eyes turned sad and he seemed hesitant to leave as his gaze fell on Blaine. Indecision flitted across his face, but then he stood and walked over to where Blaine sat. Their eyes met and for a moment, and Blaine thought he might just leave.

Yet, Finn Hudson-Hummel leaned over and pulled Blaine into a hug that had the shorter boy momentarily shocked. And he whispered words into Blaine's ear that almost reduced him to tears.

"Thank you for being there for him. And for me."

He stood back up and Blaine could hear his soft footfalls as he ascended the stairs and it was so quiet that he could audibly recognize the sound of his bedroom door closing.

Blaine brought his eyes up, his heart still pounding in his chest, though now it hurt less. It was no longer the thrum of fear, but the gentle thudding of anticipation. He waited for either of them to speak.

It was Carole who broke the silence once again, explaining, "We talked to Finn last night and it seemed to help him, to get out everything he was feeling. Finn wouldn't tell us anything specific, but said that you were having a hard time. It's completely okay if you don't want to, but we're here if you want to talk. We," she glanced at Burt, who made no move to disagree with her, "can talk to you if you want or you can just talk and we'll listen or we can just get started on lunch if you'd rather not do anything."

He wanted to tell her, almost needed to. He clenched his hands in his lap, as if willing himself to stop the words before they came, but he felt Carole's comforting hand on his shoulder and they tumbled from his lips so quickly, there was no way he could have halted the dam breaking.

"I feel so lost and confused and hurt and angry and sad and scared and guilty and I still can't believe that he's gone."

He didn't meet their eyes, instead focusing on his hands in his lap.

"I've never felt that kind of pain in my life. I don't know how I made it back to Dalton, but I did and I went into the choir room and just fell apart. I cried and screamed for so long and I went back to my dorm and I knew I got sick, but I don't really remember. I think Wes found me and he took care of me. I couldn't do anything without being reminded of Kurt." He stopped, his voice breaking on his boyfriend's name. "It was awful." His words sounded in a whisper, trying to forget. "I didn't want to eat or see anyone or do anything. Wes was the only one who was there the whole time. I know I scared him though, because I just became... I don't know... depressed? He threatened to get the guidance counselor to talk to me and made me call Finn to tell him I was coming here."

He swallowed, feeling the lump form in his throat and for a second, he thought about stopping there. He didn't want to feel this pain again, but he was with people who would understand and help him and he took a shaky breath and closed his eyes for a moment before opening them again. He felt the tears on his lashes, but he did not brush them away.

"I love him. I've never loved anyone as deeply as I loved him. And every time I think about him, I know it's selfish, but all I can think about is how I'm alone now. And I feel guilty because it's so much harder for the two of you than it should be for me, but I just don't know how I'm going to live if he's not here." He was sobbing now, the tears making it hard to catch his breath. Neither Burt nor Carole interrupted and he was grateful because he didn't know if he would be able to stop now. "He's gone and I love him and I'll never see him again. Of all the people in the world, he didn't deserve this and it's not *fair* and I keep asking myself why him and not me? What did I do to be standing here still? I love him and I just want to have him hold me and tell me it's going to be okay because then I might start to believe it and I think of all the things that I've done and I just keep saying that if I had tried harder or done something else then he would still be alive. If I hadn't taken him in the rain, he'd still be alive."

The shame and guilt and crippling sadness that filled him made his throat constrict and his stomach churn and for a horrible moment, he thought he might be sick. He covered his face with his hands, crying into his palms, knowing that he should be feeling humiliation at breaking down like this, but all he felt was relief.

A pair of arms was around him and held him tightly, a strong, secure voice in his ear. "Shhh... it's okay. You're okay. We're here. It's okay."

His fingers clenched in his lap and he felt Carole's hand on the back of his head and he sobbed into her shoulder, his full weight leaning on her as she supported him.

And he cried. For how long, he had no idea, but when his sobs began to subside, Carole slowly released her grip on him and let him catch his breath. He looked down at his hands. He felt himself being stared at and he hesitantly looked up.

Carole's eyes held apprehension. "Blaine, what do you mean he got sick because of the rain?"

And the answer blurted from his lips, as if he hoped the faster he said it, the less it would hurt. "We went to the library and we didn't realize how late it had gotten and it was raining really hard and I'd forgotten my gloves and he gave his to me and wouldn't let me give them back and I should have gone ahead and brought the car to him, but we walked back to the dorms and both got soaked and a few days later, he had a fever and he was shaking and then he passed out and I took him in the rain and it's my fault he got sick!"

Whatever pent-up tears he had left went streaming down his cheeks. He saw identical trails of tears on Carole's face. He couldn't bring himself to look at Burt.

Again, there was a pause until Blaine could breathe again. But this time, it was Burt who spoke to him.

"Blaine."

He didn't speak any more and Blaine knew that he was waiting for him to look at him, but he was so scared. He forced himself to take a deep breath and turn his head to look at Kurt's father, who had appeared by the armchair. There were tears in his eyes, but none fell and Blaine briefly wondered if he even could cry anymore, after losing a wife and now his son.

"I can say without a doubt that you were the best thing that ever happened to Kurt. He loved you more than words can say, I know that because he wouldn't stop telling me." Something of a smile appeared on Burt's face. "There was nothing, *nothing* that could have been done to stop him getting sick. The only way we could have prevented it entirely was to have him become the next bubble boy and god knows what the 'old air' would have done to his skin. You can't blame yourself. If life was measured by hope and wanting, then he would still be alive. But I could not have asked for a better friend, a better mentor, a better

boyfriend for my son. You made him everything he wanted to be. He was happier than I'd ever seen him and that alone was enough to make me like you. But then I met you and I said, 'hey, this kid might be good for Kurt.' This isn't something that anyone gets over soon and it's going to take a long time to start making sense again, but if I could change anything about this situation, other than to have him here with me, it would have been that he'd met you earlier. You had that much of an impact on him and on me and I am grateful that he was able to spend his time at Dalton with people who accept him and admire him, and with you. Blaine, do not blame yourself for anything. Take time to grieve, and we will be there with you, no matter what, but taken from experience, life does not stop when someone dies. We can keep their memory alive and cherish the time we had with them, but blame and hatred are no way to remember the ones we loved."

A single tear track was slowly making its way down Burt's cheek. Blaine literally could not find his voice. He was speechless and could only stare back into Burt's eyes as the fresh tears flowed down his own flushed cheeks.

Burt clasped his strong, warm hand with Blaine's. "So thank you," he said, "for everything you've done for Kurt. And thank you for showing me true courage and love for Kurt in ways that I didn't think were possible. Thank you, Blaine, for everything."

He felt his heart thud behind his ribs and he was breathing shallowly in an effort not to break down completely, though he was quickly losing that battle. Burt's eyes stared deeply into his own, and then Blaine was wrapped in Burt's arms and he let himself crumble, let his walls fall down as the strong embrace held him so tightly, letting him know that he was not alone in this and they could get through it together.

Blaine wanted to say so much.

Thank you.

I'm sorry.

I love him.

I miss him.

I've missed you.

But as he clasped his arms tightly around Burt, both men knew that they did not have to say a word in order to say everything.

Later that day, after dinner, Blaine found himself in the spare room, sitting in the dark, across the hall from Finn's room. Blaine's bed had not been removed from Kurt's room, but as much as he yearned for the comfort of Kurt's belongings around him, as he sat on the comforter on the bed in the unfamiliar room, he knew that if he was there, with memories of Kurt all around him, he would drift right back to what he left Dalton in order to avoid. And he couldn't do that to Burt and Carole. He couldn't fall apart. He'd done that before and he didn't know if he could handle that again.

A knock sounded on his door and he looked up as Finn pushed open the door with his hip. In his hands, he carried two mugs of something that was steaming. Without saying anything, he drifted over and held out one of the mugs.

Blaine took it, muttering a soft 'thanks,' and cupped his hands around it, immediately feeling the warmth that transferred into his palms. He watched the heat rise, curl, and then disappear. Staring into the mug, he saw it was filled with a brown liquid. Coffee?

Whatever it was, it was too hot to drink it yet, so he just held the warm porcelain in his hands and lifted his gaze. Finn had settled himself in the hard rocking chair opposite the bed. He rocked back and then gasped quietly, as though he hadn't realized that he'd sat in a chair that would rock with him when he did. He held his mug up higher, as if that would stop it from spilling, and thankfully it didn't because Finn's drink had to be as hot as his was and Blaine couldn't help but think that getting scalded had to be the icing on the cake to what had been the worst week of their lives.

After the almost-burning, Finn set his cup down on the table next to the chair and let out a low breath, leaning his elbows on his knees and ran the heel of his hand over his forehead. It was quiet, except for the ticking of the clock on the wall as it slowly counted out the seconds that had been spent just sitting here in the dark.

Finn lowered his arm, lacing his hands together with his elbows still pressed on his knees. He stared straight ahead, not really looking at anything, eyes sunken and hollow-looking, face held too steady, seeming pale and sickly in the blue-ish silver glare of the moonlight streaming through the open window.

Blaine didn't know why he'd wanted the window open, especially now, as a chilling breeze was making its way through the room, caressing everything it came in contact with, with an icy embrace. Blaine shivered. Neither boy moved to shut the window.

They were silent for a while, each one trying to think of what to say that wouldn't upset the other.

Finn found his voice first, quiet, but so loud in the dark. "Thank you for coming here."

"Yeah."

He shifted uncomfortably in the rocking chair.

"Finn?"

His eyes darted up. "Yeah?"

"You can come sit here... if you want."

The gangly boy bit his lip in a second of hesitation, but he got up and crossed the room in a matter of moments with his long strides.

Blaine took a sip of whatever was in the cup, as it had cooled down some. He mainly took a drink to please Finn, because he'd obviously wanted to make him feel better. It was hot chocolate and made his body fuzzy and comfortable as he swallowed. It was a sweet gesture, but he just didn't feel like drinking it, no matter how much his cold form welcomed the warmth, and he knew it wouldn't even begin to touch the emotional ache. He placed the cup on the dresser and scooted over so Finn could climb up on the bed.

Finn folded his long legs up a bit awkwardly and leaned against the wall, knees drawn up to his chest. Blaine stayed where he was, then sighed and pushed himself back until he was against the wall too. He tucked his hands around his middle and waited.

"Blaine?"

The voice was hesitant, scared. He turned his head slightly, eyes drifting to the side to barely look at him, because he didn't want to see his face.

"I know you're not okay, but I just..." He paused, waiting for Blaine to tell him to stop talking, but he stayed silent, so he continued. "Did it help? Talking to them?"

Blaine closed his eyes, trying to get the thoughts in his emotionally overworked brain to form something coherent.

"Yes, Finn," he said slowly. "I think it did."

The corner of Finn's mouth twitched in something of a sympathetic look. "I thought it would. I didn't think it would, but it did."

Blaine's ears pricked and he turned his head a little more. "Did it help you?"

At having his question being directed back at him, Finn frowned lightly and shifted a bit. "I... I guess."

Blaine sighed, not able to help some of his normal sarcasm flow into his words. "That's contradictory Finn. It helped or it didn't."

Finn turned away. Blaine shifted his body, angling himself towards Kurt's stepbrother and asked softly, "What are you thinking?"

A sighing sob came from Finn, who reluctantly turned back to face Blaine, though he kept his gaze down.

"He's my brother." He said simply, though Blaine knew there was more to this. "He's my brother and I should have been there to protect him. But I couldn't protect him. I promised. I promised when Mom and Burt got married that I would be there for him and that I wouldn't let anything happen to him." He looked up at the ceiling, clenching his hands and then releasing his tense muscles with a breath. "I know that there wasn't anything I could do, that there was nothing anyone could have done, but I just... I just feel so damn responsible. Like there should have been something that I could have seen to do and didn't or..."

Blaine felt his heart clench as Finn trailed off. Because that was exactly how he felt. He kept thinking that there was one thing, *anything*, that he could have done and Kurt would be okay. He knew, just like Finn did, that there wasn't anything anyone could do, but the doubt was still forced to the front of his mind, and the pain that it caused was still aching.

"I could have spent more time with him, tell him I cared about him. I loved him and I don't think he knew. I let the jocks throw him into dumpsters and I let them push him into lockers and I even slushied him once. I helped make his life hell and all he wanted was to be himself, to have friends and... and I was one of the reasons he couldn't. And when Karofsky attacked you and him, I just... something snapped and I wanted to kill him. But I didn't do anything. I didn't even yell at him. When he came back to school, I didn't do a damn thing, just ignored him like nothing even happened." He closed his eyes tight, remembering another painful memory and when he opened them, his eyes were shining with unshed tears. "I was with them once, when they picked on him. It was after Burt and Carole started dating. We were walking along the halls and Kurt was going in the opposite direction, walking towards us, but I know he was scared because he was keeping close to the lockers so he wouldn't have to get close to us. Then Karofsky stops and says something to Kurt, who pretended not to hear, and we all just stopped and watched Karofsky go over to Kurt and block his way and Kurt said something back, but that just made him more willing to pick on him. So Azimio goes over and so do some of the other guys and back him up against the lockers and I didn't know what to do so I just followed. And they're saying things to him and making fun of him and Kurt's looking for a way out and there isn't because they're all surrounding him and his eyes are all wet and I know he's trying not to cry and he looks at me. He looks at *me*, asking for help, and I didn't do anything." He clenches his hands again, reeling to punch something, but he doesn't let his tears show. "I promised to protect him and I didn't then and I can't now."

He looks down at his hands and Blaine sits there in some kind of shock because the words he wants to say so badly to Finn are words that he hadn't let himself hear. Words that he hadn't let in because he hadn't believed them, but now, hearing what Finn's feeling and knowing that he's feeling at least some of those same emotions, he knows that the words he wants to say are true.

"Finn, you..." he sighed, having a hard time finding the words he wanted to say, to try and get both Finn and himself to believe them. "He loved you Finn," he said quietly. Not what he had meant to say at first, but he needed to hear it. "He loved you and he knew that you cared about him so much. And he loved you." Blaine saw Finn blink a few times, pulling his legs up closer to his chest. "And what happened with Karofsky, it... he didn't hold it against you. Don't blame yourself Finn. You loved him and that was enough. In the end, that's really all we could do, all anyone could do."

Finn took a shaky breath before asking softly, "Do you know what we were talking about before... before his heart stopped beating?"

Blaine's pulse slowed, his chest tightened. He waited.

"Mom and Dad were playing cards, for something to do. I was sitting with him on the bed and we were talking about Regionals and how rehearsals were going. I told him Rachel was getting all worked up and kind of crazy like, well, like *Rachel* and that she kept pushing me to run this one dance section over and over again and I just wasn't getting it, but she wouldn't let it go, and then I told him how lucky he was to have you," Finn felt a faint blush spread over his cheeks, "because you just seemed like a really cool guy and like you really cared about him and that I was happy if he was happy with you. He said, 'I am Finn,' and got this dreamy kind of look in his eyes. And I think he was kind of embarrassed about it, and maybe he forgot our parents were there, but he told me about the song you sang for him, the one you wrote, and how he was never going to forget it. And he said he loved you and that you had said it too. He smiled and asked me to get one of his fashion magazines so he could look at it and show me something that he thought would look good on me, which I doubted, but I got up and went over to get it and it was in my hands when... when the machine started beeping and I turned around and he was... he..."

Finn's words choked off and he couldn't go on. There were silent tears sliding down Blaine's cheeks as he heard what had happened during Kurt's last minutes and to know that *he* was the subject of their last conversation made his stomach clench for reasons he didn't know.

Blaine reached out, arms held up, asking permission. Finn leaned in slightly and Blaine wrapped his arms around his shoulders. Finn relaxed into Blaine's hold, arms protective and comforting as he just laid there with his head against Blaine's shoulder, waiting for the tears to stop.

When they finally did, Finn pulled away and leaned back against the wall, head hanging down. "I'm never going to forget that," he said softly, and even as he said it, Blaine knew that that he was telling the truth and his heart hurt for Finn and what he had had to see. As much as it killed Blaine to hear it, he couldn't imagine actually being there when it happened. And he didn't want to think about it, or risk having his heart torn open again. He said a silent thank you because he hadn't been there. If he had, he knew that it would have destroyed him.

"Thank you for telling me, Finn," Blaine told him, in the same soft tone that he had used, and he meant it. Somehow, knowing how Kurt's last moments went, eased the loss he felt in his heart, if only because it gave him the tiniest amount of closure.

Finn gave his hand a gentle squeeze, and he returned it, holding his gaze until Finn looked away.

"I meant what I said you know. About you being there for him. And for me, because I think I might do something I'd regret if I hadn't been able to get that out."

Blaine was about to give a compassionate reply, when something Finn said hit him. "Did you not tell your parents what you told me?"

"I can't. I told them some of it, but they're already hurting so much. If I told them I just stood there while Karofsky taunted him, they'd... I can't put them through that too."

Blaine frowned, but said, "Well thank you for confiding in me. It means a lot."

"I guess it's kind of a given though. You kind of can't not be a part of this family once you've been through this."

"Still, thank you."

Blaine saw Finn unfold his legs, a bit stiffly, and stood at the edge of his bed. "If... if you need anything or, well, anything, just... just come get me okay? All you have to do is ask."

Finn left to return to his own room and surprisingly, a small smile reached the corners of Blaine's mouth. It felt weird. Yesterday, he hadn't thought he could ever smile again. He'd never thought he'd laugh again, and yet, he had, if only for a moment. He'd thought he might just drown in his own tears and the agonizing hurt that coursed through him, and yet, he was alive.

And as much as he wished this was all just a bad dream, talking with Finn had made him realize that everyone else was hurting too and they had to stick together if they were going to make it.

And he knew that he couldn't have asked to have a more supportive, more loving, more caring family who would stop him from falling and be with him through this road to healing, one step at a time.

33. Strength

Blaine had been avoiding his reflection in the mirror all morning. Not an easy thing to do, with the entire length of the bathroom wall being one big mirror, but he had made it a point not to look at himself, so he hadn't.

He knew his eyes were red and puffy already, he knew his hair would frizz because of the rain that had decided to randomly begin drizzling, he knew his hands were shaking when he tried to brush his teeth, he knew he didn't want to look this way and if he saw himself, it would only make things that much harder.

It wasn't snowing, which was both odd and a good thing. Odd because it was three days before Christmas, and there hadn't been a Christmas that Blaine could remember without snow so close to the actual holiday. But it was good, because they were able to clear away most of the snow in order to have Kurt's funeral outside. It was so cold out, but Blaine wouldn't have had it any other way. Kurt loved lounging around outside when it was warm and taking walks when it was chilly and even just hearing the crunch of snow under his boots when it snowed. It was only fitting that Kurt's funeral was outside.

Blaine sighed and finally left the guest bedroom to head downstairs. As he expected, a solemn quiet had taken over what was normally a happy household. It had been like this all week, but as today had finally come, the silence was magnified ten times over. He trudged into the kitchen, where Carole was cooking breakfast. She looked up at him as he came in, gave him a small smile, and went back to buttering toast. Finn was staring at a plate of slightly burnt eggs and a piece of toast, just staring, not eating anything. The moment Blaine sat down, there was a plate of food in front of him and as he opened his mouth to tell Carole that he didn't want anything, he thought better of it. It would make her feel better that he had at least tried to eat and he didn't want to refuse it. She had gotten up early to make them breakfast because she knew that if she hadn't, they would all not eat anything.

After 'breakfast,' she sent the boys up to change. With a heavy heart, Blaine followed Finn back up the stairs. He went straight to the suit that had been hanging on the back of his door for the past day and slowly began to get dressed, pulling on the black pants, white shirt, black jacket, all while avoiding his reflection, but in order to do his tie, he did have to look, though he kept his gaze fixed on his trembling fingers and looked away the moment his tie was straight. His hand closed on something small and round on his dresser drawer. Taking a steadying breath, he pinned the crest of the Warblers onto his lapel.

The suit Kurt wore in his casket now was almost identical to Blaine's, in style and color, including the Warbler pin, except Kurt's clothes were designer. Finn had wanted to give him something too, so he'd enlisted the help of Brittany, and for the past few days, they'd been making bracelets out of rainbow string. Finn had handed them out to all of the Glee kids and had given Blaine a bundle of them to distribute to the Warblers. He'd passed them on to Wes, as the Warblers had come in last night and were staying at a hotel, to be here for the funeral. Every member of Kurt's family, the entire McKinley Glee club, including Mr. Scheuster and Ms. Pillsbury, and every Warbler were all wearing identical bracelets. And there was one tied loosely around Kurt's wrist. 'Loosely' on Brittany's advice so he could, "take it off if he wants when he's in heaven and doesn't want to get it dirty."

I can't do this, Blaine thought. But for as many times as the thought ran through his mind, he found himself opening the door and emerging from the room, now fully dressed, clutching a sloppily written letter in a carefully sealed envelope.

Finn was already downstairs, wearing a suit much like Blaine's, except he wore a tie that was very dark grey, almost the exact shade of the clouds hanging in the sky. Carole was lightly running her fingers over the shoulder of Finn's jacket, smoothing out the nonexistent wrinkles and turned when she heard footsteps.

She took a breath. "Do you have anything?"

Blaine held out the envelope, feeling his arm shake and was glad when the light paper was out of his hands. Inside the letter, there were five sheets of folded paper. Two held the notes and lyrics to the song Blaine had written for Kurt so long ago. The other three were tear-stained and horribly messy, but they told Kurt everything Blaine had ever wanted to tell him, and things that he had said a million times, things that meant nothing, and everything, now. Finn disappeared into the other room for a moment, but came out with his head bowed, something that looked like a rag in his hands. He carefully passed it on to his mother, letting his fingers stray along the fabric and then drop to his sides.

Carole stared at the object for a long moment before looking up at her son, tears in her eyes. "Oh, honey," she whispered. "Are you sure?"

Finn nodded immediately. "I wouldn't want anyone else to have it."

Carole wrapped her arms around him, holding Finn's offering to have placed in Kurt's casket. It was the blanket his father had gotten him when he was born.

Blaine did not let the tears form in his eyes. If he started crying now, it would be all over with and he might as well not go because he was sure he would drown in his own tears. He could hold it together that long, to make it through this. And then he could fall apart. But not until after, when he could be alone.

Carole took Blaine's hand in her own and gave it a gentle squeeze. Blaine could not understand how Carole had managed to get ready in the time that it had taken him to change, plus be able to do all the breakfast dishes. Carole wore black dress pants, and a black sweater, a string of pearls lay against the soft fabric of her sweater, her hair smoothly brushed and light make-up bringing out the softness of her skin. She looked beautiful and he thought that Kurt would approve.

"Okay then." She straightened up, carefully folded the worn blanket and placed Blaine's envelope on top of the bundle and dabbed lightly at her make-up as she told them, "I'm going to give these to Burt and he's going to go and take care of some last-minute things. Finn, honey, would you like me to stay and drive you there or do you think you could drive yourself?"

Finn gave her a small smile. "I'll be fine Mom. Stay with Dad okay?"

"Thank you dear," she said gratefully and cupped his cheek in her hand before turning to Blaine. "You can choose if you'd like to drive yourself or if you'd like to ride with Finn, honey."

He nodded and then she glanced at Finn again. "I programmed the directions into the GPS already, so you shouldn't get lost, but please call if you need any help at all. We should be there about an hour before everyone. It should only take fifteen minutes to drive there, so if you leave in twenty minutes, you should get there the same time we do. Alright hon?"

"Yeah. Twenty minutes. Thanks Mom."

And she turned and disappeared down the hallway. Blaine heard the door to the master bedroom open and close.

He hadn't seen Burt all morning. In all honesty, he really didn't want to. He knew Burt was strong, but he did not want to imagine what he must be feeling right now. Today, he had to bury his only son. There was nothing in the world that could even compare with that kind of pain.

Finn met Blaine's eyes almost shyly and ran his hand up to the back of his neck, rubbing nervously. "So... well, I don't know about you, but I really can't stand to be here anymore. Do you want to go and... I don't know... maybe just, sit and wait? Or something?"

"Yeah. That sounds fine." Blaine really didn't know what he was agreeing to, but it had to be better than standing around here. At least if they were out of the house, they had something to get their minds off of where they were going to have to go and the reason they would be there in the first place.

Blaine slid into the passenger seat of Finn's truck, ears pricking at the loud music that erupted from the speakers the moment he turned on the engine. Finn made no move to turn down the volume and Blaine was glad for the distraction the music provided; that they wouldn't have to speak to each other yet, with neither one having any idea what to say to the other.

"You don't mind if we just drive around for a bit do you?"

Blaine shook his head and leaned back into the seat, his head lolled to the side and he stared out the window at the blurring scenery as they drove. The sky was a shadowy grey, heavy with clouds; the road was pitch black, darker than usual with the absence of the sun; buildings and trees rushed past in a whirl of browns, blacks, and greens, the colors running together like some unfinished painting.

The drove for a while, just drove, not really knowing where they were going, but Finn made sure not to get too far away from the town. Eventually, he turned on the GPS to guide him to the cemetery. Blaine's heart thudded against his ribs as they got closer. And when they passed through the winding black gates, he involuntarily held his breath for a moment.

Burt and Carole were parking as they pulled up next to them. Carole rushed up to them as soon as they got out of the car.

"Oh boys, I thought you got lost. I thought you'd be here before us."

"We just drove around for a bit Mom. But we're here."

She nodded, not mad that they had taken a detour. Burt stood behind her, the expression on his face hard to read. It was a mixture of relief that they were here, hesitation in even being here himself, sadness in the reason he was here, and a stony coldness in not wanting to show any emotion yet.

Burt walked on ahead with Carole behind him, who was reassuring Finn that she'd put his blanket in Kurt's casket. She sounded sad as she said it, and squeezed Finn's hand, firmly comforting him. She turned her eyes to Blaine and reached out her other hand, which he took without a second thought.

They followed Burt up to where the funeral was going to be held. Blaine's breathing hitched when he saw the hole in the ground. He closed his eyes briefly and instead, took in the surroundings. There were a few large trees around the site, now bare and still heavy with snow that had not melted from this unexpected warmth, that would be beautiful in the spring and summer, that would provide a lot of shade. As they got closer, he saw the gravestone that marked his mother's grave, and the newer one that would be Kurt's. He forced himself to look away the moment he saw the words engraved on the stone.

There was one word that he had seen that he did not look away in time to miss.

Courage

He took a deep breath. He didn't know if he could make it through today. He could not break down again.

There was the rumbling of an engine and he looked up to see a black car pull up on the snow strewn path. Four men rushed up and opened the back. Blaine felt sick as they each took a hold on the casket and began to walk up to where Kurt was going to be buried.

He turned his head until the car drove away. And he slowly brought his eyes upwards, letting his eyes glaze over Kurt's casket.

If he had to say anything in that moment, he would have said it was beautiful. Beautiful for Kurt. The wood was so smooth, stained an ink black that contrasted starkly against the white of the huge mound of lilies that had been arranged in the center. It was beautiful.

Soon after, people began arriving, and most of them Blaine had never seen before. Burt and Carole and Finn stood near the back of the many lines of fold out chairs that had been placed in the thin layer of snow. Blaine stayed in the back, away from people if he could avoid it. More people poured in. This was Kurt's family, which Blaine had never met. He wasn't even sure most of them knew who he was, though a few people smiled warmly at him. He recognized the entire Glee club, who all came up and talked to him for a little while. Then he picked out the Warblers and moved towards them, drawn into the familiarity in this confusion of strangers. They spoke in hushed voices, entirely different than their normal volume and not a

word was mentioned about Kurt. They were probably just worried they'd upset him, but to Blaine's relief, it wasn't difficult to talk to them like it had been before.

When all the people were thanked for coming and seats were filled, Blaine sat down next to Finn. He would have sat in the back with the Warblers, but Carole insisted he be with them, which he found he didn't mind as much as he thought he might.

The preacher appeared and began speaking in a comforting voice. Blaine could hear a murmur of his words as he talked about Kurt's childhood, his accomplishments, his friends and family. He could feel Finn shaking next to him and without thinking, he grasped the teenager's hand in his own and held it tightly.

Blaine heard his own name mentioned more than a few times, along with the Warblers and Glee club members. And then he heard his name again, but this time, the preacher stopped talking and looked over at him, smiling in encouragement. Blaine had told Finn he would sing at Kurt's funeral, but he hadn't expected it to be this hard. He took a deep breath, feeling Finn's hand tighten around his own before letting go.

He had had trouble thinking of a song to sing. There were so many songs that told what he was feeling, what he wanted, what he needed. He thought about writing his own song, but he knew he was in no position to do that. He wanted the song to be special, not written harshly on tear-stained pages. And as he slept one night, he tossed and turned in worry that he wouldn't be able to find a song that was suitable. But when he woke up, he knew. He knew what song he would sing and in that moment, he wondered how he didn't think of it all along.

Blaine stood and made his weak legs carry him forward, made his face neutral, not showing any of the nervousness or hurt that he felt. He faced the audience and told himself that this was just another show. He'd never suffered from nerves before when he sang. This was just another performance, just one more song.

Blaine took a steadying breath and began to sing, raising his voice as best he could. There were no other background noises, no music, no beats, no other voices. Just him, and his voice rang out, soft and sweet and so full of broken emotion that everyone seemed to be forced to hold their breath as he sang.

I walked across an empty land

I knew the pathway like the back of my hand

I felt the earth beneath my feet

Sat by the river and it made me complete

Blaine had kept his head bowed, afraid that if he looked up, he would see the faces of all of these people who cared about and loved Kurt, his family, his friends. And he thought that he wouldn't be able to meet their eyes, didn't want to see the pain on their faces. But on the next line, he slowly lifted his head, staring ahead, eyes locked on something and nothing, as he thought of Kurt and how much he had changed Blaine's life.

Oh simple thing, where have you gone

I'm getting old and I need something to rely on

So tell me when you're gonna let me in

I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin

I came across a fallen tree

I felt the branches of it looking at me

And he thought how much he had replayed the day that he'd met Kurt. He'd seen a boy so strong, so beautiful, proud of himself, but underneath, he was scared, fallen. He could still see Kurt's eyes looking up at him under his lashes, a soft blush coloring his delicate skin, and the tears in his eyes when he'd told him about Karofsky. Blaine had done his best to be there for him and he could only hope now that it had been enough, that Kurt hadn't been scared; that was all he'd wanted. For Kurt to not have to live in fear of anything.

Is this the place we used to love?

Is this the place that I've been dreaming of?

Oh simple thing, where have you gone

I'm getting old and I need something to rely on

So tell me when you're gonna let me in

I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin

Kurt was his 'simple thing.' The thing that he'd been missing in his life, but had never known it. And his life had seemed whole, complete, when Kurt was there.

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?

Blaine could not think of anything that he wouldn't give up in order to just have one more minute with Kurt, one more chance to tell him he loved him, one more time to kiss him, one more time to hold him in his arms. He could let his pain swallow him, drag him down until he couldn't see the sunlight anymore. Or he could push through this, be thankful for the time he had with Kurt, and just maybe, he could begin to be happy again and learn to live without him. It was getting slightly easier, if he had to be honest with himself, at least he wasn't flat-out scaring all his friends with the way he acted anymore, and he knew that these scars of hurt would only go away with time.

Oh simple thing where have you gone

I'm getting old and I need something to rely on

So tell me when you're gonna let me in

I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin

It was going to be hard starting over. This was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do, to say goodbye to the man he loved with all of his heart. He knew Kurt would not want him to dwell on the past, but it was hard. It was so hard.

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 knew that Kurt would be forever in his heart. Kurt had been the only person he'd ever let get that close to him emotionally. He'd given his heart to Kurt and though he was no longer here to hold or touch or love or talk to, he would always be with him.

This could be the end of everything

He did not cry, though halfway through the song, his voice had begun to get thicker, more gravelly, more raw, and he had to blink back the tears that had formed in his eyes against his will. And now his voice was low, and his hands clenched, clasped together behind his back.

So why don't we go

He finally let himself make sense of the blurring shapes in front of him and suddenly his world became clearer. He immediately saw the Warblers, dressed in black suits, huddled together at the back, every face streaked with silent tears. Wes caught his gaze and nodded at him, lifting his chin in encouragement and pride.

Blaine's voice lowered to a whisper and his head bowed.

Somewhere only we know

He let the note fade softly and he took a deep breath through his nose. Without realizing what he was doing, he turned and stared down at the closed casket. He closed his eyes as his heart gave a painful thump, and he reached out a hand, pressing his palm against the highly polished casket. His guitar-string calloused fingertips stretched out, feeling the smooth black wood under his hand. He bowed his head, the wave of emotion that he had kept back all this time crashed over him, breaking forcefully and washing away what strength he felt he had left. The tears rolled down his cheeks and his body shook as he silently broke down. All of the people behind him had disappeared, at least for this moment. It was only him and this... this box that encased the love of his life. The right sleeve of his suit jacket had ridden up, revealing the rainbow bracelet strung loosely around his wrist as it shifted up and down as his arm trembled. The tears streaked down his cheeks, dripping from his chin or running over his mouth, bitter and salty on his tongue. He took shuddering breaths and not knowing what he did until he did it, he leaned over, pressing his forehead against the back of his hand that hadn't moved from Kurt's casket. Deep shaking breaths became weaker as he forced himself to calm down. It didn't matter to him that he was breaking down in front of all these people; it didn't matter that he was sobbing in front of them. No one said anything, but everyone felt the crippling emotion of this man in front of them. Carole pressed her hand to her mouth as silent tears fell and Burt had one arm around her shoulders and the other clasped with Finn's, who leaned into him, face pressed into Burt's chest, unashamed with choking sobs catching in his throat.

Had all these people not been here, Blaine would have crumbled to the floor and cried, but he didn't want to go through that again. He swallowed hard against the lump in his constricted throat and when his mouth could form words, he took a deep breath and whispered so quietly, lips pressing lightly against the casket under his palm.

"I'll never say goodbye to you."

And he looked up and tried to walk at a normal pace back up the center aisle. He wanted to run so badly. Just run and not feel this pain anymore.

He sniffed, pushing the heel of his palm hard against his eyes briefly as he went to stand with the Warblers.

The preacher stood before Kurt's casket, saying something that Blaine didn't hear because he was fixed on what was happening. His heart hammered in his chest and he was breathing so fast he got dizzy. He swayed and was steadied by David, who stared at him with worried eyes, but he shook his head and the Warbler did not press the issue, just held him still. The casket was being slowly lowered into the ground

and Blaine could literally feel a part of himself being sucked down with his love. He bit his lip hard to stop from moaning aloud. His legs were shaking. He wanted so badly to just sink to the floor and curl in a ball and go to sleep. His chest throbbed and soon, he could no longer see the solid black of the casket, only the tips of the white lilies peeking out over the hole in the ground. David held onto him a little tighter.

A long time seemed to pass where Blaine stood there, seriously debating if he was going to pass out or not, and then the preacher said a few more words and it must have meant that this was ending because Burt, Carole, and Finn were motioned to and they stood up to one side, in a line. Blaine felt the hands on his shoulders leave and for a moment, he panicked because now he could not know for sure if he wasn't going to tip over, and then his hand was firmly gripped and he looked up to see Wes.

"I know that was difficult. If it's any help at all, I think that Kurt would have been very proud. And I'm proud of you. We all are."

He nodded and gave him a small smile, what he could manage anyway.

A pause and then Wes nudged him. "I think they want you over there."

He followed Wes's gaze, and saw Carole lock eyes with him, a hand beckoning him over.

"We'll be waiting." Wes told him gently and Blaine mumbled a thank-you before moving with stiff legs over to Carole.

She held out a hand and pulled him closer, effectively shepherding him into the line with herself, Finn, and Burt. "You're part of this family Blaine. This is your loss as much as it is ours. Please stand with us?"

Her whisper in his ear made his heart thud with both sadness and gratitude. He nodded wordlessly and fell into line with them, while it seemed the entire group of people who had come out for Kurt's funeral, and there were a lot of people here, had stood and were all seeming to come towards them, like salmon swimming upstream.

Many of them passed slowly by Kurt's casket, while others stopped and said prayers or goodbyes or other things to help give themselves peace. And Blaine suddenly found himself shaking hands with so many strangers, all offering soothing words and sentences that fell on deaf ears. Blaine really did not understand what half of the people were saying to him. He couldn't even think anymore. He glanced to the side and saw Carole clasping a man's hand, a sympathetic smile on her face. He knew she was hurting, but she

accepted the words with a grace and strength Blaine had never seen before. So he did too. His hands grasped tightly with whoever's hand happened to reach his, and he would look into their eyes and sincerely tell them, "Thank you," when they offered their kind thoughts, letting him know that Kurt was lucky to have been able to be with him, that his song was a beautiful homage to Kurt's memory, that they were so sorry for his loss.

And just when he thought he couldn't stand the endless stream of people he didn't know, he found himself shaking the last hand, nodding to the last person, and just like that, they were gone. He felt Carole's hand on his shoulder and he met her gaze, and then returned to the Warblers, who were waiting for him. As he walked, he happened to catch the glance of Mercedes as she turned to hug a tearful Rachel. She gave him a sad smile, which he returned before being pulled into the almost crushing arms of the Warblers. When he was released from their grip, he thanked them again for being there and told them how much it meant to him that they were. They all offered supportive words and encouraging smiles before shuffling off to give their condolences to Burt and Carole, who had met some of them, though hadn't spoken to any one of them for a long amount of time, but they still cared about Kurt just as much as anyone there and Kurt's family took the time to hug and thank each and every one of Kurt's friends.

Blaine watched them go for a moment, and his eyes drifted back over to where the Glee club was huddled together. He saw Brittany and Santana hugging each other tightly, Mike and Tina gripping hands, Rachel with her head on Finn's shoulder, arms around his waist, Quinn being comforted by Sam, Mercedes had one hand on Artie's shoulder, Puck had his arm around Lauren's waist. They were all talking softly, all trying to deal with this the best way they could, for now.

"Hey."

A voice made Blaine turn his attention back to the person he hadn't realized was still standing next to him.

"I know this has been a hard day for you," Wes said gently. "And I don't want you to feel like you're alone. And I don't want you to be alone. I know this is the complete opposite of what I said earlier and why I made you come here in the first place, but we're all staying in a hotel for the weekend and I got a room with David, but I can kick him out, send him with Josh or something, if you'd like to stay with us." Even if he said no, Wes had at least offered. It put his mind at ease a little to know that he had offered, that he had done more than just said, 'I'm sorry.'

"Thank you Wes, but I'd really just like to stay here."

The corner of Wes's mouth lifted into a small grin. "Okay." He pulled Blaine into a one-armed hug and told him, "If you need anything, call me anytime alright?"

"Thanks. I will."

Wes nodded and followed his crowd to the lot where they had all parked. When they were gone, Blaine saw a movement out of the corner of his eyes and looked over to see Finn's hand reaching out towards him, calling him over. It had been a long day and all Blaine wanted to do was get out of there as soon as he could, but he told himself it wouldn't be too much longer and went to see what Finn wanted.

He was greeted by the redundant chorus of "I'm sorry's" and he nodded this acknowledgement in a way that felt almost robotic.

Feet shifted uncomfortably in not knowing what to say, but it was Rachel who spoke, turning to him and giving him the same soft comment that Wes had, "If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask."

He thanked her, but what he needed, they couldn't give him. No one could give him what he needed. He saw so many pairs of eyes staring at him and suddenly he felt the urge to bolt out of the spotlight that had seemed to be set on following him.

At that moment, or maybe he only just now became aware, it began to rain. He blinked when he felt the cold drops fall on his skin and felt relieved when everyone began to disband, saying hasty goodbyes and soft reassurances before they headed for the safety of their cars. He looked over to see Mr. Scheuster shaking hands with Burt. Finn was hugging Rachel and listening to something she said into his ear. She pulled away and Finn grabbed her hand and tugged her along after him as he headed towards his parents. Along the way, he grabbed Blaine too, who didn't feel like fighting him.

Carole and Burt were walking towards them, paying no attention to the rain that was steadily becoming heavier.

Carole had to raise her voice to be heard over the pattering rain. "We need to go talk to them," she lifted her chin in the direction of the funeral presider, "and I don't know how long it'll take and I know you're all probably tired. Go ahead and go home. We'll see you there soon okay?"

Finn nodded and Blaine stiffly dipped his head.

"We're so proud of all of you. We love you."

"Love you too Mom." Finn hugged her and then Burt, and Blaine was pulled into the tight hugs too, followed by an unsuspecting Rachel and then they were finally free to go.

Finn and Rachel ran to the cars, and as much as Blaine had wanted to be able to run earlier, now he was wanting to do anything but that. He was leaving Kurt. For the last time, he was leaving him. He heard the car doors slam and with a heavy heart, he took one last look at the final resting place of his love and turned to walk against the rain that had soaked through his clothes, making his shirt stick to his skin, the wind blowing his sopping hair away from his swollen eyes. Finn was standing outside his car, getting just as soaked as Blaine was, and waited for him. He saw him trudging through the rain and his heart ached. Blaine slid into the back seat while Finn closed the driver's side door and started the car.

Everyone was shivering and Finn turned up the heat as high as it would go, not caring in the slightest that the seats of his truck were slowly soaking up the water that dripped from their trembling forms. The short ride back to Lima was silent and once again, Blaine found himself staring out the window again, but now, all he could see was the grey haze of rain blurring out the surroundings. Lights shone from houses or cars, but they passed by so fast that they melded together and he could not tell where one house ended and another began.

When they reached the house, Finn flicked on all the lights and grabbed clothes from his room and went into the bathroom to change so that Rachel could use his room to change into the clothes she had brought. Blaine went immediately to his room to strip off the clothes that felt like they were glued to his skin. He was still shaking, though now in his pajama bottoms and an old t-shirt and dry socks, he knew it was not because he was cold.

He sat on the bed, his hands resting lightly on his knees for a long time. He didn't know how long, but he had heard Rachel and Finn's voices downstairs a while ago and the credits to a movie begin playing quietly, their voices talking over the conversation of whatever characters were having. He knew they just needed background noise, which was why the movie was on. He knew all too well what it was like to feel the way they did and what a silent room can make you feel.

Blaine laid back against the pillows, his eyes burning, but he did not close them. For a long time, he just laid there, listening to the white noise downstairs and the rain on the roof and ignoring his instinct to go to sleep after this horrid day. Eventually, his ears picked up a new sound, another voice, which, after a

moment, seemed to be getting louder. He heard footsteps on the stairs and sat up. The footfalls grew clearer as they drew nearer and then stop outside his door. He looked up as a soft knock echoed in the silent room and blinked repeatedly as the door opened and let in the light from the hall, filling the dark space and one of the last people he would have expected to see came in and shut the door carefully behind her.

Mercedes let her eyes adjust before walking forward, up to where Blaine sat on the bed.

"Hi," she said and held out a disposable Lima Bean coffee cup. "This is for you. You probably don't want it, but I brought it anyway. I got one for Finn and Rachel too."

Blaine looked up and took the drink from her, clearing his throat and thanking her, hoping she could hear how much he appreciated it. He lifted the drink to his lips and almost sighed when he felt the warmth spread throughout his entire body, warming him from the inside out. He tasted cinnamon and a crisp sweetness as the apple cider touched his tongue.

He took another few sips and then placed the cup on the table, looking up to see Mercedes staring at him.

"The song you sang was beautiful," she told him, eyes locked on his. "I've never known that that song could be so powerful. And I know Kurt would have loved it."

He hated hearing Kurt being talked about in the past tense and before he could help it, his face crumpled. He heard Mercedes's sharp intake of breath and then he was suddenly enveloped in a pair of warm arms, his head being pressed into her shoulder and he relaxed in her arms, feeling so much comfort and empathy. He didn't cry, but it felt good to have her hand moving in soft circles on his back.

"It was really hard for me," she said, not letting go of Blaine, just talking while she held him, "to even begin to understand how Kurt could even get leukemia. It didn't seem fair and just when I was starting to not hate the world, he was taken away from us. I spent a lot of time at my church when I found out. I practically lived there for a few days because I didn't feel strong enough to go back to school or even to my own parents or my friends. I just wanted to be alone. I didn't understand how this could possibly happen and I know that my preacher is always telling us that things happen for a reason, but I could not even begin to wonder why on earth god would give us this kind, sweet, caring boy and then just take him away. I still didn't know. Until today. I saw you today and I know that you love Kurt more than anything. Watching you up there, it was so powerful and I saw a strength that I haven't been able to see in many

people. Kurt loved you so much and having you in his life made his life worth living. He told me that being with you was like something from a fairytale, that it couldn't be real that he had you in his life. I went to visit him in the hospital; I think Carole had made you go get sleep or something. But I stayed with him for a while and it seemed unimportant then, but he told me that if anything happened to him, that I would promise to make sure you see how strong you are, that you don't need him to be your own person, that you could move on." He felt her tears against his cheek. "But I promised him and Mercedes Jones does not back down on a promise. Especially for my man, Kurt." She took a deep breath. "It's going to be okay Blaine. It doesn't feel like it now, but you are strong. Kurt certainly saw it, and I saw it today. You will be okay." She kissed the top of his head and smoothed down his curls, slightly frizzy because of the unexpected shower he'd received earlier.

Her hand wound in his and he waited, not speaking, barely moving. He heard his slightly congested breathing and then Mercedes took another breath, keeping her eyes on his.

And she began to sing, voice low and soft, like a lullaby.

As I lay me down

Heaven hear me now

I'm lost without a cause

After giving it my all

Blaine had heard this song before, but now, it meant so much more. It hit so close to his heart. He did feel lost, he had felt lost, even after doing everything he could to deal with this pain. But it was going to take time. Blaine was not a patient person and this was going to be one of the hardest things he'd ever done. Getting over Kurt's death would not be easy, as he had learned. But the funeral, as much as it hurt, was something that needed to be done. Another crack in his heart healed.

Winter storms have come

And darkened my sun

After all that I've been through

Who on earth can I turn to?

Kurt had been the 'sun' in his life. His day was always brighter when they were together and on this rainy day, he'd had to watch as Kurt was buried. The pain of the first night after Kurt's death still throbbed in his chest and he still felt alone sometimes. Mercedes's arms wrapped around his shoulders again. He wasn't alone. And she pulled away just enough to sing the next verse while looking into his eyes.

I look to you

I look to you

After all my strength is gone

In you I can be strong

I look to you

I look to you

And when melodies are gone

In you I hear a song, I look to you

The sparkle in Mercedes's eyes revealed pride, love, tenderness. She had said that Blaine was strong. And for a moment, he hadn't believed her. But there was no way her eyes could show an emotion that was false. He believed her. His breathing hitched and her hand on his shoulder tightened.

About to lose my breath

There's no more fighting left

Sinking to rise no more

Searching for that open door

Mercedes knew how hard Blaine was taking this. No one expected him to be able to get over this easily. And she hoped with all her heart that he would take this song and really listen to the words. She wanted his 'open door' to be forgiveness for what had happened and acceptance in being able to live his life again without sinking in grief and blame. She kept her voice at the same soothing tone throughout the entire song, watching carefully for his reactions.

And every road that I've taken

Led to my regret

And I don't know if I'm gonna make it

Nothing to do but lift my head

As if responding to her words, Blaine's head tilted up, meeting her eyes again and he squeezed her hand.

I look to you

I look to you

And when all my strength is gone

In you I can be strong

I look to you

I look to you

And when melodies are gone

In you I hear a song, I look to you

The next verse was so accurate in describing what Blaine felt, he had to close his eyes and take trembling breaths, just listening to the soothing tone of his friend's voice as she sang.

My levee's have broken, my walls have come

Crumbling down on me

The rain is falling, defeat is calling

I need you to set me free

Take me far away from the battle

I need you, shine on me

Blaine licked his lips, tasting the salt and rainwater and apples as he met Mercedes's eyes. Both of them had had their worlds turned upside down, had the castles of their perfect lives ripped out from under them, crumbling into a thousand pieces after the loss of their best friend. It would have been so easy to just give in to the hurt, the pain, defeat. But they had strength in each other. They could pick themselves up and walk away from this disaster, never truly forgetting it, instead, leaving the pain and begin to rebuild. With strength, they could leave behind the crushing ache that loss brought to this battle and start to live again.

I look to you

I look to you

After all my strength has gone

In you I can be strong

I look to you

I look to you

And when melodies are gone

In you I hear a song, I look to you

Mercedes dropped her voice to an even quieter tone, letting the last notes fade softly.

I look to you

I look to you

She wiped away the single tear that ran down her cheek and let out a little gasp of surprise when Blaine's arms were flung around her.

"Thank you." He whispered, holding her tightly. "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

She held him tightly until he pulled away. Then she smiled at him, then her eyes glanced at the clock on the table and her smile fell.

"I'm sorry baby." She squeezed his hand again. "I told my dad I'd be back in an hour. I have to go. I'm sorry."

Blaine stood up with her and she released his hand, turning towards the door, but looking back at him as she had her hand on the knob. "Are you going to be okay?"

He looked up at her, no longer shaking. He took a slow breath, no longer trembling.

"I think I am." He said in a low voice, feeling the comfort in his own words, the words that he said truthfully and believed them.

She nodded. "Alright baby. I'll see you around okay?"

"Thank you." He told her again and with one last smile, she was gone.

Mercedes had meant to tell him that he gave her strength, but without realizing it, she had instilled a strength in Blaine that he didn't know he had left.

Burt and Carole returned home a while after Mercedes left. The movie Finn and Rachel had been playing was just ending. Blaine was lying on his bed, thinking. No one was asleep, though after the exhausting day they'd all had, it was a wonder that they weren't.

Blaine heard their voices downstairs and after a while, a pair of footsteps came up the stairs. For some reason, he expected Finn, and not Carole, to open the door to his room. He sat up as she came in.

"Hey honey," she said softly. "How are you?"

"I'm alright. Getting better. Mercedes came after we got home and talking with her helped a lot."

"I'm glad sweetheart. We're all so proud of you. I know getting up there and singing like that was hard, but it really was amazing."

He gave her a soft smile.

Carole returned it, but a look came over her face, a hesitant, almost worried look. Like she wanted to say something, but didn't know how he would take it.

He noticed the look immediately and told her in a low voice, "I'm okay Carole. Really. You can tell me whatever it is you need to."

She let out a breath and nodded, pausing just a moment before saying, "I wanted to give you this later and I'm sorry that I've kept it for this long, but I just didn't know if it would make things harder..."

She trailed off and then shook her head slightly. "I wanted to make sure you were alright before I gave it to you," she said as she stood and crossed the room. "I'll be right back."

And she disappeared out the door. Blaine did not move, did not breathe. What was she going to give him? It was obviously something that she thought might make him upset. His mind was racing. His heart beat faster. It could be anything.

In the time it had taken his mind to run away with the mystery of what she might be giving him, she came back, sitting beside him. In her hands, she held two boxes stacked one on top of the other. The one on top seemed to be a shoe box, while the bottom one was larger, maybe one foot in height, width, and length.

She smoothed her hand along the top of the shoe box and then looked up at him. "Kurt told me to give these to you. But not until you were ready. He made me promise to wait until I could tell that you weren't lying to me when I asked if you were okay."

His heart stuttered. What?

She gently set the boxes on his lap. They weren't heavy. She stood and ran her palm up and down his shoulder, giving him a comforting smile.

"Thank you again honey. It means more to us than you know. You know where to find us if you need anything. " And she gave him a soft kiss on his hair and she left him.

Blaine sat very still for he didn't know how long. Minutes, an hour, a few seconds? He felt the weight of the boxes in his lap seeming to grow heavier. His fingertips brushed along the top of the box. He couldn't do this yet. He'd open them tomorrow. But not today. He'd had just about all he could take today.

With slightly shaking legs, he rose and placed the boxes down carefully next to the large bookcase. He stared down at them, heart pounding, aching to know what was inside, but knowing that opening them now would be too much to handle. Tomorrow things would be better. He'd open them tomorrow.

He curled up on the bed and closed his eyes, pulling the blankets up around him.

Today had been hard. Tomorrow would be better.

34. Brave

Blaine did not open the boxes the next day. He kept busy with helping Carole decorate the house for Christmas. Tomorrow was Christmas eve and though no one really felt like celebrating, both Burt and Carole wanted the boys to keep some sense of 'normal' and being together as a family for the holidays was the first thing they could do. Blaine had always spent the Christmas holidays at a friends' house, usually with Wes or David, as going to his parent's house was always tense and without a doubt, his father would have a pretty girl join them for Christmas dinner, hoping that she would catch Blaine's eye and he wouldn't have to worry about having a failure for a son. Blaine was perfectly happy spending his break somewhere other than with his parents and when Carole had asked him to stay, he'd hugged her so hard he'd almost knocked her over.

They were currently stringing garlands over the fireplace. A large pile of metal hooks and a huge box of ornaments were sitting on the table, waiting to be strung, next to another box that held the lights. They were getting the tree tonight.

