

# Take It Like a Man

by

**idoltina and penguintopia**

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

*A Legally Blonde AU. Blaine Anderson has it all. He's a member of both the polo and fencing clubs, founder of the charity Songbirds in Schools, and the lead soloist of the university's famous all-male a capella choir, the Warblers. In his senior year at UCLA, Blaine-- a show choir major -- wants nothing more than to be the future Mr. Blaine Anderson-Smythe. When Sebastian breaks up with Blaine instead of proposing and heads off to a more 'serious' life at Harvard Law, Blaine sets his sights on following the love of his life to Boston to win him back. But Harvard holds a lot more obstacles than Blaine anticipated: challenging coursework, Santana Lopez, and an admittedly cute graduate by the name of Kurt Hummel.*

*\*also includes the side stories **Draw the Line** and **Sunrise on the East Side***

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### SUNRISE ON THE EAST SIDE

## TAKE IT LIKE A MAN

### *Chapter One*

Blaine sits up with a slight groan, running a hand over his face and through his curls. He makes a quiet, happy noise into his hand, sated, before moving to retrieve his boxer briefs from the floor. Sebastian wraps an arm around Blaine's torso and tugs Blaine against his chest, hooking his chin over Blaine's shoulder. Blaine settles against him with a rather ungraceful *oomph*, laughing. He turns his head slightly to face Sebastian, raising an amused eyebrow. "You up for round two already?"

Sebastian shakes his head against Blaine's shoulder, lips moist against Blaine's skin. "No," he mumbles, "just want you to stay." Blaine smiles a little and eases them back onto the mattress, resting his cheek against Sebastian's abdomen. They lay there for a while, quiet, before Sebastian glances down at him. "What?"

Blaine shrugs. "Just thinking."

"Cute," Sebastian snorts. "About?"

Blaine smacks his chest lightly. "You- us. Just remembering asking around about you after you wrote your phone number on my hand and said *yes--*"

"You pranced out of Cornell and into the courtyard singing Rod Stewart and asking if I thought you were sexy, B, what did you want me to do?"

Blaine bites back a smile. "You were pretty well known for a freshman and everyone told me the same thing, you know."

Sebastian raises an eyebrow. "Which was?"

"That you weren't serious. They told me you didn't do relationships. And look at you now," Blaine teases with a grin. "Almost three years and you want me to stay," he says in a sing-song voice. Sebastian rolls his eyes and tangles his fingers in Blaine's curls, pushing his head away a little. "I'm serious," Blaine laughs. "They made you their homecoming king and put a pretty girl on your arm and here I am, in your bed--"

"Oh god, don't even get me started on Celia," Sebastian groans. "She's a nightmare. You would've been preferable."

Blaine quirks an eyebrow at him. "Really?" he drawls. "You think I'd be appealing to your legions of admirers?"

"Oh please," Sebastian laughs. "You'll be charming the pants off of old ladies when you're eighty-three and gray-haired and wrinkled."

Blaine grins. "Well one of us has to be likable. You're going to be one of those old men who complains about everything. You're- oh god," he laughs, hiding his face against Sebastian's stomach. "You're going to be George Wilson."

"And you're an *asshole*," Sebastian declares, closing his eyes and settling in more comfortably against the pillows. He hums a little before chuckling. "God, what a pair we'd make."

Blaine shifts so his cheek is resting against Sebastian's stomach again, reaching over to tangle their fingers together. "You've thought about that?"

"Hard not to," Sebastian snorts. "You and the Warblers performed at a nursing home last week. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it since." He pauses before opening an eye and looking down at Blaine. "Why?"

"No reason," Blaine says, shrugging. "It's just cute--"

"Pooh Bear?"

"Yeah?"

"Stop talking, you're ruining this."

Blaine laughs and crawls back up to Sebastian's face, leaving soft kisses across Sebastian's chest in his wake. He props himself up on his arms a little, hovering over Sebastian's face. Sebastian smiles and anchors a hand at Blaine's waist. "You started it."

Sebastian grins and pulls them to the edge of the bed, tugging Blaine into sitting up before kneeling on the floor below Blaine with an increasingly wicked smirk on his face. "Well, then, I guess I'll just have to finish it, won't I?" He bends his neck and starts tracing kisses up Blaine's thigh; Blaine arches towards Sebastian's mouth, enjoying the attention until--

He pulls himself away from Sebastian slightly, wide-eyed, and suddenly all he can think about is *just want you to stay and old and gray-haired and wrinkled and what a pair we'd make and I haven't been able to stop thinking about it and I'll finish it.*

"B?" Blaine blinks and shakes his head. Sebastian's looking up at him, eyes searching, his thumbs rubbing in circles over Blaine's hips; he doesn't break eye-contact and tugs his class ring off of his right hand to switch it to his left and oh my *god*.

Blaine exhales slowly, gathering himself. "Sorry."

Sebastian's mouth twists into a smile. "You with me?" he asks with a raised eyebrow before resuming his attention to Blaine's thighs.

Blaine returns the smile and leans back onto the bed, right hand twitching towards Sebastian's left. "Yeah," Blaine breathes, pressing their hands together. "Definitely."

\*\*\*\*\*

The sun is warm against Blaine's face and his back as he walks up the path to the front door; he feels like he could *fly*.

He opens and shuts the door quietly before resting his back against it; it's still early, before eight, and he doesn't want to wake the rest of the Warblers just yet. He breathes out through his nose, calm and even, before crossing the foyer and pushing open the kitchen door.

He's greeted by bright lights and a constant stream of chatter, the smell of something deliciously unhealthy frying on the stove. A few of the Warblers wave at him in greeting before returning to their conversations; it's Thad who nudges his side on his way to the refrigerator. "Somebody got *laid*," he teases, winking over his shoulder.

Blaine smiles faintly but doesn't answer, moves instead towards the kitchen island in the center of the room. David glances up from the stove before turning the burner off and transferring the scrambled eggs onto a plate for Jeff. "Blaine? You okay, buddy?" The room starts to go quiet; Nick reaches over to click the radio off. Blaine sets his fedora on the counter and grips the edge of the island. He's quiet when he speaks but he's got the Warblers' full attention; he knows they'll all hear him.

"I think Sebastian's going to propose."

\*\*\*\*\*

It's another three days before he's absolutely sure.

*hey B, dinner Friday night @ 8? your favorite?*

Blaine tries (and fails) to bite back a grin before planting his face in his pillow and letting out an (admittedly) incredibly undignified squeal.

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine looks at himself in the mirror and frowns. *No, no, this is all wrong. It has to be perfect for tonight. I don't know why Sebastian's decided now is the time, but this is it, so this outfit needs to be exactly right.*

He sighs. This may take more than his admittedly substantial and occasionally miraculous powers of shopping and outfit creation. He sends a text to Trent.

*outfit emergency. need fabulous warbler help asap.*

Trent sends back a smiley face, and Blaine heaves a sigh of relief. The boys of the Warblers will know what to do.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Tonight's important!" Blaine says defensively. "Maybe I need to try something different."

"It's a cardigan," David says flatly. "It's a cardigan and it's *gray*, for crying out loud. I can't think of anything that's less you."

"David has a point," Thad interjects, rifling through the sales rack. "I don't understand why you're completely disregarding blazers as an option."

"Or your signature color," Trent tacks on. "You need color."

He tries a full tuxedo next, and David's brow furrows as Blaine emerges from the dressing room. "You look like you're going to a wedding."

Thad grins at him. "Isn't that the point?"

By the time Blaine emerges in a suit entirely in soft pink silk, he knows he's testing his friends' patience. The three of them stare at him in collective silence as he looks himself over in the mirror, and Trent actually *sits down*. Blaine worries his lip. "Is it too much?"

"It's pink," David says, voice flat.

Blaine looks to Trent for help. "Signature color, right?" Trent just gives him a *look*. Blaine looks back at his reflection. "It's too much."

He ventures into some vests, after that – a decidedly less... flamboyant option. "I, for one, think you wear it even better than Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Justin Timberlake combined," Thad offers with a grin. "And you know how I feel about Joseph Gordon-Levitt."

"Thanks, Thad, but I don't think that's good enough for tonight. It has to be special -- but it can't look like I'm expecting anything. I need perfection. Plus neither of them is married, anyways," he finishes, muttering.

"We've been through twenty different outfit combinations just since the three of us got here, Blaine, and I don't know how many you went through before that. Just pick a goddamn suit or whatever -- he's already gonna propose, whether you wear a suit, a sweater vest, or nothing at all," David says.

"Actually, I think he'd probably prefer the latter," Thad mutters.

"While I understand the importance of the right outfit for the right occasion, I have to agree with David," Trent says. "Sebastian'd think you were gorgeous in sweatpants and a hoodie. So for the love of God, make a decision."

"Okay, I'll make a decision. Um..." He darts back into the changing room and quickly changes, tossing rejected pieces of clothing aside.

"This one," he says in front of the mirror, satisfied. "It's perfect."

\*\*\*\*\*

The look Sebastian gives Blaine when Blaine walks down the stairs to the front hall makes Blaine glad he decided on the pale pink button down, skinny tie, and tight slacks combo after all. Sebastian only gets that look on his face when he's contemplating the slow removal of every piece of clothing Blaine is wearing.

"You look...amazing," Sebastian says, eyes roaming over Blaine's body.

Blaine grins. "Likewise." Sebastian looks *hot* -- the first few buttons on his shirt are unfastened and it's making Blaine want to forget dinner and just finish the job. But this dinner is important -- Sebastian's *proposing* -- so instead he steels himself against the urge to drag Sebastian upstairs to his room and shrugs into the jacket Trent holds open for him; Blaine has to bite back a smile as Thad discreetly waltzes by to drop Blaine's pocketwatch into a jacket pocket. "Reservations at eight, right?"

Sebastian nods absently, eyes still roving, before reaching out and hooking an arm around Blaine's torso, sliding his hand underneath Blaine's jacket. His palm is flat and warm against the small of Blaine's back, the material of the shirt sliding smooth against Blaine's skin. Sebastian tugs him a little closer, dips down to press a kiss to Blaine's mouth; it's meant to be quick but Blaine leans into it, inhaling sharply. He can't get over the way Sebastian's hand feels right now, fisting tightly into the material of Blaine's shirt in a way that makes something twist and coil in Blaine's stomach. He rolls up on the balls of his feet, aching to be just a little taller, a little closer; he starts to open his mouth to Sebastian's when there's a rather forceful pressure on the top of his head. Blaine breaks the kiss, indignant, and opens his eyes to find his fedora unceremoniously perched atop his head. Wes calls over his shoulder at them. "Get a *room*."

\*\*\*\*\*

At the restaurant, Sebastian pulls out Blaine's chair and does all the little chivalrous things he rarely bothers with, and Blaine is rather charmed by it all. It's a little old fashioned, especially since Blaine isn't actually a girl (no matter his penchant for fashion), but it's sweet.



Once they're seated, though, it's like someone's flipped a switch in Sebastian; he's still courteous and charming, but he doesn't really talk to Blaine, except when Blaine actively tries to engage him in conversation. Even then, he seems distracted. But then, who wouldn't be?

Eventually, though, Blaine runs out of topics -- Sebastian doesn't really seem interested in reliving homecoming, or whether he and Blaine should go to the Jason Mraz concert next weekend. Blaine looks down at his ravioli and sighs. "Is there something you wanted to talk to me about?"

Sebastian flicks his eyes up before letting out a shaky, uneven chuckle. "Is it that obvious?"

Blaine laughs brightly and dabs his mouth with his napkin before reaching across the table for Sebastian's hand, squeezing it lightly. "Only to me."

Sebastian breathes out, too loud, his hand unmoving and tense in Blaine's. "Okay, it's-- I've been thinking a lot about this and I-- I think this is the right time. We've been together for a while, and I think we've reached a crossroads. We have to make a decision about the future. I-- I have a lot of plans."

"Yeah," Blaine says, "you've mentioned. I remember."

Sebastian's shoulders relax a little. "Good," he sighs. "I'm glad we're on the same page."

Blaine's eyes flick down to Sebastian's hand and he runs his thumb over the top of Sebastian's class ring. "Of course we are."

Sebastian hesitates for a moment, and Blaine offers him an encouraging smile.

"I think we should break up."

Blaine starts to give his answer -- yes -- but clamps his mouth shut when he realizes what Sebastian's actually just said. "Wait," he breathes, withdrawing his hand. "What? You- you're breaking up with me? I-- I thought you were... proposing."

Sebastian cocks an eyebrow at him. "Come on, B," and he's laughing, *why is he laughing?* "You and I both know that this has been fun, but it's time for me to stop dicking around."

Blaine flinches at the word choice and shakes his head, trying to understand. "So... when you said you'd always love me, you were just dicking around?"

Sebastian sighs and reaches across the table for Blaine's hand, but Blaine recoils, stung. "I'm going to Harvard," Sebastian reminds him, fingers toying with the napkin holder on the table. "I need someone serious, Blaine. My parents expect a lot from me."

Blaine sinks back into his chair, shoulders sagging. "So you're breaking up with me because you're afraid your family won't like me? Everybody likes me."

Sebastian drums his fingers on the table in a familiar rhythm and Blaine watches his fingers move, tries desperately to figure out the melody because this isn't happening, it can't be happening. "East coast people are different, Pooh Bear."

"I'm from Ohio," Blaine reminds him.

"Still, it's the Midwest," Sebastian argues, and he's tapping out the irritatingly unidentifiable song with the napkin holder now. "It's not... classy," he says slowly, deliberately, and it's like he's trying not to hurt Blaine's feelings which doesn't even make any sense because he's breaking up with Blaine. Sebastian's face splits into a slow, hesitant grin.

Blaine gapes at him, heart sinking. "So what, I'm not- I'm not *good enough* for you? For your family?"

Sebastian's face falls a little and the constant drumming finally stops. "B, it's not like that. It's- law school is different. I have plans, I want to run for office some day. I- I need someone serious."

Blaine falls against the back of his chair. "Where is this even coming from? What did I do?"

Something flickers in Sebastian's eyes and Blaine has *got* to stop paying attention to these details because none of it matter any more, Sebastian is breaking up with him-- "This isn't about you," Sebastian starts, then considers something for a minute. "Well, it is, but it isn't. This is really more about me, Blaine."

Blaine's gapes at him, chest heaving, and this is when he knows for sure that it's over, that this is really happening. "Did you just give me the *it's not you, it's me* speech?" he asks incredulously.

Sebastian sighs, clearly frustrated but Blaine doesn't care, doesn't want to soothe Sebastian's nerves or make this better because it's not going to get better, it can't. "I told you," Sebastian says thinly, "I need someone serious."

"I'm not serious? I'm seriously *in love with you*. What else do you need?" And Blaine can't do this anymore. The man he thought he was going to marry just broke up with him, he feels like he's going to start sobbing any minute, and he just wants to hit something -- and despite everything, he'd really rather it wasn't Sebastian's face.

Sebastian's hand twitches on the table in a wildly transparent effort not to reach across the table for Blaine's hand again. He opens his mouth and inhales several times, on the verge of speaking several times but he keeps coming up short. Finally, he sighs and says, "Pooh Bear, I just need you to-- I don't expect you to understand--"

"Yeah, that's because I don't," Blaine breathes. "I don't understand, at all." He stands up from the table and grabs his fedora -- the black one with the pink band that matches his shirt, the one he bought especially for tonight -- and turns to leave.

"I'm sorry I'm not what you want, Sebastian. I-- I'm sorry--" He stops and glances over his shoulder to look at Sebastian one more time, his eyes swimming with tears. "I'm sorry I wasted so much of your time."

Blaine takes a deep breath and walks resolutely out of the restaurant (he does not storm out; he does not cry).

\*\*\*\*\*

*(Sebastian, it's- it's Blaine. I just... Please, can we talk this through? I think I can fix things. Call me when you get this, okay?)*

Blaine stands in front of the punching bag in his slacks and undershirt, picturing Sebastian's face on the bag, but he can't do it. He still loves Sebastian, and he doesn't want to hurt him, even if only in his head. Instead, he tries to empty his mind and just punch the bag. No visual.

One.

Two.

One-two.

*(It's Blaine again. Will you-- will you please pick up the phone?)*

He just doesn't understand. How could he have so misread the situation that he thought Sebastian was going to propose while Sebastian was planning to break up with him? He knows people sometimes mistake his joy in life as simple-mindedness, but he's actually pretty smart; he doesn't understand how could he have missed this. Except...

*I'll finish it.*

Oh god.

Oh *god*.

One.

Two.

*(I'm not ready to give up on us.)*

He just wishes Sebastian would call him back. They can work this out. Blaine can convince Sebastian that he's serious, and they'll get back together, and everything will be like it was before. If Sebastian would just call back.

One.

Two.

One-two.

*(Baby, please, please don't leave me.)*

Blaine barely notices the tears slowly streaming down his face as he hits the bag harder and harder. Why doesn't Sebastian love him any more? Try as he might, Blaine just can't figure it out. Did he do something

wrong? How can he be what Sebastian wants if all Sebastian wants is someone 'serious'? What does that even mean?

Why does Blaine care so much?

One.

Two.

*(The voicemail box of the person you are trying to reach is full.)*

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine trudges into the kitchen, still in last night's wrinkled clothes. Only a few Warblers are there, chatting quietly. Blaine slumps listlessly onto a stool at the island and drops his fedora unceremoniously onto the counter.

Thad turns and notices him there. "Hey, what are you doing back already? I thought you two would still be *celebrating*." He grins a little at Blaine, but then starts to frown at Blaine's obvious unhappiness. "Is everything okay?"

"He broke up with me."

There's a split second of silence before Trent *shrieks*. "He did *what*?"

"He broke up with me," Blaine repeats dully, and he will not cry again, he won't.

It's Thad who asks the obvious question. "*Why*?"

Blaine shrugs. "He wanted someone more *serious* for when he's at Harvard."

"What does that even *mean*?" David mutters.

"I don't know, but apparently I'm not it." Blaine glances up at his friends and slumps his shoulders inward. "He broke up with me." The last bits of his resolve finally leave him, and it's Wes' shoulder he buries his face into when the tears finally come again.

\*\*\*\*\*

Trent knocks on Blaine's door on Day Seven of the Sebastian Smythe is a Jackass weepfest and opens it to find a quite alarming sight. Blaine is burrowed under a mass of blankets and throws (and how he's not sweating to death in the California heat is beyond Trent) and surrounded by the remnants of tissues and candy wrappers. There's at least a large bag's worth of Tootsie Roll wrappers near Blaine's feet, and close to a dozen empty fast food soda cups strewn about the bedside tables. Most worrisome of all, *Rent* is playing on Blaine's television, and it's reached "Without You." It's time for an intervention.

"Hey, Blaine."

Blaine waves weakly at Trent. "Hey."

"Blaine, sweetie, I know you're upset --" Blaine snorts. "Okay, devastated -- but you've been holed up in here for an entire week. And the amount of times you've watched *Rent* and *Moulin Rouge* is starting to scare me. And don't think I didn't see David bringing you that *Titanic* DVD." Trent inches towards the bed. "I think you need to get out of this room."

"No."

"Yes. Get up, we're all going out for karaoke, and you *are* coming with us."

Blaine pokes his head out of the blankets a little. "Karaoke?" He shrugs. "I guess I could go with you. I mean, if you don't think I'd be too much of a wet blanket."

"Great. Let's go."

\*\*\*\*\*

"*ALL BY MYSELF--*"

"What have we done?" Thad asks in horror. "He's -- no, I can't even say it."

David pats him on the shoulder. "He needed to get drunk. How could we know it would result in--" He waves in the general direction of the stage where Blaine is currently serenading the microphone stand. "--this?"

"You know, I'm actually impressed that he's in key right now," Trent offers. "Even with the crying." Thad and David nod in agreement.

"Oh my *god*." Trent glances up and over his shoulder to find Wes joining their group and staring in shock at the display Blaine's putting on. "What did you guys *do* to him?"

"Nothing!" Thad says defensively. "We just put a little liquor in him, that's all." Collectively they watch as Blaine stumbles off of the stage and gets caught on the arm of a pretty, wide-eyed girl; together, they laugh as she helps him down into a seat. "You can't blame us for *that*," Thad adds quickly. "That's just Blaine."

"We should probably stage an intervention," David sighs. "Poor girl's not gonna know what hit her."

"Or Blaine will be too polite to say no," Nick suggests. "Either way, this cannot end well."

Wes shakes his head. "Amateurs, all of you. Why am I always the one who has to clean up after your messes?" He weaves his way through the tables and between chairs and rests a hand on Blaine's shoulder. Trent and the rest of the Warblers watch as Blaine turns in his seat and smiles brightly at him. He fumbles slightly for the girl's hand and presses it into Wes' hand, trying to get them to shake. Wes shakes the girl's hand firmly before reaching for Blaine's elbow to tug him up and out of the chair. Blaine drapes himself over Wes' shoulders while Wes speaks to her, and then he lifts his head from Wes' neck, blinking rapidly before promptly dissolving into tears again. Wes sighs, hauling him upright and dragging him back towards the rest of the Warblers. Blaine's babbling by the time they rejoin the group. "He broke up with me."

Wes pats his shoulder reassuringly. "I know. We still love you."

Blaine blinks up at him, his tears ebbing. "You're my *favorite*."

Thad gasps in indignation. "I thought *I* was his favorite."

David rolls his eyes. "You think you're everyone's favorite."

Blaine's hands are carding through Wes' hair now, his expression thoughtful and contemplative. "You're really pretty."

"O-kay, and that is my cue to leave," Wes announces, depositing Blaine in Nick's lap. "I have a meeting at eight in the morning. Can I trust you guys to baby-sit him?" David nods absently while flagging down a waiter for another round of drinks. Wes smacks him on the back of the head. "Do *not* let him drink any more, got it? You have to be firm with him--" Thad exchanges a look with Jeff and they both snicker. "Oh my god, you are all *children*. I'm leaving now."

Four hours later, the rather inebriated group of Warblers stumbles into the house and up to Blaine's room.

"You know, for a little guy, Blaine is really heavy," David huffs out, before finally dumping him on his bed. Blaine grabs at him a little before flipping over and snoring loudly. "And loud."

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine wakes up and his head is killing him. He's pretty sure a drum-heavy garage band has taken up residence inside it, and there's a matching Irish step dancing team that is occupying his stomach. It's not fun.

He groans and stumbles out of bed to the bathroom. From the outer room he hears a pounding on the door in time with the throbbing in his head. He sighs.

"What?" he says grumpily as he opens the door.

Wes is standing there, eyebrow raised. "Blaine."

"Oh, it's you. Come on in."

"Thanks, but I'd really rather not -- it looks like a hurricane blew through and tossed a dumpster on everything. Besides, you need to come to fencing practice, and I have resolved to stand here in your doorway until you do."

Blaine frowns at Wes. "I'm wallowing. And hungover. No."

"Yes. We have a meet in four days, and you haven't practiced for the last week." He smirks. "I promise I'll go easy on you."

Blaine rolls his eyes. "Fine. I'll fence. At least let me put some clothes on first."



\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine tries to keep up with Wes while they practice, but the last week of junk food and candy -- and the copious amount of alcohol he drank last night -- is taking its toll on him. He can't quite keep up with Wes' flurry of parries and thrusts.

Eventually he drops his sabre to the floor gently, steel clattering against wood; he follows it to the ground as it rolls away from him and resolutely does not look at his sorry reflection in the mirror. Wes is still standing akimbo, clearly annoyed. "Sebastian is an *asshole*, Blaine."

Blaine kicks at his sabre, sending it further across the floor. "I don't know what you want me to do, Wes."

"I want you to pull yourself together. I want you to get up off of the floor. I want you to get over him already."

"I can't!" Blaine shouts, his voice echoing throughout the small dance studio, up into the corners and against the mirrored walls and back down again.

"Yes," Wes argues, "you can."

"How?" Blaine falls backwards and rests his back against the hardwood floor, sighing and folding his hands over his abdomen. "How am I supposed to just... get over him? We were together for almost three years, Wes. *Three years*. How do you stop being in love with someone after three years?"

Wes doesn't answer him, just stands there for another moment before heaving out a sigh and lying down on the floor next to Blaine, his sabre resting between them. "Look," he says, "what you see in Sebastian is beyond me, but I concede the point. No one is saying you're not allowed to be hurt."

"Seems like that's exactly what everyone's saying," Blaine mumbles.

Wes nudges the sabre towards Blaine. "We hate seeing you like this," he admits. "No one really gets why he did it either, Blaine. We're just a lot more furious than you are. You're..."

"Heart-broken," Blaine supplies moodily, elbowing the sabre back over to Wes.

"Yes," Wes says testily. "That."

"If I knew how to win him back, I would. I just- I don't know what he *wants*," Blaine sighs, exasperated.

"You told us he wanted someone serious. What else did he say?"

Blaine rests an arm over his eyes, groaning at the thought of reliving any part of that night. "It's-- I don't even know, really. He said a lot of things, a lot of things and none of them made sense."

"Focus, Blaine," Wes snaps. "How are you supposed to win him back if you don't have the proper tools?"

Blaine removes his arm and lolls his head to the side, eyes wide with surprise. "Win him back?" he echoes.

"Yes," Wes sighs, a touch dramatic. "Isn't that what you just said?"

Blaine gapes at him. "But-- you just said--"

Wes glances over at him. "I know what I said. I'm tired of listening to "Will I" drift down the hall, regardless of how good you sound singing along." Blaine smiles faintly at him. "If the jackass-- sorry --if he's what you want, then you have to figure out what *he* wants to make this work. I'm not generally one to get behind the whole 'change who you are to impress the person you're into' message, but."

Blaine squeezes his eyes shut, thinking hard and willing his heart not to hurt. "He's going to Harvard," he says, breathes in and out, even. "He's worried about his parents. He wants someone serious."

Wes snorts next to him. "Sounds like he wants a lawyer."

Blaine's eyes snap open and he sits upright, his own startled reflection looking back at him out of the mirror. "That's it."

Wes sits up slowly, rubbing at his neck. "Okay, you lost me."

"Harvard," Blaine says, like it's the plainest thing in the world. "He's going to Harvard. He's going to be a lawyer. He wants--" Blaine laughs, running a hand through his curls. "He wants someone who will fit in with that life. He wants a *lawyer*, Wes."

"So what, you're going to apply to Harvard Law?" Wes asks, laughing. Blaine turns to look at him, eyes bright, and the smile disappears from Wes' face. "You have got to be kidding me."

"I have a 4.0 average," Blaine says defensively, wounded. "And my list of extracurriculars is great, I've got the Warblers and fencing and--"

"You're a show choir major," Wes reminds him slowly. "People who go to Harvard-- people who go to any law school, really, major in pre-law."

Blaine shrugs. "Maybe that'll work in my favor then," he muses. "Aren't they always looking for something different?"

Wes opens his mouth and then shuts it, eyes shifting rapidly over Blaine's face, considering. "You have to take the LSATs. Harvard won't take a score of less than 169, but you really want to shoot for the 170s."

"Okay," Blaine says amicably, turning to face Wes fully now, cross-legged. "You're taking them, aren't you? You're applying to Stanford, right? We could take them together, study for them, even."

Wes' shoulders relax a little and the corner of his mouth twitches upwards. "You're really going to do this, aren't you?" he sighs, resigned. "You're going to try to get into Harvard Law."

Blaine leans over and picks up Wes' sabre off of the ground, poking Wes with it good-naturedly. "I'm *going* to get into Harvard Law."

"This isn't a joke to me," Wes says seriously. "This is what I've been working towards for a long time, Blaine. I want to be a Supreme Court Justice some day. I can't afford to get side-tracked. I want to help you, Blaine-- we're friends, of course I'll help you --but I need to make sure you're serious about this."

Blaine offers a hand to help Wes up off of the floor. "That's the whole point, isn't it?"

Wes grins at him. "Exactly."

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine wants to get started preparing for the LSATs and filling out the application and writing his essay, but this whole endeavor is going to be useless if he can't get his parents to pay for it. His family is far too well off for him to get financial aid.

So he goes to brunch at their Malibu home on Sunday, and he talks to his father about the playoffs (it's probably going to be Patriots/Giants yet again, but the Browns are actually in the running this year, so his dad's even more into the playoffs than normal) and eats his crêpe. His mother takes a sip of her mimosa as she turns a page of the fashion section of the Sunday paper (Blaine's probably going to borrow it, once she's done with it) and says, rather casually, "How are things with you and Sebastian, dear?"

"I want to go to law school. Harvard."

He really should think things through before he speaks, sometimes.

His mother blinks up at him, startled, and sets her glass on the table while exchanging a look with his father. "You want to what, sweetheart?"

"I want to go to Harvard Law School," he repeats, stumbling a little over the words; all his planning of this conversation going out the window in the face of actually having to say anything.