Blaine had hardly seen Burt. When they'd come home from the funeral, Blaine had stayed in his room until he fell asleep, and hadn't gotten up until eleven this morning and Burt was already gone. He'd left to go to the cemetery, Carole had told him with a slight hitch in her voice. She said he'd be back later. Blaine wanted to do something for him, to comfort him in some way, as Mercedes had done for him, but he didn't think singing was appropriate and he was just lost in any other way to do anything because he knew that there really was nothing he could do. They'd just have to give it time until Burt was ready.

As he strung the last garland, his thoughts turned again to the boxes sitting by the bookcase. He had no clue what was inside them. He didn't even know Kurt had left him anything. Where had he found the time? Blaine couldn't remember ever being away from Kurt in the past two months, when he'd gotten sicker, and he didn't have any idea when he could've done it without him noticing. He wanted to open those boxes so badly it was almost painful, but whatever was inside them, he knew he would want to be alone and have time to just feel the emotions he knew would crash over him and being so close to Christmas, he didn't want to ruin everyone else's attempt at being a family while he was bursting into tears again.

He sighed and began to slide the little hooks through the loopholes in the tops of the ornaments. He was fascinated by the ornaments, as silly as it sounded. After he threaded them through the hooks, he'd hold

each one in his hand and slowly turn it around and around as if he wanted to memorize what each one looked like. There were ones that were obviously very old, saying things like "Baby's First Christmas" with "Finn" written in black sharpie on the back, ones that were newer with "Our First Christmas" that held a picture of Carole and Burt on their wedding day. There were sparkling orbs in every color, small glittering snowflakes on invisible fishing wire, handmade cutouts and painted clay figures that were obviously made by Finn or Kurt when they were little, and random forms of things like the logo of Burt's favorite football team, a porcelain version of Carole's favorite cookie, chocolate chip, a shiny black profile of Mickey Mouse, a tiny bottle of sand tied with a hemp rope, and other knickknacks that described the Hummel-Hudson family.

He strung each one with care and declined when Carole asked if he wanted her to get Finn downstairs to help. The teen was supposed to be writing a list of ingredients needed to make cookies the next day, but he had retreated up to his room with the cookbook and had probably fallen asleep. When all of the ornaments were lined up in neat rows, he opened up the box of lights, preparing to begin the difficult task of untangling the strings, but he found that the lights had been wound into a circle and tied with a rope and there were no tangles to deal with. Carole laughed and said that that was her idea; she'd gotten sick of spending hours fighting with the lights that her dad never put away properly and she promised herself that she would not doom her family to the same fate. Blaine smiled and closed the lid and instead, began to organize the large stack of cards that had gone unopened for weeks as the family had been preoccupied with being at the hospital and Kurt's funeral. He gathered them into a neat pile and set them on the counter. They were not his cards to open, though Carole had said she didn't mind, but the majority of the reason was that he knew there would be 'sorry for your loss' cards mixed in with the 'happy holidays' cards and he didn't want to look at any of those.

Burt returned an hour later, went straight up the stairs and came back down holding the unopened cookbook. Finn had fallen asleep. He propped up the book on the counter and began to write down ingredients, asking Blaine to check the fridge or cupboard occasionally to see if they had a certain spice or enough milk. There was a soft smile on Burt's face when he met Blaine's eyes, but he knew it was just to make him feel better. The tired man's eyes were red and puffy.

Carole headed to the store before dinner to pick up what they needed to make cookies and popped a pizza in the oven. The house was soon warm with the excess oven heat and the smell of cooking food brought Finn out from his lair. It had begun to snow again. Blaine thought that they couldn't have had a more perfect day for Kurt's funeral. It had snowed the day before and the day after, but it had been a beautiful day, cold and raining after, but nonetheless beautiful.

After dinner, the family piled into Finn's truck, the only vehicle they owned that could fit a pine tree in the back, and drove down to the Home Depot, where they had a lot of trees set up in the back parking lot. Lima didn't have a Christmas tree farm that was nearby and the closest ones were way overpriced and no one minded a Home Depot tree. A tree's a tree right?

Blaine shrugged his jacket closer around him as the flakes of snow began to fall and the wind picked up, sending a chill down his spine. Finn was right behind Burt, his hands shoved in his pockets, and Blaine jogged up to catch up to them, where Carole was standing by a tree that was taller than Finn.

"What about this one?"

"Looks fine Mom."

"Are... are we going to be able to get that in the house?"

Carole took a step back, seeming to compare the tree to the height of her son and reconsidered. "Yeah, I guess that wouldn't work. See anything you like Blaine?"

Blaine had never gone shopping for a Christmas tree before. His parents always had a professional pick it out and if he went home for holidays, it was sitting in his living room, sparkling with perfectly placed generic ornaments that he knew his parents hadn't even touched. The same was true at Dalton, though the gigantic tree in the dorm lounge looked picturesque, reminding him somewhat of the tree that graced the hall in the Harry Potter movies, while the tree in his parents' house just made him think of artificiality. This was a new experience for him and he didn't really know where to start. He knew Kurt would have been able to find a lovely tree that would be perfect in the designated corner of the living room and they would decorate it meticulously until it looked like one of the trees in the window of the Bloomingdale's and they'd drink hot chocolate and sing carols at the top of their lungs and...

Blaine bit his lip. No, this trip was supposed to be about the family. He craned his neck, searching down the rows of trees labeled by their kind and height. He didn't know the first thing about what trees would be good or not.

"Go on honey. Take a look around and come find us if you see something you like."

He nodded and turned away to wander among the 'forest' that had been erected in the Home Depot parking lot. His boots crunched over the random piles of snow and he was surprised when Finn fell into step alongside him.

He saw the look on Blaine's face and shrank back. "Oh, I... I can go back... I didn't mean to..."

Blaine shook his head, unsure of what expression had darkened his face to make Finn afraid he'd done something wrong. "No, no. Sorry. It's fine. I was just thinking."

Finn looked apprehensive, but he didn't leave. They turned up another row of trees and Blaine let his eyes focus on the softly falling snow and neither boy said anything until Blaine blinked and glanced up at Finn.

"Umm... so, how do you know what tree to get?"

Finn stopped and stared around the trees closest to them. "We want one no taller than me. And it's got to be kind of full, you know, like fluffy, no squashed branches or anything. I guess whatever one we think looks good."

As Finn rambled, Blaine turned in circles, taking in the scene. "Okay. What... what about that one?"

He walked towards a tree leaning on others that were against the fence. Blaine pulled the tree towards him by tugging on one of the branches. Bad move. The tree, which was taller than him by a few inches but shorter than Finn, began to topple forward. Blaine didn't know where to grab to stop the tree from falling and his first instinct was to reach out and give the tree a sort of bear hug, but he saw the pine needles coming towards his eyes and that plan immediately went out the window. So he did the next thing he could think of and covered his face with his palms. Preparing for a pointy, prick-y smashing by the tree, he sucked in a breath and closed his eyes.

But the pain never came. Hesitantly, Blaine opened one eye and peered out from behind his hand. Finn had one hand lost into the depths of the tree's branches and it had halted its descent a few inches from Blaine's face.

Letting out his breath, he mumbled a thank-you to the lifesaver, who grinned down at him as he set the tree back upright. "You're supposed to grab it by the trunk."

"Thanks. I'll remember that next time." Blaine gave him a grateful smile.

Finn was glancing at the tree and spinning it side to side. "You know, this looks like a pretty good tree. You like it?"

"Now that it's not trying to crush me? Yeah, it's nice."

Finn stood guard by the tree while Blaine went to find Burt and Carole. They abandoned a tree that looked like it wouldn't even fit in the back of Finn's truck and followed him, immediately commenting on how perfect the tree was.

"Oh, honey. It's beautiful."

"Blaine found it. It was going to squash him."

A hand clasped on Blaine's shoulder and he heard Burt's quiet laugh behind him. "Sometimes you don't realize how perfect something is until it jumps right out at you."

Blaine smiled softly. He knew that feeling. It was the same feeling he'd had when he saw Kurt sing Blackbird so long ago. When he'd realized he loved Kurt. He'd never felt 'love' before so he didn't really know what to do with those emotions. He'd felt 'crush' and 'fling,' emotions that paraded as love, but changed as often as the clouds. Love was different. Love didn't change. And it hadn't changed. Blaine thought that he'd loved Kurt from the moment he saw him, though at the time, he didn't know how to distinguish 'love' from 'crush' and it was good that things hadn't worked with Jeremiah because he would have never been able to discover the way he felt about Kurt. Oh yeah, he knew that feeling and though Kurt was gone, he doubted that feeling would ever go away. It might fade as time, years, went by, but his love for Kurt would always be there.

They left the parking lot with the tree in the back of Finn's truck, just barely fitting, and tramped back into the house, Burt and Finn lifting the tree along with them. Finn tripped once and almost dropped the trunk end and had his hands full of sticky sap by the time it was set in the corner. They all stood back to admire the bare tree; Finn stared down at his hands and went to wash them as everyone else began decorating. Carole turned on the radio station that played Christmas songs 24/7 and Burt strung up the (not tangled) lights while Blaine and, a now sticky-free, Finn passed each other ornaments to hang. It took a little while, but Blaine hesitantly began to sing along to one of the songs. He sang the first verse and then he heard Finn's voice mesh with his own. Finn smiled at him carefully, as if asking if it was okay. Blaine returned his

grin and nodded and they let their voices carry, growing louder as they became more comfortable. Even Carole joined in and by the next song, she'd gotten Burt to hum along and eventually sing softly with them.

When the tree was laden down with ornaments big and small, they stood back to admire their work. The decorating was slightly messy, more chaotic, not as precise as the trees Blaine was used to seeing, but it looked better, more homey, more real.

"Nice pick bro." Finn clapped his shoulder and Blaine nodded.

"Thanks."

The next day was Christmas eve and Blaine spent most of the day baking with Carole. Pouring flour, cracking eggs, stirring batter, Blaine saw why Kurt liked doing this so much. It was soothing in a way, as long as they read the ingredients right. Finn had been banished from the kitchen when he'd tried to put a quarter tablespoon of cinnamon in the mixture. Blaine had caught him just in time and informed him that they needed a quarter *teaspoon*.

But however much fun baking was, it took up a lot of time and Blaine had barely noticed when the clock on the oven told him it was four in the afternoon. He and Carole had turned on the radio again and spent the hours singing together and hashing out old memories of childhood Christmases. Blaine had mainly listened on that topic, but he loved learning about toddler Finn trying to wrap himself as a present, and Carole liked hearing about the holidays at Dalton. Burt came down to help them, though on Carole's insistence, he not try to bake, but gave him pieces of cookies that had broken and with a wistful look on his face, he told Blaine about Kurt's early Christmases and how he'd cried when his uncle had given him a Transformer and the only thing that made him happy was that he dressed it up in clothes from his niece's Barbie doll.

The snow had decided to quite literally dump itself all over the little town of Lima the night before and a good two inches covered the ground. Heaters were turned on, fireplaces lit, and fuzzy socks were worn by all.

Tonight was Christmas eve and there was a certain *feel* in the air, an anticipation. All over the world, little kids were being tucked into bed, practically bouncing off the walls from excitement and too many cookies.

The Hudson-Hummel home was quite different in that respect. They all sat around the fireplace, drinking hot chocolate out of mismatched mugs and biting into cookies still warm from the oven. They'd hung stockings and Blaine was a bit surprised when he saw that there was one for him. Just being here with them was enough and he tried to tell Carole that, but she wasn't having it.

"You are family. And family members get stockings. Just make sure you don't try to cover yourself in wrapping paper and tape yourself to the wall," Blaine noticed that Carole's eyes drifted to Finn at this, and the gangly teen suddenly found his cup of cocoa very interesting, "like *someone* did last year. Because that stocking can come down real quick."

She smiled as she spoke to Blaine, but the threat in her voice was clear when she looked at Finn, who mumbled, "It was a joke."

Blaine smiled, even daring to laugh. Apparently, toddler Finn wasn't much different than teenage Finn.

When night had fallen and the twinkling lights on the tree had been lit, Carole stood, went over to a closet, opened it up and pulled out three small square packages. She silently handed one to Finn, who smiled hugely and looked like the Cheshire cat, and one to Blaine, who took it with an apprehensive glance. Carole just smiled at him.

"It's nothing big honey. In my family, it was a tradition to give the kids in the family one present to open on Christmas eve. Another tradition is-

Finn pulled off the wrapping paper and lifted the lid of the box, revealing the silver profile of a football helmet that read *Finn 2011* in curly cursive.

"-that the present be an ornament. And each child hangs it on the tree and it's theirs to hang up every year."

"Thanks Mom." Finn gave her an appreciative smile and immediately hung his on a center branch, then kissed her on the cheek as he returned to his seat.

Blaine lifted the lid of the box in his hand and saw a small silver guitar, also inscribed with his name and the year.

Carole was watching him. "It seemed appropriate. Kurt told me that you play beautifully. I'd love to hear you play sometime."

Blaine held up the ornament and let it dangle from his fingers. The light reflected off the shining silver surface. He looked up and told her sincerely, "It's perfect."

He uncurled his legs from where he was sitting on the floor and moved to the tree that was so packed with ornaments, it seemed impossible to find a place for it. But he did, right next to a mini wreath on a branch near Finn's.

He gave both her and Burt long hugs before sitting on the couch, trying to let them know how much this meant to him, and pulled his legs up to his chest.

Carole then turned to Burt, pressing the third package into his hands. It was silent in the room, except for the sound of rustling paper as Burt pulled it off of the box. With a steady hand, he opened it and then held up the ornament inside as Blaine had done. It was a silver music note with *Kurt 2011* written in the same curly writing.

"I bought these a few months ago and it didn't seem right to not use it. Kurt's still part of this family."

There were tears in her eyes and in Burt's, but they smiled lightly at each other and he pulled her into a hug, whispering something in her ear.

It was quiet for a while but for the music thrumming through the radio and the gentle crackle of the fireplace. The house was filled with inviting scents, like sugar cookies, the clean, sharp smell of pine, and the enticing sweetness of hot chocolate. This was always how Blaine had imagined Christmases would be like, but he'd never experienced it. As much as he loved spending the holidays with Wes or David, nothing could compare to being here. It felt... safe, warm, it felt like home.

The music had changed into background noise while they talked softly, all clad in their pajamas. And then the song changed and Blaine stopped speaking mid-sentence. The music seemed so loud then; the only thing he could hear. His chest throbbed uncomfortably and a quiet sound like a strangled moan came from his throat.

He excused himself quickly, saying he was tired, and bit back the sob that was building in his chest. Carole adopted a sympathetic glance and told him to get some sleep. He didn't notice her concerned eyes following him as he left.

Once in the safety of the guest room, he curled up on the bed, hugging a pillow to his chest, and cried softly, the echoing memory of last year ringing in his head.

I really can't stay

But baby it's cold outside

I've got to go away

But baby it's cold outside

It was just harmless flirting. Really. That's all it was.

This evening has been

Been hoping that you'd drop in

So very nice

I'll hold your hand, they're just like ice

Sure, Blaine had flirted with other boys before, but this... this felt different.

My mother will start to worry

Beautiful, what's your hurry?

My father will be pacing the floor

Listen to the fireplace roar

So really I'd better scurry

Beautiful, please don't hurry

No, this didn't just feel different. This was different. Kurt was different.

Well maybe just a half a drink more

Put some records on while I pour

The neighbors might think

Baby, it's bad out there

Say, 'What's in this drink?'

No cabs to be had out there

I wish I knew how

Your eyes are like stars right now

And Blaine felt that he'd never truly sang a song that meant this much, that said what he wanted to say so badly without knowing he did.

Your eyes are beautiful.

Your hair is beautiful.

Your voice is beautiful.

You are beautiful.

To break this spell

I'll take your hat, your hair looks swell

I ought to say no, no, no

Mind if I move in closer

At least I'm gonna say that I tried

And Kurt smiled as their shoulders touched and Blaine couldn't help but smile too.

What's the sense in hurting my pride?

I really can't stay

Baby, don't hold out

Ah, but it's cold outside

Blaine leaned against the mantle of the fireplace, dapper and confident as always, and just watched Kurt as he mirrored Blaine's pose, looking relaxed and happy and Blaine realized that he would do anything to keep that look on Kurt's face.

I simply must go

Baby it's cold outside

The answer is no

Blaine grinned.

Oh, baby it's cold outside

This welcome has been

How lucky that you dropped in

So nice and warm

Look out the window at that storm

My sister will be suspicious

Gosh, your lips look delicious

He smiled coyly as he sang that line, but he meant it. Kurt's lips were pink and soft and he wouldn't mind kissing him. But if he was going to have any kind of relationship with Kurt, he wanted it to be real. Blaine knew he had a tendency to get ahead of himself, to rush things. He'd always been that way. Too much energy and too little patience, even as a child. So he'd let Kurt decide. If Kurt came to him, he'd be there, waiting as patiently as he could.

My brother will be there at the door

Waves upon a tropical shore

My maiden aunt's mind is vicious

Oh, your lips are delicious

Well maybe just a cigarette more

Never such a blizzard before

Blaine shrugged nonchalantly as he watched Kurt.

I've got to get home

But baby, you'd freeze out there

Say, lend me a coat

It's up to your knees out there

You've really been grand

I'm thrilled when you touch my hand

But don't you see?

How can you do this thing to me?

Blaine grinned at the slight blush that appeared in Kurt's cheeks as he clasped his hands and crowded around the countertenor, begging him to stay. Kurt bounded away from him with a mock-serious expression on his face, while his eyes were full of playfulness.

There's bound to be talk tomorrow

Think of my life long sorrow

At least there will be plenty implied

Kneeling on the couch, Blaine pulled his best pouty face, watching Kurt's hands slide along the back of the couch and leaning in slightly.

If you got pneumonia and died

All Blaine had to do was lean forward a bit more and...

I really can't stay

Kurt circled away from him and rounded the corner of the couch, a hand dragging lightly over the soft fabric.

Get over that hold out

Blaine glanced up and gestured for Kurt to join him as he sat down. Kurt did and Blaine felt his heart beat faster when Kurt's side was pressing against his. He could reach out and grab his hand if he wanted. He did want to. But he remembered Jeremiah. No, he wanted this to work. Take things slow. Let Kurt come to him.

Oh, baby it's cold outside!

Blaine woke with tears practically gluing his eyes shut. They hurt to open and he did so slowly. Had he really cried in his sleep? He groaned and went to the bathroom to splash water on his face, the coldness immediately making him more alert. He threw on a different t-shirt, one that wasn't wrinkled from his uneasy sleep, and headed downstairs. Halfway down, he stopped mid-step. Today was Christmas.

His ribs were crushed as he was suddenly lifted off his feet in a bear hug. He regained his breath as he was set back down and Finn slid past him saying, "Merry Christmas bro." Not knowing what to expect, he slowly followed Finn and his heart dropped at what he saw.

Finn was settling himself down on one armchair that had been piled with presents. Burt was sipping coffee and talking to him with a slight smile in his voice. There was another pile of presents on another armchair and Blaine knew undoubtedly who they were for.

It was too much. He didn't need any presents. Being here was enough.

Carole saw him standing at the foot of the stairs and approached him, reaching out a hand to pull him along.

"Carole," he hissed, leaning down close to her so Burt wouldn't hear, "you've done way too much for me already. More than I could have ever asked for. I don't need any presents. The stocking was enough, but this isn't-

"Blaine." Her hand closed lightly around his wrist. "How many times do I have to tell you that you're family? It's been a really hard time for all of us and we wanted to give you something-

"But this is too much. I don't deserve-

The look on her face made the words freeze in his throat. "We want to honey. Don't say you don't deserve anything. You deserve everything in the world, especially after what you've been through." Her gaze softened and she shifted her grip from his wrist to clasp his hand in hers. "Come on honey," she said softly. "We're waiting for you."

He looked into her eyes, seeing no way out of this, and followed her as she led him to the armchair and went to go sit by Burt. Finn looked at his parents and with a small nod of okay, he began to tear into his gifts. Blaine started slowly, still feeling uneasy. He didn't want them to spend any money on him at all, yet they had and apparently they weren't taking no for an answer.

Half an hour later and their presents were piled all around them. Blaine had no idea how they were so good at picking things he liked, but they did. Carole shared Kurt's fashion sense, so he assumed that all of the clothes had been her doing, and Burt had probably picked the things to care for his car. There were new guitar strings too, which he thought Finn might have had a part in picking those out.

After the last present had been opened, Burt smiled lightly and said, "Merry Christmas boys."

Finn put an arm around each parent and hugged them at the same time. Blaine licked his lips and then chewed on his bottom lip, thinking hard about what he was about to do. This could either cause a waterworks meltdown or it could help in some small way. Blaine didn't know what that way was, but he knew he had been overcome with an urge to do this.

"I'll be right back." He said and dashed upstairs, his heart thudding with every step.

He returned to see most of the wrapping paper shoved in a bag to be shredded and used to light the fireplace. Burt and Carole sat together on the couch and Finn was sorting his presents into what looked like a fortress around his chair. He gripped the neck of his guitar tighter and walked into the living room. All eyes fell on him and he pulled over one of the chairs from the dining table and sat down. Finn stopped barricading his seat and watched, a curious expression on his face.

"Carole, I know you wanted to hear me play and this wasn't really the way that I'd thought I'd do this." He looked down and took a deep breath. "And Burt, I've been thinking for a while and I know that there's nothing I can say to lessen what you're feeling, but I originally wrote this song for Kurt and though some of the words are kind of out of context, I hope you can find comfort in this song. Mercedes sang to me the day of Kurt's funeral and it really helped, so I guess I just wanted to give back something for everything you guys have done for me."

He took a slow breath before he began to strum his fingers lightly against the strings, his hands moving in a practiced ease on the frets. And then he began to sing.

I've been alone

Surrounded by darkness

And I've seen how heartless

The world can be

And I've seen you crying

You've felt like it's hopeless

I'll always do my best

To make you see

Baby you're not alone

Cause you're here with me

And nothing's ever gonna bring us down

Cause nothing can keep me from loving you

And you know it's true

It don't matter what will come to be

Our love is all we need

To make it through

Blaine sang the whole song without a hitch in his voice and, if anything, he felt peace as he sang. It was a weird feeling. This song had evoked so many feelings both while he was writing it and in the first time he sang it for Kurt, but now, as he sang it to Kurt's family, he felt that this song now had a different meaning from when he first wrote it. Now, it was a song of comfort, of forgiving and healing. They could get through this together, as a family, no matter what.

There were tears in both Carole's and Burt's eyes and Blaine was a bit surprised to see Finn hastily wiping his hand across his eyes, but there were soft smiles on every face as he finished the song.

"Thank you Blaine." Burt said, getting up and pulling him into a hug.

He didn't know how much the song had actually helped, but he saw a true smile on Burt's face and for now, that was enough.

Christmas breakfast was, for lack of a better word, entertaining. Plates were piled high with bacon, sausage, and cinnamon rolls dripping with icing and glasses of milk were served ice cold.

"Put the glass in the freezer overnight and *bam*," Finn said, waving his arms in a wide flourish, "you can have super cold milk without the nasty ice cubes."

"It wouldn't be nasty if you didn't get distracted and let the ice melt." Burt chastised as he pointed his fork at his stepson.

Finn ignored that, turning back to Blaine. "It's like magic, man."

"I believe you Finn." Blaine laughed and clinked his glass with Finn's.

"Alright boys, Burt and I are going to see that play downtown today so we probably won't be back until dinner."

"I promised I'd go in any shops she wants, though I'm beginning to regret that already."

Carole lightly smacked Burt's arm and continued, "So, you can do whatever you'd like today. I'm giving each of you fifty dollars to spend however you want alright?"

Finn's face lit up. "Sweet!" He looked thoughtful for a moment. "I think Rachel's going to some charity thing with her dads but it gets over at noon... I'm going to take her ice skating and we can have lunch at that nice place by the movie theater."

Blaine carefully pressed the money back into Carole's palm. "I'd rather you spend it. Thank you, really, but I think I'm just going to hang out here today."

For a moment, her face fell. "Are you sure honey?"

"Yeah." He smiled at them. "There's something I need to do today. And it won't cost anything."

"Well, okay, if you're sure. I'll leave it on the counter though. Just in case."

Thanking them again as they left to get ready, Blaine felt an anticipation start to build. He knew what he was going to do the moment they left, though he knew it might not be a happy sort of Christmas present, he was willing to take that chance.

Burt and Carole left almost as soon as they were ready, wanting to get a good parking place downtown. Finn took a little longer, but eventually, Blaine had the house to himself.

His feet dragged slowly as he made the ascent up the stairs. As much as he'd wanted to run up earlier, now he wanted this to last. He took his time and when he finally reached the guest room, he just stood in the doorway for a while, feeling his heart thud and his pulse race in eagerness. When he could take it no longer, he entered the room and shut the door, though there would be no one home for hours. He knelt down carefully in front of the boxes that were still sitting by the bookcase, having not moved an inch since he put them there last.

These boxes had been invading his dreams and almost every thought since Carole brought them in the room. He didn't know what lay inside, and he almost thought it better that he didn't know. Ignorance was bliss. But his curiosity overwhelmed.

He lifted the shoe box up and placed it next to the larger box. There were numbers written in thick black sharpie, labeling them one and two. The larger box was labeled one, so he pushed aside the smaller box, took a deep breath, and lifted the lid.

There were a variety of things inside, that he knew at first glance, but there was a white envelope that read *Read this first* in red pen, so he would not miss it. He pulled out the letter and immediately recognized Kurt's neat handwriting. He sat with his back up against the door, knees drawn into his chest, smoothed out the paper and began to read.

Blaine,

As Carole has probably already told you, I didn't want you to have these until I knew that you were alright. I trust her judgment, so if you're reading this, you've passed test number one. I'm just kidding. There's no test.

But really, I wanted you to have these only when you're ready. If you don't feel ready, please baby, put the lid back on this box and stick it in the closet for a while and when you're truly ready, pull it back out again. I

won't be mad if it takes you one day or one year to go through these. It sure took me long enough, so I won't blame you in the slightest.

*I wanted to be prepared if anything happened, so that's why I have these done. I swear, I don't go around putting my stuff into boxes and dropping them onto an unsuspecting person's head. These boxes are full of memories. The best memories I have. And you know what? Most of them happened with you. You may look at these and think 'Wow, he really was crazy. He saved **that**?' But baby, you have to know that I am kind of a packrat. I admit it. But I organized them neatly for you, so I'm not that bad right? Don't get me started on Hoarders. Just watching that show makes my skin itch from all the who-knows-what is in those houses.*

Anyway, take your time with these baby. It might be hard at some points, and don't feel bad if you have to stop and come back to it later. I want you to remember these memories as happy times. Don't dwell on the bad things in the past, mon amour.

I love you.

Kurt

Blaine blinked away the tears and set aside the letter. He sat up on his knees and reached into the box, pulling out the first thing his fingers touched.

It was a paper menu from the Dairy Queen that Blaine had taken Kurt to once over summer. They'd gone with Thad and David. Kurt had refused to eat anything, but Blaine had made him take a bite of his ice cream. That's when Blaine had found out how serious Kurt was about health. There was a sticky note attached to the menu with Kurt's handwriting on it.

You made me eat that spoonful of ice cream. And I told you it was the most fattening thing I've ever let grace my lips. You told me my lips looked cute. I remember blushing. And I'm sorry baby, but I lied. I did like the ice cream. Maybe it was because you fed me off of your spoon, but it was good.

He laughed. So the liar liked the ice cream? And Blaine had almost smeared the ice cream on Kurt's nose, just for fun. But he didn't because he thought Kurt might hit him.

The next thing was a ticket for the play Kurt had invited Blaine to.

Your hand was so close to my knee the entire time we were watching this. I couldn't concentrate on what Juliet was saying because all I could think was, 'Stop being such a baby and hold his hand already!' I never did. And I've regretted it since. I could have held your hand that much longer.

His fingers landed next on a book. He pulled it out and held it in his hands, reading the note that was stuck to the inside cover.

You introduced me to the magical land of Harry Potter and for that, I can't thank you enough. You're right, magic can be found everywhere. I found it with you. I know that sounds cheesy, but it's true. Without you, I would have been still stuck in my figurative broom closet, not knowing that there was something better out there.

The next object was a cotton t-shirt. Blaine shook it out and laid it carefully on his lap. It was white, with large black letters boldly stating, "Likes Boys."

I wish you could have been there to see this. I know I told you a million times, but Born This Way really was the first song I performed with New Directions that I felt like I could just let go and be free. We were supposed to be stating our insecurities and you know better than anyone that I have no problem with who I am, but I went with these words because of the problem that other people seem to have. I wanted to show that they could say what they wanted, but I'd still stand up and be proud. I like boys and I am proud to be me. The only thing that would have made it better was if I could have kissed you in front of everyone. And believe me, I wanted to.

Blaine smiled, letting his hand trace softly on the printed words of the shirt. He was about to fold it when he pulled the shirt up and cradled it in his hands, lifting it to his face and inhaling the scent. It still smelled like Kurt. His heart banged erratically and he clutched the fabric in his fingers, holding so tightly as the tears began to come. Kurt had said to take it slow so he let himself cry into his boyfriend's t-shirt for a long time.

He wanted to keep looking in the box, he really did, but his heart thudded painfully and he knew if he looked at one more thing, he wasn't going to be able to read what the note said because he'd be crying too hard. And Kurt wanted him to remember the happy times, not be sad. So he took a deep breath and gathered up the things he had looked at and placed them carefully on the dresser, lined up one after the other. With hands that shook slightly, he folded up the t-shirt and laid it next to the book.

He had the house to himself for another few hours, so he took a shower and spent the day in his pajamas and curled up on the couch while he watched the movie guaranteed to make him smile. He did think of Kurt while he watched Harry Potter, but it did not make him sad. No, instead, he imagined that Kurt would approve of his day in and his movie choice.

And he did smile.

35. Memories

Blaine was running. Running had always made him feel better, calmed him down. He had left his iPod at home, something that was unusual for him. Kurt had joked once that his earphones would glue themselves to his ears and he wouldn't be able to get them out. But tonight, he wanted to run without any distractions. Twilight was his favorite time to be outside, after the sun had set and the sky would be painted an array of darkening purple and navy. He liked to watch the stars appear and the pale moon glow brighter. It was generally quiet out, especially because it was cold and snowing. No one else seemed to like to be out. He'd dressed warmly, but not so much that he'd get overheated. He pulled up the hood on his jacket as the snow began to fall softly.

He started out slowly, letting his muscles get back into the feel of running. He hadn't done this in so long. His legs felt stiff and achy, but he pushed through the initial discomfort and soon fell into a steady rhythm.

He could hear the whistling of the wind and the pounding of his heart with every footfall. He liked the feeling of his blood pumping through his veins and the quickening of his breath as he ran faster. He could focus on those little things that he'd not had the strength to take the time and notice. And it did feel good.

Running made him feel energized, alive, and for the time being, he could take himself out of whatever chaos he felt and just *be*. He varied his pace, letting his muscles push him further as he went faster, and when he felt like stopping, he slowed to a light jog and listened almost amusedly as his breathing began to slow as well.

His nose, cheeks, lips, and even his ears under his hood were stiff with cold and it was only then that he turned back, not out of discomfort, but he just felt that it was time to go back.

He thought that now, he might be ready to go through the rest of the box that had sat untouched for the few days since he'd first opened it.

The Hudson-Hummel house was quiet, with Burt being the only other occupant. Carole had taken a begrudging Finn shopping. He'd grown another two inches over the winter and as a result, all of his pants were now too short.

Blaine nodded at Burt as he came in, which Burt returned and then went back to reading the paper.

Hopping up the stairs, he pulled off his jacket and t-shirt as he went, and tossed them on his bed. He yanked on another shirt hurriedly in his haste to get to the box.

But then he turned and it was like everything else in his line of vision had disappeared. All of his senses were narrowed and he slowly walked forward, feeling as though he were in a dream. It was cold outside, but suddenly, the room seemed very warm.

He let out a huff as he sat down on the ground with his back up against the door and pulled the box into his lap. The things he had already looked at were still lined up carefully on his dresser, but at a glance, he could tell the box held at least double the amount that had been given the place of honor on his dresser.

He stared down inside at the contents, and pulled out the first thing that caught his eye, setting the box aside and stared down at the picture he had just unearthed.

I think you'll agree when I say that there are no words needed to describe this picture. But I still think you look adorable.

The paint in Kurt's room was a pale white, soft and creamy, that outlined the full length mirror in the center of the picture. Blaine was on the left, Kurt on the right. Dressed in an obnoxiously yellow coat, his hair a cotton ball mess, Blaine had plastered a grin on his face, but he could tell just by looking at himself that he was trying to hold in his laughter, his eyes crinkling in the corners. Kurt had one arm around Blaine's waist and leaned his head on his shoulder, smiling an impish grin with his camera in his other hand.

Blaine smiled at the memory. He'd been 'upset' at Kurt for making him wear that coat, but now, he was glad he did. And he'd gotten back at him by trying to make him wear a sweatshirt.

He set aside the picture and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. He smoothed it out and laid it against his thighs. It was a sheet of notebook paper and written in red sharpie covering almost the entire page was a heart with an arrow sticking through it and the words 'Kurt + Blaine' drawn in neat block lettering.

You almost saw this once, but I think I hid it before you did. This was before there was ever a 'you and me,' as we were just friends then, but now I feel comfortable telling you that this is how I've felt even from the first time I saw you. You were so nice to me when I stopped you on the stairs and when I saw you perform, that

was it. For me, that was the first time I'd ever been speechless. I loved you from the moment I saw you and I kept falling in love with you every moment after that. Pour Toujours. For always. Forever.

Blaine took a deep breath after reading that note. It was how he'd felt too. He saw Kurt on the stairs and he thought that he'd never seen anyone so perfect before. He knew instantly that Kurt wasn't supposed to be there, but he'd put in an effort, even wearing that cute little red tie to try and blend in, and he had decided that there wasn't any harm in Kurt watching them perform one song. But truthfully, he'd led Kurt to see that impromptu performance because he wanted to show off a bit. And he was so glad that he did.

He pulled out another bundle of papers and laid them out on top of the notebook paper. They were filled with music notes. It was sheet music to 'Candles' by Hey Monday. Blaine's heart thudded even before he read the note. He briefly closed his eyes. This was the first time he sang onstage with Kurt.

I was truly shocked when you announced that you wanted to sing with me for Regionals last year. But I'm so glad you did. I wanted to sing with you so badly and I couldn't believe my luck when you asked the council if we could. Now, I realize it wasn't luck at all, but that was the only thing I could think for it to be at the time because why else would you have done that? I tend to over think things, as you well know, but all I could think of in that moment when we were onstage singing together was that I didn't want this moment to end. I just wanted to sing with you and be with you for just a little longer. I never knew that my silly dreams would come true. Did you know that I had thought that I made up everything that was you and me in my head? It seems stupid now, but like I said, I tend to over think things. And it wasn't until I was onstage with you that I wondered, 'Well, maybe I'm not making this up.'

Blaine had known full well what he was doing when he asked the council to allow Kurt to sing a duet with him. He wished he'd been more to-the-point with his actions when he thought back on it, but then again, he was a self-proclaimed hopeless romantic so he'd thought that Kurt would understand what singing a duet together meant to him. It had taken a little longer than he'd hoped to get the message across, but in a way, he preferred the way that it happened. Telling Kurt he loved him had been nerve-wracking and it was all he could do to keep his voice from trembling with anxiousness as he sang 'Not Alone.'

Set carefully next to where the sheet of music had been, inside the box, there was yet another piece of paper. He put the drawing and music sheets aside and held in his hand the paper. There was something on it and when he flipped the paper over, he saw one of his own guitar picks taped on the back. He pulled it off and turned it around and around in his hand, smiling as he read the note.

First off, I'm sorry for stealing this. But I did give it back, so am I forgiven? This is the guitar pick you used when you sang the song you wrote for me. The day you told me you loved me. Blaine, you have no idea how much that song meant to me, in more ways than one. Whenever I felt sad or alone or lost, I'd replay that memory in my mind and it got me through a lot of tough days. Words will not ever be enough express my gratitude or my amazement at having the best boyfriend in the world.

There were two books at the bottom, which he lugged out and set side by side. The first was a new copy of Dorian Gray.

It seems like so long ago that we were reading these for class. We had to give back the library copies of course, but I liked the book so much that I went out and bought my own copy. Call me a bookworm, call me teacher's pet, call me a nerd, call me whatever you want, but I still love this book.

The second book was one that Blaine instantly recognized. It was worn and faded and had been read so many times, held in many loving hands.

I want you to have this. If you throw away everything else in this box, promise me you'll keep this. This book got me through my lazy childhood nights, the pain from when my mom passed away, and the general unpleasantness of chemotherapy or when I was just stuck in the hospital. You reading to me that night in the hospital, I almost felt as though my mom was still there, and I was so glad to have you with me, by my side for everything. I'm so sorry I put you through all of that physical and emotional worry, and don't lie to me Blaine Anderson, don't try to deny it, you can't hide it from me. Take this book, keep it safe, maybe read it to your kids one day. I wish I could be there to see them grow up.

Blaine sniffed, dragging a hand across his wet eyes and carefully placed Goodnight Moon on top of Dorian Gray and putting the pile next to him.

There were only a few more things in the box and Blaine didn't want to stop looking through them, though he was worried about what would happen when everything had been sorted. He was scared that he might not feel connected to Kurt anymore. That when all the memories in this box were gone, he would be too.

He sighed and for a very long time, just sat there with his hands in his lap, not looking at anything, but debating in his mind what he should do. He could get up now and look at the rest another day, prolong the pain that would come with the empty box. Or he could put both of the boxes away and never look at them

again, so he would never have to lose Kurt. Or he could look at the rest and take the pain as it came, but also feel the happiness of the memories he had given to Kurt.

Sniffing again, he turned to the box. He knew as soon as he posed the options what he would pick. There was no doubt in his mind what he was going to do.

The largest thing in the box was also the most recognizable. Folded so neatly in the corner opposite the books was a navy blazer, trimmed with cherry red, and an intricate embroidered 'D' on the front pocket.

Puck made me sneak into Dalton that day. I was feeling a bit rebellious, and in truth I really wanted to see what an all-boys school was like, so that's why I went. But that day turned out to be the best thing I've ever done. I met you for the first time and saw the Warblers sing and I knew from that moment on that that's where I wanted to be. I wanted to belong. And being with you has made me realize how extremely lucky I am in that I went to spy and in the end, I was made a Warbler and I got you.

Not lucky Kurt, Blaine thought lightly, I was the lucky one. Had Kurt stopped someone else on the stairs, he would have maybe been ignored or found out as a spy and have the teachers make him leave. He could have gone on a different day, when the Warblers weren't performing. He could have decided not to go up the stairs and missed Blaine entirely. There were so many things that could have gone wrong. But for some reason, things had been perfect. Blaine knew it had nothing to do with luck at all. Fate had brought them together. It had also driven them apart, but because of fate, Blaine had known true love and he'd been able to make Kurt happy.

He ran his fingers gently over the embroidery before moving on. He next chose a box that was wrapped in silver paper, tied with green ribbon and topped with a bow. Brow furrowing in curiosity, he unwrapped the box and opened it. He read the card that was inside first, but he hadn't been quick enough to look away and caught a glimpse of something pink nestled in the box.

This was supposed to be your Christmas present. I wrapped it in a generic color though because I don't know when you'll be going through this. Don't ask me about the color of your first present. I don't know what possessed me to buy them, but for some reason, I couldn't not get them. And the second present is just a little something for my favorite coffee-junkie.

Merry Christmas. Or whatever, depending on when you read this.

Love, Kurt

There was a pair of hot pink sunglasses in the box. Blaine immediately grinned and put them on. He wouldn't have chosen the color for himself, but now that he had them on and stole a glance in the mirror, he loved them. He pulled them up and set them on the top of his head to look at the next present. It was a gift card to the Lima Bean. Blaine hadn't been there in so long, not since he went with Kurt after rehearsal when they were still at school.

Kurt knew him so well. It almost seemed like he knew him better than he knew himself. And he'd never gotten to give Kurt a present. He'd never even bought one. Something hard lodged itself in Blaine's throat and he swallowed, feeling a shiver of emotional pain.

He put aside the presents in his hand before he could dwell on the fact that he'd never be able to get Kurt anything. When he looked in the box again, he saw with a sinking heart that it contained only one more item. With a shaking hand, he lifted out the small picture frame. Encased within the glass set against a white background, was a single dandelion that had been pressed and dried.

I picked this when we went on that walk in the park. It was in my pocket for a while and I was worried it would get squished or all of the seeds would fall out or something, but it only got a little bit flattened. So I flattened it some more and framed it. Then I started thinking that it kind of symbolized all of the wishes in the world, in our world. There's so many things that I wish for you, and for me too, that I know won't be able to come true. But I know that we'll still make it, wherever this life takes us. I don't want you to give up on your dreams Blaine. You've always dreamed big and I don't want you to ever take anything for granted. Making wishes may seem child-like or hopeless, but they're still fun to make. And who knows, maybe someday, your dream will come true. I know mine did.

Blaine leaned his head forward, breathing quickening, and held his head in his hands, letting the frame slip from his fingers onto his lap. The words that Kurt had written echoed in his ears. *Don't give up on your dreams... Maybe someday, your dream will come true... Mine did.*

He took deep, composing breaths and sat up, looking around through slightly misty eyes at all of the memories Kurt had taken the time to gather and write those notes about. Blaine sat still for a while and let it all sink in and then he stood and gathered up the objects from the floor, placing them neatly on his dresser, where he could look at them as long as he wanted.

He placed the lid on the now-empty cardboard box. Strangely, he didn't feel alone or empty, as he'd feared he would. For some reason, he even felt a little better.

He knew this was what Kurt had wanted him to feel, why he had wanted him to wait to look through these until he was ready.

He still had one box left and though he decided that he wouldn't open until after Regionals, he knew that he would be okay.

Kurt had known that he would be okay. Somehow, Kurt had known what he would be feeling and what he needed to get through this.

He gently touched the corner of the picture frame that held the dandelion and grinned, remembering the memory that had gone along with it.

Mine did too.

36. The Boy on the Bed

Blaine returned to school the next week. David helped him carry some of his stuff back into his room. It was hard going back. He knew it would have been hard anyway, but the situation was made even more difficult by the fact that when he went back, Kurt's half of the room would be empty.

Finn had gone with Burt and Carole to go through the room over break, boxing up what was Kurt's and taking it back home. Blaine hadn't been able to bring himself to go with them. He just couldn't. It had been a tough thing to do, emotionally, but it had been made the tiniest bit easier in the general scheme of things because of the way that Kurt meticulously labeled all of his clothes with *Kurt Hummel* written in neat black letters on the tag of every item. He'd told Blaine before that it made it easier to identify his things quickly, especially if he'd left something at a friend's house because they'd have no doubt who it belonged to. Blaine was uncertain about that; he was pretty sure that his friends would know what belonged to Kurt just by looking at the clothing in question.

David was eagerly listing off the presents he'd received for Christmas while Blaine listened thoughtfully. It was kind of nice, the way the other Warblers and David, were talking to him just like they would have before. He still had quite a few stares following him wherever he went and most people he spoke to seemed intent on talking to him as if he would break, like delicate china. He ducked his head at a junior who looked up from the paper he was reading and full on just stared at him. David noticed and shot the kid a glare full of ice, which caused him to get back to the paper he was reading real quick.

"Ignore them man. They just don't know how to say what they feel." David nudged Blaine's shoulder with his own, being careful to do it gently because they both currently had their arms full with boxes of Blaine's dorm stuff that he'd brought to the Hummel-Hudson house for the break.

Blaine sighed, closing his eyes momentarily. "It wouldn't be so difficult if I didn't feel like they're just waiting for me to fall apart."

"It'll stop eventually. I could paint the dean's car again?"

Blaine had to smile at the soft smirk that appeared on David's face.

"I think it's time for a new coat of paint. Green is your favorite color is it not? It'll give everyone something else to talk about." David laughed and Blaine knew he was only half-serious. "Really though, it's just because they don't have anything else to focus on. And it's your first day back for classes tomorrow so their curiosity will peak and then everything will fall back into place. You'll see."

Blaine's mouth lifted in the smallest of smiles as they reached the dorm. He could only hope that David was right. He fished the key out of his pocket and set it in David's waiting hand, while he balanced the boxes on his hip with his other arm. Blaine maneuvered David's top box and scooted it over onto his own stack so he could balance better.

David threw a grateful smile at him and opened the door.

Everything had changed.

But not in the way Blaine expected. Not in the way he expected at all.

David was staring at the doorknob and jiggling the key slightly so that the lock would release it. He yanked a bit and the key finally came free in his hand.

"Geez Blaine. I'll have someone come and look at this lock. It wants to eat your key!"

He chuckled and hoisted the boxes back up in his arms, looking back at Blaine as he entered the room.

"You know, offer's still open if you want to room with us man. I know it'll be cramped, but it-"

He stopped, very aware of the way Blaine was standing, frozen on the spot, with his gaze locked straight ahead, but over David's shoulder. He was gripping the boxes tightly.

"Blaine?" His voice dropped low and he started to turn back, when something caught his eye.

Not something.

Someone.

Blaine's side of the dorm looked exactly the same as he'd left it, except the clothes that had previously been in random heaps on the floor were now folded in neat piles on his bed courtesy of Carole.

But the other side, Kurt's side, had been completely changed.

Blaine had expected it to be empty. But it wasn't.

David set down the boxes slowly and his eyes never left the boy who sat cross-legged on the bed. He had about the same build as Blaine, with dark brown hair and piercingly green eyes. He had smiled when they came in, but he took one look at Blaine and his smile began to ebb away.

The boy set aside his pad of paper and chose to meet David's gaze after a hurried glance at Blaine, who was still rooted to the spot.

"We're in the right room, yeah? This isn't some joke? Switch all the dorms around over break? No?"

At the shake of the boy's head, David sighed. The boy on the bed leaned back, uncrossing his legs and stretching them out in front of him.

"Just transferred. I'm assuming by the freaked out looks on both of your faces that they didn't tell you?"

David bit his lip, sneaking a quick look at Blaine, who had seemed to thaw and had taken a few ginger steps into the room. "No, the administration didn't tell us anything."

"Oh. Could've sworn they said they sent you a notice."

"Blaine didn't go home over break. They probably sent it to his parent's house."

Bright green eyes flicked over to Blaine and then back at David. "You didn't get it either?"

"I'm not dorming here. I live across the hall."

"Oh, alright. Well, sorry to break it to you like that. Wish I would've known." A huge grin broke out over his face, crinkling the corners of his eyes. "I would have made it a better surprise."

David saw movement and turned his head, seeing Blaine set down his boxes at his feet. He straightened up slowly, eyes darting back and forth, heart hammering.

The kid stood and approached the pair, his arm outstretched. "I'm Caleb," he said, smiling again and taking David's hand as he introduced himself.

He turned to Blaine. "And you must be my roommate."

Blaine took the boy's hand and felt a warm, strong grip take his. "Blaine." He was unable to raise his voice as much as he wanted. His mind was still reeling with this new information. He didn't really know what to think.

Caleb grinned, saying confidently, "Oh, and I'm gay."

Blaine's heart skipped a beat.

"I've found announcing that right out is the best thing to do." He winked. "Makes things easier."

Blaine felt his hand tremble where it still rested in Caleb's. The other boy let his hand go, misreading his action.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to..." His eyes searched back and forth between the two boys. "I know it was blunt and I-"

"No." Blaine cut him off. "It's fine. I'm gay too."

Caleb looked relieved. "Really? Wow. That's... that's great." He colored instantly. "Not... not that I'd want to, you know... umm... I just meant that it's nice to know someone else who's out. It's not easy you know?"

Blaine nodded. "Yeah, I understand."

He felt himself relaxing for some reason that he could not even begin to explain, as he took in the surroundings that had been so greatly changed.

Caleb had plastered the walls in different posters and as Blaine raked his gaze over them, he noticed right away the one that advertised the premiere of the new Harry Potter movie. There was a plain black

comforter on the bed and a soft-looking grey blanket laid out on top. He had a laptop, iPod charger/stereo, and an open, blank sketchpad on the desk. His cell phone was charging, casting a soft thrumming glow against the wall. A gooseneck lamp was poised over the sketchpad, but was turned off.

"Blaine?"

He looked up. "Yeah?"

"Do you need help unpacking?" David was obviously giving him a chance to say, 'I need you here,' but in a split second Blaine made up his mind and the answer was out of his mouth before he could think.

"No, I'm fine. Thanks. I'll meet you in the Commons later, yeah?"

Blaine had had enough of feeling like he needed to have other people there. David had told him that people would stop staring and treating him like a scared little kid when this was moved to the back of their minds. He needed to start being strong for himself. He didn't need to give everyone a reason to stare. If he was going to have people treat him like they did before, then he needed to start taking control. He needed to do this. It was the first step, for him at least, in moving on.

"Text me later okay?"

With a firm squeeze on his shoulder, Blaine watched David leave, quietly shutting the door behind him.

It was silent for a moment as each boy stared back at the other. Then Caleb loped over to his bed, Kurt's bed, and resumed his position, grabbing his sketchpad.

"*Did* you want help?" He asked, looking up.

"I'm fine," he said as he bent down to stack the boxes on the floor and shove them over to the dresser.

Blaine began to unpack the first box, taking out his folded up clothes and placing them in the drawers.

"I left half for you," Caleb said, nodding towards the dresser. "Let me know if you need more room. I can cram my stuff over. Wrinkles never hurt anyone right?"

He laughed, a slightly scratchy sound, but full of warmth. Blaine felt himself laughing softly along with him. It was quiet as Blaine unpacked the rest of his things. When he was done, he moved to sit on his bed.

Caleb looked up, a charcoal pencil held in his left hand. "You're quiet aren't you?"

Blaine blinked. "Oh, umm... well, no not... not normally."

Something of a disbelieving look appeared on his face. "Says the kid who had his friend talking for him the whole time he was here."

"It wasn't..." he sighed, feeling his defensive words die in his throat. "I was just surprised."

"Then I'll remember to keep the surprises at a minimum." He winked again.

"I didn't mean that. I just....well, it's been a... difficult few months."

Caleb kept his gaze, looking truly intrigued, but also a bit concerned. "How so?"

Blaine bit his lip. But suddenly, he opened his mouth and he just felt so comfortable here. "Dorms at Dalton are generally very hard to come by unless you're a freshman."

"I noticed. Lucky this one was available huh?"

A slight spasm of pain seared through his chest. "I had a roommate."

Blaine paused so long that Caleb asked cautiously, "What happened?"

He swallowed, folding his hands together and debating if he really was going to bring this up now. "It's... it's really difficult to talk about. If it's okay, would you mind me telling you later? I don't think I can handle it right now."

"Yeah, sure. Didn't mean to pry." Caleb's gaze had softened and he kept his eyes on Blaine for a lingering moment before turning his attention back to his drawing.

Blaine sighed and leaned back against the pillows, slipping his headphones into his ears and closing his eyes. He was feeling so much right now. And the event that had just unfolded presented an entirely new set of problems.

The way his heart was hammering sporadically had only happened a few times before. Kurt had told him to move on, but god, he was sure he didn't mean for him to go right out and fall for someone else. Blaine didn't even know if that's what he was feeling. Maybe his strung-out emotions were making him confuse the two feelings. He groaned lightly tried to clear his mind of all thought, of all emotion.

But the thudding organ in his chest had different ideas indeed. Ideas he wasn't sure he was ready to act on, or even think about.

God, this was going to be harder than he thought.

Blaine awoke to his cell phone vibrating in his pocket. He rolled over groggily and blinked at the light that pierced the darkness around him. Caleb had turned off the light. He sat up. And covered him with a blanket apparently. One he didn't recognize. It was grey and so soft.

The memory of earlier hit him. The blanket had been on Caleb's bed. It was his blanket.

He kicked it off and stared down at his now-silent phone.

Warblers meeting. Choir room asap. -D

Blaine slid off the bed and slipped on his shoes. Caleb was gone. He was alone and it was quiet.

He flung open the door, wanting to be out of there as soon as he could.

The cold air outside helped clear his thoughts a bit, sending goose bumps down his spine. He traveled the familiar path that was lined with thick white snow, heading for the choir room as fast as he could. He met Jared on the way there, who immediately launched into some huge story about how they were meeting up later to roast marshmallows in the lounge after dinner and he should join them because it was going to be awesome and there was a new guy, a transfer from Taylor Day, in the cafeteria who knew him and said to say hi and that he's sorry for intruding.

"I didn't ask what he was sorry about. Seemed nice though."

They reached the door just as Jared finished his thought and they entered, where the other Warblers had gathered. They stood facing them and Jared hurried forward to join them.

Wes smiled his welcome and a very confused Blaine took a few more steps forward.

"What's going on?" He asked, because everyone else seemed to understand why they were here.

Wes nodded back at everyone and they all dispersed, settling themselves in the many armchairs that were around. Blaine sat down, feeling very uncomfortable, like they were all keeping a giant secret.

David caught Blaine's gaze and smiled, but that didn't help his nerves one bit. Wes finally spoke and everyone seemed to be watching him with bated breath.

"I've talked to the guys about this and everyone agrees. So no arguing, alright?"

Blaine nodded slightly, not sure what he was trying to say.

"Regionals is in one week. And I know that this may seem crazy. Well, it is crazy to put it bluntly. But we all want to do this." Wes looked around as if to get the approval of those around him, who nodded immediately. Then he lifted his chin and told Blaine, "We want to change songs."

A forced kind-of laugh squeezed from his lungs. "You're kidding right?"

The set look of Wes's face told him that no, he was not kidding.

"Regionals is in *one* week. It'd be suicide. Do you want to lose? We've been working on this for *months*. Are you really planning on throwing it all away?"

His inner soloist was fuming. What the hell are they thinking? They've worked too hard for this. They might as well hand the trip to Nationals over on a silver platter to New Directions.

"Told you he'd take it well." A laughing voice came from one of the side chairs.

"Blaine, we're serious about this."

He just sat there, openmouthed. "Wh... what- why?"

A hand appeared on his shoulder and he looked up as David spoke. "We want to do something for Kurt."

His heart thudded. "What are you talking about?"

"We just want to do a song for him."

Blaine let his head drop forward and he pushed his hand through his hair. He let out a deep breath through his nose. "What song?"

David smiled down at Blaine as he tilted his head sideways to look at him. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow. And you're singing lead."

"What?" His head flicked up and he sat back. "I... guys, I..." His voice weakened. "I can't."

"Why not? Blaine, it's-"

"No, I'm not letting you throw this away. You can't."

"This isn't about winning." Thad's voice was low. "We don't care about that. We want to do this for Kurt."

Blaine was silent once more. He didn't know if he'd be able to sing. Thad said it wasn't about winning. He thought it might be about closure. But it was still a lot to think about, and he didn't know if he could do it.

"Will you try, Blaine? Please?"

He looked up into Wes's eyes.

"Songs can be very powerful. They can say things that words can't. They can hurt," he gave him a knowing look and Blaine knew he was talking about Somewhere Only We Know that he sang at Kurt's funeral, "but they can also heal."

Blaine took a deep breath, his mind racing. Maybe Wes was right. He bit his lip, chewing lightly. "Okay," he whispered.

Every uncertain face broke out into a smile. Wes stood. "Alright then. Shall we?"

He gestured to the stairs and all of the Warblers trooped over, sitting down wherever there was space. Wes pulled out a thick stack of papers from a folder and began passing out the sheet music.

"We don't have time for choreography, but I really don't think it's necessary. Not with this song at least. I'm thinking a simple formation with Blaine in front as lead. We only have a week, so it's better if we get the song itself down and not worry about anything else. So everyone take these..." He glanced around. "Everyone got one? Good. Study it like I know you all crammed for the calculus final. Rehearsal at lunch every day and after classes for however long we need to be here. We're going to pull this off guys. We're doing it for Kurt."

Blaine trudged back to his room, gripping the sheet music in his hand. He wasn't surprised to find Caleb there when he opened the door.

He looked up from his laptop as he came in. "Hey."

"Hi." Blaine moved to sit on his bed as Caleb swiveled around in his rolling chair to follow him.

"I met this kid in the cafeteria. He knew you. James? John?" He scrunched up his eyes, trying to remember.

"Jared." Blaine corrected.

"Yeah, him. Said he was part of the Warblers? Told me you were too. Then he got this text and ran out of there before I could ask him what that was."

"Oh."

Caleb stared at him, waiting for an explanation.

"Well, it's our glee club, kind of. Did they have a glee club at Taylor Day?"

He shook his head.

"Okay. Umm, it's... it's like choir but different. There's a group of us and we learn songs to sing, and there's usually dancing to go with it, and we perform wherever we can. There's also competitions, which is what we practice for the most, and we compete against other school's glee clubs."

Caleb shrugged. "Well, I guess I'll have to see it to understand. I'm picturing some church sing-a-long and I doubt that's what you're talking about."

He laughed and Blaine smiled too.

And the words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. "We're having a competition in a week. Regionals. If we win, we go to Nationals in New York."

"Really?" He leaned forward, intrigued. "New York. Wow."

Blaine nodded. "I've always wanted to go to New York." He looked down, feeling the pressure of what he was expected to do start to push down on him and his voice wavered. "But I don't think we're going to win."

"Why not? You said yourself that you practice really hard for this. You don't seem like the type of person to take something lying down. I'd bet anything that you're a leader."

Blaine blinked slowly. "Yeah, I guess I am. Well, I was. It's a long story."

"I got time." Caleb smiled and then his expression became more serious. "But if you don't want to tell me, that's fine."

He sighed. He was going to find out anyway. "I was the lead soloist for two years, but I gave my solo up to Wes, the alternate, a month or so before Regionals."

Caleb looked up at him, not saying anything, but waiting for him to go on.

"I just couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't be the leader, the one everyone looked up to. I was falling apart and the guys didn't need that kind of stress so close to the competition. So I asked Wes to take my place."

"Did he say yes?"

Blaine nodded. "But now they want me to sing lead at Regionals. They want to change the whole song and I don't know if I can do that. I feel like I'm letting them down." His voice lowered. "But if I don't do it, I feel like I'd be letting myself down." He closed his eyes. "I'm supposed to look past this. To move on. And I don't know if I can. It still hurts so much and I feel like if I do this I'll be saying it's okay that he's gone and I-"

He froze. He hadn't meant to say that. In the rush of emotions, he'd let himself say more than he planned.

Blaine felt Caleb's gaze on him for a very long time in the silence that followed. But he didn't look up at him.

After a while, he sensed movement and kept staring down at his knees as he could feel Caleb get up and move over to him. He heard the rustle of paper.

"Somewhere Over the Rainbow." He stated, looking down at the music sheet in his hand. "It's a beautiful song."

"I know." Blaine whispered, unable to lift his gaze.

"It's a song about wishing right? Wishing that you could be more than what you are and unable to get there, but still hoping for it anyway."

Blaine didn't say anything. He felt Caleb sit down beside him.

"You said that you *were* a leader. I don't believe that. You still are. No one just stops being who they are, just like that. I think that you still are a leader and if you want, you can step back up and be who you want to be. I think that not doing this will hurt you more, be something you come to regret. I don't know what's going on or what happened, and you don't have to tell me if you don't want to, but I can see how much it hurt you."

He paused and placed his hand on Blaine's knee. It was nothing more than a comforting gesture and Blaine was suddenly glad that he did it.

"The way Jared talked about you, it was like you were his idol. He told me you were the best singer he's ever heard and you lead them to Regionals two years in a row, with this year making three. He wouldn't stop talking about you and any kid who thinks that highly of someone, especially someone their own age,

it says a lot. I haven't known you for very long and I'm sorry if this sounds weird, but I feel like I am only seeing half of you. Like you've hidden away the other part of Blaine in the dresser drawer and you're not letting yourself be what you know you can be. It's there. I've seen it, I think, in the way that Jared talked about you. But I'm not seeing it here, now. I see someone who's very hurt and puts too much pressure on himself to be this perfect person. Sound familiar?"

Blaine sighed deeply, feeling the tears well up in his eyes. He clenched his hands together and felt Caleb's hand tighten on his knee. His breath came faster and for some reason unknown to himself, he whispered, "He said I was perfect."

Caleb's hand relaxed and then disappeared from his knee. For a moment, it was silent, and Blaine worried that he would ask the question he didn't want to answer. *Who is 'he'?* But then a voice, still a bit concerned, but now sure and confident, replied, "You still are that person."

He felt the bed shift and Caleb got up, standing in front of him and held out the music sheet. Blaine took it wordlessly, with slightly shaking hands.

"Let me know if you want to go over this. I can't sing worth shit, but I can help you if you need it. I'm going to go explore the lower levels here and I'll be back later. Don't beat yourself up over this. Whatever it is, it's gone now and life doesn't stop because we feel like it has."

His soft voice fell away and Blaine heard him open the door and shut it softly. He closed his eyes and let the tears fall silently, not noticing that they fell onto the music sheet clenched tightly in his hand.

Whatever it is, it's gone now and life doesn't stop because we feel like it has.

Why was Caleb so damn good at guessing everything he was feeling? He hadn't known him for a full two days and he already felt like he'd known him for a lifetime, like a long-lost friend. Caleb seemed to know him better than he knew himself.

I can see how much it hurt you.

You're a leader... you still are that person.

I feel like I'm only seeing half of you.

I can help you if you need it.

Blaine knew that Caleb would be able to help him, but god, he didn't know if he could stop his feelings from getting all twisted up. He was feeling more than he was able to deal with right now. Hurt, sadness, loss, and something that scared him more than anything.

Affection.

37. Somewhere Over the Rainbow

Everyone was exhausted. They'd been practicing night and day it seemed like. It had been hard to adjust to coming back to school and Blaine found that he was steadily falling behind. He tried to study and catch up, he really did. But it was as if the world was set on making his life even harder than it already was.

The first week of school had been okay. But the first day itself had been awful.

Blaine slid into his seat in Chemistry, noting that the seat beside him, which was Kurt's seat, was still empty. But then he remembered that it was Caleb's first day here for classes and he wasn't surprised when the substitute pointed at the seat next to Blaine and he found himself looking up into the boy's smiling face.

"I really hate chemistry." He mumbled as he pulled out his textbook.

Blaine gave him a soft grin and the sub, a pretty brunette, began to speak.

"Mr. Worthing has the flu so you're stuck with me for a week or so, I'm afraid." She smiled at them. "I understand there's a new student here, Caleb right? Caleb, I'm an on-site substitute so you'll see me around here often but because I fill in whenever a teacher needs me to, I don't have a certain subject I'm specifically versed in to teach. In other words, I can go over the notes left for the class, but please ask your classmates if you need help with the technicalities of a problem okay?"

She laughed lightly. "Alright then. Please say 'here' when I call your name."

Blaine was one of the first people on the list when she called roll, so he tuned out while the rest of the class waited to hear their names. He was thinking about what his own Somewhere Over the Rainbow would be when he heard a name that made his heart stop.

"Kurt?"

The entire class seemed to be holding their breath. No one spoke. Nervous eyes darted back towards Blaine, who found himself staring down at the desk very intently.

"Kurt?"

No one wanted to speak, to tell her that it was a mistake that that name was still on the roll sheet. That that boy was dead.

"Kurt Hummel?"

Blaine was breathing very fast and he could feel himself start to shake. He wanted to yell at her to shut up, to stop saying his name. Caleb noticed the change that had come over Blaine and he gently said his name, putting his hand over Blaine's clenched fingers worriedly.

Another long pause and Wes spoke, loud and clear and snuffing out any question in the matter. "He's not here."

The unsuspecting substitute nodded and wrote it down in the book and went back to calling out other names.

Caleb's hand was still on Blaine's. "Are you okay?"

"Fine." He whispered back, voice hard.

He withdrew his hand, but Caleb's green eyes kept darting back to the curly-haired boy, wondering what was going on, but having enough sense not to ask.

Blaine took a deep breath. He straightened his tie for the millionth time today. His heart was stuttering in nervous little flutters. He'd never been nervous before. What if he messed this up? He didn't want to mess this up.

David appeared beside him, putting his hands on his shoulders and peeking his head around to look at him.

"You're going to do great man. I know it. So no freaking yourself out okay? We're all here for you."

He sighed. "David, what if I mess up? I'm so scared I'm going to fuck it up and-"

"You won't. But if you do, we'll be right there to pick it up. If it gets to be too much or anything, just back up and Wes will take over. We've got this."

He bit his lip. He guessed there was nothing else holding him back except for himself. He could do this. For Kurt.

"Please welcome to the stage, from Dalton Academy, the Warblers!"

The booming voice echoed in his chest as if he could feel the sound waves. David pulled him along and nodded for him to go in the center. Blaine did so, feeling David fall into place behind him with the other Warblers.

The lights melted to a soft glow and it seemed so quiet. The curtains went up and it was only then that Blaine heard the audience. They were cheering. It was difficult to see out into the house, as the stage lights rendered him almost blind when it came to seeing the audience at all. But he saw a flash of silver, like a sea of shimmering fish scales, and he recognized the costumes for New Directions. They were clapping.

Blaine swallowed and his gaze drifted to the side. There was a tall, green-eyed boy leaning against the wall beside the curtains, wearing a Dalton uniform and smiling at him, arms crossed over his chest.

He took a deep breath, felt his heart speed up as the music began. A soft hum was growing from behind him as the Warblers picked up the first note. Blaine took one last look at Caleb before stepping forward. Last time he had been here, he was singing with Kurt. This time, he was singing alone. But he wasn't alone. Not really.

Somewhere over the rainbow

Way up high

There's a land that I heard of

Once in a lullaby

Blaine's voice was soft as he sang, but emotion lent power to his words and the entire audience was immediately silent, rendered speechless by a boy with hazel eyes.

Somewhere over the rainbow

Skies are blue

And the dreams that you dare to dream

Really do come true

Caleb watched from the wings, transfixed, with an involuntary soft smile on his face. He'd never heard Blaine sing before. He'd heard many people sing, whether recorded or autotuned or live, but Blaine's voice was something else. It was so pure, so raw, so *beautiful*. He felt the emotion that Blaine was feeling and it made him shiver.

Someday I'll wish upon a star

And wake up where the clouds are far

Behind me

Where troubles melt like lemon drops

Away above the chimney tops

That's where you'll find me

The Warblers let their voices drop lower and lower as Blaine's voice gained more power. When he reached the last line, they stopped singing completely and the only sound that could be heard was Blaine. He held the last note, and Caleb noticed there were tears falling from his eyes. He blinked and noticed there were tears in his own eyes too. Blaine let the note fade and the Warblers picked up the next note seamlessly and sang the next stanza together, as Blaine hummed alone.

Somewhere over the rainbow

Bluebirds fly

Birds fly over the rainbow

Why then, oh why, can't I?

The Warblers began to fade their voices again, and Blaine's words grew softer.

If happy little bluebirds fly

Beyond the rainbow

Tears were rolling down Blaine's cheeks and then just one voice sang the last line and he held the very last note softly with such control that the audience itself seemed to hold their breath.

Why, oh why, can't I?

Blaine let out his breath and stepped back into formation. The lights fell and it was silent. The curtain closed and then the audience began to clap, cheer, and wipe their tears. The moment the curtain was shut, arms enveloped Blaine from everywhere. They stayed like that, just holding him and each other, saying things they couldn't at the moment.

It was beautiful.

I knew you wouldn't fuck it up.

Kurt would be proud.

We're proud of you.

They moved back to the dressing rooms only because the next performers were ready to take the stage. When Blaine around him, he saw that every face was smiling at him, and every pair of eyes were watery. They'd been crying too.

As Blaine looked around the room, his gaze fell on the open door. There was a figure leaning against it.

"Caleb." Blaine breathed and stood.

The boy wrapped his arms around Blaine, who returned his hug tightly. "That was amazing," he whispered into his ear.

Blaine pulled back, smiling gently, then sniffed and wiped his tears. "How did you get in here?"

A cheeky grin appeared on his face. "You all wear the Dalton uniform. Wasn't that hard."

"Well, I'm glad you came. Different than the church sing-a-long huh?"

"Very. Wish I could sing."

"You can try out you know."

Caleb smirked. "Seriously, you know how when someone sings so beautifully people just stop talking? Well, when I sing, they scream." He paused, then winked. "And not in the good way."

"Vocal Adrenaline is next up." Wes interrupted their conversation by announcing this out loud to everyone there. "They're the last to go, and then we just have to wait for results."

"Why don't they just get off the stage? No one can top ours." Ryan grumbled.

"Hell yeah! Blaine, you just lead us to Nationals."

"Jared, don't get cocky." Wes warned. "This isn't about winning remember?"

"I know, but come on. We nailed it. I'll make the judges eat their score cards if we don't win."

Wes's glare made Jared shut up real fast. It also seemed to make the excited group more aware. Wes was right. This wasn't about winning. And if they didn't win, they needed to go forth with the mentality that this was a chance at healing. They were going through this together and whatever happened, they would not be upset. They did this for Kurt and winning would just be an unexpected surprise.

They sat in mostly silence while they waited. It was a hard thing to do, to wait.

There was a huge stack of water bottles on a table and every Warbler had at least one with them or near them at all times. Drinking it seemed to give everyone something to do.

Caleb seemed to want to be as close to Blaine as he could get. Blaine was immediately drawn in by the comfort that he seemed to radiate, knowing he could have someone who wouldn't automatically ask him if he was okay. Maybe that was why he still hadn't told him about Kurt. He was worried that telling him would jeopardize their friendship. Blaine knew that he still had a long time to go before he would get over

Kurt. His heart still ached and when he sang today, all he could see was Kurt's smiling face and he felt so hurt that he couldn't just reach out and hold him.

He did like Caleb. As a friend. He was comforting and didn't ask a lot of hard questions and knew when to back off and just knew what to say in general. It was like Kurt had sent him here to watch over Blaine, as if he knew that Blaine's loneliness was going to send him crumbling every time he thought he would get over this hurdle.

He suspected that Caleb had ulterior motives; that he might want more than friendship. And Blaine felt terrible if he was leading him on. But he just wanted a friend. He wanted someone that knew nothing of his situation, who listened without interrupting and let him cry or ramble or whatever he needed without asking why. And for some reason, Caleb was that person. And Blaine didn't know why he didn't just tell Caleb that he wasn't looking for a relationship. He had tried to tell him twice already, but every time he tried, the words died in his throat and he lost the courage to do so.

He felt like he'd talked Wes and David to the point of comatose and crying into their shoulders was only hurting them more. He knew that he was kind of using Caleb and he felt awful. But was it so bad to just want someone to be there for him? Was it wrong to want to have someone there who could make him happy? At least as a friend?

He truly believed that someday, he could fall for Caleb. He did feel something for him. He knew he did. And he was so scared of those feelings that seemed to want to burst out of him at any moment. He knew he could fall for Caleb. But not now. Now, if he acted on any of his confused feelings, both of them would end up hurt. And it wasn't fair to Kurt. Blaine had given his everything to Kurt Hummel and just because he was gone, he couldn't jump on the next guy he met. Kurt meant more to him than that. He needed to take time to begin to be happy again. And Caleb was there to make him realize that he *could* be happy again. He could make new friends, be himself again.

I feel like I'm only seeing half of you. Like you've hidden a part of Blaine in the dresser drawer.

Not anymore. No. He was going to learn to be himself again. And singing up there with the Warblers made him realize how much he missed it. He hadn't planned on going back. Without Kurt, he didn't think he could, but now.... Now, he knew how much that this meant to him and that Wes was right. Songs could heal.

Somewhere over the rainbow.

He'd spent a lot of time thinking about what that meant. There was the general meaning within the context of the song. And then there was something deeper. He'd tried to picture what his 'somewhere over the rainbow' would look like and he never could do it. He could see fuzzy outlines and shapes but no definite picture. The storm clouds, the hard times, were on this side of the rainbow. But on the other side? He couldn't see for sure what it was, but he knew that it was happy to some degree. It was where he wanted to be.

Then there was the rainbow itself. The bridge to his 'happy place.' The rainbow could be figurative to time, meaning that time would heal his wounds and then he could be okay. But it could also be something else. Or someone else.

He thought of Carole, Burt and Finn. They could help him heal too. They could be the brightly colored rainbow in his thoughts.

He thought of the Warblers. They could be the brightly shining bridge that was healing.

He thought of Caleb. He could let him in, as a friend. He could help him, maybe in ways that he wouldn't have been able to see on his own. After all, Caleb seemed to know him better than he knew himself.

He was pondering this when there was a knock at the door. Wes stood and ignored all of the anxious glances following him. He stuck his head out the door, said a few words, then turned around.

"They want us onstage." He announced. "It's time."

The lights were bright and there were so many different colors around him. The New Directions seemed to glow in their silver outfits, while Vocal Adrenaline had chosen yellow this year and looked to him like daffodils on fire. Aural Intensity was clad in a jeweled purple, next to the Warblers in their Dalton uniforms.

The groups were sectioned off with their coaches in front, so Blaine was standing very slightly apart from the rest of the Warblers. Everyone had their hands linked with everyone else's, holding on tightly as if to say, 'It's okay. We made it this far together. Nothing is going to change that.'

"In third place," the announcer opened an envelope and paused dramatically, "Vocal Adrenaline!"

The audience clapped, but the announced group did not. Their faces fell. Jesse looked pissed, but accepted the trophy, as their coach seemed unable to do anything but stand there gaping.

"In second place," Blaine felt his hand being squeezed again, "the Dalton Academy Warblers!"

They all began to applaud, clapping Blaine on the back and smiling hugely. They'd done it. Sure, they hadn't made it to Nationals. But that wasn't what this was about.

Blaine accepted the larger second-place trophy and handed it to Wes, who set it on the ground in favor of hugging any one of the Dalton-uniformed singers he could.

They'd gotten second. After changing the entire song a week before Regionals. It was more than Blaine had let himself hope for. He was so proud of all of them, but it meant so much more than that, that they'd believed in him.

The Warblers barely heard that New Directions had won first place. And they didn't care. McKinley was going to New York again and the Warblers would be staying in Lima again, but they'd grown stronger as a team. They'd done it together and they'd accomplished more than they'd ever thought possible.

He saw Caleb smiling at him from the wings, who gave him a quick thumbs up.

Blaine was enveloped in another round of hugs and he thought that Regionals had been worth the extra rehearsals and the slightly stressed out wrath of Wes earlier in the week because they'd proven that they could go through hell and back and be there for each other and still manage to heal.

As a team.

As friends.

As family.

38. Green Eyes Smolder

The next few days went by in a blur. Blaine was happy. Happier than he could ever remember being since Kurt had first told him about his leukemia. He felt as if this great weight had been lifted off his shoulders and he could breathe again. He didn't think he'd ever feel happy again.

The Warblers were huddled around the huge fireplace in the lounge, roasting marshmallows on thin metal sticks provided by the school. During the winter, when the fireplaces all over Dalton were on almost constantly, small cylinders could be found waiting on the brick mantle places, holding dozens of roasting sticks, along with baskets of graham crackers, bags of marshmallows, and chocolate bars wrapped in shiny foil. Hot chocolate and coffee could also be found on tables throughout the dorms on tables set against the wall in copper colored dispensers.

A bag of marshmallows, now half-empty, was tossed to Blaine, who caught it and threaded one onto the metal stick, passing the bag over to Caleb. Ever since Regionals, Caleb had been regarded as one of the Warblers and they welcomed him as their own, even though he would never let a single note of any song past his lips. Blaine knew that they did it more for him than anyone else. The Warblers were a tight-knit group and it was almost impossible to be with them and not feel left out unless you wore the Warbler pin on your lapel. But they'd made an exception with Caleb and Blaine was grateful.

"So, Caleb." Thad looked up from squishing his marshmallow between two graham crackers. "You're gay?"

The question was blunt, but coming from Thad, it wasn't that surprising.

Caleb nodded, not seeming fazed by it. "Yep."

"Why'd you transfer here? Taylor Day's a pretty normal high school right? I mean, not much happens there. No offense."

"None taken." He smiled and stuck his marshmallow a few inches above the crackling flames, watching it carefully. "Yeah, I guess my school was normal."

"Was it bullying?" Jared asked before he could continue. "That's why most people transfer here."

"No. There were five or so other guys out at my school, which was nice because we never really felt alone. But no one ever bothered us either. Odd as it sounds, football isn't a huge thing there. It's more of an arts-gear school."

"Like what?"

"Photography is big. So is basic drawing, you know, like charcoal shading and painting. Dance is huge. Ballet, jazz, modern, tap, whatever. Most people get scholarships to Julliard."

"Wow." David had been so engrossed in what he was saying that he didn't realize his marshmallow was on fire. He cursed and blew it out, looking sadly at the charred remains.

"You burn it, you eat it dude." Wes reminded him.

Caleb laughed softly.

"So why did you transfer?" Thad asked again.

There was a pause, only long enough for Blaine to notice.

"My parents had the money."

The tone of that sentence ended that conversation, but they quickly picked it back up, talking about what they did over break and how many marshmallows they could stuff in their mouths at once.

Blaine knew Caleb wasn't telling the truth. It looked like they both had secrets to hide.

Blaine went to bed early that night, full of smores and warm from the fireplace and friends. He curled up in his blanket and turned away, to face the wall as he closed his eyes, letting the darkness slide over him. His muscles relaxed and he heard Caleb quietly open the door and then click on the gooseneck lamp. He always made sure to cover the lamp as best he could when he did late-night drawing. He was a self-proclaimed night owl and that didn't bother Blaine at all. He could usually sleep through anything.

But once he fell asleep, he stepped into his unyielding dreams and those, he had trouble getting past.

He thought they were over. He thought he'd be okay. But that night, for some reason, he was wrong.

He could hear a heartbeat. Thudding, drumming, getting louder, faster.

Blaine tried to look around, tried to see who was the source of the noise. But he didn't see anything.

He looked up. He was in a room, a very small room. Very small. He started breathing faster. If the room was any smaller, he'd be crushed. The walls were striped, red and blue and yellow. He reached out, pressing against the side wall. It wouldn't budge. He pushed on all the walls. They wouldn't move. He was trapped.

His back pressed against the wall and he curled up as small as he could, trying to control his breathing when all he wanted to do was hyperventilate hysterically. There was only so much air in here. He'd suffocate soon.

He heard a noise. His ears pricked. His heartbeat thudded.

It was a cranking kind of noise, like something being turned. It was followed by a jingle, like soft bells. He knew that noise. It was the kind of sing-song noise that was heard when a child turned the crank on a jack-in-the-box.

What the hell?

The noise got faster and Blaine's heart sped up too. A jack-in-the-box popped up out of the box at the end of the song. Was he going to pop up too? What if the box didn't give way and he was crushed against the top of the unyielding walls?

Oh god. The song was at its fastest. It was coming soon. He closed his eyes, wrapping his arms around his knees.

And then the noise stopped.

It was silent for one long beat of his heart.

And then the box opened. He looked up, seeing darkness. He hadn't been smashed into the top wall. He hadn't even been forced to jump up like a jack-in-the-box.

He gingerly stood and poked his head out the top. It was still dark. He couldn't see anything.

And then the light turned on.

It was blinding for a moment. And then he could see. He heard the click of a door behind him and he turned.

The door was huge. He looked down and saw a the biggest desk he'd ever set eyes on, in addition to a book more than three times his size and a coffee cup that could be a swimming pool.

The door opened.

And a giant walked in. Blaine couldn't see his face, he was so tall. He doubted he would fit into the giant's palm. The figure walked over to him, in the box he was in.

Then the light illuminated the face of the huge person. Blaine's heart stopped.

It was Caleb.

He smiled down at him, his eyes seeming to glow like emeralds.

And he reached his hand down and plucked Blaine up by the back of his jacket and placed him on the desk. He lost his footing and fell. He realized sickeningly that Caleb and the ordinary objects around him were not abnormally huge. No, he was small.

The giant Caleb looked down on him.

"Time to play Blaine." He whispered.

And Blaine screamed.

"Woah! Hey. Hey!"

Blaine's eyes snapped open. He was laying in his bed. Every muscle was clenched tight, his hands fisted in the blankets. He could feel the cold sweat dripping down his face and his heart pounded so fast in his chest, it actually made him dizzy.

Caleb's face appeared above him, hidden in shadow in the darkness. Blaine saw a sneer on his face and he screamed.

Caleb's hand jerked away from his arm as if he'd been burned, and then he reached over and pressed his hands against Blaine's shoulders.

"Hey, hey. Calm down. It's okay. It was just a dream."

The hands that held him were soft, gentle. He leaned down slightly, closer to Blaine's face. And Blaine saw that what he initially thought was a cold sneer, turned out to be concern. His breathing slowed and he told himself to relax.

When he stopped trembling, Caleb removed his hands, but didn't leave.

"It was just a dream Blaine. You're okay."

Blaine groaned. Why were these still happening? He hadn't had a nightmare since that night in the dorms with Kurt.

"You want to talk about it?" Caleb's voice was soft.

He shook his head.

"Okay."

He saw Caleb start to move away and Blaine suddenly didn't want him to. "Did I scream?"

He paused, eyes darting back and forth. "Umm... a bit. At the end. You mainly just kind of moaned and thrashed around. I tried to wake you when you started screaming." He said the next sentence hurriedly as if he was trying to soften what he had just said. "You only screamed once though."

Caleb moved closer, so his pajama-clad hip was bumping up against the bed. Blaine's heart had returned back to a normal rhythm. He no longer felt the quick rush of adrenaline that came with waking from a nightmare. But he didn't want to be alone. He had a sudden fear of being alone. Again. He didn't want to be alone again. There was still a hole in his chest, no matter how small he tried to convince himself it was, and he had an aching want to have that hole be filled. He needed someone here with him.

"It..." he cleared his throat. "It helps if I have someone here. My old... roommate... he..."

"You want me to stay with you?"

Blaine nodded slowly.

What was he doing? He shouldn't be doing this. He should tell Caleb to go back to his bed. He should-

"Yes. I need someone here."

"Okay." Caleb's voice was low.

Blaine scooted over as far as he could get and Caleb lifted up the blanket, sliding in beside him. Caleb made sure to leave as much space between them as possible. Blaine brought his arms up towards his chest and curled up tightly. The bright green eyes stared softly at his and he smiled, so small and gentle.

Caleb reached over and pulled the blanket up to drape it around Blaine's shoulders and then he stayed curled up on his side of the bed. Blaine closed his eyes, at once feeling the comfort that came with having him here, the same comfort that he always felt when Caleb was around.

And he knew he would have no more nightmares tonight.

Blaine awoke to a soft light filling his room. His eyes were slightly blurry when he first opened them and he noticed a figure next to him. He smiled.

"Kurt."

The figure moved. He blinked, got his eyes to focus. And he realized that the eyes looking back at him were green, not blue.

Why did he say his name? He wasn't supposed to do this anymore. He was supposed to move on. Kurt was gone and he was never coming back.

The other person either pretended not to hear or Blaine had spoken too quietly, but either way, the boy asked, "So I'm guessing no more nightmares huh?"

Blaine shook his head. "No. Thank you. For... for staying."

He smiled. "No problem."

"I'm sorry I woke you."

"Oh, I was just drawing. I was already up. It's actually kind of good that you had that nightmare when you did. I needed sleep anyway." He laughed and the soothing sound echoed, ringing in Blaine's ears.

Caleb jumped out of the bed as quickly as he could, so as to not let any heat escape from under the blankets, and landed lightly on his feet.

"Want to go get breakfast?"

Blaine sat up and nodded.

Blaine threw a sweatshirt on over his t-shirt, not bothering to change his pajama pants. It was Saturday and though Dalton was strict uniform-only on the weekdays, the weekends were free game. He was pretty sure that Thad would have shown up to breakfast in his bathing suit just because he could.

Blaine handed Caleb a plate and they got in line behind the rest of the students. It didn't take long though. The Dalton chefs were always ready for the Saturday morning rush, as most students got up around nine. Blaine glanced at the clock. Nine-fifteen. Both boys plated scrambled eggs, toast, and bacon. He saw Josh pass him with a plate full of danishes. He let out a low laugh.

"That boy could eat a doughnut shop and still go back for seconds."

Caleb's eyes followed him and he moved out of the line, motioning for Blaine to come with him. He did, but threw a pointed glance at the table where most of the Warblers were sitting around cups of coffee, cereal, eggs, and sausage.

"If it's okay, I'd like to talk to you alone."

Blaine's heart pounded. "Oh, okay."

Caleb scoped out a table near the back that was empty and walked over, setting down his plate and sitting, watching as Blaine did the same.

"What did you want to talk about?" Blaine asked, trying to sound like this wasn't a difficult question.

He sighed and met Blaine's eyes, staring at him intently. "Who's Kurt?"

Blaine froze. So he had heard.

"Just... just a friend." The lie fell from his lips easily, though it was the worst lie he'd ever told. Kurt was so much more than just a friend. He had been so much more than that.

Caleb got that look on his face. The one that said he knew Blaine was lying. "Are you sure about that?"

"Boyfriend then. Okay?"

Blaine scooted his fork around his eggs, not eating anything. He wasn't hungry anymore.

"Were you dreaming about him?"

He looked up. "No."

"Did you-"

Blaine immediately became annoyed. "Why all the questions?"

"I'm trying to understand." He looked slightly hurt.

"Understand what exactly?" Blaine's eyes blazed.

"What you're so hurt about."

Blaine let his mouth snap shut. He didn't speak, so Caleb continued cautiously.

"You're obviously upset about something. The first day when I was here? You said 'he's gone.' And a week ago, in class, you got all shaky and freaked out when that sub called his name. And you had that nightmare

and then you woke up saying his name. You thought I was him. What's going on here? I want to help you Blaine, I do. But I can't do that if you don't tell me."

He stood up, abandoning his breakfast. "Please Caleb. Just don't bring this up again. I'll tell you. I promise. But not now. And probably not soon. It hurts too much."

Caleb stood too. "I care about you Blaine. I think you've known for a while. But it hurts me that I can't do anything about why you're so upset."

Blaine didn't have an answer to that. So he didn't say anything.

"Will you take a walk with me?"

Caleb's question caught Blaine off guard. And he found himself nodding.

He led Blaine out of the cafeteria and out into the winding path leading to the dorms. But instead of going on that path, he turned and began to walk out where the path loped around the school.

Blaine shoved his hands into his pockets.

"I'm sorry about asking you all those questions. I didn't mean to make you mad. I just really want to help you and I don't know how."

Blaine looked down. Caleb seemed sincere and he knew that he would probably do the same thing if their situations were reversed. "It's okay."

After a while of walking in silence, Caleb stopped and looked out to the side of the path. His expression was thoughtful. There was a thin layer of freshly fallen snow out and it covered the grounds in a smooth blanket, reminding Blaine of the swirling white rocks, sanded smooth by the tossing sea, that he found at the beach on a vacation once.

"Have you ever made a snow angel?"

Blaine bit his lip. Truthfully, he never had because no one else wanted to make one with him. He watched as Caleb trudged over to an expanse of white snow and immediately laid down. He looked up expectantly.

Blaine thought about it for a millisecond and then his mind said 'what the hell?' and he flopped down near him. They spread their arms and legs out, pushing the snow off to the side, creating indents in the ground.

Blaine's nose was cold, but he felt warm. He started laughing, knowing that the snow would be all over his back, butt, and legs.

Caleb stood up carefully, so as to not disturb the drawing in the snow.

"And that's how you make a snow angel." He said confidently. He stared down at both of the figures in the snow, putting a hand on Blaine's shoulder. "I think mine looks better."

"What? No way."

Caleb grinned. "Oh yes, mine encompasses all of the grace of an angel."

"I'll show you grace." Blaine grumbled and promptly bent down and picked up a handful of snow before tossing it in the unsuspecting boy's face.

Caleb's eyes held surprise and he stared, openmouthed for a moment before a wicked grin appeared. "You really didn't want to do that."

He pointedly bent and scooped up some snow, locking eyes with Blaine the entire time, challenging him to do something about it.

Blaine stood still, watching Caleb. He was wearing a light green beanie pulled down just above his eyebrows with small tufts of hair peeking out from underneath. The color green in his hat brought out the intensity of his eyes. Blaine felt himself smoldering as he stared into those eyes.

With his grin growing wider, Caleb threw the snow slightly above Blaine, so that it rained down on his head in icy fluffs. Blaine shivered and retaliated, picking up more snow than before and hurling it at Caleb, who had ducked behind a tree.

A full on war ensued, with both boys seeming to be aiming to bury the other in snow. Everything that was not covered by clothing was frozen to the point of being numb and everything that was clothed was soaked. Blaine shivered uncontrollably and had to laugh as he saw Caleb had fared no better.

"Truce?" The green-eyed boy asked.

Blaine smiled. Well, he thought he smiled. He couldn't feel his lips at the moment.

"Only because I can't feel my fingers."

"I'd offer to warm them up for you, but I can't bend them." He laughed, holding up his hand to illustrate his point.

"We'll have to fix that. To the dorms?"

"To the dorms." Caleb agreed and they began to walk together back the way they'd come.

On the way back, Blaine found himself staring at Caleb's lips. He wondered if his had turned as pale as his were.

Caleb saw him staring and took it the wrong way. "My kisses taste better when my lips aren't frozen."

Blaine knew Caleb was sarcastic. In the time he'd been here, Blaine couldn't count the number of times Caleb used sarcasm on a daily basis. He hoped that now, he was being sarcastic. But he heard no hint of it in his voice.

"No, I'm not... I didn't mean to-"

"No need to apologize. If you wanted a kiss, you just had to ask."

The boy grinned and Blaine felt something shift within his chest. Caleb was offering to kiss him. And he kind of wanted to.

Since Kurt had died, he'd felt numb. He didn't think he'd ever be able to love again. And now, he wanted to feel normal again. He just wanted to stop feeling so lost. And maybe Caleb had been sent here for a reason, to help him in more than just being his friend. There was only one way to find out.

"Yes."

Blaine stopped and Caleb did too, a look of surprise shown clearly on his face.

"Yes?"

Blaine nodded, not moving from where he stood. Caleb doubled back instantly and rushed up, cupping Blaine's jaw in his hands that were warm now from being in his jacket pockets, and kissed him full on the lips. The sharp intake of Blaine's breath showed his shock for only a moment. And then he was kissing Caleb back, hands reaching up around his neck. Their lips moved together and neither one of them felt cold anymore.

Kurt. That thought slammed into Blaine's mind. Kurt. He was letting Kurt down. He was doing the one thing he told himself he wouldn't do. No, no, no, no. What was he doing? What the hell was he doing?

His mind screamed all of these questions. But his body wasn't listening. He felt the warmth of Caleb's lips on his and the way he gently held his head in strong hands. But what hurt the most is that he felt happiness, pleasure, *fireworks*.

He moved his hands down suddenly and put them flat against Caleb's chest, but instead of pulling him closer, like the green-eyed boy expected, he found himself shoving as hard as he could. Their lips parted and Caleb was left staggering back, utter confusion and hurt on his face.

"Don't!" Blaine screamed at him. "Don't! Don't touch me!"

Caleb stood, swaying slightly, as a million emotions rushed up at him. But he shoved aside the anger and instead let the concern take the front line. "I'm not. I'm not." He held up his hands to prove his point. "Blaine, it's-"

But the curly-haired boy had taken off into the snow, not hearing Caleb's yells after him telling him to come back and that he was sorry.

He stalked off into the swirling snow and felt his heart race, the need to throw up almost overpowering by these crippling emotions that tore through him.

What the hell had he just done?

39. The Truth Comes Out

Blaine tore off through the snow, not feeling the icy wind that had picked up and breathed down his neck. Everything hurt. His whole body ached; he felt like he'd just gotten beat up. He just kept walking, not sure where he was going and not caring. The bitter tears stung in his eyes and he had to keep blinking harshly so he could see.

He didn't know what to do. He didn't know what he was going to do, what he could do.

He went to the first place he felt like he could be alone. Swinging open the doors to the choir room, he ducked inside and shut the door, feeling the immediate silence inside the room seep into his very bones. He let out a stuttering breath and let his shaking legs carry him to the white stairs before he sat down, holding his head in his hands as he cried.

He was shaking. He couldn't breathe. His mind was going a million miles a minute and he had no clue what to do with the boatload of emotions that were racing in his veins.

He was so angry. Angry at himself. Why had he done that? That was the worst possible thing he could have done. God, he didn't know why he was so stupid. Why? Why? Why? The question kept pounding in his head and he was no closer to any kind of answer.

He was so confused and hurt. Kurt's death had been so hard on him. He'd felt like he was feeling around in the dark for so long, grasping at straws. He'd been scared, mad, reduced to a sobbing mess and he'd just wanted the pain to go away. And then he met Caleb. And Caleb had been nice, hadn't treated him like glass, and he'd thought that maybe, *maybe*, Caleb would be able to help him feel happy again.

And he'd been stupid enough to be right. Caleb had made him happy. And Blaine had gone and fucked everything up. He'd wanted to feel *something*. It was incredibly selfish, but if he was being truthful, he was tired of feeling hopeless and alone all the time. And he'd felt happy with Caleb. He'd thought kissing him would make him feel. But all it had done was make him more angry and confused.

It was too late to change anything. He couldn't take back what he'd done. It was stupid. And he knew it.

His cell phone in his pocket kept buzzing. He knew it was Caleb. He shoved his hand in his pocket, pulled out the phone, and with a strangled scream, threw it against the wall.

It smashed, the back cover popping off and the battery went flying across the room.

He wrapped his arms around himself and tried desperately not to throw up or punch something; both of which he was feeling a very strong urge to do at the moment.

Kurt was gone. He knew that. It killed him to think about it. Why didn't he ever do anything without thinking about it first? He didn't know that that kiss would rip his heart apart again. He loved Kurt. He thought that he still did. He *knew* he still did. But Kurt could never love him back. Never again. And in the haze of the thoughtless action where he said that Caleb could kiss him, he had had the selfish vision that he was going to be alone forever.

What the hell was wrong with him? Kurt had been gone for a month. A month. *One* month. It was way too fucking soon for any of this to be happening.

Why did he have to say yes?

Why?

He clasped his hand to his mouth and a sob was pressed back. He bit his fingers so as to not scream.

Kurt had been gone one month and he was already feeling something for someone else.

He felt like shit.

He sat there until his tears ran in silent streams down his cheeks and he no longer wanted to hit something. And he picked up the pieces of his broken phone and put one unsteady foot in front of the other, making his way slowly back to the dorms.

He knew Caleb would be there. He had to tell him. He had to tell him about Kurt. He hadn't wanted to, but it was going to hurt Caleb even more if he didn't say anything. Caleb was just doing what Blaine had told him to do. He couldn't have known the emotional war that was raging within the gentle hazel-eyes.

Blaine took the stairs on the way back, moving slower than he thought possible. It physically hurt to lift his legs, which felt like bags of wet sand.

He pushed open the door when he reached it and carefully stepped inside. His eyes were downcast and he could only see Caleb's shoes and shins in his line of vision. Taking a quick deep breath, he looked up.

Caleb was sitting on the bed, arms folded around his torso. The look on his face sent a surge of guilt coursing through Blaine. His eyes held confused pain and hurt and he looked so crestfallen.

Blaine bit his lip as Caleb met his eyes. He moved over and sat down on his bed, not caring that his clothes were still soaked.

"Blaine," his voice was soft and defeated, "I didn't mean to-"

"It's not your fault." Blaine whispered. "You didn't do anything wrong. I did. I should be the one apologizing." He looked up. "I'm sorry."

Caleb sounded as if he didn't hear him and he spoke in a rush that told Blaine clearly that he'd been thinking about what he was going to say for a while. "I'm sorry about asking all those questions and... I knew you were hurting, but I just wouldn't stop asking and I know that you didn't want to talk about it and... god, I feel like such an ass right now."

"You're not. It's me. I..." Blaine looked down before sighing and resuming his gaze. "I didn't want to tell you because I liked that you didn't know. I liked that you treated me like you would treat anyone else. I liked that I could have someone to listen when I ramble and not ask why. I liked that I had a friend who could help me. But I was stupid. I was selfish and I'm stupid."

"Blaine, you're not-"

"Yes I am. I let myself feel things that I don't even know if they're real and I jumped head-first into a lake that I have no business being in yet. I hurt you and I'm sorry."

Caleb's glance softened, but he didn't speak. Blaine took a steadying breath, unclenching his hands on his knees and kneading his fingers into his thighs.

"I want to tell you about Kurt."

Caleb still did not speak, just sat still and waited, giving him a very slight nod.

"Kurt was my roommate. But he was more than that. He was my best friend, the one person I could go to for anything, the person I'd do anything for and I know he'd do the same for me. He was my boyfriend. I loved him with more of myself than I'd ever loved anything. We weren't together for very long. Six months. But they were the best six months of my life. And also the worst." He bit his lip lightly, blinking back the tears. "He- he had leukemia. I was there through everything. His dad told me the day after they found out. I was there with him when he went to chemo and waiting for him when he got back. I stayed with him night and day and sat there helplessly as he puked his guts out. I sang to him, read to him, watched TV with him, whatever I could to make him feel better. I knew it wasn't enough. But I loved him and he told me that was all he needed. He had the second round of chemo and that was awful, but they said it was working and he was getting better and then he got sick. He got pneumonia and I was the only one there when he passed out and I brought him to the hospital and then they said he was going to be okay." Blaine couldn't help the sob building in his chest. "They said he was going to be okay and then.... I was at rehearsal and I came back and he was... he'd stopped breathing. He died that day and I wasn't there." He was openly crying now and he could see the tears on Caleb's face through his own blurry vision.

Blaine sniffed, locking eyes with Caleb as best he could and forcing himself to sit taller. "His funeral was a month ago. And I'm hurting every damn day even though I know there's nothing I could have done. And I'm sorry Caleb. I met you and I thought that I could put everything behind me and stop feeling this way and I thought if I tried to let myself be happy that it might fix everything, that I'd stop feeling so broken. I'm sorry I told you to kiss me. I was scared of being alone and I took advantage of you. And worst of all, I kept all of this from you and just ended up hurting you more. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

Caleb was silent for a very long moment. And then he crossed the room and sat next to Blaine, not touching him at all, just sitting. Blaine was looking down at his knees, getting his breathing back under control.

"Blaine, I... I wish you would have told me. I wouldn't have been... I don't know." He sighed. "I know what you're going through."

Blaine lifted his head, to tell him that no, he didn't, but Caleb spoke before he could.

"I do. I didn't just transfer here because my parents had money." He said slowly. "I-" he pushed a hand through his hair and groaned. "I can't believe I'm saying this now. I haven't talked about it in so long." There was a long pause before he spoke again. "My brother committed suicide."

And the truth comes out.

"He was eighteen. A senior. He had friends, a family that loved him. He was going to go to college, with a basketball scholarship. He was my idol. I looked to him for everything. He was my best friend. And one night, we were up watching a movie and he started to get real quiet and I thought that he was getting sick or something. He told me to get some sleep and that he loved me. And when I woke up, he was dead. He took pills from my mom's medicine cabinet. And he was gone. It's been a year and I think about him every day. It's gotten easier, but I'll still see things that remind me of him and I have to just focus on not falling apart or getting mad at whatever I saw because it makes me remember that he's never coming back. I stayed at that school for as long as I could. But I couldn't take it anymore. Everywhere I'd look, I'd see *him*. Reminders of him. It stopped affecting my schoolwork after a while, but it's the little things that hurt the most, even now. His favorite color was green. And it doesn't make it any better that I can't help but think of him every time I look into a goddamned mirror."

The emerald eyes blazed. Blaine instinctively shrank back a bit. He knew that feeling.

"It's been better though, since I transferred here. New atmosphere you know? And the Warblers are great."

"Yeah, they are." Blaine remembered how they all stayed in Wes's dorm for hours, just waiting to see how Blaine was doing on the day he stumbled, blinded by pain, back to his room after Kurt had died.

"Do you remember what I told you before? About how life doesn't stop because we feel like it has?" He said quietly and waited until Blaine nodded. "People told me that all the time those first few months. So much so that I started to tune people out. They didn't know what I was going through. So how could they even begin to help me when I didn't know where to start to try and help myself? But I look back now and I realize that I just didn't understand. I was closing people off and not letting anyone in because I was afraid that they would try and make me forget about him. And I didn't want to. And I can see now that I was living in this closed-off world, my own little safe bubble. Healing isn't just something that happens overnight. It's going to take time. I know that from experience. I still go days where it's hard to get through them because I keep thinking about what he would be doing right now if he were still alive. Kurt meant a

lot to you. I can see that. I'm not going to lie and tell you that I don't feel anything for you Blaine, because I do, but I want you to believe me when I tell you that I can be here for you if you want me to. I can listen to you if you need someone to, I can be there for you if you just need to cry, I can stay with you if the nightmares keep you up at night. I won't do anything that you don't want me to. And I'll try to be level-headed and make the right calls if your judgment needs some help." He smiled softly and then his face showed concern. "I am sorry that I kissed you if it made you hurt more. You've been through a lot and I'm sorry if I made things worse."

"No, no Caleb. You didn't." Blaine looked up and then cautiously set his hand on top of his on the comforter. "Thank you. For being here. For understanding. And I'm sorry about your brother."

He smiled softly. "Thanks. I'm sorry about Kurt."

There was a long pause and then Blaine removed his hand and said, "Yeah."

Then he sighed. "I think I'm going to try and take a nap. Rough night you know?"

Caleb nodded. "Okay. I'll wake you up if you start, you know, nightmare stuff alright?"

"You don't have to stay if you don't want to. I'll be fine."

"Nah. It's cool. I want to get back to this drawing."

A small smile appeared on Blaine's face. He'd never seen Caleb's drawings before, but he always seemed to be hard at work on them. He kicked off his shoes and pulled off his wet hoodie and pajamas, replacing them with a dry t-shirt and yanked on a pair of sweatpants. Too tired to bother throwing it towards the hamper, he left his clothes in a pile beside his bed and curled up, closing his eyes immediately.

He'd told Caleb about Kurt. And he'd felt better after he did. The air itself within the room, once heavy with secrets, now seemed lighter, no longer anxious and foreboding. He could breathe again.

He heard the soft scratching of Caleb's pencil on paper. And he fell asleep, lulled by the sound and the solace that was slowly filling his mind and body.

He thought that this could be okay.

He could be okay.

40. I Will Follow You into the Dark

Wes sat sprawled out on a couch in the common room, with Blaine curled on the armchair. It was quiet now, as everyone had gone to bed. The fireplace crackled, sending a warm glow around the room. January was finally over and the snow had decided to stick around for the beginning of February.

"Did you hear Mr. Roney's essay got moved? We get another two weeks to work on it."

Blaine smiled lightly. "Yeah. It'll give me more time to fix it."

"Wait, you're done? Impossible. That prompt was made to kill us."

He watched in slight amusement as Wes's face turned disbelieving. "I was done with it a week ago."

"Wow. Any tips?" He smiled.

"Other than 'do your own work'?" Blaine laughed. "First half of the book has a lot of relevant quotes, I thought."

Wes grinned. "Thanks man."

There was a pause and Blaine stared down at his knees. Wes chewed on his lip, watching Blaine as if he didn't really know how to start what he wanted to say.

"Hey, Blaine?"

He looked up.

"How's it going with Caleb?" Wes reddened immediately. "Oh, wait. I didn't mean that... like that. Umm, what I meant was, how..." He sighed, pushing a hand through his hair. "He seems like a nice guy."

Blaine felt the blush creeping up his neck. "Oh, yeah. He's... he is. Yeah, he's a nice guy."

"I talked to him the other day. Wouldn't stop talking about how great the Warblers are. I asked him if he wanted to try out, but he says he can't sing for shit, so...." He laughed.

Blaine felt a slight grimace turn the corners of his mouth down. Caleb lied.

Wes met Blaine's eyes again. "He talked about you too."

He felt his blood freeze. He stayed silent.

"He... he thinks... he's worried about you. Said you've gotten quiet. And I've noticed it too man. You're not... who you used to be."

Blaine's eyes blazed. "You lose the one person you've loved more than anything in the whole world and then you tell me that that wouldn't change you."

Wes held up his hands in a surrendering gesture. "Whoa. No, I didn't mean that. Just, well, you seemed happy, at first, when Caleb was here. And now..." His voice grew softer. "I thought he was helping you. I could see it; you were more *alive* than I'd seen you since..." He trailed off. "What changed?"

Blaine was silent for a long time.

It was Saturday. The common room was quiet. Most everyone had gone to bed or to the party that was going on in Nick's dorm. Blaine hadn't felt like going. He liked the calmness that came over the dorms at night.

He walked, feet slipping slightly on the hardwood floor in his socks, and pulled on his hoodie. He let his hand trail over the smooth wooden railing of the second story along the hallway. Turning towards the rail, he set his elbows on it and leaned over, looking down onto the quiet lounge of the first floor. The fireplace had almost burned itself out, the orange coals smoldering gently and illuminating the red of the fabric on the chairs closest to the light. The towering pine tree in the center of the room extended up, reaching eye level of the second story railing, decorated with hundreds of ornaments and loaded with streamers. As always, a huge replica of the Dalton Academy crest sat atop the tree, glittering red and navy in the night. The other chairs and couches and tables, piled heavily with books and forgotten school papers, were shrouded in darkness, an almost eerie divergence from the way it was in the day: crowded, loud, and bright.