Neither of his parents speak for a good fifteen seconds. Blaine's not sure, but he thinks they might be having an entire conversation with quirks of eyebrows and slight frowns. It's a little disconcerting. "While I don't want to stand in the way of you fulfilling your dreams, sweetie, law school is for boring, ugly, serious people -- and you... aren't any of those things," his mom says finally, obviously concerned.

Blaine sighs, frustrated. It's not that he minds his parents looking out for him, but does everyone think he's not serious? He knows he's been less... *driven*... since they moved to California, but he's still serious about the things he actually cares about. Show Choir may get a bad rap as a major, but it's actually deceptively complex; there's a reason he has a 4.0 GPA, and it's not because he's pretty.

And then there's Sebastian.

"Why law school?" his dad asks. "Why *Harvard*? It's wonderful you're finally thinking about your future, Blaine, but this is a bit sudden, isn't it?"

Blaine sighs. "Sebastian broke up with me because he's going to be a lawyer and a senator and apparently I'm not serious enough for that life. And I..." He hesitates, hedging, before barreling forward. "And I'm sorry, but I can't stand to be apart from the person I love, so I'm going to get into Harvard to show him how serious I am and get him back."

"Oh, sweetie," his mom offers, patting Blaine on the shoulder. "I'm sure that's not what he meant--"

Blaine shrugs out of her touch and rubs at his eyes, sighing in frustration. "Can we just... not, Mom? I want to go to Harvard, and I would appreciate your support."

Blaine's parents share another meaning-laden glance. "Okay," his dad finally says. "If you get in, I'll pay for your tuition. Just -- please don't go there just for Sebastian. If he's what you want, that's fine-- but maybe give law school a real chance, too? Maybe you'll like practicing law."

And that's the thing. Maybe he will. He's doing this for Sebastian, mostly, but there's a small part of him that's been searching for *something* that thinks he might find it at Harvard. So he smiles and says, "I'll try, Dad. I will."

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine frowns at the page in front of him. It's not like he doesn't understand the questions. Given enough time he can even get all of them right. But he won't have that kind of time on the real LSATs, so he has to get faster at these practice exams.

He circles his last answer and hands the paper to Wes, who scores it quickly against the key and hands it back to him.

"145," Wes says. "Good enough for some law schools, but nowhere near good enough for Harvard. Try again."

Blaine sighs. Sebastian's worth it.

\*\*\*\*\*

*When have you triumphed over adversity in your life, and how has that contributed to your desire to practice law?*

Blaine bites his pencil (he likes to handwrite essays before he types them up, it's a quirk). He knows the answer that the admissions committee will eat right up, but he doesn't really like to talk about it anymore, not since his family moved to California and away from the horror that was Blaine's Midwestern existence. But he's committed to getting into Harvard (for Sebastian, for his parents, for Wes).

*I was seven the first time I heard someone insult my mother because of her race. I was twelve the first time someone insulted me because I am gay. I was fourteen when three of my classmates hit me so hard they broke my ribs and dislocated my shoulder.*

*I was seventeen before I understood that none of those things were my fault.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine's sure he's passed this practice test with a good enough score to get into Harvard, he's sure of it. He hands the papers over to Wes.

"160."

"Dammit!"

"No, that's a massive improvement over the last two you did. If you keep improving like this, I actually think you could do this."

"Really?"

"Really."

\*\*\*\*\*

Wes and Blaine take the LSATs on a Saturday, and then all Blaine can do is wait for his scores to come back. He's completed all the parts of the application for Harvard, but he feels like maybe he should do something more. Send in something extra. Like maybe a recording of a Warblers performance.

But which one?

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine's just about to take a sip of his lemonade when Wes drops it in front of him on the kitchen island counter.

Blaine's heart stops.

"Did you open yours yet?" he asks thickly, setting the glass down.

Wes shakes his head. "Figured we could do it together."

Blaine smiles faintly at him and reaches out to grab the envelope but snatches his hand back almost immediately, shaking his head. "You first. I can't." Wes' fingers pry open his own envelope (and his fingers are shaking which means he's *nervous*; Wes never gets nervous) and unfold the paper within, eyes scanning the page. "Well?"

"174." Wes glances over at him, mouth twitching upwards. "Good enough for Stanford."

"Good enough for *Harvard*," Blaine groans. He sighs, composing himself and sitting up a little straighter. "It's okay to be happy, Wes. You deserve this."

Another twitch but Wes shrugs one shoulder and pushes Blaine's envelope closer. "I kind of want to hold off on celebrating until you open yours."

Blaine smiles faintly and looks back down at the envelope, taking a deep breath and-- "I can't," he says again, air rushing out of him. "I can't do it-- will you, please?" Wes sighs but pick up Blaine's envelope again; there's a rip followed by a crinkle and Blaine squeezes his eyes shut.

"170."

Blaine blinks his eyes open, mouth agape. "170?"

"170," Wes repeats, grinning at him. "Hello Harvard."

Blaine grabs the paper from him and stares down at it in disbelief. "Forget Harvard, hello *Sebastian*."

Wes snorts. "Nice to know you have your priorities in order."

Blaine blinks up at him and sets the paper down on the counter. "Hey," he says gently, resting a hand on Wes' arm. "I never really thanked you for helping me with all of this. It means a lot to me. No one else would have done what you did."

Wes cocks an eyebrow at Blaine's hand on his arm but smiles at Blaine anyway, shaking his head and tugging him into a hug. "Yeah, well, you'll have to find a replacement when you get to Boston. I won't be there to keep your ass in line."

Blaine grins against Wes' shoulder. "You mean I have to find a new favorite?" he mumbles.

Wes pulls back a little and glances over his shoulder at the kitchen door. "Just don't let Thad know there's an opening."

\*\*\*\*\*

*Dear Mr. Anderson,*

*I am pleased to extend Harvard Law School's invitation to enroll with the class entering in September 2017. The Committee was very impressed with the qualities and talents you would bring to our school. On behalf of the Harvard Law School community, please accept our sincere congratulations on your accomplishments!*



## Chapter Two

Blaine reaches up to run a hand through his curls but stops short when he remembers that he can't because there's too much product in it.

Blaine's first day is not going quite as he planned. His alarm didn't go off and it took him twice as long to pick out something to wear (he's fairly certain David would kill him for the grey cardigan he's wearing right now). He'd realized belatedly that he'd left his bowtie on the bed (Trent will be disappointed) and the line for coffee is the longest in the entire world, he's absolutely convinced.

It might be time to invest in an espresso machine. Or Red Bull.

And he still hasn't run into Sebastian.

When he reaches the register, he places his order -- a medium drip -- and hands the cashier a bill. "I'm buying for the person behind me -- you can keep the rest as a tip." The girl flashes a smile at him and nods, and Blaine moves out of the way to wait for his coffee. Paying for the person behind him is a habit he's picked up from Wes -- good karma, he calls it -- back in California. There's something oddly comforting about it, the knowledge that his extra dollar (or five, given the price of coffee beans) will serve as a pick-me-up to someone else. Sebastian had found it endearing when Blaine had confessed to him the real reason why Blaine enjoyed doing it so much: it means he gets to take care of someone else, and that always, always makes him feel good.

He misses Sebastian.

Blaine's not entirely comfortable making conversation with the person he's just bought coffee for, though; he hasn't been in Boston that long and it's his first day at Harvard and he doesn't really *know* anyone yet. Well, anyone outside of Sebastian, and that meeting hasn't happened yet. He can make friends easily (well, it'd always been easy in California, especially after Ohio), hold conversations well and find something of value to compliment in everyone. He's just a little... nervous. He's not quite sure how to fit in with the east coast crowd (Sebastian's words stung and haunted him a little bit), but he's making his best effort. He looks the part and has done his reading. It's a start.

He slides into a chair with his coffee and digs one of his textbooks out of his messenger bag, flipping open to the first chapter and skimming through the reading again. He's trying to apply himself, he really is, but

there's so much new information and Blaine is terrified he's going to forget something. He doesn't want to screw this up.

"Thank you."

Blaine blinks up in surprise at the person who's addressed him -- a tall, slender man wearing a decently tailored suit; he's got a briefcase in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other, a smile lighting up his face. "I'm sorry?"

The man raises his cup. "For the coffee. That was nice of you."

Blaine smiles back. "You're welcome."

"Harvard?" the man asks, gesturing towards Blaine's book with his cup. Blaine nods, and the man gestures at the chair across from Blaine. "May I?"

"Please," Blaine says pleasantly.

The man settles into the chair opposite him and takes a sip of his coffee, eyes still trained on Blaine. "I remember my first day," he says whimsically. "You'll live. Just don't panic."

Blaine's shoulders relax and he lets go of the pages, settling back in his chair and laughing a little. "I'll do my best."

"Which professors do you have?"

Blaine tugs his schedule out from between pages even though he's got it memorized. "Stromwell, Callahan, Royalton, and Levinthal."

The man *hms* into his coffee, clearly thinking. "Stromwell's tough," he says seriously. "Just go into that class prepared. She won't hesitate to kick people out if they haven't done the reading." Blaine nods and leans a little further over his book, listening closely. "Speak up in Callahan's class," the man continues, the corner of his mouth quirked upwards. "He really likes people who are opinionated."

Blaine bites his lip. Opinionated in 'southern Californian' generally means catty and scathing commentary, whether or not it's warranted. He gets his manners from his parents -- his father, in particular -- and

knows his attitude, demeanor, and mannerisms take people by surprise, sometimes. "Sounds like an invitation to start something, if you ask me."

The man grins at him. "He'd hate that you said that."

Blaine buries his face in his book. "Oh god, I'm dead already."

The man laughs at him and nudges Blaine's fingers with his coffee cup. "I told you, don't panic. Now for Levinthal, make sure you read the footnotes -- that's where he gets a lot of his exam questions." Blaine looks back up at him again, trying to focus. "And Roylton?" The man pauses, glancing over his shoulder before leaning closer across the table towards Blaine, a wicked smile on his face. "Try to get a seat in the back. He tends to spit when he talks about products liability."

Blaine laughs and sinks back into his chair, relaxed again. "Noted. Thank you." He hesitates, twisting his coffee cup in circles. "You're... sort of the first person who's really talked to me since I got here. I appreciate it."

The man smiles a little, clearly pleased. "It's the least I could do," he says, holding up his cup.

Blaine grins and offers his hand. "Blaine Anderson."

The smile turns into a smirk as the man sets his coffee down and reaches across the table to shake Blaine's hand. "Kurt Hummel."

"So are you a third year, or --"

*"Blaine?"*

Blaine blinks and looks up and over at --

"*Sebastian*," he breathes. "Um, hi." Blaine looks from Sebastian (who looks good, so good but he's wearing maroon, he hates maroon) to Kurt who merely arches an eyebrow at him.

Blaine is not prepared for this.

"I -- I should go," he stammers, shoving his textbook in his bag and grabbing his coffee from the table, the chair making a loud, irritating noise as he pushes himself to his feet. "I don't want to be late." He's fully aware that he's being a little abrupt and more than a little rude, but he's completely caught off guard and doesn't want to screw this up.

Manners, Blaine.

He takes a breath to steady himself and turns to face Kurt again. "It was really nice to meet you," he says sincerely. "I'll see you around, hopefully."

"O-kay..." Kurt says slowly, raising his cup as a goodbye. "Hopefully." And he sounds like he really means it which means Blaine might have just made his first real friend here, but he can't stay, can't stop to ask for Kurt's number or e-mail or anything because he has to get out of here. He needs time to regroup and figure out how to deal with Sebastian, nevermind the fact that Blaine's got orientation and class. Blaine and Kurt both glance sideways at Sebastian; Blaine turns on his heel to leave the coffee shop.

Blaine does not do well when plans go awry. He's had a speech prepared for ages, has thought and over-thought his mannerisms for this. He wanted to play this much more casually, much more relaxed, but this? He wasn't prepared for this. It wasn't supposed to happen like this. He was supposed to see Sebastian across a courtyard or in class or the library, somewhere, anywhere but here, like this. It was supposed to be so much more... romantic. Blaine was supposed to have the upper hand, the element of surprise. He was supposed to be collected, smooth.

He reaches a hand up to run his fingers through his curls again and is met with a damp stickiness. He sighs.

So. Not. Smooth.

"Blaine, hey, wait."

And now Blaine's heart isn't pounding in his chest anymore, it's in his throat because Sebastian followed him, Sebastian is running after him and Blaine is going to *faint*. He ignores the way his stomach twists with nerves and he closes his eyes; he breathes in again and turns around, composed. "Sebastian, hi." And he's repeating himself but at least he's not falling all over himself or stumbling over his words. It's an improvement.

Sebastian comes to a stop in front of him, catching his breath. “Hi.” There’s an awkward silence between them for a moment; Blaine tugs the strap of his messenger bag higher up on his shoulder. “What --” Sebastian starts, clearly thinking his words over carefully. “What are you doing here? Are -- are you here to see me?”

Blaine wants to say *yes* but he can’t because that’s too close to the truth and he can’t seem desperate. He has to show Sebastian he’s put together enough for this, for him. Blaine shakes his head slightly. “No,” he says, laughing slightly to try and put himself at ease. “I go here.”

Sebastian blinks at him, obviously surprised, and Blaine feels the knots in his stomach start to uncoil. So Sebastian *is* surprised, that’s good. Maybe Blaine hasn’t totally screwed this up yet. “You... got into Harvard Law?”

The situation calls for something light and playful, a nudge of Sebastian’s arm or shoulder, but Blaine’s not sure it’s entirely appropriate to touch him yet, if he’s even really ready for physical contact yet. He has to take things slow. He can’t push too hard. Blaine smiles a little instead. “What,” he chuckles, “like it’s hard?”

Sebastian gapes at him a little and Blaine feels victorious; he’s made Sebastian speechless. This is good, this is excellent. Blaine’s making enough of an impact for this to actually work. But then there’s a tiny smile tugging at the corner of Sebastian’s mouth and Blaine has to leave before he actually can’t control himself anymore. “I really do have to go,” he says, apologetic, “but maybe we can meet after class, on the benches?” he suggests. “Catch up?”

Sebastian blinks and nods. “Yeah, sure, that’s -- I --”

Blaine turns a little to walk away but stops, unable to help himself. “Hey,” he says softly, reaching out and settling a hand on Sebastian’s forearm, the touch barely there. Sebastian looks down at his hand but doesn’t move, doesn’t react beyond that. “It’s really good to see you.” Sebastian looks up at him and Blaine *knows* that look, can see it in Sebastian’s eyes, remembers the first time he saw it.

Blaine lets go and waits until his back is turned to Sebastian to let a grin spreads across his face.

Sebastian is *totally* still in love with him.