And then Blaine realized that he was not alone in his thoughts. There was another noise that either had just begun or had been there the whole time but Blaine had not noticed it. He lifted his head and looked in the direction of the unmistakable sound of a piano.

He followed the sound, heart beating a little faster. The sound was intoxicating. He hadn't heard anyone play a piano so beautifully before. He was entranced, walking slowly down the stairs towards the common room, not wanting to break this spell. When he got to the bottom of the stairs, he turned left and then paused at the door.

Caleb was seated at the piano, fingers moving delicately over the keys. He played softly, a melody that was so gentle and painfully beautiful.

And then he began to sing.

His eyes were downcast towards the keys and he was engrossed in this moment, not noticing the boy who stood in awe by the doorway.

With a shock, Blaine realized that Caleb could sing. He could sing really well.

Why had he lied?

His voice was beautiful, nothing at all to be ashamed of. So why had he lied to Blaine and Wes and the entirety of the Warblers as well? He could have auditioned. He still could. And Blaine knew that he would make it.

Blaine was rooted to the spot, listening eagerly. He didn't want to interrupt and cause him to stop singing.

Caleb kept playing, letting his voice fill the room in only the way a controlled singer could. And then he let the last note fade away, hands poised lightly over the keys as the piano thrummed, echoing the last sound as it drifted off.

And then it was silent.

Blaine took a few steps into the room. "I thought you were going to the party."

Caleb looked over, surprised. "Didn't feel like it. I thought you were going to bed."

"Didn't feel like it." Blaine said, a very slight mocking tone in his voice as he smiled. "Why didn't you tell me you could sing? And play? I mean, that... that was amazing."

"How long were you there?"

"Long enough to know that you lied to me."

"I didn't mean to. I-" his eyes darted around as he searched for what to say. "Because it hurts too much."

"What does?" Blaine asked softly, taking a few more steps forward. He lowered himself onto one of the armchairs.

"Dylan taught me how to play."

"Dylan?" He hadn't heard that name before. And it clicked. "Your brother?"

Caleb nodded. "When I got good enough, we'd play together. He'd play one part of a song, and I'd play the other and we'd sing together. We used to put on concerts for our parents."

"Did he teach you to sing too?"

Blaine saw a blush appear in Caleb's cheeks.

"No. My old school, there was a choir."

Blaine stiffened a bit. He'd lied about that too. He'd said there was no choir at his school. So he did know what Glee was. Caleb's voice was way too controlled for him to not have had any practice with a coach or something. Unless it came naturally.

"Dylan auditioned four times for a solo. We never went to competitions or anything. Mainly just performances at the school. It was nowhere near as popular to be in choir as it is here. He auditioned four times and he finally got a solo. He'd tried to get me to audition as well, but I was always too nervous. I'd start to shake and get all sweaty and couldn't remember the words and I would sound horrible. My parents were so proud when Dylan finally got what he'd worked so hard for. But he never got to sing because he died two months before the show." A look of pain crossed Caleb's face. "I was asked to sing instead of him. To sing for him, to take his place. My parents encouraged me to. They thought it might help me feel more connected to

what I'd lost. The house was packed that night. No one really cares about someone until they're dead. Well, that's what it felt like. All of his friends were there and there were a lot of other kids too, with tears streaking down their faces, claiming to have been his friend. But I got up on that stage and the lights went out in the house and it was only me up there." Caleb closed his eyes briefly and Blaine knew that he was picturing the memory vividly. "And I couldn't sing. I couldn't do it. I looked out into the audience and opened my mouth and nothing came out. I just turned and walked off. I couldn't do it. And I told myself then and there that I wouldn't sing again. If I couldn't sing for Dylan, then I wouldn't sing at all."

He stopped and both boys were silent for a long time.

Then Blaine spoke. "It was a brave thing that you did though. Getting up in front of all those people."

Caleb looked away.

"I sang at Kurt's funeral. It was hard and I don't know how I was able to keep going, but I did. I know how hard it is to even get up there in the first place."

The green eyes closed. Blaine got up and moved over to the piano bench, sitting down. Caleb looked up and Blaine put a hand on his shoulder.

"But it helped. And I heard you sing just now and it took my breath away. I don't think your brother would have wanted you to live in silence, not when you have such a beautiful voice."

Blaine paused, a thought forming in his head. And he said softly, "That memory hurts a lot. You feel like you let him down."

A quiet sob broke from Caleb's lips. Blaine tightened his hand on his shoulder.

"I think... it might help if... if you sang. For him. What song were you going to sing?"

"I Will Follow You Into the Dark." He said carefully.

Blaine nodded. He knew that song. "Do you think you'd want to?"

He watched the other boy's eyes flicker, thinking. "Do you think it would help?" he whispered.

"Yes." He set his hand on top of Caleb's and squeezed encouragingly before letting go.

Caleb pursed his lips and then he shifted so he was facing the piano again. He looked sideways at Blaine, who gave him a small smile, and then lifted his hands to the keys.

He began slowly, feeling out the melody. The song seemed even more powerful on a single instrument, the notes ringing in the dark under gentle hands, played so softly.

Caleb took a deep breath and began to sing.

Love of mine someday you will die

But I'll be close behind

I'll follow you into the dark

No blinding lights or tunnels or gates of white

Just our hands clasped so tight

Waiting for the hint of a spark

Caleb's voice was so soft and hesitant, but Blaine could hear the pure talent in that voice. He was still hurting, and as Blaine listened to Caleb sing, suddenly he had a vision of himself and Kurt, hands linked together as they stood at the beginning of a long tunnel, not knowing where it would lead them, but prepared to go ahead anyway.

If Heaven and Hell decide

That they both are satisfied

Illuminate the NO's on their vacancy signs

If there's no one beside you

When your soul embarks

Then I'll follow you into the dark

His hands began to slow on the keys, but he didn't stop. He kept singing. And Blaine sat absolutely still next to him, listening as though he hadn't ever heard a song in his life before.

In Catholic school as vicious as Roman rule

I got my knuckles bruised by a lady in black

And I held my tongue as she told me

"Son, fear is the heart of love"

So I never went back

Caleb's voice began to falter, slow, and Blaine felt his heart ache. He knew what Caleb was feeling. It was the same feeling he had when he sang at Kurt's funeral.

If Heaven and Hell decide

That they both are satisfied

Illuminate the NO's on their vacancy signs

He sang the next three lines with an audible hitch, words breaking and stumbling together. There were tears on his cheeks.

If there's no one beside you

When your soul embarks

Then I'll follow you into the dark

And then that was it. His hands finally stopped moving, resting lightly on the keys, where they shook as the tears fell. He took deep breaths, unable to continue. And Blaine took a breath, a split second decision, and he lifted his hands up as Caleb retracted his to wrap around his torso. Blaine began to play and he carefully

began to sing, watching for a sign from Caleb that he wanted him to stop. But none ever came and Blaine continued.

You and me have seen everything to see

From Bangkok to Calgary

And the soles of your shoes are all worn down

The time for sleep is now

It's nothing to cry about

'Cause we'll hold each other soon

In the blackest of rooms

Blaine's hands melded across the keys, feeling Caleb still shaking beside him. The tears fell so gently from his eyes but his voice never wavered and he slowed down the ending lines, dropping his voice softly as he did.

If Heaven and Hell decide

That they both are satisfied

Illuminate the NO's on their vacancy signs

If there's no one beside you

When your soul embarks

Then I'll follow you into the dark

He whispered the last line, letting the very last note chime in the quiet darkness that surrounded them as they sat together at the piano, becoming closer and more connected in one simple thing as a song.

Then I'll follow you into the dark

There was no sound to be heard, save for the pounding of each boy's hearts in their ears. Blaine turned to Caleb with a soft smile on his face.

"Thank you." Caleb said gently, running the back of his hand over his eyes. "That... that meant more to me than you know."

Blaine nodded. "Songs can hurt, but they can heal too. Wes taught me that." He smiled softly. "You know, you can still audition for the Warblers. We would be honored to have you with us."

"Blaine, I... I can't. I just... I don't know." He sighed.

"But you could sing for me."

"I'm comfortable around you. But them, I... I can't do it."

Blaine let his smile fall. He would be a great addition to the Warblers, but if he didn't want to, then Blaine couldn't force him.

Caleb let out a nervous laugh. "You know, I promised to help you, and here you are helping me."

"How about we just agree to help each other? I think we're both going to need it."

He smiled and put his hand on Blaine's, squeezing gently. "Deal."

Blaine looked around, eyes stopping for a moment on the piano in the corner, now empty, but Blaine could still hear the notes as they drifted throughout the room.

"What changed? I did." He said softly.

A look of blank confusion appeared on Wes's face. "Huh?"

"I don't know what to do. I still love Kurt. I do, but Caleb is... he's... He makes me feel better. I like how I feel when I'm with him."

Wes took a deep breath. "Have you told him that?"

"What? No. I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because... because.... I can't just replace Kurt like that." His eyes were swimming with aching tears.

"I know it hurts Blaine. But have you ever thought that... maybe Kurt would want you to be happy? Being confused like this and hurting more isn't helping anyone. I think Kurt would be okay with you-"

"You can't know that."

"And you can't be expected to be miserable."

Blaine groaned and stood up. "And you don't understand."

He left, the echo of his words ringing in his ears.

"Can you just talk to him?"

"What? Wait. Say that again. Slowly."

"Can you talk-"

"No. Back up."

"Oh, umm... Blaine needs you to help him understand that it's okay to let go."

"Wait, wait, wait. You want me to tell Blaine that it's okay to move on to another guy?"

"Well, technically, yeah. Or at least, to stop feeling like he's letting Kurt down. I mean, Caleb is really-"

"Caleb? That's his name?"

"Yes. What-"

"I'm calling Blaine now."

"Wait! What? Don't-"

"Why not? What the hell is he-"

"Stop. I-"

"Then I'm coming up there."

"Please, he just... he doesn't need this right now. He's confused enough already." Heavy sigh. "If you're really coming up here, meet me out front. We need to talk first."

click

Wes sighed, stared at the phone in his hand and then hung up.

And he began to run through how he was going to handle the scenarios that could be brought through the door along with the whirlwind that was Finn Hudson.

41. I'll Always Love Him

Wes was pacing. He'd only ever seen people pace in movies and truthfully, he thought it looked stupid. But he wasn't about to go and sit down and wait. Therefore, pacing seemed the most acceptable thing to do.

He ran his hand through his hair for the millionth time as he turned on his heel to head back in a straight line in front of the lobby door.

David had passed him earlier, holding a perfectly golden brown marshmallow on a stick. He'd given him a look that said 'what the fuck?'

"Umm, not to be intruding or anything, but what are you doing?"

"Pacing."

"I can see that."

Wes turned and kept going.

"Is there a reason you're pacing?"

"Yes."

"Which would be.....?"

"In about another hour, if you stay here, I'm sure you'll be able to figure it out."

"What's that supposed to..." David trailed off, deciding he really didn't care that much. "Well, want a marshmallow while you dig a trench into the carpet?"

"No, I'm fine."

David shrugged. "Your loss. Well, I'm going to go play some video games with Trent if you get tired of guarding the door and you're welcome to join us."

Wes didn't look up. "Uh huh. Thanks."

With a last I-don't-even-know-why-I'm-your-friend look from David, he bounded up the stairs and Wes resumed pacing.

What the hell was he going to do?

Finn was the 'big brother' figure in Kurt's life and Blaine's friend. But he sure hadn't sounded like his friend earlier. Wes groaned. He was ninety-nine percent sure his life was going to end tonight at the large hands of an angry teenager.

He really thought that Caleb would be good for Blaine. He could see the way that Caleb cared for him and he'd seen the way that Blaine looked when he talked to him. It was a look of, well, not *love* necessarily, but it was *something*. It was more of an emotion that he'd seen on Blaine's face in a while and it truly made him happy to see Blaine happy. He knew that Blaine was very confused at possibly liking someone again and not able to deal with all these new emotions, in addition to the self-induced torture that he was inflicting on himself for even having those feelings in the first place, as if he could help it. He sighed.

Blaine appeared then, bounding up beside him.

"Hey."

Wes froze. Damn him for being so stealthy. "Oh, hey man! What's up? How's it going?"

Wes's voice sounded way too cheerful even to his own ears. Blaine's head tilted in suspicion.

"Well, just on my way back to the dorm." Then he smiled, saying, "If anyone asks you about a navy sweater, you know nothing."

Confused, Wes leaned over and looked down the hall that Blaine had just appeared from. There was the eight-foot tall statue of a guy that gave a huge amount of money to the school every year. Blaine had seen the statue every day since he'd arrived at Dalton, but he still had no clue what that guy's name was. Everyone, the students that is, just called him Sir Cottonball when referring to the statue, dubbed so because of the old man's ridiculously wispy, poofy hair. Wes noticed with a grin that the statue now wore a navy blue sweater.

"I know nothing."

Blaine grinned back at him and rocked on his heels. "So what are you doing?"

"Oh, just... just looking for my..."

"Your Warblers pin?"

"Yeah! Yeah, uh sure. Well, I don't seem to see it here, so if you find it anywhere can you-"

Blaine raised an eyebrow. "Wes, you didn't lose your pin."

"Yes I did. That's why I'm here, looking for it."

"It's on your lapel."

"What? It..." He looked down and saw that, of course, it was neatly attached. "So it is! Thank you Blaine for helping me out there buddy. Why don't you go up to Trent's dorm? David said you're welcome there for a video game marathon."

"Oh. Well, alright. You coming?"

"No, I think I'll head up back to my dorm in a bit. Kinda tired."

He fake-yawned, which felt weird and made his eyes water and then halfway through, he actual-yawned, which made his eyes water more.

Blaine raised his eyebrows again, but he said, "Alright man. See you later. Get some sleep!"

And then Wes was alone again. He groaned, checking his watch. He really needed to start thinking of good lies. Ones that could be used in any situation.

What are you doing?

Well, good sir, as you can see, I am looking for my invisible pencil, but I can't seem to remember where I put it...

Ah, a perfectly reasonable thing to lose my dear fellow. How about I leave you alone so you can look for it?

What a splendid idea! Now go away.

Finn had a two-hour drive before he got here. Wes hoped that the drive would cool him off a bit because he really didn't want to deal with hyped-out Finn.

Finn was fuming.

He couldn't remember the last time he felt this mad. Or this disappointed. Or mad. Or angry. Did he mention mad?

How? How could Blaine do this to Kurt? It didn't make any sense.

His hands gripped the steering wheel tighter. He didn't even know what he was thinking. The jumbled mass of angry thoughts just paraded around in his mind and he couldn't focus on any single one in particular. That just meant that he had a head filled with confusing thoughts that all read: *MAD*, which made it hard to piece together what he was going to say.

Blaine was wanting to date another guy. Blaine was moving on just... just like *that*? Finn hadn't been able to hardly look at anyone at school because they'd all adopted the same look on their faces that just spelled out pity. And Finn didn't want their pity. He wanted his stepbrother back. And some days he felt pissed at everything and some days he felt like if anyone looked at him, he would just bust out crying, and some rare days that seemed to be occurring more often now, he felt okay and he thought that just maybe he would be able to get through this someday.

But how the fuck was Blaine even okay? How could he even begin to *think* about another guy?

His eyes narrowed and the confused mess of thoughts in his head began to fall together, marching across his mind in a seemingly organized parade and he knew what he was going to say.

Wes was silently freaking out. The common room was quiet now, the lounge deserted. He was the only one here. He could hear the laughter coming from a room down the hall; Trent's room, he supposed, based on the collective cheers and then groans whenever someone presumably did something good or bad in the game.

He didn't know how long he'd been pacing. God, it felt like forever. He checked his watch again. It had been an hour and a half.

Shouldn't he be here by now? Blaine had loudly complained about Finn's driving like a madman plenty of times, so Wes figured he should have been here.

He was just going to turn and start pacing back the other way when he heard footsteps on the walkway, slightly muffled by the snow. The steps were heavy, followed by a single knock that was like a gunshot in the silent lounge.

Wes's heart skipped a beat and he opened the door to find a livid-looking Finn.

"Finn, I-"

"Where is he?"

"Come on, Finn, let's just-"

"What the hell does he think he's doing?"

"I know this is-"

"How could you let him do this? It's not-"

"Finn!"

Wes grasped the flailing arms of the teen who was a good head taller than himself, and raised his voice as much as he dared to get his attention. Finn stopped moving and looked down at him. Wes lowered his volume to a hiss.

"You can't just start screaming in here. Come on, let's go sit down."

"I don't want to sit down," he growled, though he had brought his volume down considerably. "I want to talk to Blaine."

"Well, that's not going to happen right now. Just let me explain-"

"What's going on?"

Both boys froze as another voice sounded. They flicked their heads over to see Caleb standing by the fireplace, a water bottle held in his hand.

"Who are you?" Caleb asked Finn, who glared at him with a cold gaze for interrupting.

He wanted him to go away so he could get some damn answers, but the boy kept talking, seemingly unaware that all of his questions were going unanswered.

"Wes, get your hands off him. Why do you want to talk to Blaine?"

"Because he's a liar and he doesn't even care about Kurt-"

"Finn!" Wes tightened his grip and practically begged him to shut up, but the damage had been done.

"Kurt?" Caleb's brows pulled down. He knew that Kurt was a touchy subject for Blaine and whoever this kid was, he wasn't good news. He wasn't about to let him anywhere near Blaine. "How do you know Kurt?" His voice had turned stony as well and he raised his volume, feeling the anger rise, fueled by all the yelling in the first place.

"It doesn't matter how I know him! What matters is that Blaine screwed up everything and he never even cared!"

Finn was full-on yelling now and walking around the room in a rage. Wes had given up trying to hold him and kept trying to hush him, but to no avail and he could only pray to god now that Blaine didn't hear what was going on.

But apparently he hadn't tried hard enough because Blaine appeared at the top of the stairs, along with Thad, David, Trent, Nick, and Josh.

"What the heck is going on down there?"

"Who's yelling?"

"Will you just shut up? I'm trying to beat this level!"

"What are you screaming about?"

"Did someone forget to put a mute button on your face? Who the hell is that?"

Blaine was the only one silent as he peered over the railing. It was obvious the moment he saw him who had been making the noise. He knew.

His eyes darted back and forth between Wes, who looked like he just wanted to disappear, Caleb, who looked both confused and ready for a fight, and Finn, who stood between them, pure rage on his face as his eyes traveled up and locked on to Blaine's.

"Blaine!" He cried, the word filled with hurt and pain and fury. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Half the dorms seemed to have be awakened and spilled out onto the top floor, watching the scene unfold below, every person seeming too frozen with shock to do anything but stare. Every eye traveled from Finn to Blaine.

He didn't speak.

But Caleb did.

He took striding steps forward, close to Finn, and said in a strong voice, "Knock it off! Who the hell are you anyway? You can't just come in here and start yelling at people-"

"I'm Kurt's brother!" He turned his icy glare on the kid who wouldn't stop talking. This was between him and Blaine and this kid had better not try and get up in his business.

"I'm sorry about Kurt, I really am, but that doesn't give you any right to barge in here and wake up the entire dorm!"

Everyone was hanging on every word. No one spoke, no one moved, no one breathed for fear of missing something.

"I did care Finn. I do care. I cared about him more than anyone! Why are you saying I don't?" Blaine gripped the railing in his hands, not moving from the stairs, maybe rooted to the spot with shock and crippling hurt.

And Finn was yelling. "It hasn't been two months since his funeral! And you're over here getting with some other guy? How the fuck could you be so heartless-"

"Hey!" Caleb yelled back to get his attention. "You don't even know-"

"Who the fuck are *you*?"

He stood a little taller, made his voice a little stronger. "Caleb."

Something in Finn's brain clicked. His misty eyes narrowed as he turned on the boy with the green eyes. "Do you know who you're dealing with?" His words were soft, dangerous.

Caleb had no way of knowing that Finn didn't know about the kiss and the words tumbled from his mouth an effort to stop Finn from yelling at Blaine and he tried to explain, "I didn't mean for it to happen, honestly. Don't yell at Blaine. It was one kiss, it-"

Finn froze on the word *kiss*. He looked like someone had punched the air out of his lungs. He glared at Blaine with so much hatred in his eyes, that Blaine felt sick.

"You kissed him?" A tear rolled down his cheek, but the venom in his words was, if possible, worse than the yelling had been. "You kissed him? You fucking kissed him when Kurt hasn't been dead for two months? Did he mean that little to you? Oh, now he's dead, I can go kiss anyone I want! Do you know how much you fucking meant to him?"

"Finn, please-" Blaine's voice was whispered, so shaky with the tears that had filled his eyes and his legs felt like they wouldn't support him. He had to grip the rail so hard in order to not fall to his knees.

"And you!" Finn rounded on Caleb, who instinctively started backing away. "You let this happen! You know about Kurt, I know you do! And you kissed him anyway? You're sick! You're a sick person you know that?"

Finn had been getting closer to Caleb. The shorter boy raised his hands up in front of his chest as he took another step back. Finn was right up in Caleb's face, screaming at him.

"How could you do this? To Blaine? To *Kurt*?"

"I didn't know I swear!"

But Finn was too blinded by his anger to hear the truth in Caleb's voice, see the fear in his eyes, or hear the rambling screams from Blaine to leave him alone, that he hadn't done anything wrong, that he was only doing what Blaine had told him to do.

Finn did not hear any of that.

And rage got the better of him and he brought his hands up and shoved Caleb as hard as he could, knocking him to the ground.

The room went silent as Caleb hit the ground with a *thud*.

"Who the hell do you think you are to kiss someone whose boyfriend hasn't been dead for two months?" Finn yelled through his tears, towering over Caleb.

The moment he'd hit the ground, the spell of immobilization seemed to be broken because suddenly, Blaine was running down the stairs, followed by the entire second story level of students.

Finn couldn't see anything but Caleb in his clouded vision and he so badly just wanted to hit him, for making him go through this pain again, and for even just being here. In the back of his mind, he knew that he was overreacting, but adrenaline pulsed in his veins. He felt his body being grasped in strong hands and he let himself be pulled back by two people, who each had one of his arms. Caleb sat up on his elbows, shock in his eyes, as Blaine ran up and dropped down beside him.

"I'm okay Blaine. I'm fine." Caleb tried to calm him as he blubbered out 'I'm sorry' and 'Are you hurt?'

And Finn continued to yell, though he did not fight the arms that held him, his voice getting hoarse now.

"Blaine, you told me you loved him! It was all a lie! You never cared about him at all! If Rachel died, I would be on my knees! I wouldn't be able to move and here you are cuddling up with this piece of-

Blaine was kneeling by Caleb, silent tears streaking down his face, as he listened to Finn. Every word cut through him like a knife. Caleb was sitting up taller, but didn't move from the floor, one hand resting lightly on Blaine's shoulder, eyes never leaving Finn, watching him, gauging him. Blaine wanted so badly to stand up to him, but he wondered if he could even do that. Last time he stood up to someone, it had been Karofsky and he'd ended up with a mild concussion. But he'd had enough. Finn had to know the truth and he wasn't seeing anything straight when he was this blinded by anger. But Blaine was mad too and he let his words lash out, trying to get Finn to understand.

He flicked his head up, tears shining on his face and anger in his eyes. "Don't talk about Caleb like that!" He pushed himself up, followed by Caleb, whose hand was gentle on his shoulder. Blaine shrugged him off and took a few steps closer to Finn. The hands on Finn's arms tightened, but he didn't move, just kept his eyes locked with Blaine's. "I loved Kurt more than I've loved anything in this whole world. Finn, you know that! How can you say I didn't care about him? His death almost destroyed me. And you didn't see the worst of it." His voice got quieter. "A week, I was here, hardly eating, not sleeping, snapping out at everyone and getting lost in my own anger and hurt. It still hurts Finn! It's always going to hurt."

"Seems like you got over it real quick." Finn growled.

Blaine felt the retort build in him like fire, but he took a deep breath. He didn't want to yell anymore. He was starting to get a headache and he knew that he let himself get lost in his emotions easily. He calmed himself down, but his brows went down in irritation. "Can we please talk about this somewhere else?" He whispered, eyes darting around at the students all gathered in the lounge.

Finn looked around, seeming to notice for the first time all the people here. "Yeah, I guess," he mumbled and seemed to take a few deep breaths.

Blaine turned his eyes to the two students who had Finn in their grasp. The hands released him.

"Everyone back to bed!" David called out. "And if I see anyone out of their dorms, I'm sending you straight to the dean. Got it?"

Heads nodded and slowly everyone began to file back upstairs, with looks of curiosity on their faces in wanting to know how this would play out, but all thoroughly aware that David took his position as this hall's dorm monitor very seriously.

He was the last to leave, and as he set a foot on the bottom of the stairs, he turned his head to look back at the four people who now occupied the lounge. Finn and Blaine across from each other, Wes and Caleb on either side of them, creating a diamond shape. David locked eyes with Wes for a moment, who shook his head infinitesimally and David followed in the path up the stairs the rest of the students had taken.

It was so quiet in the hall now. Silence seemed to ring in the ears of the four boys. Finn and Blaine locked eyes with each other; Caleb and Wes glanced nervously at either of them. They could hear David's footsteps upstairs and the soft click of a door being shut. It was quiet for all of one heartbeat before Blaine spoke first.

"Finn, what are you even doing here?" Blaine's voice sounded softly, like he was very tired.

Finn raised his arm and pointed to his left, at Wes, the anger still in his words. "This one told me you were with another guy."

Wes immediately began to try to mend the outbreak that happened as an occurrence of that sentence. "Woah, woah, woah. I never said that. Blaine, it's not true. I told him that you needed help moving on and I-"

Blaine turned his eyes to Wes. "Why would you do that? It's hard enough already!"

"Blaine, I was trying to help-"

"That's not the point. What are you even doing with him?" Finn pointed an accusatory finger at Caleb.

"Back off!" Caleb growled, as he took an automatic step forward, slightly angled in front of Blaine. "You don't know anything about me so don't go making assumptions you can't prove."

"You kissed him." Finn's eyes narrowed. "You knew who he lost and you did it anyway!"

"I-"

"Finn! Stop it!"

Finn froze at the desperation in Blaine's tone.

"It's true. Caleb's not lying. He was assigned to be my roommate and I didn't tell him about Kurt because that's how I wanted it to be. And I was starting to feel somewhat normal and I asked him to kiss me because I didn't want to feel like I was alone. I needed someone and that sounds stupid, but I asked him to. He didn't know about Kurt then. We're all still hurting. Please don't get mad at him. And Wes," he turned to the Warbler, who had been listening silently, "I appreciate what you did, but I really just need to figure this out on my own okay?"

Wes stared at him as if he wanted to say something, but he seemed to think better of it and finally gave a curt nod.

Blaine looked to Caleb. "I think it's best if you went back to the dorm for now," he said softly.

A dark look crossed Caleb's face. "If you think I'm leaving you here with *him*," he glared and pointed at Finn, "then you don't-"

"Caleb." Blaine stopped him. "Caleb, please."

Caleb looked slightly stunned and then his face changed. Blaine could see that he wanted to stay. He wanted to stand by Blaine and fight. But Blaine had had enough fighting.

"Please," he whispered.

After looking at him for a long time, Caleb huffed out a breath and walked behind Blaine, throwing a glance at Finn who had his arms crossed over his chest. Blaine's gaze followed him as he met up with Wes and they both ascended the stairs. They waited until they could hear the footsteps enter each boy's dorm and then Blaine motioned to Finn, telling him to sit down on the nearby couch.

Finn seemed to have deflated. He sprawled out on the couch and hung his head in his hands. It was like he'd screamed out all of his anger.

Blaine sat down beside him. He let out a deep breath and spoke softly. "Finn, I'll never, *ever*, stop loving Kurt. I'll always love him. Please, you know that. You *have* to know that."

Finn tilted his head to the side, barely looking at Blaine. And then he straightened up, dropping his hands. "I know you do Blaine. I know." His voice was a whisper. "I know you loved him more than anything."

"You have to understand," he said, folding his hands in his lap and staring at the carpet, "that Caleb didn't do anything wrong. He's trying to help me. He really is and... I like his company and the way that I feel when I'm with him."

"Do you like him more than Kurt?" Finn's voice was almost inaudible.

Blaine paled. "Don't. Don't even... Finn, please."

"I just need to know."

"Wh...? I... I could never love anyone more than I loved Kurt. I saw him the first day he snuck into Dalton, standing on those stairs, and I just knew that we were supposed to be together. And after we were together, I never thought that anything would ever drive us apart. But it did." There were silent tears falling on Blaine's cheeks. "I don't even know if what I feel for Caleb is real. But he's making me feel *happier* than I've felt in... in so long... and he's making the hole in my chest throb less. And I think that I really do like him. I don't know what I'm going to do now. But he will *never* take Kurt's place. I'll always love him. Always."

Finn sighed heavily and was silent for a long time.

He had felt so much anger. And then... just like *that*, it was gone.

42. Please don't worry I love you Blaine

Blaine sat back in the chair, feeling like all of the energy had been drained out of him.

Finn groaned lightly and leaned back too.

Blaine took a breath, not wanting to upset him more, but he knew he had to say this.

"Finn?"

The teenager turned his body more towards Blaine, letting him know he was listening. Blaine took another breath and continued cautiously.

"You told me a while ago that you felt like you needed to protect Kurt and that you never did and you felt guilty."

Finn dropped his gaze to the floor. He remembered. He looked back up, slight hurt in his eyes. "What about it?"

"I just... well, I think that maybe that's the reason you're having such a hard time dealing with this. I mean, I know it's a lot to take in right now and I really wish that I could have told you and I'm sorry you had to find out the way you did."

"You think I came here because I want to protect Kurt by not letting you be with anyone else?"

Blaine was silent. So was Finn, just staring at him. Then Blaine asked quietly, "Didn't you?"

Finn's mouth moved, opened then closed. His brows furrowed a bit as he thought how he wanted to word his next sentence. "I really don't know. When he told me, I... I was just so mad. It was all I could think about. I was mad at you for getting over Kurt so soon. I was mad at you for finding someone else just like *that*. I was mad that it was Wes telling me and not you. I was mad that you didn't trust me enough to flat out tell me. I was mad at myself for not giving you any kind of chance at all." He sighed. "I just wanted him gone. Caleb. I don't know why, but I thought if he left, everything would go back to how it was supposed to

be." He groaned and dragged his hand down his face. "Am I such an awful person that I want you to be sad and miserable and never move on?"

Blaine was quiet, watching Finn with slight fascination at his words. When he spoke, his voice was soft.

"Finn, that doesn't make you an awful person. It makes you human. And I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I wasn't quite ready to deal with this. I'm still not. To tell the truth, I was mad at myself for the exact reasons you're mad at me. I feel like the worst person in the world because I'm not curled into a ball and unable to move because I miss him so much. And sometimes it feels like I could just do that. I feel like I'm not supposed to let myself move on. Not yet at least. You're right Finn. It's way too soon for this to be happening."

The gangly teen was listening and then he seemed to sag back down deeper into the chair. "You're not the worst person in the world. You can't stop what you feel Blaine, whatever that may be."

Finn's tone surprised Blaine. "W-what?"

"I did the same thing. To Quinn. When I was with her, I kissed Rachel. And after we broke up, I was with Rachel and I kissed Quinn. Then I was with Quinn. And now I'm with Rachel." He groaned. "I'm such a hypocrite. I stayed with Quinn because I thought that was what I was supposed to do. I love Rachel, but I went back to Quinn because I wasn't listening to what I wanted. What I really wanted. And that was Rachel. I wanted Rachel so I went back to her and... Blaine, I'm happy now." Finn stopped talking for a little while and Blaine just waited patiently, knowing that there was more to this. And when Finn did speak again, Blaine listened without saying anything. "I know this is completely the opposite of what I said earlier, but I think Caleb really cares about you. He stood up to me when I was yelling at you and protected you. I know he would have fought me if he had to. I'm... I'm not saying that I'll *happy* if you get together, but Blaine..." he sighed, "just please think about this okay? I can't stop you if you like him. But just don't do what I did. Don't use him as a rebound because you're hurt and confused. I did that with Rachel and Quinn and it hurt me and them more in the end. I love Rachel and I know there's a part of me that will always love Quinn, but I made it harder on everyone by going back and forth instead of just listening to what I wanted in the first place."

Blaine let out a heavy breath. Finn was telling him it was okay. That it was okay to give Caleb a chance.

As much as he wanted to, Blaine knew that he couldn't do that. Not yet.

"Thank you Finn," he whispered. And he knew that would be enough.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here at all. It's your life and I wasn't thinking and I was just so angry.... I put you through more pain and I'm the last person who should be doing that."

"It's okay." He put a hand on his shoulder. "But next time, maybe just wait until daytime? Or when we're outside? Alone?"

Finn cracked a small smile and let out a light laugh along with Blaine.

"Sure thing."

"Hey Finn? It's probably raining pretty bad out there now and considering it's..." he glanced at the clock above the fireplace, "now nine-thirty, do you want to stay here tonight? We have a couch in the dorm you can use."

Finn tilted his head, considering it. His eyes told Blaine that he was tired and probably worn out from the earlier ordeal, just as Blaine was. "You sure?"

"Wouldn't ask if I wasn't."

"Well, if that's okay then, yeah. Yeah, that sounds good."

Blaine smiled softly and started to lead him up the stairs, then down the row of dorms. He stopped in front of a door, then pointed to his door and tossed Finn the key, saying, "Go on in. I have to talk to Wes for a second."

Finn caught the key and turned towards the other door. Blaine knocked quickly on Wes's door and wasn't surprised when it flung open immediately. Wes and David stood there, both trying to squeeze out the door at the same time, successfully banging their shoulders.

"Back up man!"

"I'm the dorm monitor. You back up!"

"Warblers soloist!"

They continued to push with the same earnest efforts until Blaine had to bite back a laugh and grabbed each of their right arms and pulled.

They tumbled out of the door and then straightened up quickly, their minute bickering forgotten. "What happened?" They asked in unison.

"It's fine. It's all worked out. It's too late for him to go home and it started raining again so Finn's going to crash on our couch for the night. Just wanted to let you-" Blaine froze, feeling like someone had just grabbed onto his tongue. "Shit!"

He turned and ran the few feet back to his dorm, flinging open the door and bolting inside. Wes and David, not knowing what else to do, looked at each other and then followed cautiously.

Caleb was standing by his bed, the sketch pad on the floor, as he had obviously abandoned it when he stood up. He was glaring at Finn, who had backed up a few steps and held up his hands in surrender.

"What are you-"

"Caleb!" Blaine interrupted him as he ran inside.

Green eyes flashed to him.

"Caleb, please, it's okay. We're fine now. I'm fine. Finn's staying here tonight."

Caleb rounded on Blaine. "What?"

Wes and David looked at each other again. "Hey, guys, let's all just calm down okay?" Wes began.

"Yeah, let's talk about this. Without screaming." David agreed.

Caleb kept talking, maybe not hearing them. He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger. "Blaine, he just came in here, woke up the entire hall, yelled at you until you sobbed, and shoved me to the ground. And you're telling me it's okay to let him in here?"

Finn visibly shrank back a bit, as if hearing that made him realize that much more how bad he felt about that right now.

Blaine's eyes flicked back and forth between the two boys, helplessness rendering him speechless for a moment. Then he locked his gaze with Caleb's. "Yes. He... he cares about me Caleb. It's not..." he sighed. "That's why he was mad. He wanted to make sure you weren't hurting me. Or I wasn't hurting myself."

Caleb's voice was quiet. "I would never hurt you."

And the way his green eyes flashed made Blaine know he was remembering the kiss, and his promise to never do anything to make him hurt again.

"I know that." He said softly. "And Finn knows it now. Right?"

Blaine glanced to Finn, whose nod was almost too vigorous, then looked back at Caleb. "Okay?"

Caleb looked for a long moment from Blaine, to Finn, and back to Blaine. Then he said, "Okay. I trust you Blaine."

Blaine visibly relaxed and nodded to Wes and David, who had been hovering closer in case they were needed. "Thanks guys."

"Sure thing. Get some sleep and try not to kill each other in the meantime."

Blaine laughed softly and David left them, pulling Wes along with him and talking in low voices to each other as they headed back down the hall.

When they were gone, Caleb pointed a finger at Finn. "I trust Blaine. You? Not so much. If you ever pull anything like that shit again, I will not hesitate to kick your ass. Got that?"

Finn just nodded so hard he looked like a bobblehead doll. Blaine suspected he was just trying to keep the peace, or maybe he was just tired of fighting. Either way, they were getting along. Kind of. They knew enough to keep out of each other's way as Blaine tossed a blanket to Finn and they all curled up on their respective beds, or couch in Finn's case.

It had been an eventful night and it was awkward now, to say the least, but as Blaine closed his eyes in the comforting darkness, he couldn't help but feel that things were going to get better. Finn had blown up and maybe that was what he needed, in order to be able to start accepting that things were going to change.

Finn left very early in the morning to drive back to Lima before school that day. When Blaine awoke at eight, there was a note on his desk.

Thanks again. And I'm sorry about everything. I didn't mean to push Caleb. I hope he knows that.

Blaine read the note twice and then stuck it in the drawer on his desk.

He nudged Caleb to wake him up and then went to take a shower. The warm water felt so good. It had sprinkled rain during the night and it was now back up to the normal 'pouring.' He was glad to be warm before he had to bundle up to head out into the freezing rain for class.

The half-asleep, slightly guilty looks on most of the boys in Blaine's classes clued him in to the fact that almost everyone in his hall had stayed up to try and catch fragments of what was going on downstairs. He suspected ears had been pushed flat against the door or the crack on the bottom where the door met the carpet. He knew they wouldn't dare leave the dorms when David had specifically told them not to. He could picture David leaning up against the door, listening for sounds of a very different kind. Being a Warbler had made David's hearing even better and more precise than it usually was and no one, not even the most light-footed, would dare to try and creep past his door. Plus, the thought that Finn would rip their heads off was another good reason to stay behind closed doors.

Every eye in the room turned to look at him at least once, curiosity getting the better of them. His friends asked him specific questions, which he answered truthfully, trying to get them not to worry. Others just let the obvious want to know glaze in their eyes and he softly told them that they had figured things out and it was okay. It seemed to satisfy everyone and Blaine was glad when he could look around the room and not see anyone else looking back at him.

When Blaine entered the dorm room after Warblers practice that night, he was alone. And the room was empty. He texted Caleb, who replied that he'd gone to get help on studying for an upcoming test and would be back later.

Blaine set down his bag and looked around his room, eyes taking in everything. Nothing seemed out of place. Not that he'd expected anything to, but still. He hadn't had the room to himself in a while and he let his eyes wander over all the belongings neatly hung in the closet or tossed on the bed or strewn across the

desk. Caleb's side remained relatively neat, a closed sketch pad on the desk next to Blaine's. He twirled around in the rolling chair to face the opposite desk, eyes glued on the notebook. He wanted so badly to open it, to look inside, see what Caleb was drawing all the time. Whenever Blaine asked about it, he'd say it was a nonimportant project and change the subject.

As he stared at the innocent notebook, his eyes flicked over to an object that sat next to the bookcase. It had been there so long, it had almost become a part of the wall itself, something Blaine saw every day, yet still overlooked. He felt his heart speed up. It was a box.

A shoe box to be exact. But a box. Something most people wouldn't give a second glance to, but for Blaine, this box was everything. He had let himself forget about it, and maybe he had never truly forgotten. The box was always in the back of his mind, but now, he let himself put it first, to the front of his thoughts.

He was alone now. And he thought he could handle this. He wanted to. He wanted to look at it so badly, it was almost like a rope dragging him, a pull yanking on his subconscious.

Open the box. Open the box, his mind chanted at him and he wanted nothing more than to obey.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes again, his hands were trembling, but the box called to him in a way that was so strong it was almost maddening. And he launched out of the chair and picked up the box, brushing off the dust with a surprising gentleness. The ache he felt in his heart was almost feral with how badly he wanted to rip off the top of the box and finally set his eyes on what was inside.

Instead, he cradled the rectangular weight of the cardboard in his hands. He stared at it for a while, ignoring the animal instinct to tear off the top, and he carefully pulled the lid away, setting it next to his crossed legs.

What he saw was surprising. Inside, lined up one in front of the other, were envelopes, all crisply white. Everything seemed to disappear, his line of vision narrowed to the blazingly white paper. His hands shook as he lifted out the first envelope.

The envelope itself was perfectly neat, as he expected it to be, especially knowing Kurt. There was a single word printed in black ballpoint pen on the front.

Blaine

He sucked in a breath. Maybe he couldn't do this. Maybe he should read them later. Maybe-

No. He had to do this. He wanted to. He'd gone this far and he knew that the desire to know what the letters inside said would eat at him until he could think of nothing else. It was already consuming him. He couldn't see anything but the white of the paper and his name stood out like a burning flame in the night.

Flipping the envelope over, he very carefully slid his finger under the sealed edge. He pulled his finger along the seal slowly, so as to not rip it. His heart was pounding when it finally came free and he gently pulled out the letter inside.

He had to remind himself to breathe when he smoothed out the single sheet of paper. His eyes glazed over the letter, not reading a single word but just remembering the gentle curve of Kurt's handwriting that filled every line. He ran his palm across the long-dried ink, picturing the way Kurt held a pen in his right hand.

Blaine had never seen him write a letter before. Where had he found the time to do all of these? He felt his heart thrum in his throat as he saw a date written at the top on the right-hand side. He remembered that day. It was the day Burt had told Blaine that Kurt had cancer. It seemed so long ago.

It took everything he had to look down at the next lines, the beginning of the letter. His body seemed to ache, the familiar feeling of want. He wanted Kurt. He wanted Kurt beside him, telling him it was going to be okay. He wanted Kurt with him, to never leave him.

But he was gone. Kurt's gone, he repeated over and over in his head.

He knew what these letters would do to him. He knew how much it would hurt to read them. But Kurt had left them for him for a reason. And the desire to feel closer, somehow connected to Kurt, outweighed the impending consequences.

And he began to read.

Blaine

This feels really weird. I'm writing in a journal. I haven't done that since I was little. My first journal was silver and covered in sparkles because that's what I had wanted to buy with my weekly allowance. My dad always knew when I wrote in it because my hands would be covered in glitter. That was my first lesson in

'buyer's remorse.' But I still wrote in that journal every day. Until I got to the end that is. I don't know what happened to it. I think it might be buried somewhere in my closet. Well, if someone ends up finding it, because I can tell you right now that I won't be digging into the dregs of my closet, you will be holding a piece of seven-year old Kurt Hummel's mind. If you do find it, keep it. It'll be worth something someday. Kurt Hummel: Diva-in-Training. I like it. Has a nice ring to it.

Okay, enough about baby me. My doctor told me it might help if I wrote stuff down in a journal, keep my thoughts and feelings 'organized' as he put it. Personally, I don't know a better place for my thoughts than inside my own head, but I figured I'd humor him. He said I could just write in the journal for myself, that no one would ever have to read it. But I got to thinking and there's really no one else I'd rather have read my journals other than you. If you want to of course. I warn you that the mind of Kurt can be a bit dull sometimes or I may seem like I have 'Vegas showgirl feathers' in my brain as the lovely Santana once put it. I don't really know if I'll keep at this. This may be the only journal entry you ever read, if you read it at all. But I thought that in addition to helping me, it might be able to help you too. You know me. I have trouble expressing my exact thoughts sometimes, especially if I'm feeling a lot at once. Like now, for instance. And I know that it'll be hard to deal with. I'm still kind of in shock myself. Dad went to get you from school. You're probably on your way here right now. This is going to be so hard to say. I don't want to tell you. I don't want to see the look on your face, the same one that my father had when he found out. But I guess writing it down will help.

I have cancer Blaine. Leukemia. I start chemotherapy tomorrow and I'm scared. I don't know what's going to happen. I've never known anyone with cancer before.

I just heard the door open. I don't know how to tell you. I really don't. I don't want you to have to be scared. I'm scared enough already and having to know that you're hurting, because I know you won't do anything but worry is just

You just came in the door. He told you. I hear it in the way you're breathing right now.

Please don't worry. I love you Blaine.

Kurt

Blaine let out a stuttering breath, one he hadn't realized he'd been holding as he read. He sniffed and set the letter down by his side. This was the first one. The first day. He glanced quickly at the box, where it

seemed like there were at least two dozen letters lined up. He felt the catch in the way his breath came from a slightly constricted throat. He didn't cry. He wouldn't let himself cry.

He knew these were going to be hard to read. But he wanted to read them all. He did.

Blaine carefully folded the letter back up and placed it in the envelope, replacing it to the back of the pile and picked up the second one.

He opened it and began to read.

43. When You Wish Upon a Star

Caleb's footsteps echoed along the hall. He knew he'd been gone longer than he'd planned. In his hands, he securely held a notebook and a textbook, with a pencil stuck in his pocket. And he grinned to himself as he walked along the empty hallway. He was going to rock that test.

He expected that Blaine would be in the dorm so it wasn't surprising when he found the door unlocked. But as he set his books down on his desk and looked up, he noticed that something was up. Something was different. And Blaine didn't want him to know what that was.

"Are you okay?" he gently asked of the boy who was sitting on the bed with his legs dangling off, feet on the floor, hands on his knees. His eyes were red and so was his nose, suggesting that he'd been trying not to cry.

Blaine didn't answer. Caleb wanted to go over to him, but he stayed where he was, leaning up against the desk, a worried haze crossing over his face.

"Blaine?"

He sniffed and wiped his hand across his eyes. When he looked up, he gave him a small, trembling smile as if to try and pacify the situation. "I'm okay."

Caleb's eyes narrowed slightly, challenging Blaine's statement. "You're not okay."

Blaine seemed to recoil from that, and Caleb's feet took him to Blaine's side, where he sat down to the left of him. He tilted his head to look at him, noticing that Blaine's eyes were back to staring at the wall in front of him. "Blaine?" he kept his voice gentle. "Please tell me what's wrong."

He let out a long breath, hands curling and then he groaned, letting his muscles relax again. He whispered, "I miss him."

Caleb immediately softened. "What happened, Blaine?"

He turned away, but nudged his head in the direction of a box on the floor. Caleb glanced at Blaine for permission, but he had already curled up and didn't look at him. He didn't speak and instead, Caleb silently got up and bent down to hold the box in his hands. As he lifted the lid, he took in the sight of the envelopes inside. He could see on the front of the first one the word 'Blaine' written neatly. He didn't need to go through them and he didn't want to. These letters were personal, from Kurt to Blaine, and he didn't need to invade that. He sighed as he returned the box to its place next to the dresser on the floor.

Caleb placed a hand on Blaine's shoulder as he sat down next to him. Blaine did not flinch at the touch, but he didn't look at him either.

"It hurts." Blaine whispered, almost inaudible.

"I know it does." And Blaine did not dismiss it, because Caleb did know. "It's been a year and four months since Dylan died. And it still hurts. It's going to hurt Blaine. We both know that." He sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

Blaine was silent. And so was Caleb. For a long time, they sat together, not saying a word.

Caleb chewed the inside of his cheek. "I don't know how to make you feel better," he said.

Blaine reacted at this. He turned his head in Caleb's direction.

"I want to help you, but I don't know how."

Caleb reached out a hand and set it on top of Blaine's. The weight of the hand was comforting and Blaine slowly turned his body towards the other boy.

"How long has it been since-"

"Two and a half months."

"Not since he died." Caleb's voice was gentle. "Since the funeral."

"Two months."

"And my first day here was one month and three weeks ago. What did you do during the week after the funeral and before coming here after break?"

Blaine's eyes searched the green irises that flashed so blazingly emerald in the blearing lights. He was truly curious.

"I stayed with Kurt's family. It was Christmas. We decorated the house and tried to go back to what we thought should be normal."

"Did you... did you go... see him at all that week?"

"See him? Caleb, what-"

"His grave. Did you go to his grave? Other than at the funeral itself."

Blaine's eyes locked onto Caleb's. His voice was so quiet. "No."

"I think it would help, Blaine." And his voice matched Blaine's in volume.

He was silent for a very long time. Caleb pulled his hand out from under Blaine's and wrapped it around his shoulders. He felt Blaine tense and he made to pull his arm away, but then Blaine leaned to the side and he encircled him in his arms, pulling Blaine up against him. He rested his cheek against Caleb's shoulder.

"I don't know if I can," he whispered.

Caleb's hand moved in slow motions on Blaine's back. "I think you need this, Blaine. You don't have to if you don't want to, but it helped me. And I think it could help you too."

Blaine sniffed, let out a shaky breath, and pulled back to look at his face. A single tear fell from his eye and without thinking, Caleb reached his hand up and set his fingertips so lightly on the line of Blaine's jaw, just under his ear, and with his thumb, he brushed away the tear.

"I can go with you, if it would help." He whispered.

He was quiet, and then Blaine nodded.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

Caleb gave him a reassuring smile, though he wasn't too sure how truthful Blaine's statement was.

"Okay. I'll be here whenever you're ready."

Blaine nodded. Caleb turned off his car and pulled out a book.

"Take as long as you need," he said as Blaine got out and shut the door behind him.

He took a deep breath. It was cold out. He knew it would be cold, but the icy sting on his nose was painful after the warmth of the car.

He buried his hands deep in his pockets and walked carefully along the wet ground, avoiding the random piles of snow every few feet. The snow was melting, but it still rained a lot now and the disappearing snow made the streets very slippery.

Blaine kept his eyes staring straight ahead. It was empty here. There was no one and for a fleeting moment, he felt like he might just be the last person on earth. The comforting hum of Caleb's car engine had been cut off when he parked and now all Blaine could hear was the squelching sound of his shoes on the ground and the slight whistle of the wind. He knew where he was going; he knew that he would never forget the path that led to where Kurt lie, even only seeing it once. He turned and mounted the slight hill that curved to the left.

He could see the gravestone in the distance; his eyes picked it out right away. It looked like it didn't belong there. It was too new, too shining, too young. Just as Kurt was. He didn't belong here either.

Blaine trudged along until he reached his destination. He paused, feet close together on the asphalt and just stared down at the marble that marked this sacred place.

Kurt Hummel

May 27, 1994-December 7, 2011

Our love is all we need to make it through;

Nothing can ever bring us down

He bit his lip as he read the statement underneath Kurt's date of birth and death. He recognized it immediately and his heart thumped painfully. They were lyrics from the song Blaine wrote for Kurt, the one that had expressed his love for Kurt. He hadn't noticed it before because he hadn't looked at the gravestone for more than a moment at Kurt's funeral.

There were flowers at the foot of the marble. Sunflowers. They were wilting slightly, but they had been obviously placed here recently, within the last week. Blaine suddenly wished that he had brought flowers. He didn't have anything to give him.

He took a few shaky steps forward and stopped in front of the freezing marble, so smooth and perfect. And he let himself sink to his knees because he wasn't sure how much longer he could stand. The ground was wet, his knees sunk into the dirt that was becoming mud in the rainy weather. He just stared at the words for a long time, then his finger began to slowly trace the letters etched into the stone.

He felt the tears on his cheeks before he knew that he was crying. He was shivering from cold, but he suspected that most of it was just because of where he was.

"I love you Kurt," he whispered, not trusting himself to raise his voice any higher. "I miss you so much it hurts."

He wanted so badly to hear Kurt's voice, to know that he somehow had heard him.

"I met someone Kurt. Caleb. He's been helping me a lot. I don't know what to do." He wasn't sure why those words came from his lips first, but then he couldn't hold them in anymore and he spoke in a tumbling rush. "I could never love anyone more than I loved you. But I know that I like him. I can feel it and it scares me. Finn... he said all of the things that I was thinking but was too scared to let myself handle. It's only been two months and I don't even know how I can be feeling what I feel. Caleb is a good friend, and he cares about me. And he understands. He knows most of what I'm feeling and it's... I don't know... nice to have someone who I can talk to. I know that there's something there though. I know we would be good for each other. And I know he wants more than friendship, even though he says he just wants to

help... I don't want to be alone. But I don't know if I can do this." He sighed heavily, eyes boring into the stone in front of him. "I need you Kurt. Tell me what to do. Please! I need you." His voice had been steadily rising with his plea, and then dropped back down to a whisper. "I need you."

He let his hand drop from the marble lettering and pulled back to wrap his arms around his waist. The hood of his jacket had fallen back, exposing dark curls that blew around his forehead in the wind. His head hung forward and he cried, clutching his arms around him as if to stop the trembling.

No one had answered him.

He hadn't expected anything. But still, the disappointment hurt even though he told himself that he wouldn't hear an answer. He just wanted a sign or *something*. He wanted to know that Kurt was okay, that he heard him.