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Blaine's the first person in his orientation group to reach the meeting point on the lawn of Harvard Yard. He sits on the grass, glad last night wasn't one of the frequent rainy nights Boston's known for (he's going to have to start carrying around the pink umbrella he bought when he found this out). His group-mates slowly join him, until finally they're just waiting for their group leader.

"Okay, great, looks like everyone's here," the leader says when he finally shows up. "Why don't we go around and say something about ourselves?"

An Asian girl with an awesome blue streak in her hair holds up her hand tentatively. "My name's Tina Cohen-Chang, and I have a BA from Berkeley in Gender and Women's Studies. I spent my summers interning with the National Organization for Women and helping single mothers challenge discrimination in their work environments." Blaine flashes a smile at her, grateful for someone else from the west coast. She glances sideways at him and offers him a small smile in return.

A young Hispanic boy speaks up next; he's wearing a Backstreet Boys shirt that's designed to look 'vintage' and Blaine tries not to laugh at the irony. "I'm Josh Contreras. I've got two Bachelors -- one in English and one in Chemistry, and a Masters in Journalism, and now I'm pursuing my law degree."

"How old are you?" one of the other students asks. Josh doesn't look old enough to have one Bachelors, let alone two plus a Masters.

"Twenty," he says with a grin. "I was something of a child prodigy." Blaine's starting to feel a little intimidated by all the other students, but he's also proud of his accomplishments at UCLA. He means to go next, but then another student speaks.

"William Henry Harrington the third," a Caucasian man with very dark hair offers. "I'm the seventh generation of Harrington men to attend Harvard Law, and when I graduate I'll join my father's firm before eventually taking over when he retires."

Blaine sits up straight and grins at the group. "Hi!" he says brightly. "I'm Blaine Anderson, and I have my BA in Show Choir from UCLA. I was the lead soloist of the world-class UCLA Warblers, and I founded the charity Songbirds in Schools, which works to bring music enrichment and education to inner city schools in the LA area. Oh, and I have the most adorable canary named Pavarotti. I sing scales with him every morning."

Blaine looks around at his fellow group mates; pretty much all of them are looking at him like he's crazy, but Blaine decides that's just because they don't know him. They'll like him eventually.

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Blaine doesn't want to tempt fate in Stromwell's class, so he finds a seat as close to exactly in the middle as he can. He's a little out of practice at fading into the background, but Kurt's warning about preparation is echoing in his head, and the last thing he wants to do when he's trying to look serious is get kicked out of class, even if Sebastian isn't going to be there. Colleges are no different from high schools -- the gossip flows like a beer at a frat party.

As soon as the professor comes in he's glad he picked the seat he did. She fires questions at the students in the so-called 'hot zone,' and Blaine thinks he *might* have known the answers to the questions she's asking but he's not positive. A pretty Latina woman with her hair in a high ponytail answers Stromwell's questions thoroughly and throws scathing looks at the students who aren't quite so comprehensive. She's certainly impressive, but Blaine's not so sure about the intellectual snobbery.

Still, he was raised to be polite and helpful, so when he sees her struggling to carry everything as they leave the classroom, he doesn't even think before offering his assistance. "Would you like some help with that?" he says, gesturing at her belongings. "I could carry something if you want."

She turns to him with a glare that softens into a smirk as she looks at him. "I guess. Everything fit before I got to class, but clearly my bag can't withstand Stromwell's interrogation as well as I can."

"You did seem to hold up beautifully," Blaine offers as he picks up a small stack of books. "I was a little overwhelmed, but you were pretty impressive."

"Well, not everyone can be me," she replies, shrugging her bag onto her shoulder and picking up the rest of her books. He holds open the door for her and they exit into the sunshine; she turns to Blaine. "You might be okay, for all you're sort of crazy short. I'm Santana." She shifts her stack of books and holds out a hand to him.

Blaine beams at her and reaches out his free hand to shake hers. "Pleased to meet you, Ms. Lopez," he says, remembering her surname from Stromwell's lengthy interrogation.

Santana actually laughs at him. "Did you walk out of the 1940s, Mister...?" she prompts.

"Anderson," he supplies, taking her book bag from her and settling it down on a bench to help her repack it. "Bla --"

"Blaine," someone else says for him. Blaine straightens and looks up; his breath catches in his chest as Sebastian approaches them. Now this is something Blaine can handle. He's asked Sebastian to meet him here. This can be on Blaine's terms. They can talk and maybe even agree to grab coffee or, if Blaine can manage it, dinner.

"Hey," Blaine says breathlessly, smiling a little at him. "Thanks for meeting me. Do you want to sit?" he offers, gesturing towards the bench.

Sebastian adjusts the strap on his bag and shifts his weight from one leg to the other. "Um, yeah, sure. I -- ow!" He stumbles a little and they both look at the high heeled shoe that's just kicked him in the calf before following the leg up to Santana's face.

She gives them an impatient look. "Yeah, hi. Still here."

"O -- oh," Blaine stammers, cheeks coloring. "I'm so sorry. Santana, this is --"

"I know who he is," she snaps at him. Blaine recoils slightly, confused. Santana turns her attention back to Sebastian. "Is this *the* Blaine? You didn't tell me he'd be here."

"Poohbear," Sebastian says through gritted teeth, "I didn't know he would be."

"Wait," Blaine says slowly. "You two know each other?"

Sebastian looks from Blaine to Santana and back again, opens and closes his mouth several times; Santana rolls her eyes and reaches out to link her free arm through his elbow. "I'm his girlfriend."

Blaine's sure he misheard her. "I'm sorry," he says, laughing a little. "You're what?"

"His girlfriend," Santana repeats slowly, over-enunciating her words. Blaine stiffens a little at that because she's talking down to him (*-- stay in the closet, fag -- are you sure you want to major in show choir -- such a pretty face -- ugly, boring, serious -- sure that's not what he meant --*) but he shakes it off and puts on his best face (*-- I want smiles so optimistic they could cure cancer --*). "Not that you'd know what that is."



Blaine tries his best to ignore her (and he doesn't understand why she's being so *mean*; a few minutes ago, she was thanking him for his help and complimenting his image) and turns slightly towards Sebastian. "Sebastian?"

Sebastian's mouth is still hanging open as he tries to come up with a response; Santana's fingers curl tightly around his bicep and something flickers in Sebastian's eyes. "Santana and I went to prep school together," he says all in a rush. "We... got back together this summer at her grandmother's birthday party."

Blaine has no plan for this.

Santana grabs Sebastian's hand and her book bag from the bench where Blaine's finished repacking her books.

"Thanks for carrying my books, sweetie."

Blaine sinks onto the bench as he watches them walk away.

What is he going to do?

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine's eyes glaze past a bright purple sign that says 'Sugar Shack,' but he pauses when he sees the red neon lighting up the window: 'karaoke bar.'

Jackpot.

He pushes his way through the door and flops heavily onto a bar stool, letting his forehead rest against the wood with a soft thud. "Give me the strongest thing you've got."

No one answers him for a moment, but eventually he hears a high-pitched, slightly nasal voice address him in a bored voice. "You want me to play your therapist for the afternoon, sweetie, fine, but you are not getting an Adios Motherfucker out of me at two in the afternoon."

"I don't care," Blaine mumbles into the wood. "Just give me something, anything, please."

A clink of glasses and the sound of liquid filling up a glass and then it's nudging against his fingers; he lifts his head to look at the drink the bartender's mixed him. "That's a cosmo."

"It is."

"It's pink."

"It's that, too."

Blaine looks up at the short, petite woman towel-drying a glass, leopard-print hat perched precariously on her head. "I think I love you."

She finally looks up at him and smiles a little, setting the glass down with a sigh. "All right, what's your story?"

Blaine downs the cosmo in one fast gulp and sets the glass down with a *thunk*. "I... worked so hard to get into Harvard."

"That's a good school!" she gasps at him, resting her elbows on the bar and leaning in close.

"I know, right?" Blaine enthuses, nudging the glass back towards her for a refill. "And I did it to get my ex back -- Sebastian, he's the love of my life, and..."

"And?" the girl prompts, waving him on as she pours him a second glass.

"And --" Blaine stops and swallows hard. He cannot believe he's saying this. "He's seeing someone else. This awful, awful woman Santana and --"

"Wait," she interrupts. "He's seeing a *girl*?"

"I didn't even know he was *bi*," Blaine chokes out, downing his second glass. "And I just -- I'm all by myself out here -- all of my friends are back in California -- and apparently she hates me and he's with her and I... I just want to go home."

"Oh honey," the woman soothes, patting his hand. "You came to the right place. My name's Sugar."

Blaine blinks and glances towards the doorway. "As in --"

"As in the Sugar Shack, yes," she says brightly. "My daddy bought this for me, says it's like my own pet project or something."

Blaine hiccups slightly and offers out a quivering hand. "Blaine."

She shakes it rather firmly for such a small person and opens her mouth to speak again; the door swings open and shut and they both look over at the newcomer. It's a delivery man with UPS, brown uniform tight and firm around his muscles (and okay, Blaine might have downed those cosmos a little too quickly but god damn, he is so, so gay). The man sets a few boxes down on the floor next to the bar and holds out his stylus to Sugar, flashing a brilliant smile at her. Blaine flicks his gaze over to Sugar, who's currently trying to refill his glass and is missing *spectacularly*, liquid spilling all over the counter on the inside of the bar; she's staring at the UPS guy with wide eyes, mouth tight in the corners because she's smiling so hard. Blaine reaches over the bar and pries the mixer out of her hands before setting it on the counter; he wipes his hands off on a napkin and signs for her, waving awkwardly at the UPS man as he leaves. Neither of them seem to really acknowledge that Blaine is there.

The door clicks shut and Blaine looks back at Sugar, arching an eyebrow. "Um, Earth to Sugar?"

"Hmm?" she hums absently, leaning against the bar and staring out the door dreamily.

"You are elbow deep in spilled cosmo right now."

She blinks and looks over at him before down at the counter. "Oh!" she says, clearly flustered. "I didn't mean to, I --"

"Man," Blaine laughs, relaxing a little. "You've got it *bad*."

She bites her lip and colors as she finishes cleaning up. "His name's Rory," she confesses quietly. "He's been delivering supplies here every week for the last year. And he's, he's --"

"Sort of gorgeous?" Blaine offers with a grin.

"Like walking *porn*," Sugar breathes, and Blaine dissolves into laughter. She waves her hand dismissively, face hot with embarrassment, and stands up straight (which really doesn't do much for her because she's

five foot three, max, but Blaine isn't one to talk). "Okay," she huffs. "Back to you. Why did this Sebastian guy break up with you?"

Blaine drops his gaze to the empty glass in front of him, silently wishing for a refill. "He didn't think I was *serious* enough," he answers, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly.

"And that's why you came to Harvard?" Sugar guesses. Blaine nods. "Okay, so you're trying to be what he wants, there's no shame in that... if you're really into him."

"I love him," Blaine says quietly. "I've loved him for a long time. I can't just *stop*. But I don't -- I don't know what to do now."

"Give this Santana girl a run for her money," Sugar says, eyes twinkling mischievously. "Get on her level."

"I don't know that I can do that," Blaine admits. "It's more than the fact that she's a girl. She's... sharp."

"Like smart sharp or knife sharp?"

Blaine cracks a smile. "Both. I could probably keep up with her intellectually, but she's very... abrasive. Acidic."

"Sour," Sugar clarifies with a wrinkle of her nose. "She's one of those girls who kicks you when you're down. I know girls like that," she assures him seriously. "My whole life has been full of them."

"So how do you deal with it?"

Sugar shrugs and finally reaches out to properly refill his glass. "I don't," she says, her tone very matter-of-fact. "But if you want to win him back, you have to make it clear that you're going to put up a fight. Don't take what she has to give you lying down. Go to the mattresses."

"What?" Blaine asks blankly.

"Go to the mattresses," Sugar repeats, sliding his glass over to him. "It's from *The Godfather*." Blaine just blinks at her. "You *have* seen it, haven't you?" she asks. Blaine shakes his head. "Oh my god, that is tragic," she gasps. "Okay, come back here on Wednesday around the same time -- no one's ever here and I can queue it up on the projector. I don't think we can get through all three of them in one sitting, though."

"And this is necessary because?" Blaine prompts. Sugar just gives him a *look*.

"If I'm going to associate with you, Blaine, I can't have you ignorant of the culture of my people. People will talk."

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine stays at the Sugar Shack long enough to sober up a little, and then he drives wearily back to the dorms. He trudges into his room, but even his bright pink curtains, pale pink comforter, fuzzy phone, and adorable yellow canary (a dorm-warming gift from Wes) can't cheer him up right now. Sugar's advice had sounded vaguely sensible while he was in her domain, but now that he's not quite as buzzed he's not so sure.

He opens his laptop to see if maybe looking at cute kittens will help -- it has before -- but is distracted from his quest by the bouncing icon at the bottom of the screen, and the ringing noise coming from his speakers. He breaks into a small smile. Maybe talking to another Warbler is exactly what he needs. They've always given him great advice.

He answers the call and presses video.

"Warbler Blaine!" the group of boys on his screen choruses.

Blaine feels tears prick at the corners of his eyes. It's only his first day and he just saw them a few weeks ago at his going-away party but he already misses them like crazy. "Hi guys," he replies. "Aren't you a sight for these sore eyes?"

The faces of each of the Warblers drop simultaneously. "Bad day?" Trent asks. Blaine picks up the bowtie he'd left on the bed this morning and starts to run his thumb over it absently. "Hey!" Trent says brightly. "That's the bowtie I got you! The one with the little gavels. Did it bring you luck?"

Blaine shakes his head. "I forgot it this morning, I was running late."

"How's Harvard?" David asks, shooting Trent a look. "How are your classes?"

"Okay," Blaine sighs, shrugging his shoulders. "It's a little intimidating but I've been doing the reading, and... I tried really hard to fit in and I was really nice to everyone --"

"Of course you were," Jeff chimes in; Blaine can see a tuft of blond hair sticking up in the back row.

"Why so down?" Nick asks gently. "Do they not have a Coffee Bean out there?"

"They don't, actually," Blaine says.

"Blasphemy!" someone mutters off-screen.

"Guys," Thad chastises, snapping his fingers. "Stop distracting him. Let him talk."

Blaine looks back down at the tie again because he can't handle seeing the disappointment in their faces, *again*. "He's seeing someone else."

There's no sound except for the hum of his laptop so Blaine looks up and finds his friends staring at him with wide eyes.

"I'm sorry," Trent says slowly. "I just hallucinated. He's what?"

"He's seeing someone else," Blaine repeats. "And she's just -- she's awful, Santana's just mean and I don't understand why --"

"He's bi?" David asks, confused.

"Apparently." Blaine drops his head into his hands. "And I don't know what to do."

Blaine sees movement on his screen through his fingers and looks up. The Warblers are all exchanging looks with one another; Thad shrugs while the rest of the Warblers shift uncomfortably on their chairs. There's a beat and then they're harmonizing and Nick is singing lead -- *uptown girl, she's been living in her uptown world* -- and Blaine can't help but smile. "Guys," he laughs, waving his hands wildly at the screen. "Guys, stop."

"Were we not in key?" Jeff asks worriedly. "Oh god, we were off-key, weren't we?"

"Pitch perfect, as always," Blaine reassures him. "I just -- I don't think it's going to help."

Nick's face falls a little. "But... it always helps."

Thad and David exchange a glance. "Have you... had anything to drink since you heard the news?" David asks.

Blaine's jaw falls open a little. "How did you --"

"This is worse than we thought," Thad mutters. "Okay, Blaine, listen to me," he says a little louder, squaring his shoulders. "This Satan person --"

"Santana," Blaine correctly weakly.

"Whatever," Thad dismisses with a wave of his hand. "I don't know how long they've been together or how well they know each other, but this is personal to you, right?" Blaine nods. "You can't let that show. Be professional. It's not personal, it's business."

"Ooo, drawing from *The Godfather*," Trent enthuses, holding his hand out for a fist-bump. "Nice touch. Speaking of which, second weekend of the month is coming up. Are we still marathoning?"

"What is it with everyone and *The Godfather*?" Blaine huffs.

Thad just gives him a *look*. "Just trust us, Blaine. Show this girl you're not afraid of her. Don't go down without a fight."

"He *loves* you," Trent insists. "We all bore witness to it for almost three years. You can do this."

Blaine grins a little, heartened. "Thanks, guys."

David grins back before turning to the rest of the Warblers, raising his hands the way a conductor would. "And two, and three -- *Batter up, hear that call. The time has come for one and all* --" Blaine's heart swells a little with affection for his friends (and he tries to force down the ache he feels because Wes is normally the one who starts this song and he's not here or there). A beat and then they all sing in unison, Blaine included, voices lifting and harmonizing and making Blaine feel at home. "--*to play ball.*"

### ***Chapter Three***

Blaine lingers in his room a little longer than he probably should. Sebastian had said nine, and it takes Blaine a good fifteen minutes to walk to the coffee shop. He doesn't want to show up early, though, and he especially doesn't want to show up before Sebastian does. Blaine's taking the fact that Sebastian initiated this meeting as a good sign. Blaine doesn't want to come across as desperate or over-eager -- enthusiastic, agreeable, maybe.

They've hardly gotten to speak more than two words together to each other since Santana had commandeered Sebastian at the benches a few weeks ago, despite sharing two classes and running into each other at the coffee shop at least twice a week (Sebastian hasn't seemed to settle on a regular schedule for his coffee yet, which is throwing Blaine off and wasting an extra half hour of his time in the morning). Santana's with Sebastian more often than not, always particularly chatty when she notices Blaine around. Blaine can tell she doesn't want Blaine anywhere near Sebastian but he can't quite figure out why; he knows it might be a little awkward with him being Sebastian's ex (and that still stings but Blaine hopes to rectify that mistake soon), but Blaine's been nothing but kind to her, overly-polite and chivalrous. Most of the time, she has glares and scathing remarks to throw at him, but Blaine's noticed her nearly say 'thank you' a few times; she always catches herself, of course, but it makes Blaine feel better to know that he's getting to her.

So when Sebastian had sent Blaine a text and asked to meet him for coffee this morning, Blaine had texted back his *sure* and spent the next forty-five minutes tossing the entire contents of his closet onto his bed trying to figure out what to wear. He wants this -- needs this, really -- but he has to be careful how he plays it. It's the first time they've been alone together, really alone, since the break-up, and Blaine wants this to go well.

He leaves his room at ten to the hour and still arrives earlier than he should -- 9:03 -- but the delay he's fabricated was enough. Sebastian's already there, seated alone at a table with one of his textbooks open. Blaine stops still in the doorway, watches Sebastian's fingers trace over his hairline as he reads, a habit Blaine almost forgot he had, they've been apart so long. Sebastian's wearing green today, an improvement over all of the red tones he's been sporting lately. There are two cups of coffee on the table; Sebastian's twisting one of them in circles but the other sits still on the table, untouched.

Blaine takes a deep breath and crosses the shop to the table. "Hi."



Sebastian looks up, blinking rapidly, and Blaine notices the glasses he's wearing for the first time. "Hey," Sebastian greets, fingers abandoning his own coffee cup and reaching for the other, offering it to Blaine. "I ordered for you, I hope that's okay. Do you still take a medium drip?"

Blaine takes the cup from him slowly, nodding and fighting back a smile as he takes the seat opposite Sebastian. "When did you start wearing glasses?" Blaine asks, gesturing towards Sebastian's face with his cup.

"What?" Sebastian asks blankly. He reaches up to touch his face and colors a little before prying the glasses off and tucking them away in a case he pulls out of his pocket. "Oh," he says, clearly flustered. "Those. It's... recent. Just for reading, mostly. I still try to stick to contacts most of the time."

Blaine *hmm*s into his coffee. "It's just a little... surprising, is all," he admits. "You haven't worn glasses since you were what, ten?"

Sebastian looks surprised. "I can't believe you remember that."

Blaine shrugs. "You remembered my coffee order."

Sebastian shifts in his chair, looking more uncomfortable than he has in the entire time Blaine's been there; he trains his eyes to the lid of his cup and starts to twist it in circles again. "So," he says dully, "Harvard. I didn't expect to see you here."

"Me either," Blaine admits, slightly crestfallen that Sebastian's broken eye contact. "But what you said when-- last year," he amends, squirming uncomfortably. "What you said last year really stuck with me. I didn't really have a plan after graduation and you helped me find some... direction," he says, choosing his words carefully.

"Direction," Sebastian echos. "Northeast. To Boston."

*To you*, Blaine wants to add, but he bites his tongue and nods. "I was surprised to get your text this morning," he says, trying to change the subject a little. "You've seemed pretty busy. I mean, I can relate," Blaine says quickly, backtracking a little. "There's so much to keep up with for these classes, a lot of reading, and everyone seems to want Callahan's internship -- or at least that's what I've heard," he amends, looking down at his cup. He hasn't really made many friends here; Sugar counts, but she doesn't

go to Harvard, so Blaine's really, really glad Sebastian asked him for coffee this morning. "But you've seemed a little preoccupied," Blaine says carefully. "Santana seems a little..."

"High-maintenance?" Sebastian finishes for him, still not looking up from his coffee or his book.

Blaine's eyes widen in surprise. "You're dating her." It still hurts to say out loud.

Sebastian hums and turns a page in his book. "I am," he affirms. "But I figure you don't really want to talk about her, do you?"

Blaine bites his lip and tries to be diplomatic. "It's just... nice to have someone to talk to," he admits quietly, looking back down at his cup. "Regardless of what the conversation topics are."

Sebastian shifts in his chair and inhales loudly. "Yeah," he says finally. "Classes have kept me busy. I'll probably be here a lot more -- I'm going to need the caffeine."

Blaine tries another tactic. "What you need is to relax," he says. "We all do. I was thinking of throwing a mixer or something -- what do you think?"

Sebastian shrugs. "Most of us are still in our early twenties and fresh out of undergrad. As long as there's booze, you'll get a crowd."

Blaine's mouth twists unpleasantly. He's not -- he's not trying to bring southern California to Boston, exactly. He's trying to fit in here, trying to make friends, and none of the tactics he's tried are working. He figures it's probably best to fall back on something he's sure will work, but he already feels less confident out here and Sebastian... Sebastian isn't helping. Sebastian asked Blaine to coffee and he's practically *ignoring* Blaine. It doesn't make any sense. "Maybe I should just perform on the front lawn," he huffs out.

Sebastian still doesn't look up from his book, but his lips curl into a smile.

There.

"What are you going to do," Sebastian snorts, "have the Warblers fly out as back-up?"

"No," Blaine counters, the barest hint of a laugh in his voice. "I think I'll be fine on my own. Besides, most people here aren't as... forward as you."

Sebastian finally looks up at him and arches an eyebrow. "*Rod Stewart* is forward, B."

Blaine grins. "Are you arguing the effectiveness of that performance?"

Sebastian smiles faintly. "No," he says softly, shaking his head. "It was definitely effective." He meets Blaine's eyes for a moment and Blaine's heart beats a little faster; Blaine swallows and opens his mouth to ask Sebastian to meet him for coffee again (or lunch, if he can manage it) when --

*Ping.*

They both blink and look down at Sebastian's phone on the table. It takes Sebastian a second to reach for it and check the message he receives; his brow furrows slightly but then his face is impassive again. He closes his textbook and starts to pack his bag. "I've got to run," Sebastian announces distractedly. "I'll see you in Callahan's, though?"

Blaine nods, flustered. "Yeah, sure," he says. He tries not to be disappointed.

Sebastian stops midway through packing his bag, though, and half-glances up at Blaine. "Would you actually do Rod Stewart?"

Blaine smiles again and he wishes Sebastian would look at him properly again. "No," he answers, teasing Sebastian a little. "I was thinking Blondie, actually. 'Call Me.'"

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They're only fifteen minutes into class before the professor calls on him, and Blaine wishes that just once he'd get through Callahan's class without being called on. He doesn't ever speak up of his own volition, so he's at a loss as to why Callahan finds it so important to call on him every class.

"Mr. Anderson, would you rather have a client who committed a crime *malum in se*, or *malum prohibitum*?"

Blaine frowns. He knows Callahan wants an answer that shows that Blaine knows what the terms mean, and Blaine *does* know what they mean, but --

“Well, professor... neither. I’d rather have a client who was innocent,” he offers after a moment. Santana and some of the other students snicker a little, like they think he’s dumb or naive.

“‘Innocent’ won’t help you when the evidence is stacked against your client, Mr. Anderson.” Kurt’s reminder about Callahan liking people who are opinionated comes back to Blaine, and Blaine sighs. Callahan pauses a moment before turning to Santana. “What about you, Ms. Lopez? Which would you prefer?”

Santana shoots a haughty look at Blaine before facing the professor. “I’d rather defend someone who committed a crime *malum prohibitum*, because then they’ve simply committed a regulatory infraction, rather than something dangerous.” She turns to smirk at Blaine again and reaches out to trace her fingers over the nape of Sebastian’s neck, playing with the hair there.

Blaine narrows his eyes and tries to ignore the way his stomach twists in knots; he wants to take his fists to a punching bag, wants to slip his hands into his boxing gloves and just hit something. He hates feeling like this but he can’t help it. Callahan accepts Santana’s answer and begins to move on, but seeing Santana claiming Sebastian like that (the way Blaine used to show affection and *god*, he misses being with Sebastian) brings out the impulsive side of Blaine, especially given Sugar and the Warblers’ advice.

Blaine raises his hand. Callahan looks confused for a moment. “Yes, Mr. Anderson?” he sighs, sounding impatient.

“I still stand by my initial answer,” he starts, “but if I *had* to choose, I’d rather defend a client who committed a crime *malum in se* because I’m not afraid of a challenge,” he says pointedly, looking at Santana. She raises an eyebrow in reply, icily unamused.

“Very well, Mr. Anderson,” Callahan replies, the barest hint of a laugh in his voice. “Now, let’s look at *malum prohibitum* a little more closely...”

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After class, Blaine gets to the door just before Santana and Sebastian do; he holds the door open as they approach, silent in his courtesy. “I can handle the door, thanks,” Santana snaps, yanking the handle away from him.

Blaine steps back a little, holding up his hands defensively. "I was just trying to be nice. You don't have to get so defensive."

Santana gives him a once over. "I'm trying," she drawls, "but your hideous bowties are provoking me."

Blaine looks down at the bowtie he's wearing today (white with red and blue stripes); he actually kind of likes this one. He frowns, offended, but when he looks up to reply, they've both gone.

Blaine sighs and clutches his books closer to his chest before leaving Callahan's classroom. Provoking Santana in class is as far as he's willing to go in terms of sinking to her level and even that's starting to seem like a bad idea. It's made her more volatile, for one, but it's also made Blaine acutely uncomfortable. He doesn't like conflict and confrontation. He doesn't like coming across as elitist and judgmental. It's unfair because the only weapon he's got to use against her is his intelligence, and he feels guilty for using it.

Blaine rounds a corner into the next hallway to find Sebastian leaning against the wall outside of the women's restroom. His eyes are trained on his phone but he must have seen Blaine turn the corner because he speaks almost immediately. "B," he says conversationally, still not looking up at Blaine, "you know you can't actually kill people with kindness, right?" Sebastian glances up after he says it, clearly fighting back a smile.

Blaine grins at him. "I can try."

Sebastian laughs, actually laughs, and Blaine can't help but beam. "You know, I actually agreed with you in there."

"You did?" Blaine asks, surprised.

Sebastian nods. "I like a challenge as much as you do, you know that. There's, uh..." He hesitates and flicks his eyes to the door next to him, waiting, before shifting his attention back to Blaine and dropping his voice. "There's something immensely satisfying about working a little, ah, *harder* to get someone off."

Blaine blushes. Sebastian's always been occasionally crude, but Blaine's forgotten how to deal with it. "You know that's not what I meant. I like doing things that are hard."

Sebastian smirks. "I know," he laughs. "Remember how hard it was to find a way to be alone after our third date?"

"Yeah, I remember," Blaine replies, looking up at Sebastian through his eyelashes. He remembers how much Sebastian likes the whole 'bashful schoolboy thing'.

Sebastian's eyes are distant for a moment. "Blaine --"

There's a noise from the other side of the door -- running water and a clack of heels on tile -- and Blaine clutches the strap of his bag. "I should go," he says quietly. "I think I've already pressed my luck with Santana today." Blaine starts to walk away --

Sebastian grabs hold of Blaine's elbow. "B." Blaine stops and shifts his gaze to Sebastian momentarily before glancing over at the door again. They're running out of time. "Santana and I have known each other since we were fourteen. You don't know her like I do."

"No," Blaine admits. "I don't. But I know you."

Sebastian blinks at him a moment but releases his hold on Blaine's arm and settles back against the wall. "So does she."

Blaine turns away just as the door to the bathroom opens; he doesn't stick around to listen to whatever insult or scathing remark Santana has for him.

It might be time to try something new.