Blaine cried until his tears ran dry. He swallowed and brought his head back up. The marble was there, unchanged, still as new and beautiful as when Blaine had first set eyes upon it. He sniffed loudly.

The knees of his pants were soaked, down to his calves and he could feel the icy water seeping into his socks. He wanted to give Kurt something. But there was nothing he could give. He didn't have anything with him; he'd left everything in Caleb's car and he knew that if he went back, he wouldn't be able to bring himself to come back here. Not today at least. He swallowed again. The only thing he could give now was his voice, which ironically seemed fitting that his voice was the only thing he had now.

Blaine licked his dry lips and cleared his throat. He knew it would sound terrible because of the wind and the emotions that sent tremors down his body and the cold around him and the fact that he wouldn't be able to raise his voice above a whisper, but he wasn't going to leave here without doing this.

The song came to his mind easily and he sat up a bit straighter, closed his eyes, and began to sing.

When you wish upon a star

Makes no difference who you are

Anything your heart desires

Will come to you

If your heart is in your dream

No request is too extreme

When you wish upon a star

As dreamers do

All the wishes in the world would never make his dream come true, but the song gave him comfort. It had been one of his favorites when he was little, and he had watched Pinocchio over and over again specifically so he could sing along to this song. And he hoped that somewhere, Kurt could hear it and find comfort too.

Fate is kind

She brings us those who love

The sweet fulfillment of

Their secret longing

Like a bolt out of the blue

Fate steps in and sees you through

When you wish upon a star

Your dreams come true

It had been too dark and cloudy to see the stars at night and Blaine suddenly had a desperate desire to make a wish, like he did every night when he was younger. He smiled lightly because fate had been kind, in bringing him to Kurt and giving them that time together. He could only hope now that fate could see him through this. He finished the song and sat very still for a long time, wondering if his 'bolt out of the blue' could possibly be Caleb. He had appeared quickly into his life and was trying to help him. Maybe fate was sending Blaine a message.

He groaned. His head hurt and he was so cold but he didn't want to leave. He had no idea how long he'd been out here, but he knew it was a while. The clouds were darker.

"I love you Kurt," he whispered and got up, ignoring the prickling numbness in his legs, and took one last long look at Kurt's grave before he turned and headed back down the path.

He pulled up his hood, hoping to hide his face from Caleb. But the boy was observant, Blaine had to give him that, because no sooner did Blaine come within ten feet of the car and Caleb was rushing towards him, concern in his eyes. He didn't ask if he was okay, which was obvious by the set of Blaine's face, and just held him in a tight hug.

Blaine immediately felt the warmth of the boy who hugged him and he wrapped his arms up around Caleb's back, pulling him closer as he rested his head on his shoulder. Caleb told him he was proud of him and then gently pulled him towards the car, opening his door for him before quickly sliding in the driver's seat and starting the car to crank up the heat. But he did not move from the lot.

"Do you want to go back to Dalton?" he asked carefully.

"Yeah," Blaine murmured and Caleb nodded, then moved the car out of park and pulled out on to the main road.

It was past dinner when they arrived back at Dalton, but neither boy was very hungry. Caleb stopped by the Commons to grab whatever snacks the chefs had set out and they walked back to the dorm together.

They were warm in their pajamas, covered in soft blankets, nibbling on rolls and cheese when Blaine looked over at Caleb and asked, "How do you do it?"

He glanced up, surprised. "Do what?"

"You just seem so... I don't know... strong. I know that you're hurting and no one else knows do they?" This thought hit him suddenly. Caleb had told him about Dylan, but he'd never thought that he'd told anyone else. And Blaine certainly hadn't said anything. "No one else knows."

Caleb confirmed this with a soft nod. "It's easier, in a way. Not having anyone judge you. They look at you differently. And yeah, it does hurt, but I don't think I'm strong."

"But you are." Blaine pressed, not believing Caleb's words. "No one here suspects anything and they've all liked you from when you first started classes. You haven't let it show at all that anything is bothering you and you've been able to help me. You can't say that you're not strong."

"I'm not strong. It takes strength to overcome and I know I am far from that. But it's easier to deal with when I tell myself that he's happy. It sounds bad, but if he was so unhappy that he took his own life, then wherever he is, I know that he's finally in a better place. Do you believe in heaven Blaine?"

"No," he whispered, picking pieces of bread apart and making no move to eat them.

"Okay. That's fine. Can you close your eyes?"

Blaine looked up at him, not understanding.

"Just try okay?"

He slowly let his eyes slip closed and waited to hear Caleb's voice again.

"Picture Kurt."

Blaine bit his lip, scrunched up his eyes. He heard the squeak of the mattress as Caleb moved and then felt warm hands on his own.

"Relax." He whispered, fingers moving gently.

And he did relax.

"Good. Picture Kurt, however you want to, wearing whatever."

He immediately saw Kurt behind his closed eyelids, wearing the outfit that he thought looked the best on him. Dark wash skinny jeans, cream oxfords, a white shirt layered with a cream blazer and a blue scarf that brought out the color of his eyes. He was smiling gently and Blaine smiled too.

"Where do you picture him?"

Caleb's voice seemed far away. All he could see was Kurt. Then a huge stage materialized around him. Blaine saw that the house was packed and the spotlights were on Kurt.

"He's on a stage, singing for everyone."

The hands on his own still moved lightly. "Okay," Caleb said. "Is he happy?"

As if in response, the Kurt in his mind grinned hugely, showing perfect white teeth.

"Yes."

"Then open your eyes."

He did, and Caleb was close. Not uncomfortably close, but close.

"And picture that scene if you start to get sad. Knowing that he's happy, doing what he loves, it lessens the ache some."

Blaine felt a soft smile pull on his lips, feeling a comforting warmth in his body that he hadn't felt in a while. He truly believed that this might make it easier, to not think of Kurt alone somewhere, but doing what he loved. "I think it will help. Thank you."

Caleb nodded and returned his smile, pulling away to move back to his bed.

"What do you picture," Blaine asked hesitantly, "when you think of Dylan?"

He looked over and after a moment, said, "He's sitting with me at the piano. And we're playing together and I listen to him sing. He loved to play, so I know that's what he'd be doing, no matter where he is."

"I wish I could have met him. I think I would have liked him."

"You would have." Caleb agreed. "He was the type of person who was everyone's friend."

They were silent after that and Caleb brought out his sketch pad to draw again by the light next to his bed. Blaine set aside his dinner and went to brush his teeth. He walked past the window on his way back to the bed and turned out the light, shifting on his side and folded his arms up under his pillow, laying his head down and staring out of the window.

And as if by some miracle, he saw a sparkle.

He sat up, blinking to make sure his eyes weren't playing tricks on him. No, it was there. The clouds had thinned and Blaine could see the night sky for the first time in what felt like years. And there, in the center of his vision, was a star. A single star in the dark, but it was there.

Blaine smiled and closed his eyes.

Star light, star bright

First star I see tonight.

I wish I may, I wish I might,

Have this wish I wish tonight.

44. 11pm

It was late at night, the room quiet, the air still, the calm settling over the beds.

But not for long.

Blaine rolled over again in his sleep, curling up tightly. A small whimper sounded, so softly in the dark. His hands curled and his breathing quickened. He turned over, fingers grasping at the pillowcase, face contorting in fear. His eyes moved in frantic patterns behind closed eyelids as he tossed and turned.

He was running. Running. Running. Running.

He didn't look back. He couldn't look back. No, he had to keep running. His legs ached, his lungs screamed for air, he saw stars as the dizziness finally caught up with him.

He was going to fall. He stumbled, but kept going. He faltered, but did not break his pace. He tripped, but picked himself back up.

He thought that he might escape this.

But he was wrong.

Blaine groaned, his face buried in the sheets, holding onto the pillow like it was the only thing tethering him to solid ground. His eyes scrunched up further, brows pulling down. Caleb heard the softly growing moans and opened his eyes.

He was wrong.

He forced his cramping legs to take one more step. Just one more. He had to keep going. Running. Running. Running.

He came down on an unsteady ankle and pitched forward. And even as he fell, he knew that he would not get up. He couldn't. Not again.

Caleb sat up, swung his legs over the edge of the bed, blinking his bleary eyes. He exhaled as he stood, willing his eyes to adjust to the darkness as he carefully made his way over to Blaine, who lay thrashing on his bed.

He reached out a hand, fingers just brushing the edge of the sheets when-

He hit the ground hard, palms and knees stinging and aching. His own soft cry echoed in the silence.

But he was not alone. He stayed where he was, on his hands and knees on the ground, and forced himself to look up.

Kurt was there.

The soft blue eyes stared back at him, filled with the ghost of pain that had been brought to the surface once more. Blaine briefly wondered what look was in his own eyes, but he saw Kurt smile and every other thought was forced from his mind.

-Blaine stopped moving. He tensed, pulling the pillow tightly to his chest and just as Caleb was about to wake him, he sighed deeply and relaxed.

Caleb rubbed his eyes. Blaine looked so peaceful now, he wondered if he had just imagined Blaine in a nightmare. He stood there for a few minutes, watching for any sign of anguish, but Blaine remained calm and fast asleep. Caleb shrugged, yawned, and went back to bed.

"Kurt?"

He smiled down at him, hands reaching out to rest lightly on his shoulders. Anything that had been bothering Blaine did not matter now. Nothing mattered now. Nothing except Kurt.

"Blaine," Kurt sighed, and he thought he saw a flicker of hurt in his eyes.

Blaine immediately wanted to make him feel better. He pushed himself off the ground, and wrapped Kurt in a hug, holding him tightly when the other boy hesitantly clasped his arms around his back.

"Kurt, what's wrong?" Blaine whispered in his ear, the darkness around him no longer frightening, but comforting.

Kurt pulled away enough to look Blaine in the eyes. There was a pause and then Kurt said, "I need you to do something for me."

"Anything." Blaine's reply was immediate. He would do anything for Kurt, no matter what it was.

And Blaine could not miss the long pause, the way Kurt's eyes bored into his, how gently he held his face in his hands. Kurt's eyes quickly filled with tears, his breathing becoming shaky. Something was wrong. This was not okay.

Blaine tightened his grip on him, searching his face with concerned eyes, trying to understand what was making him so upset.

The tears began to roll down Kurt's cheeks and he closed his eyes and looked away briefly before meeting Blaine's gaze with a fierceness in his blazingly blue eyes. Kurt's voice wavered slightly, and Blaine knew that Kurt was trying to be strong, trying not to show how much this hurt.

"Blaine." Kurt's lip trembled. "Blaine, I love you. You know I love you."

Blaine nodded, still trying to understand. "I love you more than anything."

A small gasp of pain came from Kurt's lips. "I know." He whispered. "I know you do. And I know this might be hard to hear, but I want you to listen, okay?" Kurt's gaze hardened and Blaine could not doubt at all that Kurt wasn't serious.

"What? What is it?" He whispered without thinking, as the words blurted from his mouth.

And Kurt answered right away. But the words he said were not what Blaine was expecting to hear. Not what he was expecting at all.

"Blaine, baby, you need to know that it's okay for you to move on. It's okay for you to be with someone else. I love you Blaine. I love you so much and you need to hear that I won't let you hurt yourself anymore. I want you to be happy, Blaine, more than anything in this world."

Blaine's hands fell away from Kurt. He backed away a few steps. Kurt held out his arms, begging him to understand.

"Is this about Caleb?" Blaine's words were harsh.

Kurt nodded, his gaze softening at Blaine's tone. "He cares about you."

"So do you!"

Caleb's chest rose in steady breaths as he slept, and he didn't see the way that Blaine's breath stuttered, the way his hands tensed, the way he sighed angrily.

"I can't make you happy Blaine. I don't belong here."

"You belong with me." Blaine whispered, hanging his head.

And Kurt was there, just like always. His palm cupped Blaine's cheek to gently force him to look at him. "We both know I can't." He said softly. "You deserve everything in the world. Don't close yourself out to love, Blaine. You don't deserve a life without love. You're too good for that." The corner of Kurt's mouth lifted up in a small smile.

"I love you." Blaine's hand reached up to grasp Kurt's wrist. His words were tense, aching.

"I know," Kurt said, pressing his forehead so gently against Blaine's, "and that's why I'm asking you to give him a chance."

And Blaine's eyes snapped open. He looked around, shaking slightly and ran a hand across his damp forehead. When his eyes adjusted, he found himself glancing over at the next bed, where Caleb lay fast asleep. He looked away, intending to go back to sleep, but something made him look over again.

He propped himself up on his elbows and blinked a few times. Caleb was laying on his side, curled up facing Blaine. His arms were tucked under his pillow and he was breathing deeply, the blanket hanging gently off his torso. Blaine watched as his chest rose and fell steadily. He stared at Caleb's closed eyes, pupils moving softly under his eyelids as he dreamed, his hair falling in messy waves across his forehead. Blaine didn't realize he'd been holding his breath until he let it out with a groan as he flopped back against the pillows, pressing the palms of his hands against his eyes.

Why did he have that dream?

He had a fleeting moment where he thought that Kurt might actually have appeared to him in the dream, but that was impossible. He let his hands fall away from his face and sighed, turning his head to look out the window at the slightly hazy sky.

Blaine took a deep breath and then his rational thoughts began to trickle in.

His subconscious wanted him to be with Caleb, to not entirely close off the possibility that something else was there, so he'd just created Kurt in his dreams so that he could not feel guilty because Kurt had told him it was okay.

But it wasn't Kurt.

That Kurt isn't real.

But it felt real. He felt real.

It's your dream, of course it felt real.

But he was there, he held me. I held him. It was exactly like him.

You're only remembering what you want to feel.

Caleb could never replace Kurt.

Then don't expect him to. He can be enough, just as he is. You like him. You know you do.

But Kurt can't-

Kurt isn't here. He'll never be here. You have a chance for something new. To get your life back together. So what are you going to do about it?

Blaine curled up under his covers, squeezing his eyes shut to block out his thoughts, all trying to overshadow each other. He chewed his bottom lip and hesitantly opened his eyes.

The thoughts in his head were gone. It was silent in his head. All he could hear was the steady sound of Caleb's breathing from across the room. Their beds were close. All Blaine had to do was get up and walk a

few feet and he'd hit Caleb's bed. He could clearly see the way the room lit up momentarily while the clouds shifted and the moon was revealed for those few precious seconds. He could see the way the light fell on Caleb's face, revealing softened features. The way his eyelashes splayed out on the highest part of his high cheekbones, the way his freckles seemed to disappear in the crisp light, and then the shadow fell across his face once more as the moon was hidden behind the clouds. Blaine closed his eyes, sighing deeply.

All he could see was Caleb.

45. Make You Feel My Love

There was a note on Finn Hudson's locker door. A plain, perfectly normal white sheet of paper with the words 'Meeting in the choir room ASAP' printed in bold black letters. Finn pulled off the sheet and stared at it for a moment, glancing around at the lockers around his, seeing if anyone else had gotten the message. Apparently not because every other locker in the aisle seemed to be the same as it always was, nothing out of place.

Finn sighed and turned, expecting to see Rachel behind him, like she had a habit of doing, and scaring him with the mere suddenness of her presence before bursting out words a mile a minute that he tried to make sense of. But she wasn't there. He looked right and left. No Rachel.

Must be in the choir room, he thought and adjusted his backpack on his shoulder. He looked down at the paper in his hand once more. Then Finn started walking in the direction of the stated meeting place, only pausing to deposit the paper in a recycle bin.

He pushed open the door and wasn't surprised to see the entire glee club already seated on random chairs like usual. He wasn't surprised that Mr. Scheuster was leaning up against the piano, obviously waiting. He wasn't surprised that Rachel stood as he entered. He was, however, surprised to see one Sue Sylvester sitting in a chair as far away from the glee kids as she could get while still being in the room.

"What's going on?" he asked as he took another step. "What are we meeting about? And why is she here?" he turned his gaze to Sue, who didn't seem fazed by his question.

Rachel bounded down the stairs and took his hand, pulling him forward and making him sit in one of the chairs in front. She then walked to the center of the room and turned to face everyone, her hair flying over her shoulder as she did so.

She looked to Mr. Schue for a quick confirmation and when he nodded, she raised her chin and began.

"We all know that this has been a very difficult few months for everyone, but especially for you Finn. Losing Kurt has been the worst thing I've ever had to deal with personally and I know a lot of us feel the same way."

She paused and Finn met her gaze, confused. "I don't get it. You're reminding me that my stepbrother is dead, like I don't think about it every damn day?"

"No. No, Finn, please I didn't mean it to sound like that. What I'm trying to say is, that we all know how hard this has been and we want you to know that we're here for you."

"Well, that's great. Honestly. That's just perfect. Can I go to math class now and for an hour not have to think about how much my life sucks?"

Finn stood and Rachel ran to him, putting her hands on his arms because he pulled away when she tried to hold his hands.

"Sit down gigantör. Seriously, I could make a lot of money hiring you to wash the windows on skyscrapers."

Finn looked over as Sue stood up.

"What's she doing here?" He said harshly.

Mr. Schue raised his voice gently. "Finn, she wants to help."

"She has never once helped us!"

Rachel's grip on him tightened. "Finn, please. Stay for a little longer. Please."

He looked down into her eyes, wide and shining, and he looked away. "Why did you call this meeting?"

"It's for you Finn. We're trying to help."

He sighed heavily and opened his eyes, nodding once. He moved silently back to the chair, defeated.

Once back in his seat of honor, Rachel stood again in the front of the room and addressed Finn. "You're not alone in this Finn. I can see how much this has changed you, and lately, you seem even more distant. I know you're hurting and I know there's nothing any one of us could say to take away what you feel, but you have to know that we're all here for you."

Finn looked up, but did not acknowledge this.

Rachel nodded to Sue, who took her place in the center of the room. Rachel sat down next to Finn, but made no move to hold his hand, though her eyes strayed on his fingers before she gave her attention to Sue.

She stood up taller and looked around the room before beginning, hands clasped in front of her. "As much as it physically pains me to stay in the same room as so many misfit losers such as yourselves, I have suffered through it for the last ungodly forty minutes breathing in the same teenage loser-dome air that you talentless wonders expel for one reason. Last weekend, when my Cheerios gave a performance that should have me ovulating with glee and I felt nothing, I asked myself 'why?' Is it because of the rat hormones my doctor prescribed? Is it because of the myriad of fumes I've inhaled over the years of being near Will Scheuster and his incredibly greasy head of hair? And then I realized it was because something was missing. And it's not my tear-ducts because I had those yanked out ages ago. Don't miss them. No, what was missing in my daily rounds of verbal abuse to all of the brainless kids in this hell hole called a school, was one Kurt Hummel. He was the loser in this ridiculous club I least despised and I realized that his absence was actually making me upset. Now, not having to see any one of your faces for the rest of my life would be a dream come true, but Porcelain was different. I'll admit that not having him here to constantly taunt and verbally torture is going to make my days that much less bearable at this prison." She paused here and something changed on the face of Sue Sylvester. "I want you all to know how deeply sorry I am." Then, her normal personality was back, but for just a moment, Sue showed that she did in fact have a heart. "I would gladly trade Dancing Asian over there for Porcelain any day."

Tina wrapped her arm a bit more tightly around Mike's.

Sue looked to her right. Will nodded to her with a small smile and she returned it, sans smile, and went back to her chair.

For most people, Sue just ranted out about a million different insults, but to those who knew her, she was being kind. It was the best that could have been hoped for coming from Sue Sylvester.

Finn looked at her over his shoulder. She nodded at him.

Then he felt Rachel move beside him and he heard the scrape of chairs as the glee club stood, making their way to the front of the room. Rachel was in the center and when everyone was in a straight line, she took a breath and smiled lightly.

Finn was still confused, now more than ever, but when Brad began to play the piano, he knew what they were doing.

Rachel sang alone for the first few lines, soft and hesitant, like she was worried Finn wouldn't understand and leave again.

When the rain is blowing in your face

And the whole world is on your case

I can offer you a warm embrace

To make you feel my love

The rest of New Directions harmonized on the next stanza and they all sang together for the rest of the song, every line sung gently.

When the evening shadows and the stars appear

And there is no one there to dry your tears

I could hold you for a million years

To make you feel my love

Finn felt his chest tighten, his hands clench, and he bit his lip, trying so hard not to show what this was doing to him. He had felt so alone, so lost, even when he tried not to show it, and lately, though he'd been feeling better, there was still an ache deep inside that he knew would never go away. But they were right. He would be okay and he did need support to get through this and they would be there for him.

I know you haven't made your mind up yet,

But I would never do you wrong

I've known it from the moment that we met

No doubt in my mind where you belong

I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue

I'd go crawling down the avenue

No, there's nothing that I wouldn't do,

To make you feel my love

Rachel smiled softly at him when the piano played and blinked, her long eyelashes sticking together as tears welled in her eyes. She never broke her gaze with Finn and in the silence, where only the notes of the piano were heard, she mouthed, 'It's okay.' And Finn let out a shuddering breath, felt the first tears roll down his cheeks.

The storms are raging on the rolling sea

And on the highway of regret

The winds of change are blowing wild and free

You ain't seen nothing like me yet

Finn felt a hand on his shoulder, squeezing gently and he didn't need to look up to know that it was Sue. He dropped his head in his hand, openly crying for the first time at school since Kurt's death. Everyone had expected him to break down, but he'd held his ground. He wasn't sure why he did, but now he could care less if they saw him cry.

I could make you happy, make your dreams come true

Nothing that I wouldn't do

Go to the ends of the earth for you

The voices and the piano faded away and Rachel sang the last line alone as she knelt down in front of him, putting her hands on his knees.

To make you feel my love

When her voice was silent once more, she stood, leaning down to wrap her arms around him as he shook. There were tears on every face in the room and they all waited until Finn could breathe again and get out the words he was trying to say.

He swallowed hard and looked up at every one of them, his eyes red and shining, and said shakily, "I miss him. And I'm glad I have you guys."

It seemed to be all that he could say and it didn't really matter anyway because he was engulfed in a single massive hug by the entirety of the glee club.

They were bound together, by love for each other and love for Kurt, and for now, that was all they needed. They could get through this together by putting one foot in front of the other, and Finn knew that if one of them should stumble, they would be helped right back up. He could count on them and they knew that they would all be there for each other.

Blaine was sitting on his bed, humming listlessly as he flipped through his completed homework.

Caleb was at the desk, a lamp poised over the open sketchpad, drawing away like he always did after homework.

Blaine had still never seen one drawing, but he figured Caleb was a private person about that and he figured if he wanted him to know, he'd show him.

And as Blaine thumbed through his note cards, he heard the scratching of the pencil come to a stop. He looked up at the sudden silence and saw Caleb staring down at his work.

Then Caleb turned and he said, "I want to show you something."

Blaine set aside his note cards, sitting up straighter. Caleb stood and held his sketch pad to his chest, so Blaine couldn't see what was on it. He walked over and sat next to him.

"I started working on this when I first met you. When I realized that there is something more to you than meets the eye, when I knew you were hiding something, something that hurt. I've been working on it more lately because I want you to see what I see. I see someone who's strong and confident and trying his best to get his life back together." He took a deep breath, loosened his grip on the pad of paper. "I see you," he said and held out the drawing.

Blaine took it in his lap and turned it so it was facing the right way. And he held his breath at what he saw.

In his hands, Blaine held a drawing of himself in black and white. It looked so *real* that for a moment, Blaine didn't believe it was him. Dalton jacket open and tie straight, this person had his arms bent and hands supporting him against the desk he leaned on. Caleb had captured every crease on his pants, every vein in his strong hands, every curl in his hair, every wrinkle on his face as he laughed. In his eyes, there was a happiness, a joy. Blaine almost expected this person to start moving.

"Is this really what you see?" he whispered, almost not willing to believe it.

"Yes, Blaine. This is what I see."

It took a moment for Blaine to realize that his hands were shaking. He took a deep breath and the shaking stopped.

"You're an amazing artist."

Caleb colored slightly. "Thank you. Do you like it?"

"I..." he paused. "It's beautiful. It really is. I just don't know how you see this person. Because I don't see it at all."

"Well, I do." He said softly. "And you will too. I wish you did now. I wanted you to know how special you are Blaine."

He looked up into Caleb's eyes. "Thank you." He wanted to say so much more, but Caleb seemed to understand that he couldn't.

"No problem." He said and smiled gently at him, then getting up and returning to his desk. "You can keep that by the way," he said over his shoulder as he sat down.

"Caleb, I couldn't-"

He shushed him by turning around in his chair. "It was yours the moment I started drawing it."

And he turned back around, leaving Blaine slightly stunned. Very cared about and fuzzy inside, but stunned.

He ran his hand gently over the drawing of himself, taking care not to smudge it, and ran his eyes over every line drawn by Caleb's careful hand.

46. Good Life

It was warmer now, warmer than it had been in so long. For Blaine, it had seemed as though the snow on the ground was a permanent addition, that the world would always be cold.

But in the past few weeks, it had stopped snowing and the rain had been receding until it only drizzled occasionally. The sun made its appearance often now, though still hidden by puffy white clouds sometimes. But it was warm.

Blaine looked up from the textbook he was reading, a highlighter in one hand and a paper with neatly scribbled notes in the other. He marked another sentence with the pen, covering the words in a yellow stream that stood out almost desperately from the monotone white and black of the page. His eyes glazed over the notes he had written, double checking them with the textbook. He sighed and lowered the paper, ran a hand over his bleary eyes and sat up straighter, stretching his back.

Caleb had his nose practically buried in a thickly bound book, a pair of simple black reading glasses perched on his nose. His fingers drummed on the smooth tabletop, something he did when he was concentrating. Blaine doubted he even knew he was doing it.

"Caleb?"

The boy looked up. The drumming stopped immediately and Blaine grinned.

Caleb raised his eyebrows expectantly, marking his place in the book with his thumb. "Yeah?"

"You're doing it again."

"Doing what?"

Blaine smiled and waved his hand towards Caleb's. "Drumming your fingers on the table."

"Am I?" His gaze turned questioning as he looked at his hand, as if it would start doing the very thing it was accused of, but of course, now it was still. "Sorry. Didn't realize."

Caleb moved his hand to his lap.

"No problem."

"Sorry if it was bothering you." Caleb looked slightly guilty.

"Just thought it was funny," Blaine said with a little laugh.

And they went back to their respective books. It was the week before finals at Dalton, easy enough to figure out because the library was never this crowded. Every table was filled with students, some a group of friends who worked together, and others who had never talked to each other before, but came together in the need of somewhere to sit and study. There were entire shelves that were empty as books were piled high on tables that were equally as crammed with papers, highlighters, pens, notebooks, and countless cups of coffee. Sometimes Blaine forgot that he was at Dalton, the private school where many kids were offered Ivy League scholarships or internships abroad, and not at Dalton, home of the Warblers. During the school year, students were involved in many activities that Dalton had to offer, the Warblers being one of the most sought-after. It was easy to get lost in the 'Warbler world' where they played practical jokes on unsuspecting members, partied each other's dorm and just as equally, spent many an afternoon and well into the night doing nothing but running through a single verse of a song to make sure the harmony was perfect.

But as finals week approached, the students of Dalton banded together in an unspoken agreement to put everything that made them different aside and spent every waking moment studying quietly.

"Caleb?"

The boy looked up again.

"Can I borrow your highlighter?"

"Yeah, sure." Caleb smiled and handed it over.

"Thanks." Blaine uncapped it and went through his notes once more, marking important words in green.

When that was done, he set aside the papers and slid the pen back to Caleb's side of the table. He shut his textbook and opened up the next book in line, a thick novel for his English class, chewing his lip as he thumbed through until he found where he had stopped last.

He read for as long as he could, hearing nothing but the sounds of pages being flipped, pencils scratching, and the occasional squeak of a chair being moved. And then Blaine's eyes strayed to the large window they were seated near. The sky was a clear blue, dotted with light clouds. He could see the rays of sun streaming down, almost feel the soft breeze and hear the birds singing.

It was beautiful out today. And he was stuck inside.

He sighed, turning back to his book. It was the first day in so long that Blaine could actually wear a t-shirt and jeans and not be cold. It was well into spring, but the foggy rain had decided to stick around later than usual and he'd almost given up hope that he would be able to even see a blue sky again.

Screw this.

Blaine marked his page with a sheet of paper lined with notes on the book he was reading and closed it, setting it pointedly down in front of him and looked up at Caleb, only seeing the top of his head because he was leaning so far over his own book.

"Caleb?"

He watched as Caleb licked his lips and sighed lightly before slowly lifting his head.

"Yes, Blaine?" He said in a tone that made him feel slightly bad for asking him, but it was said gently, which meant that he wasn't too mad.

"Come outside with me."

Eyebrows raised over green irises. "You do realize that finals are in one week right? I know you've been dealing with this for three years, but this is my first and only set of finals at Dalton. Need I remind you that we're graduating this year? If I bomb these finals, I might not graduate."

Blaine felt the need to pout slightly. "You're going to do fine. I can help you study." He paused. "Right after we go outside."

Caleb lowered his book and looked at him from over his glasses.

"We've been in here for hours. And look, the sun's out!" He gestured grandly towards the window, raising his voice in excitement, resulting in quite a few glaring looks from boys around them.

Blaine leaned forward on his elbows, lowering his voice. "Please? This is the first time the sun's been out for more than five hours at one time. Spring is finally here. And I'm starting to turn into an albino." He whined, straightening his elbows out across the table to show Caleb his arms.

Caleb couldn't see any difference in Blaine's arm coloring, but the way Blaine was looking at him from under his eyelashes and begging was almost too hard to ignore. He would feel bad saying no to that.

He reached up a hand and pulled off his reading glasses, folded them closed and slipped them inside their black case. Then he stuck a bookmark between the dusty-smelling pages of the book he was studying and set it on top of the large pile next to him. He folded his hands carefully in front of him and looked up at Blaine, still leaning forward and eyes locked on his face.

Caleb smiled. And the smile was mirrored on Blaine's lips a second later.

"Let's go."

They gathered up their books, returning the ones they didn't need to take with them, and left. It was kind of adorable the way that Blaine was bouncing along as they walked, getting closer to the door with every step.

Blaine pulled up the strap on his bag a little higher on his shoulder and threw open the doors. Caleb chuckled as Blaine sighed happily and they moved out into a more direct path of the sun. He sat down on the brick ledge that outlined a tree that had been planted recently. It was small now, but come summer, it would be nice and full, providing plenty of shade. But for this moment, Blaine relished in the sun. He dropped his bag to the ground and held out his arms, tilting his face slightly towards the sky.

"This is awesome," Blaine commented, eyes closed and a soft smile still playing on his lips.

"Agreed," Caleb nodded and couldn't help but lift his face towards the sky too. The sun's rays were shining down on them, drenching them in warmth and a calm that only came with the scent of flowers on the air and small birds chirping in the distance.

Blaine knew that Kurt was okay. He knew that wherever he was, he was happy. He could almost picture Kurt's smile as Blaine came to this realization. His heart gave a softly pounding *thump* against his ribs, resonating as if it had been waiting for Blaine to accept this. To finally let Kurt go. He wouldn't ever forget him, but it was time to start focusing more on himself, to know that Kurt was okay and that life would indeed go on. No, he would never forget Kurt. And he smiled, hoping that Kurt's days were filled with sunshine, just as Blaine's was today, and be free of clouds and rain and sorrow.

Suddenly, Blaine plopped himself down next to Caleb and nudged him with his shoulder. "See, isn't this better than studying?"

"If I fail, I'm blaming you." Caleb grinned softly and tilted his head to look at Blaine.

"Deal. Although, you should be thanking me for getting you out of that library, you bookworm."

Caleb snorted. "I didn't realize you were so anti-book."

"Only to the boring ones."

"So, textbooks?"

"Exactly. Well, there are a few I don't mind reading, but most of them just should have never been written. Unless of course, I decide to take a class on falling asleep."

"Aww, but you're adorable when you sleep. Just not when you drool." Caleb laughed and his cheeks immediately tinged a slight shade of pink.

Blaine's laugh meshed with Caleb's, but he didn't miss the blush. Caleb's eyes looked down and then they were quiet for a while, until Caleb broke the silence.

"My offer still stands you know," he said softly, nervously.

Blaine bit his lip. Caleb hesitantly looked up, and the green eyes seemed to be lit from within, enhanced by the reflecting rays of the sun.

Blaine's tone matched Caleb's, so soft and gentle. "I know."

"So?"

He hated doing this. He knew what feelings Caleb had for him and he knew that he had those same feelings too, but he couldn't do this. Not now.

"So... I think that someday, we could be together." He said gently. "I think that in a while, if I'm lucky enough that you're single, we could give this a shot. I really do like you Caleb, I do, but I think I just need to take some time for me, you know?"

He expected Caleb to turn away, maybe to leave, but he kept his gaze the entire time and surprised him by saying, "Then I'll wait. Until you're ready."

"Caleb, I'm not asking you to do that for me," Blaine began softly.

"I know. But I want to. I told you I'd be here for you Blaine. And I'm not going to just abandon you." He moved his hand over to Blaine's and squeezed gently. "Whatever you need, I can be there for you. However long it takes."

Blaine felt his heart stutter in his chest at this improbable declaration. He hadn't let himself hope that Caleb would be so understanding. Blaine squeezed back, fingers wound in Caleb's.

"And this can be enough." Caleb said, brushing his thumb along Blaine's palm, "For now, this can be enough."

Blaine glanced down at their hands and then smiled, flicking his eyes back up to look at Caleb's. "Thank you," he whispered, which was met with a smile by the green-eyed boy.

Caleb gave his hand another squeeze and then let go, digging in his bag to pull out his iPod. He handed over one of the earbuds and set his playlist on shuffle.

Blaine almost had to laugh at the song that came on, because it was so perfect.

He shook his head and smiled, watching the clouds that drifted by slowly, creating shadows on the green grass as they danced around the sun. He could still feel the warmth that permeated his skin, smell the fresh air, feel the slight breeze as it lifted his curls around his forehead and he began to hum along to the song.

We are god of stories, but please tell me

What there is to complain about

When you're happy like a fool, let it take you over

When everything is out, you got to take it in

Oh, this has got to be the good life

This has got to be the good life

This could really be a good life, a good, good life

He heard Caleb humming along next to him and he let his mind empty of everything. Quickly approaching exams, half-finished papers on his desk, the light he may or may not have forgotten to turn off this morning, the cell phone he needed to charge, the Warblers, his friends, his family, Caleb, and even Kurt. He let himself take all of those things and set them aside, even for a little while. And his mind was clear and he was here, in this moment and for now, life was perfect.

He suddenly stood and pulled Caleb along with him, who did his best to keep pace and not yank the earbud out of either of their ears. Blaine stopped at the expanse of grass that spread across the quad in the center of campus. He grinned and walked out into the sea of bright green and purposely sat down, then laying down completely and tucking his arms up under his head, feeling the sun shimmer down on him once more.

He felt Caleb lay beside him and neither boy said a word. They didn't need to.

And maybe Caleb was right.

For now, this could be enough.

47. Eyes, Alternate Ending

Wes was having the Warblers go over the rolling harmony again and Blaine was watching, giving appreciative nods and comments when appropriate. It was only eight o'clock, but Blaine was so tired. He hadn't been sleeping well for obvious reasons, but in addition, his nightmares had been getting worse. Finn slept like a rock and either he didn't hear or Blaine wasn't screaming in his sleep anymore, which was good he supposed, but he still woke up with cold sweat drenching his body, hotel sheets tangled in his legs, and deep crescent-shaped nail marks in his palms.

Most nights, he couldn't remember what he'd dreamed about, but there was one that he vividly recalled and it sent chills down his spine even thinking about it. He kept hoping it would go away, that he'd find something else to dream about and no matter how many happy thoughts he ran through in his mind before he fell asleep, the nightmare took over and he couldn't escape it.

Yellow.

White.

Black.

The ground was black and gritty, but he paid no attention to it. Staring ahead, glancing right or left, or even straight up, all he could see was a cloudy white. But his eyes were fixed on what was in front of him.

Bright lights, gleaming a pale yellow, held his gaze. They seemed to hover above the ground, three feet up, lit from within as a foggy glow that grew brighter as it reached the center. Those lights were creepy, with seemingly nothing to be attached to, and reminded him eerily of eyes. His head was pounding, the blood pulsing in his veins. And he couldn't look away. It was as though he was forced to stare, unable to move at all. The lights stared back at him, eyes glaring in the gloomy white, and he did not blink. He found he could not blink. All of his muscles were locked, stiff, and he couldn't move anything. He was yelling in his mind to move, but he was trapped in his own body, feeling every kind of fear.

Someone was screaming. A high-pitched, blood-curling scream filled with a sickening panic. His heart banged against his ribs, and his arms and legs, down to his fingers and toes, were tingling. His eyes were burning, stinging, but he could not get his eyes to blink. The scream had died, but the sound echoed in his ears.

His stomach rolled. It was silent. Hauntingly silent, until he could hear a muffled whooshing sound around him.

The lights, the eyes, blinked and everything turned pitch black so he could not even see his hands in front of him, had he been able to move them.

He was struggling in the dark, trying desperately to move, when suddenly, his body was free of the spell that had bound him, but before he could even breathe, his world tilted and his stomach dropped sickeningly as he was falling, falling, falling, lost into blackness....

He heard the hum of the Warblers grow louder and Wes smiled.

"Good. Alright, a few more times, and we'll be done here."

Blaine felt his cell phone buzzing in his pocket. He hurriedly checked the caller ID and when he saw it was Finn, he caught Wes's attention to tell him he'd be back and slipped out the door, letting it close behind him and deafening any sound that came from within.

"Finn, is Kurt okay?"

"Yeah, yeah he's fine."

He could hear the smile in Finn's voice.

"What's up?" Blaine's tone relaxed now that he knew Kurt was okay.

"Kurt's doctor just came in and said that the treatment they're giving him is working, so he's going to stay here tonight and they're going to send him home tomorrow. He'll have to take some antibiotics or something for a while, but he's fine."

Blaine felt as though his heart could have burst from relief. He ran a hand through his hair and smiled, a real, true smile, for the first time in he didn't know how long.

"Really? Finn, that's... that's..." he laughed. "You have no idea how happy I am right now."

Finn laughed too. "I believe it dude. Well, just wanted to let you know. We're going to be heading back to the hotel soon, so I'll see you there?"

"Yep. Wes is having them run through the opening number a few more times and then I'll get going."

"Cool. Alright, see you."

"Mhmm."

Blaine hung up swiftly, still smiling hugely. He opened the door and returned to the rehearsal, his steps light and almost bouncy.

The thrum of voices inside faded away. Wes turned and took in Blaine's expression.

"Who was that?"

"Finn." Blaine said, slightly breathless with the overwhelming happiness. "They're releasing Kurt tomorrow. He's fine."

Grins broke out on every face and the entire room itself seemed to brighten. He was enveloped in a crushing hug that squeezed the air out of his lungs, but he didn't care. Blaine reached out his arms and grabbed as many Warblers as he could fit in his arms and hugged tightly. Wes clapped him on the back and smiled at him.

All of the Warblers fell away as David cleared his throat.

"In light of this happy news, Thad, Wes, and I have decided to run this one more time and then we'll let you go."

More smiles flashed up at him and they all hurried back into the starting formation. Blaine moved to the center of the room and leaned against an armchair, arms crossed lightly on his chest.

Wes snapped his fingers as he counted out the first beats, and then they began to sing, voices rising together. The entire song in itself was flawless, but there was a smile on every face and they actually performed full out, feeding off each other's energy. There was an electricity in the air, one of vigor, power.

"That was amazing guys, really. You've never performed better. Channel that energy you feel now when you perform every time, and Regionals will be a piece of cake."

Blaine grinned at them and rounds of high-fives circled with triumphant cries and fist pumps. Wes clapped his hands for silence and Thad spoke.

"Well, Blaine said it all. Keep it up guys and the Warblers will be going to Nationals."

The group dispersed, talking excitedly, after they all offered hugs and high-fives to Blaine once more, telling him to tell Kurt they missed him. He was sure Kurt would want to see them as soon as possible, but if that wasn't able to happen, they would be sitting together at Regionals to cheer them on.

Blaine pulled his coat tighter around him. The snow was really coming down hard now. He fumbled with his keys for a moment before finally unlocking the door and scrambling into the freezing air inside. He thought his car must have absorbed the icy temperature while he was at rehearsal and he almost waited for it to start snowing from the roof, but then he realized he could no longer feel his butt, as it felt like he was sitting on a block of ice. And no way was he going to deal with frozen cheeks. The car roared to life and the heat poured out on full blast. He sat for a moment, aiming every air vent in his car to point in the general direction of some part of his body and when he felt he could make it for the drive to the hotel, he pulled out slowly onto the street.

His was the only car on the road and it was kind of eerie. Before the creepy feeling could dissolve into his bones though, he pushed it away. Kurt was coming home in the morning and he was better. The thought instantly made him smile, as did his next inspiration of the warm shower and soft blankets that were awaiting him at the hotel. As long as Finn wasn't in the shower that is. There were a lot of things he would do for a warm shower right now, but trying to get Finn to hurry up was not one of them. He'd learned a few days ago that Finn liked the relaxing heat of the shower as much as he did and he'd also realized that Finn liked to sing in the shower too. In a moment of randomness, Blaine had thought about sticking his head in the bathroom and belting out the harmony to one of the songs Finn was singing, but he hadn't felt like getting his head ripped off.

He smiled as the song on the radio changed. It was a week before Christmas and most of the stations had been playing holiday music since the first week of December. He turned up the song and began to sing along with it.

The snow was pelting his windshield and he upped the speed on the wipers to the highest they could go. He'd never driven in snow this bad before and he vaguely wondered if he should pull over and call Burt to pick him up. But he shoved the thought out of his mind. He was only a few minutes away and he didn't want to bother anyone.

The road was black and gritty.

All he could see around him was a cloudy white. He couldn't make out any of the buildings or street signs and he slowed down to be able to see the sign that advertised the Comfort Inn. At least he knew he hadn't passed it. He was close now. Soon he'd have a hot shower and be able to sleep in the comfy bed and tomorrow, Kurt would be out of the hospital and he could tell him that the Warblers were going to kick ass.

A small smirk played at the edge of his lips. He should probably withhold that information from Finn.

His headlights reflected off the pavement, a gloomy pale yellow glared back at him. Two spots glittering on the ground.

Like eyes.

And suddenly, the lights blinked and were gone. That was the first thing he registered before he felt the car skidding, sliding along on the street. He slammed his foot down on the brakes, gripped the wheel tightly. The skin on his knuckles turned white, he was holding on so hard. The squeal of the brakes, trying to grip the snowy asphalt, screeched in his ears. His heart was pounding so fast. The car continued to swerve dangerously and he yanked up the emergency brake.

The sudden stop caused the car to lose balance and the traction on the tires did no good when coupled with the almost invisible black ice that glittered on the road like onyx diamonds.

The seatbelt locked and his body was thrown against it, knocking the air out of his lungs, as the car lurched. A high-pitched scream, filled with sickening panic was ripped from his throat as he was tossed around in his seat like a rag doll.

Out of nowhere, it seemed, loomed a large tree on the side of the road. In the split second before he closed his eyes, Blaine had seen the tree and knew immediately where the car was headed.

The car hurtled forward, gathering speed and there was nothing Blaine could do. He raised his arms to cover his head and it seemed like time was slowing down. It seemed to him that minutes had passed before the car finally made contact with the tree.

The driver's side slammed full force into the unyielding trunk of the huge tree. Metal screamed, glass shattered, and the car seemed to fold around the trunk. The left side of Blaine's body was thrown sideways, left to bear the brunt of the crash as the car door crumpled. The bones in his left arm snapped and his head was slammed against the tree with a sickening crack. The car rocked back a bit from the force of the impact and his body shifted back to the center of his seat as the airbags deployed.

The power of the airbag came out like a punch and he was thrown back against the seat, completely limp. His head lay against the headrest, neck bent to the side at an odd angle.

And Blaine Anderson's eyes, open and unseeing, stared at nothing.

The engine hissed and the metal crunched as the car settled back. The snow still fell in swirling sheets and the wind roared, creating almost a howl as it ghosted over the scene of the crash.

48. The Looking Glass Part 1 (Alternate Ending/Epilogue)

A/N: I'm very impatient today, so you get another 'ending' today (the sad, but happy one) because I just couldn't wait.

'Ending' is in quotes because this technically isn't an alternate ending, but I couldn't really justify calling it an epilogue either...

It's in parts (I'm thinking I'll do four parts) because by itself, this baby is about 25000+ words and I thought you'd get bored reading something that long. haha Plus, I love to hear your feedback as plotlines unfold. =]

So put this after the last chapter (chapter 46).

I imagine this slightly Hercules-esque in regards to the city and stuff and the whole thing is a bit fantasy, I guess. This stemmed from a review left by a reader (I'm terribly sorry but I forget who it was) telling me that I should do something with Kurt waiting for Blaine. So here's my (very long haha) spin on that.

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Kurt Hummel opened his eyes.

And closed them immediately. It was all kinds of bright here. He worried for a moment if his retinas would be permanently damaged. His hands clenched lightly and then relaxed.

Well, he couldn't just stand here in the comforting darkness forever. So, he took a breath and slowly opened one eye.

Okay, less bright. But still uncomfortably white. Like the florescent hospital lights had been switched to LED. He closed the eye again. His heart was starting to pound in his chest, like a drum beating out the counts to when he might actually stop being a baby and look around.

Nine... Ten... Eleven... Twelve...Thirteen...

Alright, that was enough. His eyelids fluttered open and he lifted his head, rotating his neck to take in everything he could.

It was just the initial light that had almost blinded him. Now it was a normal brightness, something his eyes didn't have to adjust to. The sky was a summery eggshell blue, with huge puffs of clouds that didn't even look real. He could feel the warmth of the sun on his skin and he turned his face to the sky, smiling up at the clouds and spreading his arms out to his sides. He was so happy to see actual, real *sky* that he didn't think anything of the fact that a moment ago, he was struggling to breathe and spots were dancing in his vision as he stared wide-eyed at the blank hospital ceiling tiles. He was too happy to be able to *move* again and run around if he wanted and smell fresh air and feel green grass to notice that everything he saw was too perfect to be real.

He was actually considering spinning around on the spot when-

"Kurt."

He froze. His head flicked back down and he felt his heart stop. He knew that voice. He would know that voice anywhere.

Kurt let his arms fall slowly back to his side and he twisted his upper body around, looking behind him, not even sure that the voice he heard was real.

He turned all the way around and just stood there in a state of shock. Tears filled his eyes and his lips began to tremble. He felt the way his throat was constricting and when he opened his mouth, a single word escaped, whispered and breathy and shaky.

"Mom?"

The woman standing in front of him smiled gently. Her eyes were shining with tears and she held out her hands. Kurt did not need to be told. He ran to her, throwing his arms around her waist and locking his

hands together. She grasped him tightly around his back as he buried his face in her shoulder, reaching one hand up to rest on the back of his head, her fingers gently rubbing through his hair.

"Hello sweetheart." She whispered and Kurt's heart jumped at the sound.

He took stuttering breaths and then pulled away to look into her face. "I-is it really you?"

She smiled, pressing her hand to his cheek. "Of course it is honey. Oh, I've missed you so much."

She pulled him into another hug and he melted into her, wanting to sink to the floor. He never thought he'd see her again. And here she was, holding him like he'd wished she could for so many years.

He looked into her face and said, "I've missed you too."

Elizabeth rested her hands on his shoulders, having to look up a bit at her son, who was a good two inches taller than she. Kurt sighed lightly.

"Mom, you look beautiful."

And she laughed, a sound that Kurt had missed dearly. "Always the charmer. Thank you son."

Her skin was pale, the same shade as Kurt's. Her eyes were a mirror of her son's, blue and sparkling. Her hair was a darker brown than his; Kurt had gotten the soft brown of his hair from his father. He'd also initially gotten his father's height, though in his teens, he had sprouted up more than they'd thought he would have. She was tall and slender, dressed in a simple flowing dress that matched the color of her eyes. Kurt knew now where he was, as much as he didn't want to ask the question, and he almost snorted when he realized that for all these years, he'd been picturing angels with huge white feathered wings and softly glowing halos. He'd had an argument with Finn once about that. He owed Finn ten bucks now. Angels didn't have wings. They were beautiful, if his mom was any testament, but no wings.

She almost started to say something, then closed her mouth and seemed to change her mind, instead telling him, "You must have a ton of questions. And they will all be answered soon enough."

She reached out and took Kurt's hand and started to walk, taking him with her. His eyes fell on the grandeur of the surroundings that he had not noticed before, but he didn't let himself get wrapped up in that yet.

"Mom?" The word was hasty and sharp.

Elizabeth turned her head, but kept walking. "Hmm?"

His next words were soft, a breath on the air, as he braved his question. "Am... am I dead? Or is this a dream?"

She stopped and a sigh preceded her answer. Her eyes held sadness. "I'm sorry baby. But you don't come here unless-"

"Oh." He cut her off and looked down.

"We have a lot to talk about." She said softly. "Do you want to?"

She gestured to the path in front of her. He nodded wordlessly.

They walked in silence until she turned and said, "This wasn't how I wanted to see you again. I've missed you both so much, but I never wanted to have you come here until you were old and wrinkly and ready."

"You didn't get much of a choice Mom." Kurt said quietly. "You weren't old, wrinkly, or ready either."

"I know honey. You're right. I didn't. And neither did you and I'm so sorry. I know you would have done great things."

"Thanks." He looked up. And then he sighed. "We were supposed to go to New York. Perform on Broadway."

She listened, nodding. "Your father would have been so proud of you. He is proud of you. And I am too. So, so proud."

"What's going to happen to him Mom?" He turned his eyes to her, emotion making his voice weak.

"He has Carole. And Finn. They'll help him through this. He's strong. Burt Hummel is a strong man."

"How- how do you know about them? They didn't meet until after-"

His voice fell as he looked at her face, where a smile was growing.

"I want to show you something." She took his hand and waited for his nod before leading him up wide stone steps that came to a stop at a magnificent building. Kurt's thoughts immediately went to the Greece temples. Large, shining stone columns held up a flat roof. There was no door, just a significant break between two columns. His mom stopped and gently pushed him forward.

His shoes clacked on the stone floor. It was open and airy here. He looked out and could see the many rolling green hills being flecked with a darkening yellow as the sun began to set. The huge town below was nestled into the hillside and he could hear and see many people bustling about.

He turned back around. His mom was standing on the opposite side of the room, next to a large stone basin in the shape of a perfect circle. Curious, he went to her, wondering how he had missed the basin. Elizabeth ran a hand along the flat edge and Kurt reached his hand up to copy her and brushed the back of his fingers against the smooth surface. Ringing the sides was a mural of intricate carvings into the swirling tan colors of the granite. He wanted to study the carvings, as he saw their beauty even at a glance.

Leaning over, he could see his reflection in the water, so smooth it was like glass.

"What is this?" He asked.

It was better than any mirror he'd ever seen, or any TV he'd ever watched. He looked beautiful in that water's reflection, a high-definition version of himself.

"We call it, 'The Looking Glass.'"

He looked at her blankly, and to his surprise, she smiled and then laughed.

"It's not a very good name. But it's been called that for much longer than I've been here and it'll be called that for centuries to come."

"What's it do?"

Her smile turned serious and she circled around the basin, across from Kurt. She leaned over and placed her palms on the ring of granite. Her eyes closed and then she reached out one hand and touched a finger to the center of the water. Smooth circling ripples fanned out from the touch. The first ripple reached the

sides of the basin and when it collided with the surface, a soft hum was heard. And again as the second ripple made contact. Again and again. The humming grew louder, but never past a whisper, The sound was gorgeous. He stared, transfixed, as the last ripple died away. And then, sharp and clear as a diamond, he could see a scene come into focus.

It was the park where his mom liked to walk. She used to take him there every Saturday and stroll along the quiet paths as long as he wanted. He'd collect flowers for her and she'd dry them and put the best ones in a book. That book was still in his room, tucked safely in his bookcase. He could see the green grass, now covered in snow except for the tips of some lucky blades that had managed to peek out to the sun, the children bundled up in jackets running across the path, a mother looking concernedly after them. He could hear the shrill laughter of the children and the howl of the wind.

"It's beautiful. It looks so real."

"It is real sweetheart."

He tore his gaze away from the scene and looked up at her. She smiled softly and explained further, "This shows you anything you want to see. You think about it, touch the water, and it comes up."

"Like a movie."

"In a way, yes. But this shows you the real time, what is actually happening. This is our connection to things we left behind on earth."

"Things?" His gaze turned thoughtful. "So, you could look at... people?"

"That's how I knew about Carole honey. I've been keeping an eye on you two."

"You did?"

She nodded. "It almost hurt to see you and know I couldn't reach out and hug you. That's the downfall with this. It shows you what you want to see, but..."

"But it will never be *real*. To us at least."

She smiled sadly. "Yes."

"And you can see anyone? Anyone at all?" He was talking faster, heart speeding up.

"Anyone. Any time of day, wherever they are."

"Mom, can... can I see Dad?"

Her face fell. "If you'd like to, yes. But honey, it's not going to be an easy thing to look at. Loss takes a toll on people."

"I want to." The determination that was so prevalent in Burt Hummel shown through in his son.

She nodded. "Just think about who you want to see and then touch the water. Touch it again with a blank mind to clear it." Her finger dipped into the water again, and it was still, reflective just as before.

"I'll be right outside when you're ready." She kissed the top of his head and left.

He took a deep breath and stared into the water. Closing his eyes, he thought hard about his father and touched the water. He almost snatched his hand back in surprise. The water was not cold as he expected, but warm. As if heated by a fire, but not boiling by any means. It was a warmth that was synonymous with life and comfort. He watched the ripples fade one after the other, the hum in his ears, his heart pounding in his chest.

And he saw Burt sitting in a hospital chair, the one that was right outside his room. He saw Finn sitting next to him, head in his hands and he noticed he was trembling. He'd never seen his dad look so... so... broken. Not since his mom died. There were steady tears streaking down his cheeks and he saw the hands clench at his knees. He wanted so badly to give him a hug, to tell him that it was okay, that he was okay.

And then his mind went to someone else.

His eyes widened. "Oh god. Oh no. Oh god."

He quickly changed his thoughts and touched the water again. The image blurred and was immediately replaced by something he recognized. He saw the surroundings of the Dalton choir room, knew right away the thick red curtains and the large room with the dark brown hardwood floor. But he wasn't ready for what else he saw.

Blaine was on his knees in the middle of the room, sobbing uncontrollably. His face held so much pain and agony as he cried. Kurt could hear his shattered screams piercing the still air.

It physically hurt him to see this.

"No. No, baby." Kurt whispered furiously. "Don't. No, please don't."

Tears welled so fast in his eyes and he had to blink repeatedly to stop them from falling. His hands gripped the sides of the basin so hard his muscles were shaking.

He saw Blaine press his forehead to the ground, still sobbing, but his screams were quieting, turning to agonizing moans. Kurt could not look away. He wanted to, but he was unable to. He had to make sure Blaine was... well, he knew he wasn't okay, but he couldn't just ignore him.

He watched with wide eyes as he saw his boyfriend pick himself up and trudge out into the snow. His heart ached as he saw him getting soaked and when he pointedly ignored every gaze that fell on him as he went to the dorms. Blaine dropped to his knees in front of the toilet. And then he watched helplessly as Blaine was sick. His tears dropped from his eyelashes, blurring the image just slightly and creating a tiny splash that glowed within before it reassembled to the scene again. He heard his name uttered by those beautiful lips and moments later, Blaine was sick again.

A soft moan echoed in his ears and his heart clenched when he saw Blaine slip from the toilet and onto the ground. A noise of pain whined from his own throat as Blaine trembled on the floor, eyes squeezed closed, and then, he relaxed with a sigh and was still. He'd blacked out.

Kurt had been unconsciously leaning forward, and now his nose was centimeters away from the water, staring unblinkingly at his boyfriend's body, curled up and motionless on the floor.

With much difficulty, he pushed himself away and crumpled to the floor, his back against the cold stone. His head dropped into shaking hands and he cried.

After mere moments, he felt warm arms around him and he turned towards the comfort without opening his eyes, and his mom held him as he cried.

"Shhhh," she crooned. "It's okay. I'm here. It's alright. You're alright."

She waited until he'd calmed down before saying, "It's a hard thing to process. I'm sorry honey, I should have-

"No. I wanted to see it." His voice was weak and he looked down at his hands as he spoke. "Is-Isn't there anything I can do?" He turned his watery eyes on his mother and whispered, "*Anything?* He's hurting so much and I love him with all my heart and there's got to be something I can do."

She caressed his cheek with her hand, running her thumb over his jaw bone, then stood and glanced down into the basin before kneeling again. "Blaine." She said gently.

Kurt let out a soft sob at the name. Elizabeth gathered him up in her arms again, rocking him slowly.

"The Looking Glass only shows us what's on earth. There's nothing we can do to change what happens there. Believe me, I've tried. But honey, I've kept an eye on Blaine ever since you snuck into Dalton. Yes, I know about that. I saw the way you two looked at each other and when I wasn't watching you, I may have set my sights on him for a bit. He loves you very much and losing someone is never easy. He has friends to help him and-

"You don't know him Mom. He's not going to ask for help." Kurt moaned. "He's going to try and get through it alone and it's going to hurt him even more."

"You're right. I don't know him. But I do know you, and if you've had any impact on him at all, he'll realize that he can't take this on all by himself. You're right, he's stubborn just like you, but I know he'll do what he needs to in order to heal."

"I'm so scared Mom. It hurts to see him in that much pain. I just want to hold him and kiss him and tell him that I'm okay."

A thoughtful look appeared on her face. "Maybe," she said slowly, "maybe you can. A few times, when the aftermath of my death took its toll on your father, I wanted so badly to let him know I was okay. So, I 'appeared' to him. In a dream."

Kurt's head flicked up, cheeks shining with tear tracks. "You can do that?"

"Yes. I did it for you too, but you probably don't remember."

"No, I do. It was a week after the funeral, and I was crying because I wanted you to read to me and then I kept having to tell myself that you were gone. And I had a dream that you told me that I was going to have to be strong and read on my own, and that you'd always be there with me."

A soft smile appeared on her face and a mist glazed over her eyes. "You do remember."

"So... can I do it?"

She sighed, taking his hand in hers. "There's a reason we don't appear in dreams very often. It's very draining, physically and emotionally. It's a hard thing to do and if it's not done right, you could end up making things worse."

"How can I do it?"

"I'll show you if you really want to, but not today. You're both too emotionally unstable right now."

She brushed her hand against his cheek to wipe away a tear and stood, peering into the basin. "Wes is with him. He's sleeping."

Kurt scrambled up to look too, and what he saw confirmed what she had said, though he wouldn't call tossing and turning and moaning sleeping.

"Come on," his mother said gently and wrapped her arm around his shoulder to lead him away.

She touched the water, and the scene vanished.

Kurt continued to return to the basin every day after that, to check in on his father, but he mostly watched Blaine. It might sound selfish, but Kurt spent more time watching his boyfriend than his dad. Maybe that was because he knew his dad had Finn and Carole, and he knew that Blaine, figuratively, had no one.

It hurt him to watch Blaine suffer and it hurt even worse when he understood *why* he was going through this pain. It was more than just sadness at Kurt's death, it was much more than that. It was guilt and self-hatred and agony that he inflicted upon himself with his thoughts and Kurt wanted more than anything to

help him. Every day he practically begged his mother to let him try to get into Blaine's dreams, but every day, his requests weren't granted.

He was staring into the water, watching Blaine have a conversation with Wes. Wes had just had a mini freak-out when he noticed Blaine was gone and had spent the past ten minutes searching for him, and eventually finding him sitting alone under a tree. Kurt chastised Blaine. He wasn't wearing a proper jacket or even a sweater. He was sitting there in his sweatpants and a t-shirt, as if he was lounging around studying. He was shivering and Kurt spoke aloud, telling him to get inside or else he'd freeze out there. He couldn't help the slight desperation that leaked into his voice, though he knew Blaine could not hear him.

Blaine held the library's copy of Goodnight Moon. He was cradling it tenderly and Kurt wanted to just reach out and hold his hand.

Wes had been taking care of Blaine, the best care he could give anyway. But it meant more to Kurt than words could say. Just knowing that there was someone there to look out for Blaine was comforting, even if he could do no more than hug him and try fruitlessly to get him to go talk to someone. He watched Wes follow Blaine inside and did a silent happy dance as Wes had gotten Blaine to agree to eat. He'd been yelling that exact plea every time he saw Blaine. He looked thinner. He didn't look like himself. It was heartbreaking.

"Please Mom." He begged, holding onto her wrist as he leaned across the table. They were eating lunch at the grand table that was filled twenty-four-seven with whatever food you could think of. But he didn't eat. "Blaine needs me. Wes just got him to eat. That's a big step. He's not refusing help. This could be a breakthrough. I need to tell him it's okay before he relapses and goes back into his cave of blame that he doesn't deserve to trap himself in."

Elizabeth looked over at her son, saw his eyes glossy with tears and determined hopefulness.

She sighed. "Alright. Yes, it would be dangerous to do when he's hurting so badly, so I suppose it's a good time." She drummed her fingers on the hard tabletop. "Well, eat something now. You need your strength for this."

He did as he was told without a word other than, "Thank you."

After she'd made sure he'd eaten enough, Elizabeth took her son by the hand and lead him to a pasture, where dazzling green grass spread out for miles. She whistled and two horses came out from the distance, their long manes and tails fluttering out behind them.

"This is faster." She explained, while pulling Kurt behind her and closer to the horses.

They stood absolutely still, hot breath fuming from their nostrils. Kurt stepped up hesitantly to the horse closest to him and stared, unsure.

"Here hon." His mom gave him a boost and he clamored up onto the horse, knees digging into the horse's side, hands tangled in the mane.

Elizabeth trotted up beside him. He'd gone stiff, afraid to move for fear of falling off. This horse was a lot taller than it looked from on the ground.

"Relax. Sit up straight. Aphrodite won't let you fall."

"Aphrodite?" Kurt repeated, trying to follow his mother's instructions.

"The horses out here are named for the gods and goddesses. This here," she patted her horse's mane, who whined happily, "is Cupid." Her eyes raked over her son, now sitting up as tall as he could manage. "Good. Let's go."

She cantered off and for a split second, Kurt almost called her back, as he didn't know what to do. But Aphrodite didn't need to be told. His horse followed alongside his mother's as if she knew where to go. All he had to do was hold on. And he began to relax, his muscles going slack and the initial fear dissipated.

These horses moved faster than any horse he'd seen on earth. Their hooves seemed to glide over the grass, and the surroundings that blurred past suggested they were going as fast, if not faster, than a car, and yet, the horses showed no sign of effort. None at all that showed that they were going any faster than a leisurely stroll.

After a little while, they began to slow, as Kurt realized not by feel, the ride had been much too smooth for that, but by the way that the trees around them came into focus. His mother dismounted and he did the same, giving his horse a loving pat on the neck. They trotted over to a stream and began to drink, whinnying contentedly. Kurt followed his mom, who had begun to walk through the trees. They had only

gone twenty feet when Kurt was face-to-face with the biggest tree he had ever seen in his life. *Huge* didn't even begin to cover it. The trunk was roughly the size of his bedroom on earth and it sprouted up more than twice as tall as his house had been. Thick, weaving branches cascaded above him, weighted with thousands upon thousands of perfectly shaped leaves, so dense he couldn't see the sky through them. It was cold in the shadow of the tree and he could only stare in wonder.

"It's something huh?" His mother elbowed him in the ribs, breaking his trance.

"Yeah."

She smiled at him and walked up to the trunk, pressing lightly in certain areas. "I haven't been here in so long, I wonder if... Ah! There it is." And she pressed her finger to a knot set at eye-level. She stood back and amazingly, the wood began to splinter. A crack, beginning at the forest floor, started shimmying up the trunk and then cut across horizontally and stopped suddenly. With a sound like a small pop, the cut-out section swung forward on invisible hinges.

It was dark inside and Kurt felt a chill ripple down his spine.

"I can't go in there with you honey, so I'm afraid you'll have to go alone. Do you still want to do this?"

He bit his lip for the briefest of seconds, and then he met her gaze and said without fear, "Yes. I have to."

She nodded. "Okay. There's nothing to be scared of. It's going to seem a bit frightening at first, but just relax and let the tree do its work."

"Sorry, but *its* work?"

"It's hard to explain. Sort of like... like a connection."

"So I need to be *plugged in*?"

"Sort of. Just sit on the chair. Once the connection is formed, your mind should go blank. You need to focus hard on whose mind you want to enter. Be very specific. Picture the person in your mind as best you can. You'll know if you've entered their dream. From there, you can control what you do within the dream. But it's very important that you know your limits. If you stay too long, you run the risk of losing yourself into the dream, and thus the person whose dreams you're visiting too."

"What happens to them?"

"They never wake up. They're lost in the dream world, at least, their minds are."

"You said *if* I enter their dream. What happens if I don't?"

"You'll know. Then you just pull your thoughts back to the tree and you'll wake up here."

Kurt bit his lip. He wasn't sure if this was such a good idea now. "What if I hurt him? What if he doesn't wake up?"

"You don't have to do this if you don't want to. But if it helps, I know that you'll make the right calls. From experience, it's easiest to know when to leave based on their movements. You'll be able to feel what they're doing in their sleep. With your father, it was his snoring. With you, it was your legs kicking. Everyone does something that you can feed off of. You'll know when it's time to leave."

He nodded, feeling slightly better. He took a deep breath. "Okay. I'm ready."

"Wes was taking him to the dorms earlier. I heard him talk to Finn on the phone for a bit as we were leaving. I'd bet he's asleep by now."

"If he's not?"

"Then come back out and we can wait until he does fall asleep. But he's exhausted honey. I'm sure he's asleep by now."

He gave a grateful smile to his mom and let his feet carry him inside the tree trunk, feeling a bit like he was about to enter some child's play tent. But inside, it was anything but child-like. It held only a simple chair, straight-backed and seeming as if it had been carved in one piece from the tree itself. The legs extended into the wood without a seam. Feeling a bit silly, he sat down on the chair as his mom had told him.

Immediately, branches uncoiled out of nowhere. They unfurled themselves and skated across the air, heading straight for him. They wrapped gently around his wrists and ankles and a thick branch ensnared his waist. His breathing quickened, but he did not struggle. Elizabeth had said to be calm. And he doubted very much that the tree would try and hurt him.

His eyes scanned around and he saw two thinner branches wiggling their way towards his face. He fought the urge to lean away as they pressed lightly against his temples, where a sticky substance was connecting them to his head. He felt warm all over and then his eyes rolled into the back of his head and his whole body went rigid for a moment. A bright light burst from behind his eyelids and he would have screamed in surprise had he been able to make a sound.

And then, he was seeing flashes. He saw flashes of his thoughts. He saw the tree and felt his fear. He thought of his mom. And he saw her, petting the horses by the stream. He thought of Blaine. And he saw him, asleep on his bed in the dorm. He relaxed and let his thoughts drift, closing out everything that wasn't Blaine.

He took a breath, concentrating hard on Blaine, and suddenly, he was *there*.

He saw Blaine lying on snow in his dream. He was breathing very shallowly, eyes closing. Kurt walked forward, feeling the familiar comfort of his favorite cashmere sweater on his skin. He knelt down beside Blaine and pressed his hand to his cheek. The man on the ground looked up and whispered Kurt's name.

Kurt smiled, removing his hand and offering it to him and pulling Blaine up. He hugged him so tightly. He wanted to say so many things, but the first thing he told him was, "I miss you."

He led Blaine through the warm fluffy snow, because somehow, he knew where he was going, and kept a hold on his hand the entire time, finally sitting down on a bench.

Blaine poured his heart out, telling Kurt things that broke his heart and asking questions that he had no idea how to answer.

"Why did you have to die?" Blaine's breath hitched.

Kurt let his gaze soften, seeing the tears in his boyfriend's eyes. "You're asking a lot of hard questions baby." He breathed.

Blaine told him he couldn't live without him. Kurt pressed a kiss to Blaine's temple and told him simply that he loved him. That was all Kurt could do. He could still love him. That would never change.

Blaine's fingers reached up and gripped at the material of Kurt's sweater, pulling him close in need. His lips were on Kurt's and Kurt could feel the warm tears that fell from Blaine's cheeks onto his own. Kurt

kissed him with more passion than he'd ever felt. Because he didn't know when he would get to again. Too soon, Blaine pulled away and they sat with their foreheads touching. Kurt could feel Blaine shift in his sleep, begin to toss and turn.

No. It's too soon.

Blaine closed his eyes and wound his fingers with Kurt's, telling him he loved him too.

And Kurt smiled, wanting so badly to stay, but knowing he had to leave.

He reluctantly took one last look at the sleeping man as he pulled out of the dream and pressed his hand to Blaine's cheek before reluctantly turning his thoughts back to the tree. And he was *there*.

Kurt was suddenly glad for the restraints of the branches, for he was sure he would have slid right out of the chair had he not had them there. The branches on his temples were gone, the stickiness of the bonding sap still warm on his skin. He took deep breaths, the tears he didn't know he'd cried drying on his cheeks. He carefully flexed his hand and the branch unwound from around his wrist, disappearing back into the darkness. He repeated that motion for all of the branches, though the one on his waist didn't leave. Instead, it lifted him up and half hoisted him to the door, which opened without him touching anything. Then it set him down gently on his feet. He felt the branch slither away from him and he took a step, instantly feeling his legs go weak and he stumbled forward with a soft moan.

His mom was there in a second, catching him and guiding him down to the grass. She laid him on his back and smoothed her cool hand across his brow.

"It's alright." She said calmly. "Deep breaths. The dizziness will go away in a little while. Are you thirsty?"

He nodded, realizing at once how dry his throat was. She pressed a small leather water skin into his hand, which held much more water than it looked capable of. He drank until he couldn't anymore and laid back on the grass, letting it form around him and sinking deeper as he waited for the world to stop spinning around him.

"I'm so proud of you." Elizabeth said above him, her hand still moving lightly over his brow.

He had seen Blaine. He had been with Blaine. He had held his hand. He had kissed him, told him he loved him.

And he smiled, the gentle tears of want and hopeless wishing falling down his cheeks.

49. The Looking Glass Part 2

A/N: This story obviously starts after Kurt's death, but I forgot to mention that it also has a lot of mentionings from previous chapters (for example, the dream in the first chapter was written about as Blaine was having the dream in chapter 31). So in earlier chapters, things are told from how Blaine's reacting to things, and now, it's Kurt watching those happen and his reactions to them. Don't know if it would help if you went back and skimmed, but if it does, by all means go ahead.

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Kurt had slept for a while after that and he awoke in his room without knowing how he got there. Well, his room in heaven that is.

Everything was decorated in shades of cream and pale blue and for a moment, he thought he was floating on a cloud. But that was just the bed, which was the softest he'd ever slept on and the thread count of these sheets that never got dirty or smelled or needed washing ever had ceased to amuse him because, well, he was in heaven and he was spending eternity here. He figured that he'd damn well have some comfy sheets if that was the case.

His eyes opened blearily and without thinking about it, he got up and immediately began the familiar walk up the path and the many stairs that lead to the 'temple,' as he had fondly grown to call it. He stared down into the basin, clearing his thoughts of anything except Blaine and lightly touched the unmoving water within.

The scene instantly swam into focus. He stared down lovingly at the dark-haired man who was reading a note in his hand. His eyes followed Blaine as he disappeared into the bathroom and stared into his reflection. Kurt sighed heavily. Blaine looked horrible. He was so pale and his eyes were ringed with dark circles. Blaine leaned against the sink and splashed water on his face and began to try to smooth down his hair.

Kurt wanted so badly to just hold him. A familiar aching sensation twisted in his stomach.

Blaine left the room and slowly moved across the hall to enter Wes's dorm. He watched as Blaine was enveloped in a hug and then led to a chair, where Wes was speaking to him, smiling as if nothing had changed. Good. If Kurt wanted to hold Blaine right now, he also wanted to hold Wes just as badly. To thank him for what he was doing for Blaine.

The hazel eyes were starting to dart back and forth and his hands were clenching in his lap. Kurt knew that look. He'd seen it once before and it hadn't ended well.

No baby. Don't do this to yourself. Please. They're just trying to help.

And he watched as Blaine bolted from his seat and flew out the door, leaving a very confused group of Warblers in his wake. Wes was after him immediately, telling the others to stay inside. Kurt had to physically stop himself from touching the water. Blaine's curled up form, shaking on the floor, was so close, so *real* that for a moment, Kurt thought that he could feel the heat radiating from his body.

Wes whispered something to him and Blaine began to breathe slower. His hands unfisted from the carpet. He stopped shaking. His panic attack was subsiding.

Kurt breathed a sigh of relief as Blaine sat up and Wes pulled him into a tight hug, then released him. And he almost leaned down to kiss Wes as he said what Kurt had been yelling in his head the entire time.

"I think it'd be... better for you if you went... back to Lima."

Good. Good. Burt and Carole can help him. Please, Blaine. You need help. You're too stubborn to accept it and you're too fragile to do this on your own. You need them.

"I can't go back."

Kurt groaned at the stiffness in Blaine's voice.

No no no no no. You need to! Please baby.

"Kurt?"

He'd been so engrossed in the scene in front of him that he hadn't noticed his mother lightly calling his name for the past few minutes. She now raised her voice to almost a shout and brought Kurt out of his trance. His head snapped up.

"Kurt, honey?"

He wanted so badly to keep watching. He had to know what Blaine did next. He *needed* to know.

But he forced himself to keep his eyes on his mother. She wore a disapproving look. He waited.

"Honey, can I talk to you?"

He straightened up, one hand protectively on the basin's edge.

"Outside?"

Oh. He took a longing glance back at the water, where Wes was sitting with Blaine, arguing slightly. He wanted to disobey, to keep watching, but he pulled his hand away and reluctantly cleared the water. His mother held out a hand and she wrapped it around his shoulders as she led him to the steps and sat down.

She sighed heavily and looked sideways at him. "This is a special place. Would you agree?"

She tilted her head back a bit and he knew she was talking about the temple.

"Yes." He breathed. This place was more sacred to him than any other place he'd ever known since he'd left his life on earth. There were so many places here, everything he could ever want, dream of, wish for. But there was only one place he needed to be able to go to. Here, he could see Blaine. Hear him. He hadn't gone back into Blaine's dreams only because he didn't want to mess something up and hurt him. His heart ached for him to go back, where he could actually talk to and touch and *feel* Blaine, but the risk of doing something wrong and hurting him forever was enough that Kurt stayed away and instead spent every moment he had here, safely watching.

"Do you notice how there's no other angels ever here?"

Kurt froze. He'd never heard his mom refer to them as 'angels' before and it made something within him hurt. It brought him back to this crushing reality, the fact that he wasn't a being of earth anymore, when

he'd been *so close* to Blaine just a moment ago. So close that he'd almost felt as though he was there with him, real and alive and a human on earth.

"I guess not." He whispered.

"There's a reason baby." Elizabeth whispered softly. "It... the Looking Glass, it's a very powerful thing. In more ways than one. You know what it can do and how amazing it is. But it's also powerful in another way. In a way that isn't good for you. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

He paused and shook his head. "No."

She put her arm around his shoulders again, holding him close to her. "Honey, the other angels don't come here anymore because it hurts too much. Seeing the ones they love back on earth and knowing that they can't be with them." Her voice grew lower, gentler. "It's hurting you Kurt."

He automatically pulled back. "I... it's..." He felt the flustered thoughts bubble up and he couldn't find the words. "I need to see him."

She couldn't tell him to stop looking. She couldn't. He wouldn't listen.

"I know you do. But-"

"You said yourself that you watched over me and dad!" Kurt countered, angry now. "You can't just take him away from me!"

"I did watch over you two, yes, but honey, you're spending way too much time here. I did look, but only for a little while. An hour at the most, maybe a few times a month. Baby, you're here almost all day every day. The Looking Glass can be a great thing, but if not used carefully, it can hurt more than help."

She couldn't do this. She couldn't.

"I need to know he's okay." He whispered brokenly, feeling his anger die down quickly.

Elizabeth sighed. Her hand fell from around his shoulders. "I know how hard it is Kurt. It was so hard to pull myself away, when I realized that it was hurting me more than I thought. They don't know that you

can see them and honey, you aren't going to be able to do anything for them. They can't get hurt from this, but you can. Please Kurt. I can't watch you do this to yourself."

Everything in his mind was telling him no. Don't agree to this. You can't just abandon him.

But he looked up at his mom and saw the faint sparkle of tears in her eyes and he knew this was really hurting her. So he sat up a little taller and nodded. "Okay mom."

She smiled and wrapped her arms around him. "I know that was difficult. And you can still come here, let's say once a week for an hour?"

He nodded into her shoulder, knowing full well that he wasn't going to comply. He had a plan.

The sky was a gorgeous shade of navy. There wasn't a cloud in sight and the air seemed so clear now. Stars, sparkling like diamonds, winked down at him, silently scolding him for what he was doing. But he didn't care. Screw the stars. Defy gravity. He was going to do this.

Kurt had thrown aside the covers on his bed and tiptoed as quietly as he could outside. He didn't bother bringing a jacket; he knew it would be warm outside. It was always warm here. But never uncomfortably hot, always just a gentle heat with a slight breeze when the sun sunk down behind the picturesque rolling green mountains.

He made it out of the house and he smiled. It hadn't been as hard as he'd thought. No booby traps, no hidden cameras, no lock on his door. He moved with bare feet down the familiar path.

He felt his heart jump with excitement as he approached the basin. Taking a breath, he closed his eyes and thought of Blaine.

And he was looking down on his father, who was kneeling in front of a distraught Blaine. He listened as his dad told Blaine that he was the best thing to ever happen to Kurt. And Kurt felt the tears well in his own eyes because every word he said was true.

"We can keep their memory alive and cherish the time we had with them, but blame and hatred are no way to remember the ones we loved."

Thank you dad. He can't blame himself.

The scene dissolved and suddenly he saw Finn and Blaine sitting together on the bed in the guest room. Finn was talking about the time that he'd been there when Kurt had been bullied.

He remembered that day. He'd been scared and he looked to Finn because his was the only kind face he could see after being shrouded in fear.

He listened. Finn felt guilty. He thought that Kurt hadn't known that he loved him.

I did Finn. I knew. I love you too.

And he heard them talking about the night he had died.

It was a difficult thing to hear. He'd remembered that he was talking to Finn and then it was hard to breathe and his heart was pumping so slowly.... And then he'd opened his eyes and he was *here*. It hadn't hurt at all, but he didn't remember most of it. Hearing what Finn remembered and what Blaine went through, that hurt.

He looked away. This did hurt.

But he was glad that had each other. He had seen Blaine suffer and he knew that going through this alone was only cutting deeper. He knew that they had to lean on each other. And he was glad that they were together now, glad that Blaine had finally went to get help, glad to see that he knew he couldn't do this alone.

The next time Kurt risked sneaking out again, he found himself looking down on a scene that he thought might just be it.

It. The time where he fell apart. The time where this became too much and he finally would heed his mother's warning.

They can't get hurt from this, but you can.

Blaine was singing. The sky was grey and heavy with thick, dark clouds. It was going to rain. Kurt could almost smell the rain in the air.

He was standing in front of a casket. His casket. Dark black stained wood with a mound of white lilies on the top.

It was weird. He knew that he, his body, was in that casket. But he couldn't feel it. He didn't feel any of the suffocating wood around him or the silent stillness of his form. No, he felt free. He was here.

But Blaine....

Blaine was singing, voice so raw, so hurt, so broken, so soft. *Somewhere Only We Know*.

The song itself was perfect, Kurt thought. And he was so proud of Blaine. So proud. He could see what this was doing to him, how much he was still aching inside. But he was so proud of him.

Kurt let himself become lost in Blaine's voice. It sent chills down his spine. He stared into those hazel eyes, red with tears, and fought the urge to press his lips to his cheek.

He was *right there*.

He knew then what his mom was talking about. Kurt knew that Blaine was beyond the place where he could reach out and touch him. And it was hurting him more than he could have thought possible.

He watched as Blaine turned and broke down, sobbing, with his hand on the casket.

Kurt's arms were shaking.

Blaine cried, pressed his forehead down onto his hand.

Kurt's shaking breaths tore from his lungs.

Blaine took deep breaths, his lips touching so lightly against the wood under his palm. "I'll never say goodbye to you."

Kurt wanted to throw up, his stomach twisted in a huge knot. *I won't either. Never.*

He closed his eyes and set his head on his arms, letting the shimmering tears fall for a long time. When he looked back up, Blaine was sitting in his room, alone.

Kurt choked back his tears and made himself watch. He needed to know that Blaine wasn't going to just let himself recede back into what he'd finally been able to escape.

And Mercedes walked in, handing him a drink and sitting down. She spoke softly and Kurt hung on to every word.

Then Mercedes began to sing.

Thank you. Thank you Mercedes. Thank you.

Blaine needed to know that he wasn't alone. And if there was anyone who was going to convince him of that fact, Kurt knew that it would be Mercedes Jones.

He'd made her promise that she would let Blaine know that he would be okay. Kurt knew that Blaine was strong and he knew that he was going to be past the point of dealing with this in a right state of mind. So he'd put everything he had into the two women he knew he could trust. Mercedes was one of them, and she'd done her job beautifully, just as Kurt knew she would.

Blaine flung his arms around her when she finished singing and Kurt wished so badly that he could do the same.

"Are you going to be okay?" She asked softly.

After a pause, Blaine answered and Kurt could tell that he wasn't lying to make her feel better. No, he was telling the truth and Kurt had never been so glad to have been able to know these two amazing people in his life.

"I think I am."

You will Blaine. You might not know it now, but you'll be okay.

Then Mercedes left and Kurt wanted to jump for joy. It was the first time in so long that he heard something other than utter agony in Blaine's voice.

A while later, Burt and Carole returned home and his gaze followed his stepmother. She went straight to Blaine's room and asked him if he was okay. The truthfulness in Blaine's voice made something in her face change and her voice sounded a bit different.

Kurt knew what she had decided. He watched when she left Blaine for a moment to quickly enter the master bedroom and duck into her closet. She pulled out two boxes and Kurt smiled, knowing what was inside.

Blaine looked confused when Carole placed them in his lap and explained what they were, but Kurt was anything but worried about it. He knew that this would help.

Carole left and Kurt waited for Blaine to open the first box, but he just stared at them. With a slightly heavy heart, he saw Blaine place them next to the bookcase and crawl in bed.

He'd wanted him to open them. But he understood that it would be a difficult thing to do.

So Kurt contented himself with watching Blaine sleep and his heartbreakingly miserable face softened into a dream-like calm.

The sun rose steadily, casting a pale pink glow when Kurt finally let himself go back home.

50. The Looking Glass Part 3

Christmas passed in a whirlwind of garlands, shining streamers, presents and cookies.

Kurt watched longingly as his family opened presents on Christmas morning. He wished he could be there with them.

Blaine had cried himself to sleep the night before, after excusing himself from the room to run to the comfort of the guest room. He had hugged a pillow to his chest and Kurt knew exactly what he was thinking about because his head was swimming with the same thoughts. Blaine had froze mid-sentence and Kurt saw his chest begin to heave. Blaine's eyes were glued on the radio and Kurt almost couldn't hear the song because of the pounding of his heart in his ears. But he took deep breaths and then he recognized the song, watched as Blaine curled up on his bed. The memory of last year, when Blaine had asked Kurt to sing Baby It's Cold Outside with him was running through his head, like a reeling movie screen. A soft, aching smile came to Kurt's lips. That song would forever be ingrained in his memory as the first song he sang with Blaine and how adorable he thought Blaine looked. It hurt that this was painful to Blaine, but Kurt knew that it was only because he was feeling the loss more. Kurt wished he would open the boxes.

But after some persuading from Carole, Blaine had opened all his presents on Christmas morning and Kurt was glad to see a smile on his face. And when he saw Blaine jump up and disappear, he was as curious as the rest of the family. When he saw his boyfriend reappear with his guitar, Kurt sighed contentedly. Blaine was going to sing for them. He was nervous, Kurt could tell by the way Blaine's hand gripped the neck of the guitar tighter and the way he licked his lips.

Go on. You can do this.

Blaine took a seat and began to strum his fingers against the strings. Kurt recognized the notes immediately. He was singing 'Not Alone.' Involuntary tears welled in his eyes as Blaine began to sing. He could hear the strength in Blaine's voice, the soft power, as if he'd been asleep for a very long time. And Kurt was proud of him.

He could see the way his father sat so still, a feat even Carole had seemed unable to accomplish. His father had what Kurt lovingly dubbed 'spider legs' because he couldn't stop moving. It was even hard to get him

to sit still for a movie. But Burt Hummel might as well have been a statue. And Kurt knew that Blaine was getting through to him.

Kurt felt bad. He felt so guilty. He'd been spending all of his time watching Blaine and hardly any watching the rest of his family. He'd just figured that they had each other, but he hadn't noticed how much this was affecting his father. He'd been torn apart.

Burt seemed to have aged ten years. The lines by his eyes seemed to be etched deeper, the skin under his eyes was dark, his lips seemed permanently drawn down in a slight frown, and the light-hearted laughter was gone from his eyes.

Kurt's gaze switched to Carole. She too, seemed more aged. Her eyes looked small and the skin on her cheeks seemed to sag a bit. She held Burt's hand tighter and rested her chin on his shoulder, smiling softly as Blaine sang.

Finn was, well, very much still *Finn*. But he too had changed. He looked pale, tired, the ghosting shadow of not having enough sleep showed in the slight bags under his eyes. He was staring at Blaine with a mixture of fascination, admiration, and hurt.

Blaine finished the song and let his eyes glance up to meet Burt's, as if worried that he'd overstepped some boundary. But Burt stood and wrapped him in a hug and Kurt's face broke out into a smile.

He was so proud of both of them. Blaine, for finding the courage to sing in the first place, and his dad, for accepting the gesture.

The next time Kurt was able to sneak away wasn't for another week. He had a feeling that his mother knew what he was doing, but she hadn't tried to stop him again, so he didn't say anything. He had tried to heed her warning, that the Looking Glass could hurt him more than it was worth, but Kurt just couldn't leave. Not yet. He couldn't stop looking until he knew that Blaine and his family were okay. So, he stepped up to the basin and dipped his finger in lightly, the immediate warmth from the water at his touch comforting.

Blaine was sitting on the ground, back up against the door, reading a letter that was smoothed up against his thighs.

Kurt began to panic. He saw the handwriting and knew it was his own. When had Blaine opened the boxes? Kurt was supposed to be there for that! He needed to know that Blaine wouldn't be hurt again. His eyes scanned the room quickly. He locked onto the dresser. One. Two. Three. Four.

Blaine had placed four of the items on the dresser. Where were the rest? Then he noticed a pile next to Blaine's hip. The box was empty. There was a small picture frame in Blaine's hand.

Blaine let the note and frame slip from his fingers onto his lap as he dropped his face into his hands.

No! No, baby, no. This is supposed to help. Don't cry. Please, please don't cry, Kurt begged him silently.

Kurt cursed himself. He was making Blaine hurt more. It was all his fault and his stupid idea. He'd made Finn watch P.S. I Love You with him the week that he'd decided he wanted to leave something for Blaine. Stupid, stupid, stupid. He should have known that it would take more than damn material things and obviously cutting memories to help Blaine. He should have known it would just remind Blaine of the things they wouldn't be able to see or do and it would hurt more. He should have-

Wait. Hold up.

Blaine wasn't crying.

Blaine. Was. Not. Crying.

He took composing breaths and sat up, then gathered the pile next to him and got up, arranging them carefully in a line on his dresser. Kurt watched, jaw slightly open, as Blaine sat on his bed and closed the lid of the box. There were no new tears on Blaine's face. He stood and set the empty box by his bed and then softly touched the corner of the picture frame and smiled.

He smiled.

Blaine *smiled*. A real smile.

Kurt couldn't believe it. His heart was calming down. Blaine was okay; he could see that now. He returned the picture frame to its place at the end of the line of items on the dresser and turned to head to the bathroom. Kurt heard the shower water turn on and for the first time in what felt like years, he touched the water, returning it to its glass-like state, and he felt relief.

Kurt had not expected this. Not at all.

And neither had David or Blaine apparently.

It was clear on Blaine's face. *What the hell is going on?*

Kurt almost wanted to laugh at the look of loathing that seemed so out-of-place on Blaine's beautiful face. But Kurt couldn't laugh. His breath was caught in his lungs.

Who was sitting on his bed?

The kid's eyes took in David, who had just noticed him and given him a look full of confusion, and then raked over to Blaine, who had not moved a muscle. His eyes darted away almost as soon as he caught Blaine's gaze and he chose to keep his eyes on David as he asked him if this was some kind of joke.

The kid looked nice enough, Kurt thought. Straight brown hair that brushed along his forehead, slight evidence of freckles on a small nose, skin not as pale as his own but still smooth, and a welcoming crease of the skin by his eyes as he smiled, showing straight white teeth. But the thing that stood out the most, was his eyes. Kurt had never seen eyes so green. It was like the kid had emeralds for irises, they sparkled and twinkled like the jewel.

He introduced himself to David and Kurt immediately repeated the name in his head.

Caleb.

Blaine took Caleb's hand hesitantly, the loathing look less prominent now, but indecision still etched on his face.

"Oh, and I'm gay."

Kurt heard *that* sentence quite clearly. His ears pricked. He leaned forward, studying the boy in Blaine's dorm. He actually *winked* as he explained that it's easier to announce that first.

Caleb looked relieved when Blaine said that he was gay too, though he noticed the way Blaine's voice shook. Caleb reddened when he stumbled over his words, the blush coloring his cheeks and making his eyes stand out even more when he looked down in embarrassment.

David left soon after that and Blaine was alone with Caleb.

Kurt watched as Caleb folded his long legs up to set a sketch pad on his thighs, holding a pencil in his hand as he watched Blaine, who was unpacking the boxes of his dorm stuff.

Caleb said something to Blaine that Kurt didn't hear, being too engrossed in watching for Blaine's reactions, the unsure look disappearing from his face. Caleb's laugh was a slightly scratchy sound, but it was real and appealing nonetheless. Blaine smiled lightly, laughing along with him.

They had a short conversation, and Kurt hung onto every word, making sure he didn't miss anything. There was a pang of jealousy that had lodged itself in Kurt's chest, but he had to admit that this Caleb kid was truly nice and very understanding.

Kurt sucked in a sharp breath when Caleb commented how lucky it was that this dorm was open, considering it's hard to find a room mid-semester with only one student. Blaine answered that he had had a roommate and Kurt didn't miss the audible pain in his voice. Neither did Caleb apparently because he waited a long time before cautiously asking what happened.

Blaine avoided the question as best he could, telling Caleb that he would tell him eventually, but not now. And Kurt was glad when Caleb didn't press the matter.

He watched as Blaine laid on his bed and closed his exhausted eyes as Caleb went back to his drawing. Kurt's heart was hammering. And he was sure Blaine's was too.

If happy little bluebirds fly

Beyond the rainbow

Why, oh why, can't I?

There were silent tears falling down Kurt's cheeks as he watched Blaine sing.

He'd been so surprised when he found himself looking down at the Carmel High School auditorium, where he knew Regionals was being held this year. But it wasn't really what he saw that surprised him. No, it was what he heard.

The beats had been much slower, the notes soft and so unlike what they'd been practicing for months. Why did they slow it down? It wasn't-

And then Blaine had begun to sing.

It had been a completely different song. They'd changed songs.

They'd *changed songs*.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow. Definitely not the pop mix they'd been practicing last time Kurt heard the Warblers sing. He didn't know why they'd decided to change songs. The first thought that popped into Kurt's head was that it was idiotic and stupid and they were going to lose now and how could they do this? This competition was everything. If they won, they went to New York. If they lost, they went back to singing at nursing homes. Kurt knew how much this meant to all of them. Why, why, *why* had they done this?

But then Kurt's brain stopped firing off questions. He stopped everything. He stopped breathing. He could only stare, transfixed in amazement, at Blaine. And then he didn't care why they'd changed songs. He didn't care if Blaine started singing the theme song from Barney. Blaine's voice was... angelic. There was no other word to describe it. The way he sang, made Kurt's heart stutter and his mind go blank because all he could do was listen to the words Blaine sang. There were tears streaming down Blaine's cheeks and Kurt was sure there were tears in the rest of the Warblers' eyes too, but he couldn't take his eyes off of Blaine to see if that was true.

Blaine was beautiful. And Kurt didn't care that they'd changed songs.

When Blaine finished and the last note fell away to thunderous applause, the curtain dropped and Kurt lost Blaine, only because he'd been engulfed in so many arms as every Warbler pressed in as they hugged each other. Kurt smiled.

I'm so proud of you.

Kurt learned a lot in the week that followed the Warblers second place victory at Regionals.

Caleb was probably the best friend Blaine could have right now. Blaine still hurt, Kurt could see that clearly and he knew that he wouldn't want someone else to know what was going on with him. He bottled his emotions until they exploded. Kurt wanted so badly for Blaine to open up to Caleb, to tell him what had happened.

Kurt learned that Caleb was a transfer from Taylor Day. And he didn't like to talk about what had made him switch schools. Blaine and Caleb were alike in that way, not wanting to tell others things that had happened. He had told Thad that he'd transferred because his parents "had the money." Liar. There was a slight pause before that sentence and he'd smiled softly as he said it, not giving anyone reason to believe that it wasn't true. But Kurt had heard the sharp intake of breath, seen the slight widening of his eyes. And he knew that Blaine had seen it too. They both had secrets. And it was only a matter of time before one of them caved. Kurt just hoped with everything that he had that Blaine was at least sitting down when the dam broke.

Kurt learned that Caleb was patient and empathetic. Kurt had been watching helplessly as Blaine struggled in the depths of a nightmare for twenty minutes. Blaine hadn't had a nightmare since that night in the dorms so long ago. Kurt couldn't watch him go through this, not again. And yet, he couldn't tear his eyes away. He was staring wide-eyed as he saw him thrash and moan. Twice, Kurt had to stop himself from reaching out and touching him. No, touching the water. But he was *right there*. He was so close and Kurt wanted to hold him, to tell him it was going to be okay. Kurt begged someone to help him and as Blaine began screaming, Caleb was there, shaking him awake and holding him still. Kurt breathed out a sigh of relief as Blaine's panicked eyes focused on the calming green ones above him. Blaine groaned and Kurt knew he was angry at having a nightmare again. Caleb started to go back to his bed, but Blaine called him back. He watched as Caleb crawled under the blankets with Blaine and laid there with him. Caleb reached up and draped the blanket over Blaine's shoulder as he began to fall back asleep. Kurt's heart ached. He wanted so badly to take Caleb's place, to be there for Blaine, to hold him and tell him he loved him.

Kurt learned that Caleb was observant. Blaine was balancing a tray on which rested a glass of orange juice and a plate of toast with a grapefruit and set it down on a table as he followed Caleb to a place in the dining hall that was mostly empty. Kurt heard his own name and he tensed immediately, wondering what Blaine's reaction would be.

"Who's Kurt?" The green eyes glanced up curiously as he took a bite of bacon.

"Just... just a friend." Blaine's voice was ever-so-slightly higher pitched, as it was when he was lying.

And apparently Caleb had figured that out. A 'don't-pull-that-crap-with-me' look came over his face as he asked, "Are you sure about that?"

"Boyfriend then. Okay?" Blaine's voice was now louder, more forceful. He was done talking about this.

Blaine got defensive at the next set of questions and Kurt wanted to shake him to make Blaine realize that he was being stupid. Caleb could help him and he was closing him out.

Tell him! Tell him baby. Please. He'll understand. Don't close yourself off.

Caleb stood up as fast as Blaine did. "I care about you, Blaine. I think you've known for a while. But it hurts me that I can't do anything about why you're so upset."

Blaine didn't answer and Kurt felt as though he'd just had the wind knocked out of him. Caleb liked Blaine. Why hadn't he seen it earlier? He'd just assumed that Caleb was being nice, friendly. He hadn't thought that he would fall for Blaine. Then another thought made him freeze. Blaine hadn't been letting him in at all. Was it because he just didn't want to be reminded of the pain of losing Kurt or was it because he was feeling isolated because he'd developed new feelings that made the guilt crash down over him?

Did Blaine like Caleb?

Kurt sighed. Blaine had always been good at hiding his emotions from others and Kurt had always been able to think that he knew his boyfriend well enough to read him like a book. But this was one thing Kurt hadn't seen coming. Blaine hadn't given any sign that he felt something for Caleb. Kurt had chalked his defensiveness and anger and everything else up to still grieving. But what if there was something else?

He knew this would happen eventually. He'd known somewhere deep down that Blaine wasn't going to be alone forever. And he didn't want him to be alone. Caleb would be good for Blaine, he could see that. But it still hurt. But he wanted Blaine to be happy, to not feel like he was letting him down or anything. Caleb could make Blaine happy. That was all Kurt wanted.

Caleb had convinced Blaine to take a walk with him and they were currently making snow angels. Kurt had never seen the appeal in them; he'd rather not have his clothes soaked and covered in snow and who knows what else has been on that ground, thank you very much. But he could see it now. The way Blaine was smiling and laughing, the way he looked so carefree and alive and Kurt wished he would have made a snow angel with Blaine.

Caleb had told Blaine that he was sorry and that he wanted to help him. Kurt believed him. He just wished that Blaine would let him in.

Grinning a smile that crinkled the corners of his eyes, Caleb teased Blaine about how his snow angel was the better one. Blaine's jaw dropped dramatically and he promptly tossed a handful of snow in Caleb's face, who smiled wickedly and retaliated.

By the time the snow fight was declared a truce, both boys were soaked and shivering, but their cheeks were flushed and they were laughing. The walk back to the dorm was almost silent and Kurt could picture them thinking of hot chocolate, a warm shower, and blankets. He noticed Blaine kept glancing to the side at Caleb. Maybe he did it without realizing he did, but Caleb didn't miss the glances.

"You know, my kisses taste better when my lips aren't frozen."

Blaine immediately reddened and looked down, shoving his hands deeper into his pockets as he stumbled over his words.

"No need to apologize. If you wanted a kiss, you just had to ask." Caleb grinned and Kurt saw Blaine's face change one second flat.

He chewed the inside of his cheek and Kurt knew he was thinking. It would hurt, Kurt knew that. But he wanted Blaine to be happy. And if Caleb made him happy, then Kurt was happy for him. For them.

Blaine stopped walking, the toes of his shoes digging into the snow. He swallowed hard and then looked up, and Kurt could see the desperation flash in his eyes. He knew what he was going to do and Kurt steeled himself for it.

"Yes."

Caleb had gone a few feet ahead of Blaine before realizing he'd stopped and turned at his voice.

"Yes?" There was hesitation in that word, as if Caleb wasn't sure if he'd heard right.

But Blaine nodded and then Caleb turned all the way around, closing the distance between them in long strides and immediately cupping Blaine's jaw in his hands and kissing him.

Kurt felt like he'd just jumped into a swimming pool filled with ice. No, not jumped. Pushed.

The shock on Blaine's face was there for a moment and then he rocked forward on his toes and wrapped his arms around Caleb's neck and Caleb's hands were running gently through Blaine's un-gelled, snow-soaked hair.

Kurt clenched his hand. It did hurt. He knew it would, but he had to let Blaine go. And if he was honest with himself, he couldn't have planned for someone as caring and understanding and everything Blaine needed right now to come into his life.

But Blaine wasn't kissing him anymore. He shoved Caleb back as far as he could and began to yell at him not to touch him. Caleb froze with hurt and confusion, but he held his hands up to show that he wasn't going to come closer.

"I'm not. I'm not. Blaine, it's-"

Blaine don't do this. Please. Don't do this to yourself.

Kurt watched, unable to do anything, as Blaine tore off through the snow, back the way they had come.

Blaine! Go back! Don't leave him. He doesn't want to hurt you. Please, Blaine, let him in!

Kurt was practically sobbing as he yelled at Blaine, knowing he couldn't hear him. Blaine kept going until he reached the choir room, flung open the door and slammed it closed behind him. He dropped down onto one of the stairs and held his head in his hands and let the tears begin to fall.

He was shaking so badly, Kurt knew this was really upsetting him. He cried and cried as he sat alone in the choir room.

Please go back to him. Caleb will understand. Just tell him baby. Tell him.

Blaine threw his vibrating cell phone across the room, where it smashed into the wall, separating back cover from the phone and sending the battery flying. Kurt winced.

Blaine cried for a long time, until his tears ran dry. Then he picked up the pieces of his phone and made his way back to the dorm. When he lifted his head up, Kurt could see the change on his face. His eyes were hard with determination, his jaw set in courage.

He was going to tell Caleb what happened.

There had been tears and whispered words and aching silence and trembling breaths, but Blaine had finally told Caleb everything. And Kurt wanted to jump for joy that Blaine had confided in him. And Caleb did understand, just as Kurt knew he would. He knew Caleb would be sympathetic and not pressuring at all, but he hadn't expected Caleb to *really* understand. But he did.

Because Caleb had lost someone too.

His brother had committed suicide and Kurt's heart almost stopped in his chest. He never knew. Caleb had never said anything or even done anything that let on that he had lost a brother. But after he told Blaine what had happened, Kurt knew that Caleb would be able to help him in more ways that he initially thought. They were both hurting, they both needed support, and they could be there for each other.

Kurt almost felt bad for eavesdropping on this conversation, because it was so personal. But once he started listening, he couldn't stop.

He listened to Caleb pour his heart out and then console Blaine, telling him that he would be there for him if he wanted and that he was sorry he kissed him if it made him hurt more. And Kurt knew Caleb was telling him the truth. Kurt wanted Caleb to be there for Blaine.

He wanted Blaine to be okay.

51. The Looking Glass Part 4

Oh shit. Oh shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.

Kurt was freaking out.

Now, it must be known that Kurt does not curse. He did not curse on earth and he wasn't about to make a habit of it in this place. He still refused to call it heaven, though there really was no other explanation. He supposed he kind of had to believe in heaven now, but he still had no proof that a higher being existed here, or anywhere. Or a magical flying teapot that housed an evil dwarf that shot lighting out of its boobs. He'd looked. No evil dwarf.

However, Kurt was one to make exceptions, like the time he wore the previous year's Marc Jacobs cardigan because it went with the rest of his outfit. That was an exception.

And he was making one now.

His hands were pressed flat against the smooth edges of the basin. This could not be happening.

He knew it wouldn't help anything. He knew that no one, except his mother and he had silently thanked the evil dwarf that she wasn't within earshot, would be able to hear him. But it made him feel a bit better.

"Shit!"

Remembering that other angels did in fact walk by here, though no one came in, he was still in a place with no walls, only drop-dead gorgeous columns, which did absolutely nothing when you wanted to be quiet. He looked around quickly and lowered his voice to a hiss.

"Go. Back. Home."

Finn had honorable intentions. Really, he did. And Kurt could even see why he was doing this. But Kurt wanted nothing more in this moment than to be able to reach out and shove Finn as hard as he could and yell at him a bit.

Probably more than a bit, but he would take what he could get.

Unfortunately, this wasn't one of those 'you've been a good boy, so you can go on earth for a few minutes' deals.

Kurt had his eyes locked on Finn, who was driving a bit stiffer than usual, mumbling to himself and narrowing his eyes. He quickly pulled his thoughts away from Finn and concentrated on Blaine.

The scene dissolved and Kurt was looking at Blaine from behind. No, really, he was. Not like *that*. Admittedly, he did sneak a peek at his lovely boyfriend's lovely behind, but it's not like he could see much anyway and he was here for more important reasons.

The dorm room had been rearranged. Kurt knew it must be Trent's based on the posters on the wall and the overall cleanliness. The sofa had been shoved up against one wall, now occupied by David and Nick. Thad and Josh sat on the floor with their backs up against the bed, where Blaine and Trent sat cross-legged, the latter occasionally 'accidentally' kicking Josh's shoulder with his foot. Every boy held a video game controller except for Nick, who had a huge bowl of popcorn in his lap and would amuse himself by tossing pieces at unsuspecting dorm mates.

Kurt was right behind Blaine. He felt like he might be able to feel the cotton sheets as if he were sitting there too. But Kurt was too worried to enjoy this.

"Blaine!" he hissed in his ear, knowing it would do no good. "Blaine, you're so happy right now and I hate to do this, but Finn is coming and he's pissed and I really wish I could warn you right now," Kurt ended in a low moan, wanting to just wrap his arms around Blaine and hold him.

Kurt could only hope that Wes would be able to hold Finn off, calm him down, make him go back home. It was a feeble hope, but it was all he had.

Jeff hopped down the hallway and leaned in the doorway. Nick turned his head, everyone else too engrossed in the game to notice the newcomer, and smiled at his friend, chucking a handful of popcorn at his face. Jeff grinned and hung more in the doorway, stretching out his neck to snag popcorn pieces from the air in his mouth. Then he stopped. He froze mid-chew, a puzzled look on his face.

"What's up?" Nick asked, glancing down at the half-empty bowl. "Too much butter?"

Jeff pulled himself back from the room and leaned out into the hallway instead. Ears pricked in a trained way, he tilted his head and stared down the hall.

Nick stood, setting aside his popcorn, and stepped up to the door.

"What is it?"