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Blaine only realizes when he's looking ahead on the syllabus at the next few weeks' readings that he forgot to buy one of the books for Levinthal's class. Of course, there are none left to buy at the bookstore, and every single copy at the library is checked out and reserved at least three times over. He's just turning away from the circulation desk, wondering desperately if he can get it from Amazon in time when he bumps into Kurt, the man from the coffee shop. Blaine's ended up buying coffee for him a few more times in the weeks since school began, but one or the other of them is always running off somewhere so they haven't really had a chance to talk.

“Hey.”

“Hey,” Kurt replies with a smile. “Looking for a book?” He leans in conspiratorially. “I hear this is a good place for that.”

Blaine sighs. “Somehow I forgot to buy one of the books for Levinthal’s class, and we need it for next week’s readings. There are no copies here or at the Coop so I’m not really sure what I’m going to do.”

Kurt frowns a little. “Can’t you just borrow it from one of your classmates?” he suggests.

“That would require them to talk to me,” Blaine says wryly.

Kurt raises his eyebrows a little. “Well, in that case, you can probably borrow it from me. I’m pretty sure I held onto all of my books from -- well, from every class, actually. And Levinthal never changes his syllabus, so I can’t imagine it’s a book I don’t have. Which one is it?”

“Um, *The Common Law*, by Oliver Wendall --”

“Oliver Wendall Holmes, Jr., yes.” Kurt smiles. “It’s pretty well known. It’s often considered one of the foundations of healthy and constructive skepticism in the law. Or so I seem to remember.”

“So do you have it?” Blaine asks. It’s occasionally frustrating to be constantly reminded how much he doesn’t fit here -- he’s obviously supposed to know who Holmes is, and to have at least heard of his book, but that’s not the case. Kurt doesn’t have to make fun of him for it.

“I do,” Kurt confirms. “Do you need it tonight? I can go grab it from my apartment.”

Blaine shakes his head. “Just by the weekend. Did you want meet up and you could give it to me? It would be a big help.”

“Sure,” Kurt says with a grin. “How about we get lunch on Friday, and I’ll give you the book then? Unless you have class.”

Blaine ducks his head a little, charmed by Kurt’s offer. “I’d love to have lunch with you. My morning class ends at 11:30. 11:45 at the gate to the Square?”

"Absolutely. I'll see you then." Kurt gives Blaine another smile and then walks out of the library, dodging nimbly around Santana and another girl from Callahan's class coming in the doors.

"Okay," Santana says to her friend as they walk past Blaine, "you supply those amazing sausage bites of yours, Jackie will bring the fish tacos, and Sebastian and I will bring the alcohol."

"Great," her friend replies. "It's going to be an awesome party."

Blaine doesn't mean to, but --

"Party? You guys are having a party?"

Santana turns to look at him, eyes narrowing as she takes in his cardigan and bowtie. "Yes," she says shortly. She pauses and then smiles at him, all teeth. "Next week. You should come. It's a costume party."

Blaine smiles back faintly. Maybe being nice to Santana has finally paid off. "I love costume parties."

"Of course you do," she sighs. "Friday, 7:30 pm, 243 Mass. Ave. Looking forward to it, Anderson." Santana saunters away with her friend towards a table over by the windows where Sebastian and a few of their classmates are sitting. Blaine can almost make out a frown on Sebastian's face, but it's hard to tell from where he's standing. Then Santana leans down close to whisper something in Sebastian's ear, and Blaine *can't* watch anymore; he rushes out the library doors into the ever present drizzle.

At least the Sugar Shack will be open at this hour.

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Sugar watches as Blaine sinks onto a barstool and rests his cheek against the wood before looking up at her through his stupidly long eyelashes. "I don't know if I can do this anymore, Sugar," he mumbles.

Sugar sighs and starts to mix him a drink. "You're doing fine," she reassures him. "You've been studying, haven't you?"

"Yes --"

"And you've been fighting fire with fire, right?" she continues, pouring his drink into a glass.



“Well, yeah -- what is this?” he asks, taking the glass from her and sipping it carefully.

“Desert Rose. Pink drinks seem to be your thing.”

Blaine smiles at her and Sugar can't help but smile back. Blaine is cute, ridiculously cute, and she wants to help him, she does (he's got that whole kicked puppy look down pat), but for a show choir major from California, his confidence seems a little shaken, at least out here. Sugar thinks he's doing the right thing, trying to fit in; he's got the personality and the manners to pull it off, but for whatever reason, it's not working. Sugar doesn't get it -- people should like him (*she* likes him, and her opinion is probably one of the only ones around here that should even matter anyway -- well, hers and this Sebastian guy's, apparently) but they don't. Sure, Blaine could probably go easy on the hair gel, but the cardigans and bowties he's been wearing have made him totally look the part. What else is he supposed to do?

“I don't know, Sugar,” he sighs, sipping more of his drink and rubbing at the back of his neck awkwardly. “I tried what you suggested -- you know, getting on her level?”

“Right,” Sugar says, wiping down the counter. “And?”

Blaine probably starts to answer her but the front door swings open and shut, and Sugar's heart stops beating.

*Rory.*

Sugar leans over the bar as gracefully as she can and rests her chin in her hands. One of the bottles of vodka she's got out teeters dangerously; out of the corner of her eye, she sees Blaine reach out a hand to keep it from tipping over. She can thank him later. Right now...

Rory places a box on the bar and holds out his stylus first and tablet second. Sugar smiles at him and glances down at the tablet. There's a pink, heart-shaped Post-It note stuck at the top near where she's supposed to sign and a message scrawled on it:

*How are you today?*

Sugar takes the stylus from him and bites her lip before flicking her gaze back up to him. Maybe Blaine's onto something with the whole eyelashes thing. “Fine,” she answers airily. She doesn't stop smiling, not

once, not even after he takes the tablet and stylus back from her, *winks* his goodbye (don't faint, don't faint, don't faint), and walks out the door.

"You have *got* to be kidding me."

Sugar looks over at Blaine and bats her eyelashes. "Like walking porn," she reminds him, and she knows she's whining a little but she can't help it. "And he asked me how I was, Blaine. He's got --"

-- the entire package?" Blaine finishes for her. She nods at him, and he bursts out laughing. She smacks his arm lightly and he curls away from her a little, hiding his drink from attack. "You were the one who said he was like walking porn!" Sugar does her best to scowl at him (it's really hard, he's so goddamn *cute*) and it seems to work; his laughs fade away and he looks at her very seriously. "Sugar," he says slowly, "are you telling me that this is the most you two have interacted in the last *year*?"

"No!" Sugar snaps defensively, but she softens a little and glances back towards the door. "Sometimes I say *okay* instead of fine."

"Oh my *god*." Blaine takes a much larger sip of his drink before setting his glass down on the bar and turning to face her properly. "Sugar, why don't you talk to him? Why don't you, I don't know, ask him to come by when he's off-duty and fix him a drink?"

Sugar's mouth drops open. "I can't do that!" she protests, scandalized. Honestly, what is Blaine even thinking?

"Why not?"

"Because..." Sugar glances over at the table in the corner, eyes lingering on Stacy and Jessica and Laurie; Stacy sees her staring and sniffs disapprovingly before turning away. Sugar looks back down at the counter and plucks a lime from the crisper. "He's probably like this with all the girls," she reasons, slicing the lime carefully. "He's probably nice to everyone. It's part of his job or something."

"Hey." Sugar glances up at Blaine and sees his hand outstretched over the bar, silently asking for hers. She rolls her eyes but places her hand in his anyway. Stupid puppy eyes. "If there's one thing I've learned from this whole ordeal with Sebastian, it's that you have to fight for what you want, who you love..." Blaine tilts his head to the side and --

Damn it.

Sugar sighs. She's not giving in quite that easily. "I don't know how."

Blaine raises his eyebrows at her. "What, you've never flirted with a guy before?"

Sugar purses her lips. "Not all of us are as good as you at turning boys' heads. We're not all as cute and compact as you are."

He places a hand over his heart, faking offense. "That is a *lie*," he hisses, but he laughs a little. "This is officially the weirdest conversation I have ever had with a girl." He lets go of her hand, finally, and turns to look at the stage. "You could still invite him here when he's not working," Blaine suggests, turning back around to face her. "Karaoke's a great ice breaker. Trust me, the way to a man's heart isn't through his stomach -- it's through his ears. Sebastian asked me out after he saw me perform." Sugar's stomach drops and it must show on her face because Blaine's eyes wrinkle a little. He looks confused. "You can't do that either?"

Sugar shrugs and turns her attention back to the lime. "I dunno," she says absently. "I've never been trained or anything," she says, which is true but only part of the reason she doesn't want to do it. "If I was going to get up there and sing to try and get his attention, I'd want to be good, you know?"

Blaine pokes at her arm to get her to look at him again. He holds out his arms and grins widely and Sugar has to try really hard not to laugh at him. "Luckily, you've got a show choir major right here. I could totally give you singing lessons."

Sugar bites her lip and tries not to get her hopes up. "You'd... do that for me?"

She regrets asking it almost immediately because the kicked puppy look is back and it makes her feel bad. "Well, yeah," he says, deflating. "That's what friends do, right?"

Sugar's heart starts beating again and she smiles warmly at him, nodding. "Right." She takes a breath and squares her shoulders, standing up straight. "Okay, back to you," she says, determined. "Why isn't sinking to her level working out for you?"

Blaine's face falls a little. "It gets people's attention," he says. "I'll give you that. I sort of made a point to try and show her up in class earlier this week. It got Sebastian's attention, but..."

“But what?”

“It’s not me, Sugar,” he sighs. “I’m really uncomfortable acting like I’m better than people. I can’t -- I can’t sink to her level, not the way you want me to. I can’t be that mean. I can’t even *try*. I mean, after that class? I held open the door for them.”

“Oh wow,” Sugar laughs, patting his hand affectionately and moving around the bar to stand next to him.

“I told her I was trying to be nice,” he continues, “and she insulted my bowties!”

Sugar shakes her head at him. “Yeah, that’s because you told your enemy your strategy *and* your weakness,” she informs him. “Honestly, did you learn nothing from *The Godfather*?” Blaine takes a long drink from his glass and avoids looking her in the eye. “Okay, new plan,” Sugar announces, shoving him off of his bar stool and surveying him from head to toe. “Obviously sinking to her level didn’t work. You have to remind Sebastian what he’s missing out on. Show him what you have to offer, something she can’t, or maybe something that you’re better at.”

“Well,” Blaine says slowly, “there is a costume party on Friday...”

Sugar beams at him. “Perfect,” she purrs. “You have all the equipment -- you just need to read the manual.”

Blaine arches an eyebrow at her, craning his neck and twisting awkwardly as she paces circles around him, eyes still roaming his body. “I have no idea what that means.”

She flicks her gaze up to him and grins. “Use your assets,” she says cheekily. “And by assets, I mean your ass.”

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Blaine knows there’s something wrong the second he steps through the front door. The first person he sees is in jeans and a hoodie, the second in a pencil skirt and cashmere sweater. There are ten people standing in the foyer when he walks in, another eight lingering in the doorways to the adjoining rooms and another six or so are on the stairs in front of him. The closest thing anyone’s wearing to a costume is the streak of blue hair in Tina Cohen-Chang’s hair.

This isn’t a costume party.

Santana lied to him. Of course she lied to him.

There's probably alcohol in the kitchen (forward, through the crowd of people gaping at him) but there's a gym near campus (back out the front door and six miles over the creek); Blaine would take either at this point but the latter seems less embarrassing, so he turns tail (oh god, he's wearing a *tail*) to run when --

Sebastian pauses in the doorway between the foyer and the living room, beer in hand. He blinks in surprise, eyes trailing from the ears perched on top of Blaine's head down, sweeping over Blaine's bare arms and past the fitted pink vest, down to the shorts that leave very little to the imagination. Blaine fights the urge to shift uncomfortably under the attention; instead, he arches an eyebrow and smirks in Sebastian's general direction, turning a little to retreat back into the house. Sebastian catches him as he passes through the foyer, leaning in over Blaine's shoulder, lips pressed right up against Blaine's ear. "Halloween's next week, B." Sebastian's fingertips trace feather-light over the curve of Blaine's ass before squeezing playfully at the cotton tail. Blaine glances over his shoulder and grins as Sebastian saunters into the next room.

Blaine hears a wolf whistle from his right and whips his head towards it.

"Check out Mr. October!"

"Hey, what's up Doc?"

The people around him start snickering; Blaine's face *burns* with embarrassment and he backs up towards the door again. Even if Sebastian does appreciate the outfit, Blaine is not going to stay here and be mocked. He stopped doing that a long time ago.

Tina gets up off the stairs as he's backing up and shoots a glare around the crowd, shutting up the worst of the snickers. She gives him a genuine smile, not a smirk like the rest of the partygoers. When she gets to him, she reaches out to grip his arm lightly. "You've got serious balls, Anderson. Plus you're way hotter than everyone else here, so keep rocking those ears, they're awesome. How'd you get them to stay up like that?"

Blaine ducks his head slightly, making sure the ears don't fall over. "Wire hangers," he says with a small smile. "And practice."

Tina grins at him. "Awesome job." She holds out her hand for a fist bump, and he brings up his own fist to meet hers. "You should stay. The alcohol and food's back there in the kitchen. Rock on."

Blaine squares his shoulders. Maybe he can do this. "Okay. Maybe I'll see you later?"

"Count on it, Anderson."

Blaine walks slowly toward the kitchen, holding his head up even with the much quieter snickers around him. He'll get something to drink, he'll find Sebastian again, and he'll... use his assets. He blushes and shakes his head. Sugar's idea might be a little insane, but Sebastian's already taken notice. People might stare at Blaine the rest of the night, whisper behind his back and cat-call at him, but Blaine only wants -- only cares about capturing Sebastian's attention.

"Well, well, well," Santana drawls, laughing. "If it isn't Pinkie Pie."

Blaine freezes in the doorway to the kitchen, eyes finding Santana perched on a barstool. She looks... different. She's let her hair down and he's pretty sure not even her pencil skirts are as tight as the dress she's wearing right now (or as short, either). She looks almost as out of place as he does but then... she doesn't. It's with a twinge in his gut that Blaine realizes that she could just as easily fit in out in southern California as she does here, and he doesn't see how that's fair. How does she do it?

He forces a tight smile. "Santana," he says shortly, resisting the urge to use his hands to cover himself. "You look... nice."

She arches an eyebrow at him. "And you look like a gay Hugh Hefner's wet dream."