Jeff turned his head back towards his friend, but his ears were still poised to listen as far as he could. "Do you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Nick leaned out of the door and assumed the same position that Jeff had, complete with the puzzled look.

Voices. Getting louder. Downstairs? A voice they knew. And one they didn't.

As the boys strained to hear, suddenly, they didn't need to anymore.

"It doesn't matter how I know him!"

They looked at each other. They couldn't place the voice; it definitely wasn't a Warbler, but by the way he was yelling, the kid had a set of lungs on him. And he was clearly pissed.

It was impossible for everyone not to hear the shouts coming from downstairs. Trent cursed as he realized that looking up had made him drive his car off of the road and he had lost. But no one else even noticed. They all looked at each other and then they glanced towards the door.

All curious, they didn't see Blaine's hands tense on the controller or they way his eyes widened.

"Who is that?" Josh asked as he stood, dropping the controller to the floor.

"No clue, man. But he sounds pissed."

Everyone started gravitating towards the door. Everyone except Blaine.

"What matters is that Blaine screwed everything up and he never even cared!"

Every eye in the room suddenly flashed to Blaine, who had not moved. The only thing that changed was that he was now considerably paler than usual and he looked a bit sick.

As if some 'inner Warbler sense' had snapped them all to action, the boys all darted at the same time, heading down the hall. Blaine jumped up and ran as fast as he could. He made it to the middle of the pack when they all stopped and stared down at the source of the racket, yelling things at the unknown person.

Blaine was silent, his hands gripping the railing, eyes locked at the figure who suddenly noticed all the people who lined the upper level.

Finn turned his gaze, so full of hatred and anger, up and immediately locked onto Blaine.

"Blaine!" he cried. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Finn! Stop it! Stop, please!

"Knock it off! Who the hell are you anyway? You can't just come in here and start yelling at people-"

Caleb had spoken and Kurt silently thanked him for defending Blaine, but it was short-lived.

"I'm Kurt's brother," Finn snarled.

"I'm sorry about Kurt. I really am. But you can't just come in here and wake up the entire dorm!"

It was hard to pull his gaze away from this scene, but Kurt's eyes traveled up the stairs and to the railing, where Blaine was still gripping the polished wood so tightly in his hands, the look on his face so hurt, that Kurt now found it difficult to look at either scene.

"I did care Finn. I do care. I care about him more than anyone. Why are you saying I don't?"

The pain in Blaine's voice made Kurt's heart stutter. Dark, curly hair spilled over Blaine's pale forehead, making his eyes look wider and more scared.

"It hasn't been two months since his funeral. And you're over here getting with another guy? How the fuck could you be so heartless-"

Kurt understood where Finn was coming from. But he had forgiven Blaine. He needed him to move on. And there was no way for Kurt to make Finn understand right now.

"Hey!"

Kurt's heart soared at the sound.

Caleb was drawing himself up taller, yelling as loud as he could, "You don't even know-"

"Who the fuck are *you*?"

Caleb's voice was stronger as he said his name loud and clear. Kurt could see the wheels turning in Finn's brain, knowing he'd heard that name before. And then it clicked.

Finn was dangerous. He looked so menacing and so full of rage, something Kurt had never seen before. He knew that Finn was only doing this because he loved him, but he just wanted him to stop.

Finn's voice lowered to a harsh whisper, one that was almost more terrifying than the yelling had been. "Do you know who you're dealing with?"

Caleb took a step back, his words coming out in a rush. "I didn't mean for it to happen, honestly. It was one kiss-"

Finn froze. His face fell. It was heartbreaking.

"You kissed him?" And the pain in his words made Kurt utter a soft sigh.

Finn, it's okay. I know Blaine loves me and I know how hard this is, but you need to understand. Please.

Kurt was staring at the scene, trying to take in everything at once. And then, he was snapped out of his thought as Finn shoved Caleb to the ground and towered over him, screaming.

"Who the hell do you think you are to kiss someone whose boyfriend hasn't been dead two months?"

Blaine had been holding onto the railing as if his life depended on it, tears streaking down his face. But now, he tore down the stairs and fell to his knees beside Caleb with blubbing murmurs of 'are you okay?' and 'I'm sorry.'

"Blaine, you told me you loved him! It was all a lie! You never cared about Kurt!"

That statement killed Kurt. It hurt so much that Finn didn't understand. He didn't know how much Blaine loved Kurt and he didn't know that Kurt knew it too. He didn't know that he was making this worse. And his words hurt Blaine too, because he slowly stood, a look of agony in his eyes.

"I loved Kurt more than I loved anything in this whole world. Finn, you know that! How can you say I didn't care about him? His death-" and Kurt could see a flash of the pain that had taken over Blaine's life those weeks that followed his funeral, "-almost destroyed me. And you didn't see the worst of it." His voice was soft, not wanting to remember that pain. "A week, I was here, hardly eating, not sleeping, snapping out at everyone and getting lost in my own anger and hurt. It still hurts Finn! It's always going to hurt."

Blaine was begging Finn to understand and Kurt was silently there with him.

Please, Finn. Please.

Finn paused for barely a second and then his jaw tightened and his eyes hardened. "Seems like you got over it real quick."

Kurt groaned. *Finn. Stop it right now.*

Blaine's mouth opened and he looked like he just got punched in the stomach. It was eerily silent in the room. Blaine seemed to shrink back a bit and looked away from Finn. It was then that he seemed to notice all of the people who crowded around the second story, looking down on the scene.

"Can we talk about this somewhere else?" Blaine said, his voice a whisper, trying to look anywhere but the wide eyes of the students lining the balcony.

Finn's eyes narrowed and then he looked around. "Yeah, I guess," he grumbled.

"Everyone back to bed! And if I catch anyone out of the dorms, I'll send you straight to the dean. Got it?"

Kurt had to smile at David's declaration. David was generally kind of quiet and the person who was everyone's friend, but he could be mean when he had to and he'd gotten the message across because every student was now trooping regretfully back to their dorms.

With everyone gone, this left Finn, Blaine, Wes, and Caleb. Silence echoed in the hall. Kurt was right beside Blaine. He had to stop himself from reaching out and wrapping his arms around the boy, he was so close. Blaine suddenly looked very tired, and so achingly sad that Kurt automatically hummed softly in his ear in the comforting way he used to.

"Finn, what are you even doing here?" Blaine's voice was so soft. He was done fighting and Kurt didn't blame him in the slightest.

"This one told me you were with another guy." Finn pointed his finger accusingly at Wes, who tried to defend himself and then Finn interrupted and rounded on Caleb.

"What are you even doing with him?" He glared at the green-eyed boy as he posed the harsh question to Blaine, who was silent. Kurt could see the indecision in his eyes. He had no idea what to say to Finn and Kurt knew that this was hurting him more.

"Back off!" Kurt heard Caleb growl and when he took a step forward to put himself slightly in front of Blaine, Kurt smiled so softly. Caleb was protecting Blaine without even thinking about it. "You don't know anything about me so don't go making assumptions you can't prove."

"You kissed him. You knew who he lost and you did it anyway!"

Caleb was at a loss for words, wanting to make Finn understand just as much as Blaine and Kurt did, but not knowing how to get him to stop being accusatory.

"Finn! Stop it!"

Blaine's voice was louder than it had been since the group had been left alone in the room. He turned his gaze on Finn, desperation flashing in his eyes.

"It's true. Caleb's not lying."

Kurt saw Finn's face change, maybe finally taking in Blaine's tone, and the hardness in his eyes began to disappear. Blaine asked Wes and then Caleb to leave, the latter of which was very reluctant to do so.

"Caleb, please," Blaine whispered, and that alone was enough to make Caleb give up and head back to the room, but not before throwing an icy stare towards Finn.

Kurt watched as Blaine walked over to the couch, with Finn following slowly. Finn seemed to curl in on himself, the battle lost. Or maybe he'd screamed out all of his anger. Either way, Kurt's brother's features had softened and he no longer looked like he wanted to punch something, or someone for that matter.

"Finn, I'll never, ever, stop loving Kurt. I'll always love him. Please, you know that. You *have* to know that." The desperate tone had seeped into Blaine's words again and Kurt involuntarily felt his heart soar at hearing those words on Blaine's lips, no matter how he said them. Blaine loved Kurt. Always.

I love you too.

Blaine kept his gaze on Finn's, practically sending laser beams out his eyes, he was staring so intently at him. He was begging him to understand.

"I know you do Blaine. I know. I know you loved him more than anything."

And Kurt knew that Finn was going to start listening. He knew that he could begin to accept this. Blaine sighed deeply, as if clearing every painful thought from his body.

"You have to understand that Caleb didn't do anything wrong. He's trying to help me. He really is and..." Blaine licked his lips, fumbling for the right words, "I like his company and the way I feel when I'm with him."

Finn was silent for a moment and then he asked, "Do you like him more than Kurt?"

And Kurt swore that if he could die again, he might just do that. His heart was no longer beating in this perfect body, but right then and there, he felt that his heart would have stopped at the expression on Blaine's face.

Blaine immediately paled, stared at Finn with wide, glossy eyes. He let out a painful breath through his nose and closed his eyes for a moment. Kurt could almost feel his chest constricting and his throat closing up. "Don't. Don't even... Finn, please," he whispered, unable to get the words out.

"I just need to know." Finn's voice was stronger, demanding an answer in the least-demanding way possible, looking up at Blaine and waiting.

He was silent for a long time, then Blaine met Finn's gaze and swallowed hard. "I could never love anyone more than I loved Kurt. I saw him the first day he snuck into Dalton, standing on those stairs and I just knew that we were supposed to be together."

Kurt smiled at that. He knew it too.

"And after we were together, I never thought anything would drive us apart. But it did."

Kurt frowned as Blaine's breathing hitched and he noticed soft tears on his cheeks.

"I don't even know if what I feel for Caleb is real. But he's making me happier than I've felt in.... in so long... and he's making the hole in my chest throb less. And I think I really do like him. I don't know what I'm going to do now. But he will *never* take Kurt's place. I'll always love him. Always."

Always.

Kurt smiled again, softly, and tore his gaze away from Blaine to look at Finn, who sighed and was quiet for a while.

"Finn?" Blaine asked hesitantly.

The gangly teen looked up and Blaine explained that he wished he could have told Finn about Caleb himself and that he thought he knew why he was having a hard time dealing with this.

His answer surprised both boys.

"You think I came here because I want to protect Kurt by not letting you be with anyone else?"

Blaine answered this with his own softly spoken question, the confusion evident, "Didn't you?"

"I just wanted him gone. Caleb. I don't know why, but I thought that if he left, everything would go back to how it was supposed to be."

Kurt listened eagerly to their conversation, wanting to hug both of them so tightly that the air was squeezed out of their lungs.

Finn was telling Blaine that it was okay to give Caleb a chance, but Blaine seemed reluctant. Kurt knew it was because he still felt guilty and he had all of that guilt brought to the surface once more with everything that Finn had yelled earlier. He thanked him though, and offered to have Finn stay the night because it was now pouring rain.

Kurt missed the rain. This place was beautiful, he gave it that, but being beautiful had its drawbacks. It never rained. Or snowed. Or hailed. Or gusted wind, or sweltered heat, or anything other than pleasant and calm. Kurt wished it would rain. He strained his ears, listening for the sound of the water drops splashing against the pavement behind the grand windows at Dalton, swearing he could hear a crack of thunder.

Kurt closed his eyes. He was tired. He had no idea how long he'd been out here, but it was dark now. The stars were out, twinkling and shining down upon him. Not a single rain cloud in sight.

He glanced back down at the scene before him. All three boys were curled up in their beds, or in Finn's case, the pull-out couch, and a satisfying calm had drifted over them. Kurt smiled and let his hands drop from the side of the basin. The Finn fiasco had ended. He let out a breath of relief and contented himself with watching Blaine sleep for a while, then he finally let himself clear the water and head back home.

52. The Looking Glass Part 5

"Kurt?"

The boy shifted in his sleep, rolled over and pulled the covers up tighter around him.

"Kurt. Baby, you need to wake up."

"Mmmfph." Kurt grumbled, squeezing his eyes tighter. He was having such a good dream.

A hand on his shoulder. Shaking him.

"Baby, wake up. You need to wake up." The voice was louder, more insistent.

He groaned and opened his eyes, blinking in the soft light. His mom was staring down at him with an expression on her face that he couldn't quite place at the moment.

"What's going on?" he croaked out groggily, licking his dry lips and running his hands through his hair.

Elizabeth paused for a moment, indecision etched on her features. Then her gaze turned sympathetic.

She sat down next to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Honey, I know that I told you that the Looking Glass was hurting you and that you shouldn't go there anymore and I know that you have been going anyway-" she paused for the briefest moments here and raised her eyebrows slightly, "-and I've accepted that. I haven't tried to stop you, even though I know I should. And I didn't think I'd be saying this, but I was there this morning and I don't know why I did it, but I went to go check on Blaine and-"

Kurt sat totally upright in bed, face pale. "What? What happened?"

She stood and said, "You need to go to the Looking Glass."

Kurt's stomach dropped. He hadn't been able to go to the temple yesterday. What had happened to Blaine? He was up and running before he could even think.

His bare feet pounded on the flawless stone of the floor as he ran. He felt his mother somewhere near him, but he couldn't look anywhere but forward, towards the temple. Towards the basin. Towards Blaine.

This short journey took much too long in Kurt's opinion and when he finally skidded to a stop, all he had to do was barely touch the water. Every thought coursing through his brain was Blaine.

And he saw him.

It was raining gently, the clouds darkening the scene, but Kurt could clearly see Blaine kneeling in what was quickly becoming mud. He was shaking, the hood of his jacket pulled up around his face, hiding himself from the world inside this little cocoon.

Kurt did not need to be told he was crying. He couldn't see what Blaine was kneeling in front of, but his heart ached.

Blaine was whispering, so quiet it was hard to hear over the steady fall of the rain and the random rumbles of thunder.

"I'm sorry honey. I just thought you should know. I saw another boy with him earlier telling him that he should-"

Kurt barely even heard what his mom was saying. It was white noise in the background. He leaned in, so close, to the water and strained to hear against the roaring wind.

"I love you Kurt," Blaine's whisper trembled. "I miss you so much it hurts."

Kurt let out a soft sigh, closing his eyes briefly. When he opened them, he realized Blaine had shifted a bit, and he could now see what had Blaine so upset. It was Kurt's gravestone. His own gravestone.

The moan that fell from Kurt's lips was almost inaudible. The tears filled his eyes immediately. His mother's warm hand was on his back, but he made no move to show that he even felt it.

He kept his eyes glued on Blaine as he struggled to make out what he was saying.

"I met someone Kurt. Caleb. He's been helping me a lot. I don't know what to do." Blaine's words were coming faster now and Kurt's nose was centimeters away from the water. "I could never love anyone more

than I loved you. But I know that I like him. I can feel it and it scares me. Finn... he said all of the things that I was thinking but was too scared to let myself handle. It's only been two months and I don't even know how I can be feeling what I feel. Caleb is a good friend, and he cares about me. And he understands. He knows most of what I'm feeling and it's... I don't know... nice to have someone who I can talk to. I know that there's something there though. I know we would be good for each other. And I know he wants more than friendship, even though he says he just wants to help... I don't want to be alone." The last words were so quiet, Kurt wasn't sure he'd heard right. The tears were streaming down Blaine's cheeks and the wind had blown his hood off his head, exposing the unruly curly hair as the rain steadily stuck his hair to his forehead and neck. Kurt had his hands pressed against his cheeks, trying desperately to catch his tears before they fell in the water and distorted the scene.

"But I don't know if I can do this." Blaine lifted his head and then his voice was louder and Kurt jumped at the sudden sound. "I need you Kurt. Tell me what to do. Please! I need you." His voice was desperate and Kurt sobbed.

I can't. I can't Blaine. I'm so sorry. I can't.

Blaine let his hand fall from the cool marble of the headstone and wrapped his arms around himself, rocking back and forth as his head hung forward and he sobbed.

And suddenly, the scene went blank.

Kurt shot up, red-ringed eyes locking on his mother, who was withdrawing her hand from the basin.

"What are you doing?" he cried and thrust his hand forward towards the water, hit with a desperation he hadn't felt before.

"You don't need to see this Kurt." Her arms wrapped around him so he couldn't reach the basin.

"No!" he untangled himself from her grasp and stumbled back a few steps, chest heaving with sudden emotion.

Elizabeth froze, letting her hands fall slowly to her sides. She took a step forward.

"I shouldn't have told you. I'm sorry-"

"You think by not seeing it you could somehow 'protect me'?" Kurt's voice rose. "I love him mom! I know he's hurting and I need to make sure he's okay!"

"Kurt, this is poison! It's like a drug to you! I see what it's doing to you and I never should have showed you. And bringing it up now just made it worse. I should have stopped you when I knew that you were sneaking out at night." Her words matched her son's in volume. She moved forward, holding out her hands.

Kurt stared straight into her eyes. "Go."

Elizabeth recoiled slightly at the harshness in her son's tone.

"Kurt, I just-"

"Just go. Please." Kurt turned his head, wrapped his arms around himself.

Kurt barely felt his mother brush his shoulder as she went past him. When he was sure she was gone, he let out a sob and rushed to the basin, practically slapping the water in his haste to see Blaine.

And a soft melody filled his ears even before the scene finished rippling into place.

When you wish upon a star

Makes no difference who you are

Anything your heart desires

Will come to you

Kurt was utterly silent as he listened, watching Blaine when he could. He was sitting up straighter in the mud, hands clasped gently in his lap as the raindrops fell on his skin. He was still shivering with cold and all Kurt wanted was to wrap him in the world's biggest hug.

When he finished the song, he stayed there for a while, just looking at the letters etched in the smooth marble.

Finally whispering, "I love you Kurt," he got up and slowly turned.

Kurt followed him as he walked back down the path, every sound now muffled by the rain. He pulled up his hood as he approached Caleb, who had gotten out of the car the moment he saw Blaine. Caleb took one look at him and ran forward, immediately gripping the boy in a tight hug. Blaine looked like he might fall to his knees at any moment.

He watched Caleb lead Blaine back to the car and then they drove away.

Kurt stayed there for another three hours, drinking in every scene. He frowned when Blaine tried to press that Caleb was stronger than himself and he smiled when Blaine confided in Caleb that he saw Kurt on a stage and singing for everyone. His heart ached some when Caleb mentioned Dylan.

Silence fell over the room quickly and each boy went to the comfort of their own beds. Kurt's eyes strayed on Blaine and he was intrigued when he saw his eyes locked on something. He followed his gaze and Kurt could see a single star shining in the dark night sky.

A soft smile broke out over Blaine's face and Kurt smiled too.

He knew his mom was going to be mad at him, but he didn't care. He would do anything to see Blaine again.

Blaine was sleeping. He looked so peaceful when he slept, like all of the worry and stress was drained out of him.

Kurt just stared at the beautiful boy, unable to take his eyes off of him for even a moment. For a while, he was still, his breathing even and relaxed. Then he began to move around, rolling over and tangling his legs in the covers. Kurt passed it off as him getting in a more comfortable spot, not giving another thought. But when a small whimper sounded in the dark, Kurt had no doubt who it was from. He leaned down more, eyes grazing over the scene, heightened for any reason that Blaine would not be okay. He saw Blaine's hands tighten in the blanket, his face scrunching up in what had to be fear.

"Blaine?" Kurt couldn't stop himself from whispering the word.

The boy was turning over again, moaning lightly.

Oh no. Another nightmare. Kurt's eyes immediately flashed to Caleb. Caleb would help him. He did it before.

But Caleb wasn't moving. He was curled up on his own bed, the blankets pulled tightly around him and he was snoring gently.

Wake up! Wake up!

He did not stir, made no indication that he even heard the growing groans from the boy near him.

Blaine's eyes squeezed shut and he whimpered loudly, eyes moving in constant terror. Caleb wasn't moving.

Kurt made a split second decision then and he was running without even bothering to clear the water.

He ran so hard, his lungs burned and his eyes watered, but he did not slow down until he reached the rolling green pasture, the grass slightly misty with dew. He put his finger to his lips and whistled, trying to remember how his mom did it, and hoping beyond hope that it worked.

And suddenly, Aphrodite was there. The shining beige coat of the mare seemed to shimmer in the moonlight. He wasted no time and jumped up as quickly as he could, grabbing onto the mane.

"Go, please." He whispered and the horse whinnied lightly before taking off.

It was an odd sensation. He told himself to expect it, but it was still weird, seeing the world around you whizz by in a blur of color when it felt as if you were going no faster than an afternoon stroll. He trusted Aphrodite and she knew where to go. His surroundings came into focus sharply and the moment she was still, Kurt slid off the horse's back and ran straight to the larger-than-life tree, almost smacking into it. His fingers moved up and down the trunk desperately, not really knowing what he was looking for. Then he felt a slight indent. His fingers froze. He brought his face close to the scratchy wood of the bark, searching. And then he saw a slightly indented knot in the trunk and pressed down on it. The wood began to splinter immediately and a door appeared. He rushed through the moment the door was open.

Kurt threw himself down on the seat in the middle of the room and almost the moment his butt touched the chair, twisting branches were making their way towards him. He waited until his limbs were secured

down and he felt the warm, sticky sap on his temples as the last branches attached themselves. Then he thought of Blaine, as clear and sharp an image as he could.

A quick flash of white light, a sharp tugging sensation, and Kurt was *there*.

Blaine was on the ground, on his hands and knees, breathing hard. Kurt looked down at him, his heart clenching.

He knew what he had to do. He didn't want to, but it had to be done and he knew that if he didn't, it would be because of his own selfish reasons.

Blaine looked up, the fear in his hazel eyes receding the moment he saw the bright blue eyes looking back at him.

"Kurt?" he whispered.

And Kurt felt himself smiling, despite what he was about to do. He reached out his hands to rest lightly on Blaine's shoulders as he kneeled beside him.

"Blaine," Kurt breathed, an involuntary reaction. He could feel Blaine's warm flesh under his hands and he'd missed it so much, the feel of Blaine.

He stood, pulling Kurt up with him and wrapped him in a tight hug. Kurt returned the hug a little too tightly, holding him as if he would never get the chance to again, and Blaine noticed immediately.

"Kurt, what's wrong?" his beautiful voice was in Kurt's ear.

The taller boy pulled away, capturing Blaine's gaze in his own. He took a deep breath. "I need you to do something for me."

"Anything."

And Kurt felt his eyes fill with tears, tried to control his shallow breaths. He felt Blaine's grip on him tighten, eyes searching his worriedly.

"Blaine. Blaine, I love you. You know I love you." He was trying so hard not to break down.

"I love you more than anything." Blaine said, voice strong.

Kurt heard the soft gasp come from his lips. "I know. I know you do." No going back now. He had to do this. For Blaine's sake. "And I know this may be hard to hear, but I want you to listen, okay?"

"What? What is it?" Blaine's words were filled with worry. He had no idea what Kurt was about to do.

And Kurt hated himself for doing this, but he had to. Or Blaine would keep hurting.

"Blaine, baby, you need to know that it's okay for you to move on." He kept his gaze locked on the hazel eyes, needing him to know how serious this was. "It's okay for you to be with someone else. I love you Blaine. I love you so much and you need to hear that I won't let you do this to yourself anymore. I want you to be happy, Blaine, more than anything else in this world."

Kurt stiffened as he felt Blaine's hands fall away and he backed up.

"Is this about Caleb?" He lashed out, irises sparkling with confusion and hurt.

Kurt felt himself nodding. "He cares about you."

"So do you!" Blaine yelled.

Kurt's heart pounded hard against his ribs in response.

"I can't make you happy Blaine. I don't belong here," he said.

Blaine's words were whispered and he hung his head. "You belong with me."

Kurt rushed up then, palm cupping Blaine's cheek, making him look up at him. "We both know I can't. You deserve everything in the world. Don't close yourself out to love, Blaine. You don't deserve a life without love."

"I love you." Blaine said, fierce and unyielding.

Kurt smiled lightly, leaning down to press his forehead to Blaine's. "I know, and that's why I'm asking you to give him a chance."

Blaine's eyes snapped open at the same time everything went black.

Kurt screamed, feeling his entire body pulse with immediate pain, like thousands of red-hot needles pricking his skin. He was engulfed in darkness, even when his eyes snapped open, he couldn't see anything. He couldn't sense the world around him, he had no idea where he was. He couldn't feel his own body. His scream echoed, the only thing he could hear and the only thing he couldn't stop doing.

And then he was in the chair, the lightless room dull and fading in and out of his vision. He felt the branches slithering away from his body, the thick branch around his waist the only one left. It tightened around him and lifted him up, practically dragging him towards the door that had popped open again. He felt an immediate rush of nausea at being pulled through the air and things kept sliding in and out of focus. The branch deposited him right outside of the tree and a burning white light flashed across his mind. He groaned and fell to the ground, too weak to even try to catch himself on the way down. He hit with a soft thump and sucked in a shuttering breath, cheek pressing into the cool grass, feeling his arms and legs tingle.

And then his world faded away.

53. The Looking Glass Part 6

When Kurt awoke, he was still on the forest floor, something warm and wet pushing against his cheek. He moaned and opened his eyes, making him nauseated and closed them, but not before he saw a large beige *something* way too close to his face.

He took shallow breaths and slowly moved around. Okay, he could move his toes. And his fingers. Wiggle his arms and legs. And his face was not covered in blood as he initially feared, but rather, wet with dew. And drool, he realized as he opened his eyes again and saw that Aphrodite was poking his cheek with her nose.

Rolling over onto his back, he groaned again and was glad for the cover from the sun that the large tree provided. It was cool and the air was slightly misty in the shade. His arms and legs tingled slightly as he carefully picked himself up.

He had a pounding headache and wondered if his perfect body would be covered in bruises and what the hell had happened?

He had been in Blaine's dream one moment and the next, *bam*. It was like their connection had been severed, snatched away in a moment. He was staring into Blaine's eyes and then there was nothing. Pain. It had hurt.

Then it hit him.

Blaine must have woken up. A million thoughts poured into Kurt's brain at that moment, but the one that stood out the most was: *did I hurt him?*

His mom had said that if the person whose dream you were in woke up.... Well, he couldn't remember right now exactly what she said, but it was bad wasn't it?

Oh god. What if he hurt Blaine?

The thought pounded in his head, in his chest, in his very blood.

Ignoring the dizzying sensation this caused, Kurt scrambled up and clamored onto Aphrodite's back, knowing that she would take him where he wanted to go without saying anything. He had to close his eyes to the world around him that was swirling by as the horse picked up speed unknown to any breed on earth.

He did have to open his eyes momentarily so he could guess where they were and to his relief, the third time he did this, he realized that they had stopped. Kurt slid off her back and patted her on the neck once as a thank-you before he began to run towards his house. He hoped his mother would be there.

And she was. He pushed open the front door and saw his mother sitting at the table, a steaming cup of coffee in her hands.

"Kurt, where have you been?" she stood and the question was asked automatically before she actually *saw* him. The moment her eyes moved up and down him, her expression changed.

"Oh, honey, what happened?"

Kurt took another step and immediately felt the tears well up in his eyes and he knew he wasn't going to be able to stop them. His legs felt rubbery and weak and that one step caused him to sink to the ground on his knees. His mother dropped down immediately beside him and she wrapped him in her arms as he began to cry.

"I'm sorry mom. I'm so sorry." Kurt mumbled through his tears, almost incoherent. "It's all my fault. I didn't listen and it's my fault."

Elizabeth held him gently, rocking him back and forth like he had wished for so many times when he was younger. "Shh.... Honey, it's okay," she shushed him, running a hand through his hair. "Are you hurt? What happened?"

Kurt was still shaking and sobbing and after it was clear that her son was not in any immediate danger, she let him cry it out and comforted him before asking again what was wrong.

When his cries were reduced to soft hiccups, she pulled away from her tight embrace and stared into Kurt's eyes. A hand went to his cheek and brushed away the tears that streaked his pale skin.

"Kurt? Honey?"

He met her eyes and bit his lip, still shaking slightly. "I messed up mom," he whispered.

"How so?"

"I think I really hurt Blaine." His voice broke on the last word and his tears threatened to spill over again but he somehow managed to hold them back.

Her gaze turned questioning and she pulled back a bit, hands on his shoulders. "What do you mean?"

"I went to the tree. The one that lets you go into people's dreams."

At his mother's shocked expression, Kurt blurted, "I needed to mom! He was hurting so badly and I had to do something! I couldn't just leave him like that! He needed to know that I'm okay and that it's okay to move on. I know Caleb can help him but he can't see it because he's so confused right now."

She didn't say anything at his reasoning and instead asked, "What happened?"

"It happened just like it did before and I saw him and held him and it was going fine and then... I was looking at him and then it all turned black. Blacker than black. I couldn't feel my own body, but everything hurt like needles on my skin. And I woke up back in the tree and it dumped me outside and I passed out."

Elizabeth did not say anything, just got up quickly and disappeared into her room, returning with a softly woven bag that looked like it could have been made from clouds. Kurt was still on the floor, the ache in his chest painful as he tried to regain his breath. He stared up at his mom through his tears, watching her sift through drawers and cupboards.

"Wh-what are you doing?"

She again ignored him, pulling out small vials of brightly colored liquid from random places around the house.

"Mom?" he asked again, louder this time and he heard the confusion and slight fear in his voice.

She turned, with a small bottle of something clear and shimmering clutched in her hand. "You can come with me if you want, but you need to promise to stay quiet."

She brushed past him, pausing by the door to look at him. "I'm going to see if the connection is broken."

Without waiting for an answer, she was gone. Kurt's mind was reeling. What was a connection? Why did she need those bottles? What was in the bottles? Where was she going?

But it had to do with Blaine. Kurt knew that much, so he scrambled up and ran after her.

"Mom, what are you-" he panted slightly as he kept pace beside her.

"No questions honey. Later."

He bit his lip, holding back all of the words that wanted to burst free and demand that she tell him what was going on. Instead, he clenched his fists and kept his gaze forward, noticing familiar areas around him. He looked up and saw where they were headed and though his mind sent forth another frantic bought of questions through his brain, he kept his mouth shut.

They were going to the temple.

Kurt followed alongside his mother as the two of them entered the temple, which as always, was empty save for the basin that Kurt had become so attached to. It was almost sad if he stopped and thought about it, how much he cared for the basin itself, if only for what it was able to show him. He cared about Blaine more than he could even describe, but without the basin and its powers, he would have no other way to see him. There was the tree of course, but now, Kurt knew that he would be scared to even go near the thing again for fear of messing something else up. Kurt knew without a doubt that he would do anything to be able to see Blaine again. And if he'd accidentally done something to mess this up, but not just this at being able to see him, but if he actually *hurt* Blaine, Kurt didn't know what he was going to do.

He kept his mouth shut at his mother's orders and bit down so hard on his lip to keep from badgering her with more questions, that he could taste the tangy copper of blood on his tongue. Instead, he forced himself to stay back a few feet, though involuntarily, he kept moving forward every few seconds to crane his neck to try and see what she was doing. He felt like a small puppy, being told not to come nearer and wanting with all of his might to do just that.

His mother had taken on a serious demeanor, eyes and hands moving only where they needed to go. She seemed to know what she was doing but Kurt was aching to know exactly *what* it was she was doing.

Her hands moved swiftly as she rooted through her bag and pulled out some of the vials, one filled with a bright green mixture, the other a deep turquoise, and one that was so clear Kurt would have thought it empty except he kept seeing tiny shimmers coming from the bottle, as if the liquid itself was lighting up from within.

Kurt found himself holding his breath as she pulled the stopper out of the turquoise bottle and gently poured a quarter of it into the water. He impossibly leaned forward even more and watched as the still water was permeated with blue, watched as it mixed in soft swirls. A green bottle was thrust into his line of vision.

"Open this for me."

Elizabeth's words were crisp. This was a command. He took the bottle from her and found that his hands were shaking. Focusing all his attention on the tiny cork, he gripped it with his thumb and pointer finger as his other hand wrapped around the bottle. He yanked and it came free with a sound like a sigh and the strong scent of sandalwood and shaving cream and something else.... The sticky, slightly sweet scent of hair gel tingled in his nostrils. And he found himself suddenly wanting to breathe nothing but that scent for the rest of his life. His eyelids fluttered and he inhaled deeply.

"Don't breathe that in, honey."

And the bottle was gone from his grasp. His mother poured the liquid drop by drop in a large circle at the very edge of the water. Each drop landed with a hiss and sunk to the bottom as though weighted, each drop a perfect orb until it hit the stone bottom where it burst and frothed strangely purple. After the last drop was poured, the darkly colored water in the basin sat still. Kurt waited and nothing happened.

He knew what the smell in the bottle was. He could never forget that scent. It was *Blaine*. The scents smelled so strongly of Blaine, for a moment, he'd forgotten where he was and almost believed that Blaine was standing there beside him. His heart sunk as he was pulled back to reality, staring at this water that looked like it may have come from the Black Lagoon.

A soft whimper sounded in the back of his throat. Why wasn't anything happening?

He tore his gaze from the blank water and stared at his mother, not noticing until now that the clear bottled liquid was held in her delicate hand. His eyes locked on the bottle, drawing down as it was tilted closer and closer to the water. It fell in gentle waves from the thin, twisting neck of the glass bottle until it too was made to sink.

The water rippled quickly and he watched in awe as the water was changing, growing lighter and lighter with every second. Soon, the basin was filled with a soft purple, then lavender, then paler still, until it was returned to the original glassy color it had been a mere minute ago.

It rippled again in waves, but now it was made by no means of magic colored potion, but by his mother's hand. She lay her palm flat against the water, skin just barely resting on the surface, her eyes closed. She took a deep breath and Kurt fought the urge to touch her, to make her tell him what was going on.

But no, he'd promised to be quiet. He licked his lips, felt the chapped skin where it had bled. His heart was pounding so fast, he wondered if he might pass out.

And then a dull throbbing sound echoed from the heart of the basin itself and Kurt saw a soft shimmer of gold shine across the water's surface. His eyes immediately went to his mother and she was smiling. He assumed that this meant something good, but he could not get himself to smile. He needed to hear it from her.

Her hand receded and strangely, it was dry. Kurt's eyes felt like they were bugging out of his skull because he kept holding his breath in anticipation.

"Mom?" he whispered, unable to trust himself to raise his voice any higher.

She looked at him as he cowered like a scared animal and her arms wrapped around him. He was so tense in her grasp. She rubbed her hand soothingly across his back.

"He's okay, honey. He's fine."

And Kurt immediately relaxed and burst into tears.

"H-how do you know?" he asked when he had control over his words again.

"I can feel it. The connection between Blaine and Neera."

"Neera?" he repeated somewhat stupidly. "I don't understand."

"Neera is our 'path' so to speak, from this world to earth. We go there in our minds, leave our bodies behind, but our soul can appear to someone on earth for a little while. In dreams."

She looked at him, waiting for him to make the connection.

"The tree."

She smiled. "Yes."

"So... you *felt* the connection? What is a connection?"

"It's the reason you were able to go into Blaine's dream. It's hard to explain honey because I don't know much about it myself."

"What did you put in the water?"

She started to answer, but then, he cut her off. "No, never mind. I don't even care. Are you sure he's okay?"

Elizabeth nodded and Kurt pulled away from her to carefully touch the water once more. It swirled and rippled like always and when it was still, Kurt saw the scene as clear and beautiful as ever.

Blaine was sleeping, curled on his side with his features slack and calm in deep sleep. Kurt sighed with relief.

"Thank you mom. I don't know what you did, but thank you." Kurt whispered earnestly.

She pulled him into another tight hug. "I like him." She laughed lightly as she said it, the smile evident in her words.

Then her tone was serious. "But honey, please don't ever go to Neera again without me."

"I won't," he promised and he knew that that was one statement he was never going to go back on.

54. The Looking Glass Part 7

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Shuffle.

Scrape.

Yawn.

Turn the page.

Kurt had been watching Blaine and Caleb study for what seemed like an eternity. Dalton finals were fast approaching and every student had turned into a focused zombie, with immeasurable cups of coffee being drained and refilled, books piled up higher than they could ever read, countless pencils being sharpened into nubs, and the time when the 'I'll promise I'll stop biting my nails' habits were broken and brought back out once more. Ah, yes. Finals. Kurt had only been through one set of notoriously difficult Dalton exams, but he'd had enough for a lifetime. For Blaine, this would be his fourth and last, set of finals.

Kurt had asked him once before how he did it, how he stayed so calm and collected and managed to get dressed in the morning, straight tie and all, in addition to leading the Warblers, and not have his brain fry from so much studying and still managed to be adorable. Okay, so he'd left out that last part, but still.

"Oh, didn't you know? It's the hair gel," he'd told him with a wink and a smile. "Magic powers."

Kurt remembered that he had groaned and had wanted to throw something at that perfect smile, but the only available thing was the book he had open on his lap and he didn't want to knock out one of those pretty little teeth. So, he'd chosen the next option, and the only thing he seemed capable of doing when rendered unable to breathe by the sheer closeness of Blaine. Astonishment.

"Why do you have to be so perfect?"

"Mmmm, is it because I'm with you and you make everything in my life more amazing and anything less than perfect would be unworthy of you?"

And he'd gotten up and kissed Blaine long and hard and he hoped that his lips weren't chapped but there really wasn't anything he could do about it now and all he could think about was Blaine's lips on his and Blaine's hand in his hair and Blaine's arm around his waist and *Blaine*.

"Again with the perfect." Kurt sighed and pulled back, had grinned slightly when Blaine's hand tightened around his arm so he couldn't leave. "You are so infuriatingly perfect and it sometimes amazes me why you're even with me."

Blaine had pushed himself up to capture Kurt's lips in a quick kiss. "Because I love you."

And that simple statement coming from his boyfriend's mouth, no matter how many times he'd heard it, would always make Kurt smile. "I love you too."

"And admit it, you love the hair. And the blazer."

Kurt remembered laughing. "So true."

"But without my hair and blazer, who would I be? I mean, I play guitar when everyone just wants to hang out and I make weird covers of Disney songs. Who does that?"

"Well, I think it's adorable. With or without your crazy hair."

Their next conversation had led into their future plans and what they were going to do after high school. And it hurt too much to think about.

Kurt pulled himself out of that memory and stared down once more at the beautiful boy before him.

Blaine and Caleb were sitting on a low brick wall surrounding a small tree, talking. Just talking. Kurt bit back a smile. Even under all of these pressures, Blaine still was not worried about finals. And apparently, he had convinced Caleb to do the same, for now. Blaine could be very convincing. Mainly because he pulled the sad eyes, pouty lip thing that seemed to make everyone who saw it reconsider because it was just so freaking *sad* to see that look on such a beautiful face. At least, that's why it always worked with Kurt. But he could see how Caleb would be swayed.

"My offer still stands you know," Kurt heard Caleb say so softly, as if worried what affect that statement would have on Blaine.

And all he said was, "I know."

Kurt could tell he wanted to say more. He knew that look on his face when he was organizing his thoughts.

Caleb's question was hesitant, nervous. "So?"

And Blaine answered in the way that Kurt expected him to. He didn't quite agree with it, but he wasn't shutting out all possibilities of moving on. And Kurt was happy with that much.

"I think that someday we could be together. I really do like you Caleb, I do, but I think I just need to take some time for me, you know?"

And Caleb didn't look hurt, and Kurt had learned to expect that too. Caleb was strong, but understanding in a way that made Kurt like him more. He knew that Caleb would always love and care for and take care of and be there for Blaine if the opportunity arose. Caleb would do and be everything for Blaine that Kurt couldn't.

"Then I'll wait. Until you're ready."

A very slight flash of pain shone in Blaine's eyes and Kurt could see that he was torn between wanting to accept Caleb's promise, and not wanting to make Caleb hurt by asking him to wait. "Caleb, I'm not asking you to do that for me," he said softly.

"I know. But I want to. I told you I'd be here for you Blaine. And I'm not going to just abandon you."

Kurt smiled. This was what Blaine needed, even if he didn't know it yet, or rather, hadn't let himself believe.

"Whatever you need, I can be there for you. However long it takes."

Caleb's hand had moved over Blaine's and he squeezed his fingers. "And this can be enough."

He held out an earbud to Blaine, releasing his hand. Blaine smiled and Kurt was so happy in this moment. He saw the way the breeze gently blew Blaine's curls around his forehead and the way the sun shone down on his face. Blaine got up and practically pulled Caleb along with him as he went and sat down in the grassy quad. Caleb laid beside him and they stared up at the clouds with a smile on their lips and all trace

of sorrow or sadness or hurt was gone. It was sunny and bright and Kurt looked down at Blaine and knew that he would be okay.

Kurt bolted awake that night, yanking him out of his deep sleep. He blinked and his eyebrows knitted together. He'd never woken up in the middle of the night before. Not here anyway. There was nothing to awaken him; he never had nightmares or got too hot or cold.

Was that... thunder?

Kurt sat fully upright, leaning slightly to the side as if that would help him hear better. Thunder?

It never rained here. Never.

He slid out of bed and for the first time, felt cold. A strong breeze was blowing through the open window, making the curtains flutter and blow neat piles of paper off his desk and around the room. He walked briskly out of his room, down the hall, and into his mother's room.

It was dark. He tiptoed inside. "Mom?" he called gently.

No answer.

He tried again, calling louder this time.

Still, nothing.

His hand ran along the wall, searching for a light switch. Light flooded the room. The covers on his mother's bed were rumpled, as if thrown off in a hurry. There was no sign of her or where she had gone.

Confused, he turned back and made a full search of the house, stopping in every room and calling her name. His heart was speeding up in anxiousness and he found himself jogging to each room. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. No sign of her.

More than a little afraid, he opened the front door. The sky was a nasty shade of black, not quite black enough to call it pitch black, but definitely made black enough by the enormous clouds to block out the

light of the moon. Here and there, streaks of royal purple made their appearance, zigzagging between the clouds. The wind was roaring, blowing his hair into his eyes and making his pajama pants feel like they were trying to tear themselves away from his body. He'd never seen this before. Not even on earth. This was ridiculous. Where was his mom? He just wanted his mom.

"Mom!" he yelled against the wind, looking left and right as if she would appear and everything would go back to normal.

Nothing.

He made a lap around the house as it started to rain. No, not rain. Pour. It didn't start out as a little drizzle and then get progressively worse, as he was used to. No, it was like someone had cut a seam into the clouds themselves and then stood back as all of the water sloshed out in big, fat drops.

"Mom!" he hollered again and again over the howl of the wind. He was shaking now, his pants completely soaked and sticking to his freezing skin, the wind like pricks of ice on his wet body, his hair plastered to his head and water running in his eyes.

That was when the first bolt of lightning struck.

It shocked, as a streak of the brightest white Kurt had ever seen, across the sky in a jagged line and was gone in a second. The thunder followed with a massive *crack* that made Kurt jump. No, this was definitely not normal. Not even for a place as magical as this.

Kurt began to run. He didn't really know where he was going, but the second it was even an idea in his head, he knew that he'd meant to go there all along. He had to run against the wind, every drop of rain stinging his skin. Another shock of lighting, this one cracking in a straight line, straight down. It made contact with the ground and the resulting noise was incredible. Kurt stopped running and put his hands over his ears to try and block out the earsplitting *boom* that seemed to echo in his skull even after it stopped. More lighting. Each bolt appearing mere seconds after the other. Some stayed in the sky, creating flashes of light that illuminated the world in front of Kurt for a moment before fading, only to be replaced by another just as quickly. But some released their attack on the ground, leaving smoking trails in their wake.

The wind was whipping, changing direction constantly so that Kurt never truly knew if he was going to be fighting the wind to move forward, or being pushed ahead by the powerful current. He wrapped his arms around his shirtless torso (why oh why had he not gotten a jacket before he left?) and carried on, having to squint to see past the rain that pelted his vision and dripped in his eyes. He'd just reached the front of the temple, saw the clear water running down the great marbled steps like a mini waterfall, when another flash lit up the sky followed quickly by an earsplitting boom.

The sound seemed to resonate in his very bones as he realized that lightning had struck the temple's roof. He winced, but knew that the marble would hold. And then he heard another sound. A higher pitched sound that was clearly human, calling his name. He turned.

"Mom?"

Her arms were around him before he could even move. She began to lead him away from the temple and he resisted, only to give up when she began to scream in his ear, the only way he could hear her over the roaring of the winds.

"What are you doing here? We need to get inside!"

He clung to her and they ran against the wind, being pelted from every direction with huge drops of water. He stumbled once or twice, but Elizabeth held onto her son and together, they soon came to their house, which seemed a dreary place in the foggy darkness. Elizabeth pushed the door open and shoved Kurt inside, where he collapsed on the ground, shaking and breathing hard. She yanked the door shut and locked it before dropping down next to him, breathing just as ragged.

"Kurt, baby," she panted as she ran her hand over his sopping hair and cupped his cheek, "what were you doing out there?"

"I couldn't find you," he whispered, feeling pathetic and dropped his gaze to the floor.

She sighed, a sound mixed with relief and exhaustion, and wrapped her son in a hug. "I'm sorry honey. I was in a meeting with the council."

Kurt pulled his face away from her shoulder and looked up at her, all the fear he'd felt melting out of his veins like snow. "Council?"

A shadow of doubt crossed her face, like she didn't want to tell him.

"Mom?"

She licked her lips and then sighed again. "You're not going to like hearing this, and I'm sorry, but I think it's best for everyone-" A flash lit up the sky then, pulsing through the windows with the loudest crack of thunder yet, making them both jump. Kurt looked to his mom worriedly as a sickening sound filled the air. A drawn-out hiss, almost like a wail, and moments later, there were many crashes echoing through the silent air within the house. The only thing Kurt could compare it to was an avalanche.

"What's going on mom?" he whispered, face pale.

A thickly knitted blanket was wrapped around his trembling shoulders and he clutched it close, his eyes never leaving his mom's face as she sat next to him, tying a soft robe around her waist.

"It's the council."

"What?"

"Because The Looking Glass is so powerful, this is the only way the council can destroy the temple." His mother's voice was very small, almost as if she were the child admitting a mistake.

"What!" Kurt yelled and stood, letting the blanket slide to the floor.

Elizabeth was on her feet in a second and held out her hands in a consolatory gesture. "It's what's best for everyone. You don't see how-"

Kurt was feeling so many emotions pulse through his veins, he had trouble sorting them all out. Anger, confusion, hurt, betrayal, fear, sadness. "No, you don't see! It's the only way I can see him mom! Tell them to stop! They can't do this! It's the only way I can see him!" he screamed, his voice overpowering the pounding rain outside and the continuous cracks of thunder. "You can't take him away from me! Not again!"

And he threw open the door, running on desperation, as his feet slipped and slid over the paths that had turned into ankle-deep mud. Every time he lifted his foot, it came free with a squealching sound, and when

he planted his foot in front of him, it sunk deeper. It was getting harder and harder to keep going with the rain mixing with his tears on his cheeks, and the wind ripping at his body as it tried to shove him back.

"No!" he screamed as he felt a pair of arms wrap around his torso. He tried to break free and lost his balance, falling to his knees, the arms still clenched tightly around him. His whole body felt numb. He couldn't control his limbs enough to peel away the hands locked together in front of his chest. It was all he could do to keep running, but now, he couldn't do even that. "Mom, make them stop!" he cried, eyes locked on the magnificent temple in the distance that was crumbling as he watched.

The arms around him tightened more, pulling him into her, turning his face away. "I can't baby. I can't make them stop. It's better this way, you'll see. I know you'll see." She whispered furiously, trying to hold her son together, the guilt and ache in her bones pounding. But this was better. It was better this way. It's for him. For Kurt.

He sobbed against her, too tired to fight her, knowing he couldn't do anything. He vaguely felt her pull him up and lead him back to the house, but he did not try and get away. She set him down on the couch and wrapped the blanket around him. There was a vacant look in those piercingly blue eyes that were swollen and ringed with red, as he laid down and pulled the blanket tightly around himself.

She knelt down in front of him. He looked anywhere but her face. Her hand rested gently on his shoulder, but he pulled away. "Honey, I'm sorry," she whispered, eyes searching his face, silently begging him to look at her. "I know you hate me right now, but you have to understand that I know the pain that The Looking Glass can cause. I see it in you. And that hurts the most. I couldn't let you do that to yourself and I knew you wouldn't listen to me. Baby, the council has been talking for a long time about destroying it. And it took my accounts of what you're going through to finally make them see the damage it can cause. This is a good thing honey. I know you don't see it now, but it is. You don't need to see Blaine to know that he's there. To know that he's okay. He loves you and he wouldn't want you to do this to yourself." She placed a soft kiss on his forehead and was gone.

The rain was still furiously assaulting the world around him and in the distance, Kurt could hear the tell-tale hiss and crack and crumble as the lightning found its mark. The temple. It would be completely destroyed in a matter of minutes. And there was nothing he could do.

Blaine. Kurt just kept picturing him. He could never see him again. He closed his eyes. The last picture he had of Blaine, he was laying on the grass, warm with a soft breeze blowing his curls out of his eyes, and

Caleb was next to him, smiling gently, as they watched the clouds float by. Blaine was happy. Blaine was okay. The words his mother said kept running through his mind.

You don't need to see him to know that he's there. To know that he's okay. He loves you and wouldn't want you to do this to yourself.

And what hurt, was that he knew that she was right.

He squeezed his eyes shut tighter and turned away from the world, pulled the blanket up over his head and let himself fall asleep, the images of Blaine smiling and laughing rolling by like an old movie projector in his mind.

When Kurt awoke, it was silent.

That was the first thing he noticed. The silence.

No rain, no thunder, no nothing.

He dragged the blanket off his body and got up, feeling the dried mud on his feet and caking his pants, which were still soaked. He groaned disgustedly, but otherwise put that thought out of his mind.

Immediately, Kurt went to his front door and opened it, to find the world outside unchanged. No sign of the mud, the river created by the rain, nothing. Everything was back to normal. Except when he looked in the distance. The gleaming shine of the marble roof that greeted him so many mornings was gone. Kurt took off in a run and felt his heart speed up in response. As if his heart was thudding the words *please no, please no, please no* with every step.

He felt the sun shining on his back, warm whispers on his neck as the breeze picked up slightly, seeming to mock his pain and desperation. He was breathing heavily when he skidded to a stop at what used to be the temple.

He couldn't stop the tears that came to his eyes, had to swallow hard against the lump that formed in his throat, fought back the horrible twisting in his stomach that made him want to throw up as he looked down upon the rubble.

The stairs were still there, still as gleaming and shining as ever, but now they led to nothing. Only a pile of grand rocks were left of Kurt's sanctuary, his safe place. There were charred chunks of the rock that used to be beautiful, now streaked with black where the lightning had hit directly and forced the stone to crack and crumble. Some of it still smoked in gentle puffs that dissipated into the clear air. Kurt took shaking steps onto the stairs, had to try so hard not to fall to his knees. He clenched his fists at his sides as he came closer and the basin came into view.

No, not *the* basin. *His* basin, the one that kept him connected to Blaine. Somehow, the pieces of the ruined temple had fallen around it, keeping it from being crushed to bits, yet had not protected it from the fury of the lightning. One hit, that's all it had taken, to have what Kurt knew of his life shattered. His basin, once so pristine and fascinating, had been struck, it seemed, with a single bolt right in the center of the bowl. The bottom of the basin was now charred an ugly black color and the force of the hit caused the basin itself to be split cleanly in two, a single crack running along the center, yet it still remained intact. The water was gone, presumably it had dripped out of the cracks and onto the ground, only to be washed away by the rain and dried by the sun.

Kurt ran his index finger along the edge of the basin, hoping that this was just a trick, that he could just wish it to be how it used to. He pressed his entire palm into the bowl, wanting so badly to feel the warmth of the water within and see Blaine's face swim into view. He closed his eyes and the tears fell, rolling down his cheeks and chin and landing on the back of his palm, where it sat in the basin, dry as bone.

His basin had been destroyed. And he'd promised himself that he would never again go near Neera, the tree that allowed him into Blaine's dreams. He could never see Blaine again.

And he did fall to his knees then, sitting amidst the ruins that was the only place he felt connected to the people he loved. Now that had been taken away too. It was gone.

He let himself sob, holding his arms tightly around himself as he wept until his tears ran dry. And he scooted back until his body was pressed against the cool marble of the basin and he sat there for a very long time, until the sun began to set. The air began to cool down until it reached the gentle warmth of a spring night, and the sun stained the sky a deep blue streaked with orange, pink, and purple.

Against his will, words began to flow through his mind.

For now, this can be enough. Caleb.

You don't have to see him to know that he's there. His mother.

I'll always love him. Blaine.

He lost track of how long he was sitting against the basin, hearing those words repeat over and over in his mind. And the more he thought about them, the more he realized that they were true.