"Yeah, well..." Blaine's mouth thins into a line for a minute before he smiles a little. "The whole costume party thing made sense to me, you know, because Halloween's on Tuesday, but I guess you and I were the only ones who got that memo." Santana's jaw falls open a little, her tongue sliding between a row of teeth as she surveys him. Blaine can tell she's narrowing down her list of comebacks before she uses one, but he takes advantage of her silence before she can speak. "Did Sebastian like your costume, too?" he asks brightly, grinning.

Santana narrows her eyes at him and sets her jaw before pushing herself off of the barstool and making her way towards him. "Okay, you wanna do this? Fine. Come here." Santana grabs him by the elbow and balances her wine glass in her free hand. She leads him through the kitchen and releases his arm to grab a

wine cooler out of the refrigerator; she forces it into his hand and grabs his elbow again before tugging him out onto the back porch. "There," she huffs as she settles onto the steps. "It's pink. That should make you happy, right?" Blaine bites his lip to keep from commenting (he doesn't want to give her the satisfaction of being right) and sinks down next to her, sipping the wine cooler slowly. "Do you want to know why I don't like you?"

He blinks over at her, surprised. "It'd be nice to know," he mumbles, "so I can try to fix or change something."

She narrows her eyes a little before she answers him. "Let's start with the obvious," she says in a clipped tone. "It's wildly transparent that you're here to get your ex -- *my* boyfriend, mind you -- back." Blaine feels his face grow hot but he doesn't break eye contact or react beyond that; somehow Santana still seems to see right through him. "Oh please, you were practically drooling all over him when I first saw you together."

Blaine sits up a little straighter and takes another sip of his wine cooler. "I'm not forcing him to make a choice, Santana."

"It's funny how you seem to think he has one." Blaine's stomach twists, hot and unpleasant. "If I overlook the hideous bowties," she continues, "you being here pisses me off on another level entirely. You're such a brown noser."

He curls in on himself a little, offended. "Excuse me?"

"You're used to everything being easy for you. You're used to people being polite and accommodating. You're used to getting your way. And to the rest of us -- people like me -- it's never that easy. We've worked our asses off. We're not fed with a silver spoon. We had to earn the right to be here. We didn't have Daddy around to drop a name or throw some money at the school." Blaine twists to face her a little, ready to say *that's not true* because it's *not*; he earned the right to be here just as much as she did, just as much as Sebastian did and every other person in their classes. But Santana holds up a hand and presses a finger to his lips to silence him before he can even begin to speak. "Let me put it terms you'll understand, Pinkie -- you're a people pleaser."

The knot in Blaine's stomach twists a little further, heat fueling his anger. He has to take a long, slow breath to steady himself. "You don't have to talk down to me," he says through gritted teeth. "I'm not a child."

"Then grow up," Santana snaps. "Let me be *very* clear: leave him alone. Go home, Anderson. You don't belong here." She bends the tip of one of his bunny ears down a little before rising to her feet and retreating into the house.

Blaine closes his eyes and wets his lips, the taste of alcohol finally starting to settle in on his tongue. Santana's got him so wrong and she refuses to listen to him. There's a part of Blaine that wonders if she's making her assumptions based on something Sebastian's said, but that train of thought inevitably leads to Blaine wondering if Sebastian thinks that same thing -- that Blaine shouldn't be here -- and that's not a place Blaine wants to go. Santana wasn't wrong, though, in pegging Sebastian as one of the reasons Blaine's here. Blaine might actually be getting the hang of this whole law school thing, but at the end of the day, he falls asleep wishing he were next to Sebastian.

Blaine believes in love. He believes in big, romantic gestures and in savoring the little things. He knows Sebastian loves pineapple and mangos and prefers yellow light to white light; he knows that Sebastian looks good in every color but particularly despises wearing too much red, although he never tells Blaine why. Blaine knows that Sebastian's favorite flowers are blue hyacinths (one of few types of flowers that don't agitate his allergies) and knows that Sebastian's been wearing glasses since the fourth grade but prefers to wear his contacts (and Blaine knows the *why* of that one, remembers the quiet confession of being teased and picked on and called names and *oh*, how Blaine identified with that).

Blaine remembers. He remembers the first time they kissed (a crisp night in January in front of the Warbler house) and the sex in Cabo. He remembers lazy Saturdays on the beach; he remembers curling into Sebastian's side on the couch while they watched *Jeopardy*. He remembers the notebook full of ticket stubs from every concert they went to together; he remembers every hat and Sebastian's inexplicable fascination with Marilyn Monroe. He remembers the first time Sebastian said *I love you*.

Blaine shifts and feels the press of the tail against his ass, remembers the way Sebastian's eyes had lingered and his fingers had reached out to touch.

Blaine can *totally* still do this.



When he walks back into the house, though, a good twenty pairs of eyes fall to him (his pink bunny ears, his tail) and he loses a little of his nerve.

A few drinks might help.

He makes his way to the kitchen and sees the child prodigy from his orientation group – Josh -- wearing a t-shirt that says ‘I’m with Genius’ with an arrow pointing upward and doing tequila shots at the island in the center of the room. Josh grins at him as Blaine sidles up next to him and grabs a shot glass. “Condoning underage drinking?”

Blaine downs his shot quickly, alcohol burning his throat. He takes a second before answering Josh. “Nope,” he sighs, smacking his lips in satisfaction. “Encouraging the consumption of liquid courage.”

Josh laughs at him and takes another shot. “What’s with the outfit?”

Blaine wrinkles his nose and reaches for another shot glass. “Channeling my inner Gloria Steinem.”

Josh glances towards the foyer. “Has Tina seen you? She’d be proud.”

Blaine nods and laughs a little, his face warm. “She’s already offered her compliments.”

Josh’s eyes flick from Blaine’s bunny ears to his tail. “If you’re looking for attention, Blaine, I think you succeeded.”

Blaine beams at him. “That’s the idea.”

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Blaine stumbles over the top step on his way upstairs, reaching out for the banister and fighting not to laugh. He’s drunk, god he’s *so* drunk and he just needs a quiet place to lie down --

There’s a hand on his arm and it’s firm and warm and familiar; Blaine glances up and meets Sebastian’s grin with his own. Blaine feels like he could fly but he doesn’t have wings. He does have ears and a tail, though; he wonders how he could use that to his advantage. Sebastian tugs him up by the arm, righting him, but Blaine stumbles again, falling against his chest. “Wow,” Sebastian huffs out, laughing a little. “I haven’t seen you this drunk in --”

-- a year and a half," Blaine hiccups. "Spring fling beer bash extreme our junior year. God, I don't think I even remember most of that week." Sebastian chuckles, his voice low. Blaine looks down and oh, Sebastian's hand is still on his arm. "Remember the nights, though. Do you?" He glances up and even his eyelashes feel heavy on his face, but Sebastian is looking at him, really looking at him for the first time in ages and --

Blaine leans in, steps up on tip-toe and wraps a hand around the back of Sebastian's neck, capturing Sebastian's lips in an open-mouthed kiss. And god, it's just as good as it ever was, hot and wet and Blaine is so drunk; he can taste it on Sebastian's tongue, the beer Sebastian's been nursing all night and the sweet, salty aftertaste that's so inherently Sebastian. Blaine arches his back and presses against Sebastian a little more firmly, fingers tangling in the hair at the nape of Sebastian's neck.

Blaine can't think straight; it's too loud and his head is spinning but nothing exists in the world except for Sebastian's lips against his. It's with a loud, sharp inhale that Sebastian kisses back --

Sebastian is kissing *back*.

Sebastian's hands fall to Blaine's hips, anchor there for the briefest of moments before sliding around and cupping Blaine's ass, tugging him forward. Sebastian's middle finger trails over the tight, black material, between cheeks and around the tail. Blaine whines against his mouth and breaks the kiss, breath heavy in the little space between them; he's turned on, god, he's so turned on, hard in his shorts and it's so, so obvious. "Room," Blaine murmurs against Sebastian's lips. "Let's find a room."

He lets Sebastian lead and follows blindly as Sebastian stumbles backwards, his hand fiddling with a doorknob before pushing a door open and pulling Blaine inside, the *slam* not loud enough to disrupt the rest of the party-goers. Back again and Blaine goes tumbling forward as Sebastian's knees hit the back of a bed, causing him to sink down. Blaine hooks a leg on either side of Sebastian, straddling his waist; he cups Sebastian's jaw with both hands and dives in for another kiss, rolling his hips down. "*Fuck*," Sebastian hisses, hands firm and solid against the small of Blaine's back.

"Missed you," Blaine gasps against his lips. Sebastian's lips fall to Blaine's throat as he works open the buttons of Blaine's vest and he slides a hand up and under the wife-beater to touch Blaine's skin. Blaine arches his back again, craning his neck to allow Sebastian better access. "God, missed you. Want you. Want you so *bad*." Sebastian hums against Blaine's Adam's apple and works his free hand around to dip underneath the waistband of Blaine's black shorts, the spandex snapping against Blaine's skin. Sebastian's

fingers trail down and work to spread Blaine's cheeks apart. Blaine lets his forehead fall to Sebastian's shoulder and nuzzles his nose into Sebastian's neck, spreading his legs a little wider. There's something missing -- lube, he thinks, and maybe a condom -- but he can't even be sure of his own *name* right now, he's so drunk. "Knew I could do it," Blaine mumbles into Sebastian's skin. "Knew I could make you love me again."

Sebastian's fingers slow but don't stop until they're closer to Blaine's entrance, hovering. He exhales loud and heavy into Blaine's ear before kissing Blaine's earlobe. "Come on, B, don't be like that," he groans, shifting a little on the bed so that his hips pivot upwards and oh my *god*, Blaine forgot how good that feels, Sebastian's cock against his own even if it's through layers of fabric. "Just this once, okay? One last fling, and then --"

Blaine lifts his head a little, trying to focus on Sebastian's words but it's difficult; it's warm and Blaine is hard and drunk but it doesn't matter because his plan is working. "And then?" he echoes, sucking Sebastian's earlobe, his teeth nipping at the soft skin there before releasing it.

Sebastian sighs impatiently, pulling back a little and forcing Blaine to meet his gaze, his fingers long and slender and firm against Blaine's jaw. Blaine grins at him. "One time deal, okay? This isn't -- we're not getting back together, Blaine, we *can't* --"

Blaine rushes in for another kiss, determined. "Why not?" he asks, and he knows he's whining but Sebastian's hand is still buried inside of Blaine's shorts, his cock still hard against Blaine's. "You want this, I want this. Just -- just let me love you, okay? Let me show you how serious I am."

Sebastian snorts out a laugh and taps one of Blaine's bunny ears affectionately. "Yeah, you look real serious."

"I am," Blaine insists, kissing the corner of Sebastian's mouth, pushing back into the warmth of Sebastian's hand and then forward again, rocking gently. "I came to Harvard for you. Isn't that serious enough?"

Sebastian sighs again. "That's sort of my point, B. You came to Harvard for me, not to be a lawyer. You're not taking it seriously. Just... like... this," he murmurs, punctuating the last three words with another set of kisses. "Let's just -- don't ruin this with talking, okay? Let's just enjoy this."

"I got in," Blaine reminds Sebastian, and ow, it hurts his brain to be thinking this much right now. "I got in just like you did. I --" Blaine pulls back a little, blinking rapidly. "You agreed with me. You -- you said you liked having to work harder to get someone off."

Sebastian smiles a little at him, eyes falling to Blaine's lips. "Yeah," he chuckles, pulling his hand out of Blaine's shorts and running his thumb over Blaine's hip. "I did."

Sebastian leans in to kiss him again, fingers reaching around to dip back into Blaine's shorts, but Blaine places a hand on his wrist to stop him. "Humor me," he says, laughing a little. "Work a little harder now. I did. Help -- help me understand. I'm -- I'm a little drunk."

Sebastian grins. "You're a lot drunk." His eyes keep falling to Blaine's lips and his hands are *everywhere*, Blaine's hip and ass and arms and lower back, stroking and caressing and grabbing. It's incredibly distracting and Blaine's having enough trouble focusing as it is.

"No, but --" Blaine moans as Sebastian fastens his lips to Blaine's neck; he pushes Sebastian back, hand firm on Sebastian's shoulders. "I -- I worked really hard," he says breathlessly. "I know Santana doesn't think I did, but I did and..." Blaine's face falls a little. "Am I not smart enough for you?" he asks. "Is that what you meant by *serious*?"

Sebastian's features mirror Blaine's -- the smile disappears and all of the muscles in his face fall flat. "No," he says firmly, wrapping a hand around the back of Blaine's neck and tugging him into a kiss.

Blaine leans into it, relaxing a little and kissing back, but there's a twist in his stomach (the alcohol, probably) that won't let him rest, won't let him stop talking. He really should stop talking -- Sebastian is finally kissing him and wants him and it's everything Blaine's been wanting for the last *year*, but...

Blaine breaks the kiss reluctantly. "Then what's the problem?" he asks, trying hard to ignore the way Sebastian's hips keep rocking up; god, the *friction* -- "Why can't we be together?"

Sebastian pulls back a little, finally, and runs a thumb over Blaine's cheek. "B," he pants, trying to catch his breath; Blaine can feel every muscle twitching in an effort not to move toward Blaine, not to move against him and with him. "B, I'm with Santana now."

Blaine wrinkles his nose in confusion. "And yet you're up here with me." This isn't making any sense, Blaine's head is starting to hurt. Why does this have to be so hard (and oh god, they're both still hard, why aren't they naked)?

Sebastian pulls him in closer again and doesn't bother holding back. He wraps his arms around Blaine and reaches up under Blaine's wife-beater, hands large and firm and warm across the expanse of Blaine's back. He lets one drift down after a moment to toy with the waistband of Blaine's shorts again, fingers dipping beneath the black. Sebastian cants his hips up again, slow and languid and *so good*; his lips fall to Blaine's ear, breath hot and voice low. "Just tonight," he murmurs. "Okay?"

But... no. That's not what's supposed to happen. That's not what Blaine wants. Blaine wants his Californian romance back. He wants his fairytale ending. Sebastian is supposed to be falling in love with him all over again, is supposed to want to be with Blaine again. Instead, Sebastian's acting like *this* is all he wants from Blaine, just the sex and not a real... relationship.

Blaine stops and swallows thickly as Sebastian's lips linger on his neck again.

Sebastian didn't do relationships before he met Blaine.

The realization hits him like a ton of bricks and ow ow *ow*; it hurts, hurts his head and his eyes and his lips and his heart -- his *heart* most of all. He pulls away and reaches around to wrap a hand around Sebastian's wrist, tugging Sebastian's hand out of his shorts. "Is that all I've ever been to you?" he gasps, and Blaine can't breathe right. "Am I just a piece of ass to you?" Sebastian jerks around him, his nose nuzzling Blaine's neck like he's shaking his head but he doesn't speak, doesn't give an answer. Blaine pulls back and looks down at him. "I'm never going to be good enough for you, am I?"