Caleb had said to Blaine, "For now, this can be enough." He knew what he meant when he said it to Blaine, but Kurt looked at those words differently. Kurt knew that he was going to have to let go of Blaine and he thought that he already had when he'd accepted that someday Blaine and Caleb were going to be together. But now he realized that, without knowing it, he'd been holding on to the hope that they would somehow be together again. The fact that he kept going back to the basin day after day was only driving that impossible hope deeper. He would never just wake up and find himself in Blaine's arms back on earth. And the basin was just prolonging that wish, that dream, that would never come true. The loss of the basin had hurt, just like it had hurt to lose Blaine, but with it gone, Kurt realized that the force that had tethered him to his meager hopes was gone as well. Maybe now, he could truly move on. He'd watch Blaine go through this same thing, holding onto the hope that was never there. And with Caleb, he'd been able to slowly but surely let go. Kurt had had to have a more forceful approach in that his only means of seeing Blaine were snatched away, but in reality, he knew that that was the only way he'd ever be able to let go. He knew he was stubborn. Gentle coaxing was not the way to go, and as much as this hurt, he knew it was better. For now, the memories of Blaine would be enough, until he was able to see him again.

His mother had said, "You don't have to see him to know that he's there." Kurt had been holding onto these scenes like they were the only thing that would keep him from falling. But she was right. He knew that Blaine was there on earth and that he was finally happy and could start living again. And he knew that he needed to do the same, to accept that he was just going to have to be patient and wait a little longer.

Blaine had said, "I'll always love him." Kurt knew that this was true too. This one was the easiest for him to believe of the sentences that repeated through his mind. He did not need to convince himself of this fact. And Blaine knew that Kurt loved him, that Kurt would never stop loving him. Though they were farther apart now than either of them had ever known could happen, they would see each other again. Eventually. Before, Kurt had wished that they could be together, whatever it took. But now, he wished for Blaine to live his life for as long as he could, making the best of however long he had on earth, and Kurt wished for him to have years and decades ahead of him before they met again.

Kurt pushed himself up off the ground and wiped the tear tracks from his eyes. The sky was a royal shade of navy mixed with purple and dotted with hundreds of stars. The moon was bright and full, shining down and illuminating the silver clouds. Kurt closed his eyes and pictured Blaine standing on the Dalton lawn, looking up at this same scene before him, watching the moonlight glint off the lazily drifting clouds and trying to find constellations in the stars as they used to.

Kurt smiled then, glancing around at the ruins around him, and realizing that he no longer cared that the temple had been destroyed, that The Looking Glass was broken but still standing. Because when Blaine finally returned to him, he would be able to tell Kurt all of the things he'd done and seen and Kurt could hear them for the first time. He could hold Blaine in his arms again and it would feel like it had when Blaine first hugged him. He could look into those beautiful eyes and not see pain or hurt or healing; he would see love and joy and the playful sparkle that meant Blaine was thinking about him and that he'd missed him. He could see the slight dimples in his cheeks when he smiled and the crinkling in the corners of his eyes when he laughed and it would be as if he were seeing him for the first time.

He's just going to have to be patient.

55. The Looking Glass Epilogue

Kurt had developed a loving relationship with Aphrodite over the years. It had been a long time that he'd been here. He'd stopped counting the months, the years. Over time, he'd come to love this place as his home, and even branched out enough to call it 'heaven.' Because even if it wasn't what he was expecting, with angels dressed in white and huge wings and a god that watched over them, this place was perfect enough for his every want. He'd seen many, many people arrive here in the same way that he had so many years ago. And he'd seen close to the same amount of people leave. He knew now that this heaven wasn't infinite and he didn't have to stay here if he didn't want to. All he had to do was close his eyes and think that he wasn't happy here anymore and that he wanted to leave. And he would just... fade away. But Kurt was happy here and he'd made friends and learned to live a new life here. There was only one thing he was waiting for.

Years ago, his father had joined them here. Kurt had stopped counting years, so he didn't know how long Burt had been with them. But he remembers that it had been a very bittersweet moment. With The Looking Glass destroyed so long ago, Kurt had no idea how the people he loved were doing. He'd accepted that it was better that he didn't know because he couldn't change anything that happened on earth. Better to just let whatever was going to happen take its course. He still found himself wishing sometimes that he could see his family, but he'd learned to put the thought out of his mind. When Elizabeth came running into Kurt's room, where he lay sleeping, she had tears in her eyes, but she was smiling. She'd taken his hand and pulled her half-asleep son along with her until she reached the same grassy meadow where she'd met Kurt the first time he'd opened his eyes.

When they'd arrived, Kurt saw his father for the first time in years, standing in the middle of the grass, looking younger than Kurt had ever seen him. Kurt had learned over the years that as people crossed from one world into the next, they unconsciously returned to whatever state or age that they were the happiest. Elizabeth had returned to her current age of thirty-two, when Kurt had been three. "I loved teaching you how to walk and talk and share those nights where I'd read to you for hours and Burt would even read to you sometimes. Seeing you grow and become your own stubborn self, even as a child, was the best time of my life."

Kurt knew why he'd stayed at the age that he was when he'd died, at seventeen. Because at seventeen, though he was still a teenager, he had known very clearly what he'd wanted and though it was one of the toughest times of his life, it was also the best. Because he knew that he would be going to New York and he

would try his hardest to get a job in doing what he loved. Because his dad was happy with Carole and because he'd gained a brother. Because he was with Blaine. He was with Blaine, who loved him and made him feel like the most special person in the world, just by holding his hand. Blaine was the reason that his most happy time in his life was at seventeen, and the reason he came to heaven at that age.

Blaine was the reason he hadn't closed his eyes and made that statement to move on. He was waiting for Blaine, waiting for his father and the many other people he loved in his life.

Kurt broke down when he saw his dad, who had returned at an age close to his wife's. He couldn't even run to him; he just fell to his knees and the tears began to spill down his cheeks and suddenly he was engulfed in the tightest of hugs and Burt was on his knees too, holding his son after so many years apart. They didn't speak for a long time. They couldn't speak with their tears choking up their throats but they held onto each other for so long, not needing anything but closeness.

When Burt could find the words, the first thing he said to Kurt was, "I knew I'd see you again kiddo."

And Elizabeth was there and Kurt's parents shared a long embrace, perhaps putting all of the years apart into one single hug that said more than words ever could. Then they walked together, hand in hand, as they went home.

That moment had been bittersweet indeed. And a few years later, Carole had joined them. She was of course welcomed with open arms and Elizabeth and Carole became very close friends. Elizabeth hadn't been able to thank her enough for taking care of Burt. Carole was a great deal younger than Kurt had ever seen her and he vaguely wondered why until he remembered that Finn's father had died in the war, when Finn was only a year old. Kurt had actually met Steven before and he was a genuinely nice guy with a great sense of humor, someone Finn should, and was, proud to call his father. Moments like these were always bittersweet, for in the joy of seeing a loved one again, those on earth were grieving a loss. Kurt was comforted in the idea that they would all be together again one day, as that thought helped him. But he had learned that those moments were not always happy ones.

Kurt knew that it happened all the time, as sad as it was to think of it, but he still wasn't prepared when a baby, wrapped in blue blankets and fast asleep, appeared in the meadow. Finn and Rachel. Kurt felt his heart break as he gently picked up the very small child and looked up at his mother with tears in his eyes. This baby was very small, premature. He couldn't say how early he was, but something had to have gone wrong for him to appear here. This was Kurt's nephew. Elizabeth had taken the baby and after some

adjustment period, life had gone on as normal. They'd named the baby Logan and Elizabeth and Carole had immediately taken over 'motherly' duties. His mom had told Kurt that they were taking care of Logan until Rachel or Finn could be with him again. He even got to babysit, which he found great joy in. After a while, he'd asked Elizabeth what was going to happen. "People return here in the happiest moment of their lives and he didn't live a day. Is he going to grow? Will he be a baby forever?"

"Logan will decide and we'll see what happens from there," she'd replied.

"What do you mean 'he'll decide'? How can he-"

"Remember, honey, this is a magical place. The life he would have lived is his to choose. He'll grow until he reaches the happiest moment of what would have been his life on earth and then he'll stop."

"And he'll be like us? Never growing older?"

She'd smiled. "Yes, just like us."

And Logan had grown. Day by day he seemed to sprout up more, as if each day that passed were a year on his life. Logan was twenty-five when he stopped growing, the age he would have been at had he gotten married. The tall boy who stood before Kurt now had deep brown eyes and hair almost exactly matching Finn's. He shared his mother's stubbornness and his father's laugh. Kurt tried to be the best uncle he could, but when you play wrestle with Finn's son, things usually didn't work out well. Kurt had lost count of the times he'd threatened to get Logan back for tackling him to the ground and messing up his hair. He'd said it while he'd laughed of course, so neither one took the other seriously. Logan was living with Carole and Stephen, his grandparents, though they were so close in age they might as well be high-school friends.

Kurt was brushing out Aphrodite's mane as the sun sunk down behind the hills. A light breeze had sprung up as it blew down through the meadow, tickling the back of his neck and making strands of the horse's long pale mane reach out and breeze across his nose. Aphrodite had become his very close friend and he spent a lot of time with her, devoting his Saturdays to making sure her coat was as shining as could be and had conquered his fear of riding which, when he thought about it now, was silly because he had no reason to be scared. Aphrodite had become his friend who he could talk to and vent to and sometimes cry to or even just be silent. And he knew that she listened. Oftentimes, he brought her apples or cubes of sugar or other treats and she listened to him better than any other person here. All he had to do was whistle and

she'd be there. Kurt had never had a pet in his time on earth and he liked to think that had he been able to have one, he'd have had a horse.

As the sun stained the sky orange and red, he brushed his hand over the horse's forehead and down to her cheek, he suddenly felt that someone was watching him. Logan snuck up on him all the time. For a twenty-five year old, he really had some growing up to do, but Kurt usually forgave him.

"Logan," he sighed, without turning around, "if you jump out and scare off Aphrodite, I really am going to have to tackle you this time. And I mean it."

"I don't know if I'm supposed to be jealous of this Logan guy. Is he better looking than me?"

Kurt felt his heart stop. No, really. He couldn't feel the beats in his tightened chest and he swallowed hard. Kurt whirled around so fast he would have fallen had he not been grounded by the sight in front of him.

Looking no older than Kurt could remember, he stood there with his tan skin and his curly black hair and his sparkling hazel eyes that filled with tears and his gorgeous smile that was trembling as he tried not to cry. *Blaine*.

Kurt pushed off of the ground and practically threw himself forward, the tears falling unashamedly down his cheeks. The moment Blaine's arms wrapped around Kurt's back, they both sunk to their knees, as if the thought of holding Kurt was the only thing that had kept him standing and now that they were, Blaine couldn't hold himself up anymore.

Deep, wheezing sobs tore from Kurt's chest as they both buried their faces in each other's shoulders, clutching at each other so tightly, he knew he would leave, and have, bruises. But neither man cared. It was all they could do to hold each other and if Kurt thought he could die of happiness, he just might, because it felt like his heart was going to explode. Fervently whispered statements tumbled from their lips and it was hard to understand what the other was saying at first.

When they finally pulled apart, just enough to look into the other's eyes, there were so many thoughts going through Kurt's mind that he couldn't think of what to say. He'd waited years, decades, for this moment, and now he found himself speechless. He just smiled as best he could through his trembling tears.

Blaine smiled too. "Look at you," he whispered, bringing his hand up to so softly brush the back of his fingers along Kurt's cheekbone. "Haven't changed a bit. Still just as beautiful as I remember. More beautiful."

Kurt closed his eyes at the touch. He'd missed Blaine so much. The sound of his voice, the way his shoes clacked on the ground as he walked, the touch that could be heated with passion or gentle with care. Kurt covered Blaine's hand with his own and said the first thing that came to his mind, "You're here."

Blaine laughed lightly. Oh, Kurt had missed his laugh. "That I am." And then Blaine's face turned serious. "Am I dead, Kurt?"

Despite the melancholy question, Kurt felt a smile pull at his lips. "That was one of the first questions I asked too." He rubbed small circles on the back of Blaine's palm with his thumb. "Yeah, you are Blaine. And I feel terrible and so selfish, but all I can think right now is that I'm happy you're here."

"Don't feel bad. I guess it was just time for me to go."

"H-how old were you, Blaine?"

"Eighty-seven." He said with a touch of pride. Then he looked down at his hands and pulled one of them from Kurt's grasp, holding it out in front of him. "I'm not eighty-seven. Where are my wrinkles?"

And he stared at Kurt with such a puzzled expression on his face that Kurt had to laugh. "There's a lot you need to know Blaine. There's so much I have to tell you and I want to know all about your life. Will you walk with me?"

But Blaine smiled and instead, laid down on the grass. "Is this okay? After so many years apart, I just want to lay here with you next to me and know that you're not going anywhere."

Kurt obliged and laid down next to him, getting as close as he could and resting his head on Blaine's shoulder. "Is this good?"

"Perfect." And they laid there, just listening to the sound of the other's breathing and holding onto each other's hands because even though they knew they weren't going anywhere soon, they needed the closeness now. It wasn't until the moon shone brightly and the stars twinkled down on them and Aphrodite gave up waiting for him and trotted away, did Kurt speak.

"Blaine? Will you tell me what your life was like?"

He turned his head towards Kurt and lightly stroked his fingers on Kurt's forehead. "What do you want to know?"

"Everything." He said a bit sheepishly. "Did you go to New York like you wanted? Did you fall in love? Did you get married? Did you have kids? Did you go to college? I want to know everything, Blaine."

Blaine chuckled. "Everything is going take a while. Can I start with the basics?"

"Of course."

"But I need to know one thing first."

"Anything."

"Why am I not old?"

It was Kurt's turn to laugh. "Yeah, I guess I owe you that much. When we die, we unconsciously return to the age where we were the happiest in our lives."

"So I'm seventeen again? Like that movie?"

"Sort of." Kurt smiled. "But you won't go back to your old age. Are you okay with being seventeen?"

"I could be any age at all as long as I'm with you."

"Always so charming."

"Hey, I've had decades to perfect the charm." There was a pause and then he said quietly, "I guess I'll start after you died."

It was weird, hearing that statement from Blaine's mouth, but Kurt nodded.

"I was a wreck. Losing you was the hardest thing I'd ever had to live through. I didn't think I was going to make it though, honestly. I did, with the help of the Warblers and your parents and made it through senior

year. I graduated with honors from Dalton and on a whim, decided to buy a ticket to New York. I ended up with a really long layover in Chicago and then my flight was delayed and almost canceled because of snow. So I had to find a hotel and got bored and went out downtown. And I fell in love with the city. Everything about it was amazing. I ended up canceling my flight and staying there for a year." He laughed, eyes sparkling. "I got a job as a bus boy at this restaurant to pay for the down payment on a very, very small apartment. Business was slow sometimes so my manager let me take my guitar out back so I could practice. One day some theater people happened to be walking by and heard me singing and told me about this audition coming up. So I went and I got the part. They cast me right there. I played Tony in a local theater company's production of a West Side Story for a year."

"I've always loved that musical. And you make the perfect Tony." Kurt snuggled up closer to Blaine, enjoying this moment and wanting to live in it forever.

"I know you do. And the first night I performed, I performed for you because I know you loved it so much."

"What happened after that?"

"The economy took a downfall and the company closed, but I'd gotten audition offers from some other companies so I ended up going to New York after all. I made it to a lot of callbacks, but I never ended up on Broadway. Now that I think about it, it was a good thing because I was able to book a lot of smaller shows in cafes and stuff and I was able to sing with just me and my guitar, which is what I love best. I lost contact with a roommate I had in high school and one day he called me, telling me he was in New York and we met up after one of my shows. His name was Caleb and he really helped me a lot when I was torn up because you were gone."

Kurt nodded. He knew.

"Talking led to more talking and then he asked me to dinner and it led to another dinner the next night and a play after that and..." he stopped, shifting a bit.

"Go on." Kurt said patiently.

"I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

"I don't mind." He said sincerely. "I know you didn't stay single your whole life. You're too good looking for that." Kurt smirked.

Blaine laughed and pulled Kurt closer. "I had dated other guys before, but I never really felt comfortable with them. But things were different with Caleb. I guess I knew it when I met him in high school, but it took me years to be okay with that. We were together for seven years before I proposed. I don't think Caleb wanted to rush things and I honestly believe that he was waiting for me to propose so that he knew that he was what I wanted. He knew how much you meant to me and that you'd always be my first love. When we said our vows, he promised that he would always take care of me and love me and he did. I know it sounds cliché, but he really was the best husband I could ask for if I couldn't have you. It really was like a fairytale romance and in my defense, I think I deserved to be happy."

"Of course you did, Blaine. You deserved to be the happiest person in the world. I'm glad you found someone who loved you like he did. Like I wanted to."

Blaine kissed Kurt's forehead and then spoke with his lips brushing Kurt's skin, making him shiver. "We moved to Los Angeles and made a home for ourselves there. We both went to UCLA. I graduated with a BA in acting and a minor in music. Caleb got a BA in art. I did some theater work for a while, got some minor roles in a few TV shows, and Caleb opened up his own art gallery that I played at sometimes. After that, we settled down and adopted a daughter named Kara." Blaine looked at Kurt again, with a wistful look in his eyes. "She's beautiful Kurt. We named her for you. We both wanted to. She has this gorgeous curly strawberry blonde hair and very light blue eyes. You would have loved her. I wish you could have met her. She married Tyler at twenty-three and we had our first grandchild, Charlie, when she was twenty-five and Nicole was born two years later. Caleb and I retired at sixty-five and 'grew young together' as he put it. I played guitar for as long as I could until the arthritis in my hands made me have to stop. I was able to play piano for a while longer though, which made things easier. Caleb had dementia that got worse five or so years ago and that was hard to see him go through, but music seemed to help him so I played for him a lot. I started getting sick a lot and I guess my body just couldn't fight it off anymore. The last thing I remember was dreaming so I'd guess I died in my sleep. Wow, that sounds weird to say."

There was a long pause and Kurt found himself timidly asking, "Do you love Caleb?"

Blaine looked at him and his features softened. "Yes, Kurt, I do." He put his finger under Kurt's chin. "If you're wondering what will happen when he dies, you don't have to worry. He knows that I'd always come back to you in the end. And he told me that he loves me enough to let me go to you."

"You're not just saying that?" Somehow Blaine always seemed to know what he was thinking. Kurt had prided himself on hiding his emotions but with Blaine, he was an open book.

"No, Kurt. You can ask him yourself when he gets here." He laughed gently. "He'd told me many times that he wished he could have met you."

Kurt had tears in his eyes and he just wrapped his arms around Blaine and pulled him up closer and held him as tightly as he could. "I love you."

A soft smile appeared on Blaine's face as he cradled Kurt in his arms. "I love you too. More than you could ever know."

Blaine angled his head and pressed his forehead to Kurt's. Their noses were touching and they just breathed together and Kurt could not believe that he was finally with Blaine again. Kurt tilted his head as their lips met, with Blaine pressing his hand to Kurt's cheek and feeling the spark of heat and the longing that they'd both gone for so long without each other's touch. Kurt's lips parted and Blaine deepened the kiss, Kurt tangling his fingers in Blaine's hair and pulling him impossibly closer. Kurt could not say how much he'd missed this. Honestly, he just wanted to jump Blaine right now. He could tell by the way Blaine was pulling at his hips and the needy way he kissed him that Blaine wanted to too. But he pulled away, smiling at Kurt's whine and laughed huskily.

"Later, my love." He whispered in Kurt's ear, lightly kissing the sensitive skin on his earlobe. Blaine wrapped his arms around him again and Kurt settled his cheek on Blaine's chest. Blaine kissed Kurt's hair and then rested his chin on the top of Kurt's head. Kurt gently threaded his fingers with Blaine's, smiling lightly at the moon that shone down so brightly in the dark.

They stayed that way until the sun rose, finally safe again in the arms of the person they loved and Kurt knew that now they truly could build a home together, in the way that they'd always wanted to, in the way that they were always meant to.

56. Stupid Grin, Alternate Ending

A/N: The addition of this chapter brings this story to a bittersweet close. After seven (?)ish months, I can finally move the 'In-Progress' button over to 'Complete.' I do plan on writing a 'future' chapter with Blaine and Caleb but that's going to go as a separate one-shot.

Thank you so much everyone for sticking with me through this and for those of you who added me to author alerts and favorited this story and took the time to review. They mean more to me than you know. ~~Yaled 'System' to the Ordinal for a new story~~
would love to know people's opinion on that one. It's very different from what I normally write (aka angst haha) but it's also my first attempt at an mpreg story. I normally steer away from those but I've read a few that I really like and this idea has been in my head for a while.

And with that, please enjoy the last alternate ending (goes right after chapter 29). And I'm sorry if there's any differences in information for previous chapters. It's been a long time since I've read those. Oh, and the first section you might recognize. It starts out the same as the alternate ending, Eyes.

--

Wes was having the Warblers go over the rolling harmony again and Blaine was watching, giving appreciative nods and comments when appropriate. It was only eight o'clock, but Blaine was so tired. He hadn't been sleeping well for obvious reasons, but in addition, his nightmares had been getting worse. Finn slept like a rock and either he didn't hear or Blaine wasn't screaming in his sleep anymore, which was good he supposed, but he still woke up with cold sweat drenching his body, hotel sheets tangled in his legs, and deep crescent-shaped nail marks in his palms.

He heard the hum of the Warblers grow louder and Wes smiled.

"Good. Alright, a few more times, and we'll be done here."

Blaine felt his cell phone buzzing in his pocket. He hurriedly checked the caller ID and when he saw it was Finn, he caught Wes's attention to tell him he'd be back and slipped out the door, letting it close behind him and deafening any sound that came from within.

"Finn, is Kurt okay?"

"Yeah, yeah he's fine."

He could hear the smile in Finn's voice.

"What's up?" Blaine's tone relaxed now that he knew Kurt was okay.

"Kurt's doctor just came in and said that the treatment they're giving him is working, so he's going to stay here tonight and they're going to send him home tomorrow. He'll have to take some antibiotics or something for a while, but he's fine."

Blaine felt as though his heart could have burst from relief. He ran a hand through his hair and smiled, a real, true smile, for the first time in he didn't know how long.

"Really? Finn, that's... that's..." he laughed. "You have no idea how happy I am right now."

Finn laughed too. "I believe it dude. Well, just wanted to let you know. We're going to be heading back to the hotel soon, so I'll see you there?"

"Yep. Wes is having them run through the opening number a few more times and then I'll get going."

"Cool. Alright, see you."

"Mhmm."

Blaine hung up swiftly, still smiling hugely. He opened the door and returned to the rehearsal, his steps light and almost bouncy.

The thrum of voices inside faded away. Wes turned and took in Blaine's expression.

"Who was that?"

"Finn." Blaine said, slightly breathless with the overwhelming happiness. "They're releasing Kurt tomorrow. He's fine."

Grins broke out on every face and the entire room itself seemed to brighten. He was enveloped in a crushing hug that squeezed the air out of his lungs, but he didn't care. Blaine reached out his arms and grabbed as many Warblers as he could fit in his arms and hugged tightly. Wes clapped him on the back and smiled at him.

All of the Warblers fell away as David cleared his throat.

"In light of this happy news, Thad, Wes, and I have decided to run this one more time and then we'll let you go."

More smiles flashed up at him and they all hurried back into the starting formation. Blaine moved to the center of the room and leaned against an armchair, arms crossed lightly on his chest.

Wes snapped his fingers as he counted out the first beats, and then they began to sing, voices rising together. The entire song in itself was flawless, but there was a smile on every face and they actually performed full out, feeding off each other's energy. There was an electricity in the air, one of vigor, power.

"That was amazing guys, really. You've never performed better. Channel that energy you feel now when you perform every time, and Regionals will be a piece of cake."

Blaine grinned at them and rounds of high-fives circled with triumphant cries and fist pumps. Wes clapped his hands for silence and Thad spoke.

"Well, Blaine said it all. Keep it up guys and the Warblers will be going to Nationals."

The group dispersed, talking excitedly, after they all offered hugs and high-fives to Blaine once more, telling him to tell Kurt they missed him. He was sure Kurt would want to see them as soon as possible, but if that wasn't able to happen, they would be sitting together at Regionals to cheer them on.

It was snowing again. Not badly, but enough to force Blaine to have to squint to see as he walked from Dalton to his car. He shoved his hands further in his pockets and toyed with his keys in one hand. Blaine

was trying so hard not to run to his car; he really did not want to skid out on the slippery ground and end up with freezing wet pants. He finally reached his car and turned it on, waiting for it to warm up. Blasting the heat as much as it would go, he stuck his fingers up in front of the vents, slowly defrosting them.

He pulled out of the Dalton parking lot and onto the main road. It was a short distance to the hospital, but it was really dark out and the snow was beginning to pound so he had to drive slowly. He happened to glance in the rearview mirror and noticed, with some degree of embarrassment even though there was no one else to see him, that there was the most ridiculous grin on his face that he had ever seen. He tried to calm down his giddiness, but that only succeeded in making him laugh. So, stupid grin it was.

But Blaine could not remember ever being this happy or relieved. It was as though this huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders, one that he hadn't even known he was carrying. He felt so light that he wouldn't find it surprising if he just started flying.

Kurt was okay. He grinned wider as he pulled into the hospital parking lot and practically jumped out of the driver's seat. The snow didn't even seem bothersome now as he trudged through the lot towards the large sliding double doors. The hospital itself was very white, something Blaine had grown accustomed to. He smiled at the nurses sitting at the front desk because he just couldn't stop.

His feet carried him down the hallway because he didn't have to think about where he was going. When Blaine reached Kurt's room and he saw him sitting there, flipping through a magazine, it took all of his self-restraint to not just run in and jump on the bed. Kurt either heard him coming or felt his presence by the door because he looked up and his face melted into a soft smile as he met his eyes. Blaine knew that the stupid grin was still stuck on his face but he really could have cared less.

He took a few steps in the room and the first thing out of his mouth was, "Hey."

"Hey," Kurt replied and motioned for him to come over. Blaine forced himself to walk, not run, and slowly reached out a hand to place it over Kurt's.

"They told you?" Kurt asked and the happiness in his eyes was reflected in his boyfriend's eyes too.

He nodded. "Finn did." And Blaine finally felt the smile on his face ebb away as the seriousness of this situation sunk in. "Kurt," he whispered and heard the almost embarrassing way that his voice broke. He felt the tears fall down his cheeks before he realized they had even formed in his eyes.

Kurt's own eyes were shining as he looked up into his boyfriend's face. He reached up and wrapped his arms around Blaine's back, being careful not to jostle the IV line that was still annoyingly stuck in the inside of his wrist. Kurt held him as Blaine got as close as he could get. Silent tears streaked both of their faces. And they just held each other so tightly.

Blaine finally pulled away and brushed his hand along Kurt's cheek. Then he leaned in and kissed him. As Blaine's dry lips met his own, Kurt smiled into the kiss and pulled him down closer and ran his fingers through Blaine's hair. When Blaine looked into Kurt's eyes, he could feel nothing but relief and love. Kurt scooted over and waited for him to crawl next to him. Blaine put a knee up on the bed and then pushed himself all the way up, wiggling up as close as he could get next to Kurt. The brown-haired boy laughed and snuggled into Blaine's chest, where his waiting arms enveloped him in the comforting scent of Blaine. They stayed like that for a long time, both wanting nothing more than to be beside the other for the rest of their lives. Blaine's hand found Kurt's and he linked their fingers.

Kurt smiled and looked up at him.

"You have no idea how happy I am right now." Blaine whispered.

"I think I do, if you're anywhere as happy as I am right now." Kurt replied. "I can feel your heart beating," he said softly.

Blaine smiled and brought their intertwined hands up to rest on his chest. "I love you so much."

"I love you too." Kurt bent his head down slightly to kiss Blaine's fingers. "I don't know where I'd be without you."

"Kurt, that was the scariest thing that's ever happened to me. I... I didn't know if... if you..." he trailed off, feeling the memory flash through his mind. Kurt so pale and thin, lying unmoving on the bathroom floor. He squeezed his eyes shut. Kurt moved his head at the catch in Blaine's breath.

"Hey, look at me," Kurt said softly.

Blaine carefully opened his eyes and looked into Kurt's, something gentle and protective glistening there.

"It's okay."

"For now." Blaine said, a touch of hardness to his words. He couldn't stop the anger that pulsed through his veins. He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. That... that was stupid and thoughtless and-"

He was stopped by Kurt's soft hand on his cheek. "I know. It was, but I understand." He smiled lightly. "They're just words, Blaine. I don't want to think about how scary that must have been. I mean, if it were you..." he sighed. "I don't even really know how you're not falling apart because I know that I would have so long ago."

"I ask myself that every day." Blaine told him, a lighter tone to his voice now. "I'm sorry for saying that though. I'm just so scared that something else is going to happen or I'll do something and... and-"

"Blaine. Stop. Just stop. Please." Kurt's voice was small. "We're both scared. I can see it in your eyes more than you realize and I can feel it in my own veins."

Blaine felt a sudden rush of courage and held onto Kurt a little tighter. "We're going to get through this. No matter what it takes. Having to be there when you passed out just made me realize how little there is I can do. I feel hopeless and lost, but I'm going to do everything I can for you, Kurt. Nothing is going to stop me, or you, from fighting and we are going to make it through this. I will be there for you, no matter what. You are so much braver than I am and I need to start showing you the courage that I say I have, but haven't felt lately. I love you and no matter what it takes, I'm going to be there for you. Always."

Blaine felt Kurt snuggle in a little closer. "I know you will," he whispered.

Kurt was going home tomorrow, but he still wasn't completely better. He could feel the tiredness seeping into his mind and he tried to fight it, but Blaine was here and his arms were wrapped around him and he could feel the steady rise and fall of his chest and the soft beating of his heart. Blaine's hand was moving gently through his hair and Kurt was almost ready to give in to the temptation of sleep. But then he felt Blaine take a breath and the softly sung melody that tumbled from Blaine's lips made Kurt smile and he forced himself to stay awake, if only for another moment.

I walked across an empty land

I knew the pathway like the back of my hand

I felt the earth beneath my feet

Sat by the river and it made me complete

Oh simple thing, where have you gone?

I'm getting old and I need something to rely on

So tell me when

You're gonna let me in

I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin

Kurt pressed his cheek against Blaine's chest. Blaine made him stronger, made him believe that anything he wanted could come true. Yes, he had leukemia and it had thrown him for a curve many times. But that didn't mean that he could give up. As long as Blaine was with him, he would be okay.

I came across a fallen tree

I felt the branches of it looking at me

Is this the place we used to love?

Is this the place that I've been dreaming of?

Oh simple thing, where have you gone

I'm getting old and I need something to rely on

So tell me when you're gonna let me in

I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin

This song had always held a special place in Blaine's heart and he'd just been waiting for a time to be able to sing it. And no time had ever felt more right than it did in this moment. Kurt was, is, his 'simple thing,' the only thing he needed now. Kurt had shown him love and opened a brand new door for him. He'd been confident about who he was and found a home at Dalton, but now, with Kurt, he felt that he could begin to

build a true home, one that provided everything he could ever need or want. Love, protection, hope, togetherness.

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?

Blaine's arms snaked around Kurt's body and pulled him closer so Kurt's head was on Blaine's shoulder. He hummed gently and rested his chin on the top of Kurt's head, feeling the steady rise and fall of his chest pressed against him.

Oh simple thing where have you gone

I'm getting old and I need something to rely on

So tell me when you're gonna let me in

I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin

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?

There is a moment where you realize just how much someone means to you, whether it be in a song, in a glance, or in a moment of joy or sheer terror. For Blaine, that moment had been when Kurt arrived at Dalton so long ago, the soft confusion and the mask of confidence on his face and the way his eyes lit up

when he watched the Warblers perform, when he watched Blaine sing. No matter what happened, good or bad, they would always be together in their own 'hidden place.' Sure, they hadn't been there yet, but Blaine knew that they would both figure it out eventually. It's the journey that matters and they would get there together, one step at a time.

This could be the end of everything

So why don't we go

Somewhere only we know?

Blaine let the quietly sung words fade away into the air and for a comforting moment, they weren't in a hospital, surrounded by beeping machines and white-washed walls. They were in their own world, with green grass underneath them and stars that twinkled brightly above them and trees that covered them and love that surrounded them.

Blaine had never felt a love like the love he felt for Kurt. He would do anything for him, no matter what the cost. There were things that he couldn't do, like cure Kurt's cancer and that killed him inside. But he could be there for him and he could provide love and comfort and anything else Kurt needed. No matter how things turned out, Blaine would be Kurt's everything, for as long as he would take him. Smiling gently at Kurt's sleeping form, Blaine just held him and closed his own eyes.

He didn't know where life was going to take them, but Blaine was going to take things one day at a time. And Kurt was coming home tomorrow.

That thought and the love he felt radiating from his very pores for this boy who slept like an angel next to him, was enough.

For now, that was enough. That was all he needed.

Just before sleep could cast its spell, Blaine's lips moved gently as he whispered into Kurt's ear. And so, so softly, Kurt smiled.

"I'll never say goodbye to you."

58. Gravity

A/N: I lied. Apparently I'm not done with this story. hehe

This isn't the 'future' chapter I promised and I offer my sincerest apologies about that. However, this idea hit me last night. I guess my mind doesn't want to let this story or its characters go. I'm changing this to 'In-Progress' because somewhere down the road, I may want to keep writing one-shots or something to go with this story and I'd like them all to be in one place and not clogging up ff's main page with a bunch of one-shots. As always, I'm more than happy to write anything you guys want to see and over winter break, I'll have lots of free time to get those done. I love writing prompt-based stuff so feel free to send me an idea you'd like to see written (about this story, Kurt/Blaine in general, or something else). Even if it's just a few words, I'd love to hear some of your Glee-centered heart's desires and perhaps put them into story form.

Thanks guys!

Editor's Note: Numbering is correct.

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Two pairs of feet echoed lightly on the slightly curving path. The brisk wind picked up leaves scattered on the ground and blew them on to another resting place. The path was littered with leaves and occasionally, one pair of feet paused for a moment, then the other pair jumped up and down, crunching the leaves under the owners' shoes.

The man smiled lightly, then took the outstretched hand and the pair continued along the path. The only sound to be heard was the wind as it whistled through the trees. Then he stopped and stared down at the pale gravestone surrounded by grass and fallen leaves. A soft sigh fell from his lips and he looked over at his companion.

She had asked to come. He thought it would be too much for her. He hadn't broken down in years, but sometimes he didn't trust himself. The first few years, Caleb had gone with him to visit Kurt's grave. He went once a year, sometimes more if it got to be too much. But for a while now, Blaine had been coming alone. Not because Caleb didn't want to go, but because he wanted to be able to have this time to himself.

But this year, she'd asked to go with him. And he tried to warn her, but she wouldn't take no for an answer. She was observant and determined. Even at five years old, she knew what she wanted.

"Daddy?" She squeezed her father's hand and looked up at him with those big blue eyes, her curly hair falling around her shoulders and lifting around her face in the breeze.

"I'm okay, honey." He smiled at her and returned the pressure on her fingers. "Do you want to do it?"

She nodded and he passed over the small bouquet of brightly colored flowers. She held them tightly against her chest and waited as Blaine went over to the grave and kneeled down, picking out the now dried flowers that sat in the small vase in the ground. He nodded over at Kara and she ran up, carefully placing the new flowers in the vase, then standing back to admire them.

"They look pretty."

"They're beautiful. Thank you, Kara." He held out his hand and she was enveloped in his grasp, pulling her close to him and pressing their cheeks together. Her lips mouthed the word as she read the letters, then she spoke aloud.

"Kurt." Kara turned to her father for clarification.

"Yes. Kurt was my best, *best* friend a long time ago, when I was still in school." She didn't need to know more than that. It would only confuse her at this age. There would come a time when he would take her back to this spot and tell her everything she wanted to know, but that was a while off.

"Do you miss him?"

"Of course I do. I miss him very much."

As Blaine stood, she wrapped her arms around his forearm and leaned her head down, eyes focused on the grave in front of her. "I miss him too."

Blaine let his laugh fill the quiet area. "I'm sure he would be glad to know you cared about him."

"How did he die?" The sudden question made Blaine's heart skip a beat. He kneeled down in front of her and took her hands in his. The big blue eyes stared right back into his and he was so reminded of Kurt in that one glance.

"Well, honey, he was very sick. Not like when you get sick with a cold, but much worse than that. The doctors couldn't fix him." He told her softly, his hands securely holding hers.

"Oh." That was all she said. Blaine knew she wouldn't understand, but he didn't expect her to. Not now at least. But he was glad for her company. She let go of one hand and turned to face the gravestone.

"Are you ready to go, buddy?"

She nodded, still staring at the grave. Then she waved. "Bye, Kurt!"

Blaine smiled and swung her up in his arms, then lifted her up so she was sitting on his shoulders. "Goodbye, Kurt," he whispered and wrapped his hands tightly around his daughter's calves pressed against his chest. Little hands fisted in his curly hair.

"Did you sing with Kurt too, like you sing with Daddy and Auntie Mercedes sometimes?" Her voice sounded near his right ear as she leaned over. He lifted his right shoulder a bit as he walked to keep her from toppling off.

"Kurt was one of the best singers I've ever heard. We sang all the time." He paused by a tree with low hanging branches and waited as her hands untangled from his hair to reach up and pluck stray leaves. Orange and yellow leaves twirled down around him and he felt a few get stuck in his hair. His eyes followed a leaf as it floated to the ground, touched the cement for a moment, then got blown by the wind.

"You're singing at my birthday right?"

"Of course, baby. I do every year. As long as you want me to."

The hands brushed along his hair, plucking the leaves out. He continued on.

"I'm not a baby! I'm six."

He laughed. "Not until tomorrow, little one. You're not a baby, you say? Oh, well then you must be twenty-five."

"Daddy! I'm not old!"

"Not a baby and not old? Well, then what could you be?"

"I'm a girl."

He grinned. "Are you sure you're not a bird?"

"No!"

"Well that's good because then I'd have to worry about trying to catch you before you flew away. But another little birdie told me that you want a dollhouse for your birthday."

Her hands twirled around in his curls again. "What birdie?"

"The one that knows all the secrets."

"Does it know what you want for your birthday?"

"Oh, I don't know. Did it tell you? What do you think I want for my birthday?"

There was a pause. She was thinking hard about this. "A dollhouse! But yours will be blue because mine will be purple."

"And then we can be neighbors?"

She giggled and Blaine picked her up by the armpits and lowered her down to open the car and scoop her up into her car seat. She was anxiously awaiting the time when she would be upgraded to the 'big-girl seat' when she turned six.

"I would love to be your neighbor. As long as I get to have a puppy. "

Blaine's laptop sat open on the counter underneath the open window, leaking out a random mix of songs as he did the dishes from lunch. A slew of crayons littered the area at the dining room table where Kara was on her knees on the chair, a coloring book open in front of her. Blaine was humming as he rinsed a plate and occasionally glanced up at her, watching her work so intently. She was determined to color inside the lines, even if that meant that Ariel's hair sometimes ended up blue or green or Belle had a red dress. The song changed, the beat faster and reminiscent of high school as a Warbler. He still saw most of them, mainly at yearly holiday parties, but sometimes a few of his friends would drop by and their children would have play dates. They met at the park on weekends, or David and Marissa's house in the summer because he had a pool, or Blaine and Caleb's house in the winter because they had a fireplace and every Disney movie known to man. Kara was a huge Disney fan, as was Blaine (who wouldn't outright admit it, but he'd taken Kara to Disneyland more times that Caleb could count, which led to much joking that Blaine was just using his daughter as an excuse to go).

He'd leaned against the counter with his back to the door and began to scrub at a stubborn coffee stain at the bottom of his favorite yellow mug. He didn't notice when the door opened. He didn't notice when feet clad in mis-matched socks crossed the grass. He didn't notice when she spotted a cat across the street. He didn't notice when she began to run, without a second glance.

He was still humming to himself when the song that was playing changed. He hadn't pressed any buttons at all and hadn't set the playlist to shuffle. The song that blared and broke through mid-chorus of the other song was not even one he had on his playlist. It wasn't a song he'd listened to in a long time. To be honest, he didn't even know if it was on his iTunes at all.

And nobody in all of Oz,

No wizard that there is or was is ever gonna bring

Me down!

His head snapped up, glancing at the screen. But then his eyes sensed another movement and he lifted his eyes to the open window. Curly blonde hair was flying out behind her as she took off, headed straight for the street with her eyes glued to the sleeping cat perched on the hood of their neighbor's truck. The other car in the road was approaching fast and he didn't know if it saw the little girl about to dart right into its path.

He bolted, the mug dropping from his hands. "KARA!"

She paused at the very edge of the street as the squealing of brakes screeched in the air. Blaine was beside her before the door even closed, grabbing her and pulling her up into him. He dropped to his knees with her in his arms, shaking and trembling with adrenaline. He stroked her hair.

"Oh god, baby. Are you okay?"

She looked up at him with wide eyes, her lip starting to tremble as she sensed his distress.

"Oh baby, don't ever do that again. You don't know how much you scared me." He held her tighter and she locked her arms around him. "Don't cry, Kara. Honey, it's okay. You're okay. You just scared me."

The driver of the blue car had stopped and was peering out. Blaine looked up and waved her on, telling her it was okay. She nodded and continued slowly down the street.

The door slammed as Caleb let it swing shut behind him. He ran to them and gasped out, "What happened? You screamed. What happened? Is she okay?" His eyes, so filled with worry, glanced up at Blaine for barely a moment before he scanned his daughter for any immediate injury.

"No, no. She's fine. Almost got ran over. I... I just... I'm glad I saw her in time."

Blaine stood, cradling the girl in his arms. Her tears had stopped as Blaine began to hum in her ear. Caleb wrapped his arm around Blaine's waist and gently petted Kara's curls as his voice joined his husband's.

Strings W inds W ords

*There you see her
her*

*Sitting the
And you don't know why But you're dying*

A smile crept up on Kara's face. Her eyes darted back and forth between her two dads and she kicked her legs gently, laughing as first Caleb, then Blaine pecked her on the cheek.

"I'll take her. It's time to get you ready for your nap anyway." Caleb said to Kara and held out his arms, where Blaine handed her over, wanting to laugh at the sour look that appeared on her face.

"Oh, honey. Even princesses need their beauty sleep. Like Sleeping Beauty remember?"

She characteristically stuck her tongue out at him, but said nothing else.

"You okay?" Caleb asked gently.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Blaine waited until the door swung shut before dropping his head in his hands and letting out the shuddering breath. Oh, god. He had almost watched his child be hit by a car. Just the thought threatened to make his heart race again and he paced back and forth for a minute, slowing his breathing. When he felt his was in control, he made his way back into the house, entering slowly because he knew that Caleb would be laying Kara down for her nap.

Sure enough, when he entered, he could hear Caleb's softly sung voice from the living room. Kara had been requesting her naps on the couch lately, and Blaine and Caleb were more than happy to accommodate her, as long as she took her nap.

*Stay awake, don't rest your head
awake, don't close your eyes*

~~Don't nod and dream~~ *Stay awake, don't nod and dream*

*Though the world is fast asleep
awake, don't nod and dream*

Stay awake, don't nod and dream

Though yo

Blaine went back to the kitchen and began picking up the pieces of ceramic, where the mug had shattered against the tile when he dropped it. After depositing the big shards in the trash and sweeping up the smaller pieces, he ran his hand over the ground, trying to find any tiny chips that could be found by tiny bare feet running through the house. As he was crouched on the ground, he realized that there was music playing. He looked up at his laptop and saw the screen open to the same iTunes playlist he'd listened to earlier, and the song that had been disrupted was now playing normally.

He stood and went over to his laptop, pausing the song and then replaying it, then stopping it completely. Everything worked fine. He scrolled down his list of songs, knowing that he wouldn't find it, but searched anyway. *Defying Gravity*. No results within his current playlist.

A smile appeared on his face and he gently shut his laptop, looking out towards the blue sky. There was only one person he would ever think of when he heard that song. There was no other way that that specific song had randomly cut into the perfectly functioning song he had been listening to. Only one way

that that song would have gotten his attention at the exact moment he needed to look up in order to realize that his little girl was in trouble.

"Thank you, Kurt."

59. So Why Don't We Go

The wind was blowing lazily in the clear day, with the sky bright blue without a cloud to be seen. Kurt stood at the edge of a hill, the blades of grass tickling his bare feet. He smiled when Blaine appeared behind him and wrapped his arms around his waist, settling his chin on Kurt's shoulder.

"What did you want to show me?"

Kurt turned around in Blaine's arms and face-to-face, he said, "Well it won't be a surprise if I tell you now would it?"

The arms around his waist slinked away and then his hand was gripped in a warm embrace. "Come on then, tour guide. Lead the way."

Kurt smirked and pulled him along, winding through the thickening path of pine trees. When he could just begin to smell the scent of jasmine mixed among the strong pine, he said, "Close your eyes."

"Do I have to?"

He put his hand that wasn't connected to Blaine on his hip. "Yes."

Blaine groaned, but when his eyes slid closed, there was a smile on his face. Carefully tugging him forward, Kurt walked the final ten feet through the dense pine trees and into the clearing before them.

"Okay," Kurt whispered when Blaine had come to a stop beside him. "You can open your eyes now."

Dark eyebrows wiggled under curly hair. Kurt laughed and Blaine smiled again before doing as he was told. The sharp intake of breath was what Kurt was expecting because it had been the same thing he'd done when he first set eyes on this place. Blaine's smile slowly fell as he took in the surroundings.

"Kurt... It's beautiful."

Kurt grinned and stepped closer, laying his head on Blaine's shoulder. "I knew you'd like it."

"How did you... Did you just *find* this place?"

Blaine took hesitant steps forward as Kurt stayed behind, watching his every reaction. "It's too perfect to be real."

"This is heaven, Blaine."

He smirked. "I know that, oh-one-who-knows-all. I just can't believe it's here, like I can touch it, you know? It looks too perfect."

Kurt's eyes followed Blaine as he stepped gently on the damp grass, green as emeralds and looking as though untouched in a thousand years. His hands strayed on the smooth bark of the trees at the edge of the pool of water sunk right into the ground. The sun strayed in through the leaves, casting shadows on Blaine's face, and then reflecting off his cheeks when he took a few steps forward, making his eyes alight with hazel fire. There were flowers at the water's edge, nothing like Kurt had ever seen on earth. Blaine knelt and ran the velvet petals through his thumb and forefinger. This flower happened to be Kurt's favorite. It was white, with an orange the shade of smoldering embers outlining each of the five petals, with a sprinkling of the same color in the center. A stem curled up in loops along the vine, coupled with flourishing leaves shaped like crescent moons. Blaine's eyes strayed on the blue vein that ran through the center of each forest green leaf, painting the tips with the same fading shade of navy, winding down along the stem.

"It's beautiful isn't it?"

"Kurt, how... Seriously, you did not just happen to wander through the forest and just find this place right?"

He smiled. "Well, I may have done some very hard wishing that you and I would have somewhere to go and just relax."

Blaine stood and let the soft grin spread across his face. "Somewhere only we know," he said quietly.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Blaine's shoulders. They were silent for a moment as the scent of jasmines enveloped them again. Kurt hadn't been able to find any jasmine flowers anywhere and the flowers by the water had a scent that was sweeter and slightly spicy, but he couldn't pinpoint what it was. He'd decided that even the air here was perfect, as it carried the scent along whenever the soft breeze blew.

"Can we go swimming?" Blaine whispered, his eyes lighting up.

"Of course."

"Great!" He was already hopping around as he unbuckled his belt, pulled off his pants, and threw his t-shirt over his head, tossing them carelessly in a pile at the water's edge. Clad in only his underwear, he ran down to the pool and carefully dipped a toe in. Taking a few steps back, he grinned back at Kurt and ran, pausing only to bend his legs and push off the ground as he jumped and landed in the water with a whoop, causing water to splash up and almost drench his clothes, had Kurt not snatched them up.

"Hey! Did you want your clothes to get soaked?" Kurt yelled after him and moved the pile in his arms further up the hill and away from the soak zone. Shaking his head slightly, though he didn't expect anything different from Blaine, he began to unbutton his own shirt, slipped out of his pants, and folded them neatly next to Blaine's. When he reached the water, his boyfriend was bobbing up and down and watching him expectantly.

"Don't tell me you've never swam here before?" Blaine asked, eying Kurt as he looked around for a shallow place to enter the water.

"I've only been here twice. Once I took a nap and the second time, I had Aphrodite with me and I wasn't about to go swimming by myself."

"I bet she would have gone in. That horse will do anything for you."

Kurt snickered as he placed one foot in the water and upon finding it a very nice temperature, the other foot joined in. He waded out up to his chest and then started pulling himself forward with his arms, keeping his head above water as he watched Blaine swim towards him. The water rippled in shimmering waves around them that were turquoise one moment and purple the next. Kurt smiled when Blaine's face appeared next to his. Blaine linked their hands together.

"Thank you for bringing me here."

"I wouldn't want to share it with anyone but you."

"Aw," Blaine grinned. "You're making me blush."

Kurt lightly smacked the water up towards him. Though only a few drops landed on his face, Blaine's eyebrows rose and Kurt knew he was in trouble.

"Don't you dare." He said, trying to get his voice to sound angry, when they both knew he was far from it, though the threat was there. "Don't you even think about it."

Blaine held up his hands in surrender. "Wouldn't dream of it." But the way Blaine's eyes twinkled gave him away. Kurt sighed and when Blaine kicked over to the edge to pull a few flowers down closer, he rolled over, letting the water hold him up, and began to backstroke lazily. Through the cover of trees, Kurt could see that the sky was beginning to darken quickly. He'd never been here at night before. He wondered if he would be able to find his way out of here. But the thought vanished as soon as it came. All he would have to do is call to Aphrodite and she'd get them out if they needed it. A smile pulled at his lips as he thought that he was possibly planning on using the animal as a horse GPS.

The water was warm and almost silky as it splayed out his hair and swirled over his body. He closed his eyes and stilled his arms, floating gently on the water. And then his face was pelted by softly falling raindrops. Wait... raindrops? He squinted and then his eyes shot open as he looked to the side. He spluttered and splashed around, glaring and hollering, "Blaine! Eww, gross!"

Blaine assumed his charming smile and pretended like he had no clue what Kurt was talking about. Like he didn't just spray him with a mouthful of water.

"Fine. You thought about it, you did it. Are we fair now?"

His smile never faded. "Yes. Now come swim with me before it gets too dark."

Kurt took Blaine's hand and let him pull him through the water, using his legs to lightly kick along behind him. They swam in circles or zigzags and even engaged in a splash fight which ended up with Kurt trapped in Blaine's arms after he'd unsuccessfully tried to dunk him under.

"Alright little mermaid," Blaine laughed. "I've got you now."

Kurt snorted and leaned forward, kissing Blaine on the lips and tangling his fingers in the wet curls at the base of his neck. Blaine tightened his grip, their chests now flush against each other. Kurt closed his eyes. He swore he would never stop feeling like this when he kissed Blaine. Like it was their first kiss all over again.

He opened his eyes as Blaine broke their touch and leaned his forehead down to press against Kurt's. Locked in each other's gaze, Blaine whispered, "You are so beautiful."

"You are the epitome of a gentleman," Kurt smiled.

"Seriously Kurt, it's like the moonlight is just radiating off your skin."

Moonlight? Kurt's eyebrows creased. Was it that dark already? He pulled his head back and gasped at what he saw. There was a shimmering light all around them. Blaine craned his neck, turning in a full circle around himself, blinking as if he didn't believe what he was seeing. Kurt was aware that his mouth was half hanging open, but he was too amazed to care. All around them, the flowers Kurt loved so much were *glowing*. But not just glowing, no, pulsing with soft orange hues. The vines that hung over the edge of the pool were reflected in the shimmering royal purple water, casting dancing dots on the surface. Looking up, Kurt realized that the flowers that were embedded in the tree bark and tangling up towards the leaves were glowing too. These ones were shades of pink and green and casted the same soft light. Even the leaves on the trees seemed to shimmer faintly. Kurt brought his eyes back to Blaine, not surprised to see that in his wide irises, the glowing was intensified.

His voice was so soft in the still air. "Blaine, you are gorgeous."

Their lips met again, Blaine cupping Kurt's face in his hands as faint purple drops beaded down his fingers and wrists. Kurt smiled into the kiss and pulled him closer, wanting to get lost in this moment, but remember it forever. When they broke apart, keeping an inch of space between their skin, they whispered simultaneously, "I love you." And as if on cue, a flower fell into the water, sending glittering rays of orange that danced upon the purple waves, making their skin tingle and shine with the reflecting colors.

And somewhere only they knew had never seemed more appropriate, real, or attainable as it did in that moment.