Sebastian blinks and there's pity in his eyes, pity clouded with lust and something else that Blaine can't identify but he doesn't even *care* anymore. Blaine swings a leg over and tries to push himself up and off of the mattress; his legs nearly give out from under him and flying is the last thing he feels like he could do. Sebastian's hand is on his arm again. "B, *please*, come on. Don't be like this."

It's the *please* that makes Blaine pause (*please, can we talk this through? -- will you please pick up the phone? -- please don't leave me*) but he's too drunk and far, far too angry, too hurt to give in now. "Did you ever love me?" he asks, twisting around to face Sebastian so fast that his bunny ears fall down over his face. Sebastian's jaw falls open a little but he doesn't speak, doesn't answer (again and again, no real

answers and Blaine has had enough). Blaine reaches up and wrenches the bunny ears from his head and stands successfully this time, although still unsteady on his feet.

Blaine stumbles down the stairs. The music is beyond recognition at this point, too loud to distinguish and too muted for Blaine to care. His vision is blurred as he clutches the bunny ears in his hand, the stupid, *stupid* bunny ears; his vest hangs loose and open around his chest. Out the front door and into the cold October night air and *fuck*, this was a bad idea. He starts to shiver immediately: he's nearly *naked* and it's late fall in *Boston* for crying out loud. He manages to stumble a few blocks down, the distant *thump, thump, thump* from the party growing fainter, until he finally sinks down onto a small wooden bench. *I will not cry, I will not cry, I will not cry, I will not --*

"Blaine?"

Blaine blinks up, tries to focus but his vision is getting more blurry by the second. He does *not* want to cry over this. "K -- Kurt," he hiccups. "Wh -- what are you doing here?"

Kurt nods vaguely behind Blaine. "My apartment's a few blocks that way. Why..." He pauses, something Blaine is grateful for because words are difficult right now. "What... exactly are you wearing?"

Blaine glances down at his chest, feels the uncomfortable press of the tail against his ass and runs his fingers over the soft material of the bunny ears in his hand. "It's -- I'm a bunny." He looks back up at Kurt, sure of himself. "I'm a bunny," he states resolutely.

Kurt's mouth twists into a smile. "Yes, I can see that," he says, and it sounds like he's trying not to laugh (*why is he laughing?*). "You're also very drunk. How much have you had to drink?"

"I dunno," Blaine mumbles. "There was tequila..." He shivers again, blinking up at the sky. He doesn't understand why it's so cold if it's not raining.

"Here," Kurt says, moving to sit next to him and tugging a jacket from his bag. "Put this on or you'll catch your death out here." He offers it to Blaine, but Blaine shakes his head.

"It's okay." Blaine pushes himself up off of the bench, stumbling slightly. "I'm just -- I'm just gonna --" He stops and hiccups again (and it hurts, why does it make his eyes hurt?). "I'm just gonna go back to my room," he says miserably.

"That's silly," Kurt counters, rising from the bench. Blaine blinks at him sleepily. "The dorms are all the way across the creek."

"s not far," Blaine protests. "Only six miles."

"And you're going to walk six miles?" Kurt says doubtfully, arching his eyebrows. "In that?" Blaine looks down at the ears in his hand and back over his shoulder at his tail before turning back to Kurt. Blaine blushes and bites his lip. "Do you have money for a cab?" Kurt asks. "Or the bus?"

Blaine looks down at his shorts. "I forgot my pockets."

"No money, no keys, no phone," Kurt lists. He sighs and moves towards Blaine again, draping the jacket over Blaine's shoulders. It doesn't do much -- it's still *freezing* -- but it helps his arms a little, at least.

Blaine grips the edges and curls it around himself. "Th -- thank you," Blaine stammers, trying not to let his teeth chatter too much. Why is it so *cold*?

"Come on," Kurt says, wrapping an arm around Blaine's shoulders. "You can crash on my couch tonight. I'll drive you back to the dorms in the morning, okay?"

Blaine stumbles along next to him, trying to keep focus but it's hard: he's cold and sleepy despite how much he's had to drink, and Sebastian --

Blaine squeezes his eyes shut.

Sebastian doesn't love him anymore.

Blaine's not sure he ever did.

"This -- this is really nice of you," Blaine babbles, and he knows he's babbling but he can't help it. It's just what happens when he drinks; he loses his filter. "You're so nice to me. All --" He hiccups again. "All I did was buy you coffee. You gave me all that advice and let me borrow your book and now you're letting me crash on your couch..."

They enter a building and stumble up a couple of flights of stairs -- Blaine's legs are starting to forget how to work and his tail isn't helping. He can't hop up the stairs the way he wants to. "It's okay," Kurt assures

him, fumbling for his keys. He leans Blaine against the doorjamb and *whoa*, that feels strange; the whole world shifts diagonally and Blaine can't see straight anymore. "Do you make a habit out of this?" Kurt asks, and it sounds like he's joking but Blaine can't be sure, he's so dizzy...

"No," Blaine mumbles, reaching out for Kurt's arm to right himself. The door opens and Kurt takes his hand and leads him inside. It's warmer in here than it is outside but not by much. Blaine leans in closer to Kurt and closes his eyes. He just wants to lie down, that's all he's wanted for an hour now.

"Just a few more steps, okay?" Kurt murmurs, tugging Blaine further into the living room and setting him down gently onto the couch. "Here, you lie down and I'll go find you a blanket."

Blaine leans over and puts his head on the arm of the much-cushier-than-it-looks couch and waits for Kurt. He's just going to wait for Kurt...

Blaine wiggles his toes against the cushion and tucks them under the blanket (oh, there's the blanket and when did his shoes come off?); he feels Kurt's fingers tangle with his as Kurt pries something soft out of Blaine's hands. "Wait," Blaine mumbles, reaching out a hand as his eyes flutter shut. "What are you --"

"It's just your bunny ears," Kurt says calmly. "I'll leave them right here on the coffee table." He starts to tug his hand away from Blaine's but Blaine's fingers curl inward involuntarily, wanting to bring the blanket closer, and oh, hey, Kurt's hand is there, too.

"You have to let go of my hand," Kurt says gently, laughing a little. Blaine whines a little, clutching Kurt's hand tighter. It's all a blur, now, muted and faded around the edges. He loses bits of himself piece by piece as he falls asleep -- first his dislocated shoulder followed by his broken ribs; then his curls, lock by lock. "Blaine," Kurt's voice says again, sounding far away. "Blaine, you have to let go." Blaine thinks of Sebastian and fragments of his heart start to fall away, piece by piece.

*Let go.*



## ***Chapter Four***

Kurt walks into the living room to find Blaine groaning as he wakes up. “Hey there, sleepy head,” Kurt says cheerfully, feeling slightly sadistic and gleeful at Blaine’s hungover state. Blaine’s sort of adorably miserable. “How are you feeling?”

Blaine glares at him woefully. “Peachy.” He bites his lip. “Um, bathroom?”

Kurt feels the side of his mouth tilt up into a smirk. “Down the hall to the left. Can’t miss it.”

“Thank you.” Blaine lurches towards the hallway and Kurt follows to make sure he doesn’t fall over and hit his head. Kurt watches him sink to the floor in front of the toilet and cringes as Blaine throws up what seems to be the entirety of last night’s dinner -- whatever it was -- into the toilet bowl. Kurt turns to go, satisfied that Blaine is in no more danger of head trauma and wanting to give him a little privacy, when he hears Blaine speaking quietly.

“I really thought I could do it.”

Kurt frowns. What is Blaine talking about?

“I really thought I could make him love me again.”

“Who?” Kurt asks without thinking. Blaine looks up at him, seeming shocked to see him standing there. He takes a visible breath, and then --

“Sebastian. I followed him out here to Harvard Law to get him back, and all I got were those stupid bunny ears.” Blaine slumps back against the bathroom wall, looking dejected.

Kurt’s brow furrows. “Wait -- you came to Harvard Law for a guy? Just because he was coming here?”

“He thought I wasn’t ‘serious’ enough for him. I thought I could prove him wrong,” Blaine says sulkily. “Guess I was the one who was wrong.”

Kurt shakes his head. “You... followed him all the way to Harvard Law. Wow. What crazy romantic planet are you from, anyway?” he laughs.

Blaine shrugs at him. "Malibu. Well, Ohio by way of Malibu."

"Ah." Kurt sighs. "That may be the craziest reason I've ever heard for someone coming to Harvard Law. Seriously."

"Well then why did you do it?" Blaine asks sharply -- more pointed than Kurt's heard him be before.

"You really want to know? It's a bit of a cliché," Kurt replies self-deprecatingly.

Blaine nods. "But maybe on the couch? This bathroom floor is really uncomfortable." He shifts on the floor and winces a little, obviously trying to sit anywhere but on the fluffy ball that's supposed to be his tail.

"Sure," Kurt says agreeably. He retreats to his bedroom and grabs a pair of sweatpants and a faded t-shirt from his time on the Tufts Track team -- Blaine seems pretty uncomfortable in his skimpy bunny outfit now that he's actually awake and sober enough to care. He returns to the bathroom and hands them over to Blaine, who's still on the bathroom floor; Blaine gives him a grateful smile as he climbs to his feet and turns on the faucet to rinse his mouth out.

Kurt wants to give him some privacy to change, so he goes to the kitchen to get *something* for them to eat or drink. He's not quite sure what to make for exchanging life stories with someone he's only known for a few months and had lunch with exactly once. It doesn't seem exactly like an eggs and bacon sort of experience.

Coffee. Coffee's a safe choice. Kurt's seen Blaine get a medium drip and doctor it with cream and sugar and an abundance of cinnamon every time they've run into each other at the coffee shop in the last two months. Kurt can make that easily. And maybe some tea for himself. That box of Earl Gray is around here somewhere.

By the time he makes it into the living room with the pair of mugs (mismatched -- one's a horrific Santa mug from his father that Kurt can't quite manage to throw away and the other's one of the many inappropriate lawyer novelty mugs his dad's girlfriend's son has given him), Blaine's settled onto the couch with the blanket from last night tucked around him. He looks even smaller than normal in Kurt's clothes, sitting on Kurt's couch, and Kurt wonders again why Blaine's come to Harvard. It's not a place for small personalities.

"Here, I made you some coffee," he says, offering Blaine the lawyer mug. "I think it's the way you like it?"

"Thank you." Blaine takes a cautious sip and grimaces, but gives Kurt a small smile and sets the mug down on the coffee table. He does a double-take and stares at the mug, blinking in surprise. "*Lawyers get you off*," he reads aloud.

Kurt blushes. "Well," he reasons, "it's true."

Blaine grins a little, laughing, but then his smile fades and he looks down at his knees. "Sorry," he mumbles. "It just -- it reminded me of something." He nods towards the mug. "It's perfect -- just the way I like it -- but I probably shouldn't drink it right now. Hangover."

"Oh. Right." Kurt settles on the couch with his own mug and sighs. "So you wanted to know why I went to Harvard, right?"

Blaine shrugs. "If you want to tell me, sure. I don't want you to feel like you have to, or anything."

"Most people aren't really interested in my whole life story," Kurt says with a smile. "They're just glad I can defend them in court." Blaine laughs a little, and *wow*. Kurt always forgets how cute Blaine is, and then Blaine laughs or ducks his head and Kurt's reminded all over again. And even though Blaine looks smaller than normal in Kurt's clothes, he's also incredibly adorable. He could probably ask Kurt to wear those ridiculous bunny ears and Kurt would do it.

"So why Harvard?" Blaine pries after a moment.

"Well, the question is really why law school? Why become a lawyer? Harvard's one of the best law schools in the country, and it's right here in Boston, so it was sort of the logical choice once I decided to become a lawyer."

"You grew up here?" Blaine asks. "That must have been nice."

Kurt makes a bit of a face. "If I'd grown up in this part of Boston, maybe. I grew up in Roxbury, which has its good points, but it's... not exactly the nicest part of town. My dad owns a mechanic's shop -- he's had it for as long as I can remember -- and it makes decent money, but it's still a mechanic's shop. And my mom died when I was eight -- medical malpractice. The doctor who was responsible got away with it."

Blaine shifts uncomfortably and rubs at his shoulder. "And that made you angry." It doesn't sound like a question.

"It did," Kurt says. "I thought for a while I'd become a doctor, so that I could save people like my mother, but I sort of hate the sight of blood," Kurt admits sheepishly. "So then I thought that I could be a lawyer, and maybe then I could help prosecute bad doctors, or help families sue them."

"So you've wanted to be a lawyer since you were eight?" Blaine says when Kurt pauses. He looks fascinated.

"Well, since I was nine, really. It took me awhile to figure out about the blood."

Blaine grins. "Of course."

Kurt shrugs. "I also had some classmates in high school who didn't really get the kind of representation they needed, and that meant they ended up with much worse sentences than they probably should have received -- and that's the ones that were actually guilty, instead of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I just know I can help people by being a lawyer, and Harvard's pretty much the best place to train for that. So I worked two jobs, I applied for fellowships and grants, and I graduated at the top of my class. I work at Callahan's firm now so that someday I'll be able to buy a big house for my dad and his girlfriend and pay off the mortgage on the shop. It'll be worth it."

Blaine frowns at him. "Two jobs? And classes? And -- correct me if I'm wrong -- Callahan's internship too?" He shakes his head at Kurt. "I don't how you did it."

"I didn't really go to parties," Kurt says wryly. "Or socialize at all, actually. My goals were more important than anything else."

"I..." Blaine trails off, biting his lip, which only makes Kurt find him cuter. "I don't know that I've ever had goals like that. Ones that I was committed to above everything."

"I don't know, you seem pretty committed to getting that Sebastian guy back," Kurt points out. It's not the kind of goal Kurt would make, but he admires Blaine's commitment and drive.

"I was," Blaine says sadly. "But I'm not anymore. I'm not good enough for him. Not smart enough. Not 'serious' enough."

Kurt considers him a moment. "I don't think that's true." Blaine looks over at him in surprise. Kurt doesn't know a whole lot about Blaine -- lunch was pretty superficial -- but he's pretty sure not being smart enough is not Blaine's problem. "You got into Harvard, didn't you? And I've seen you studying."

"Well, yes..." Kurt watches Blaine pause and take a deep breath. "But I wasn't doing that because I wanted to be a lawyer. I studied for the LSATs and I wrote an essay. I came to Harvard and I've been doing all my readings and completing all my assignments because I thought-- I thought maybe my ex-boyfriend would change his mind and take me back when he saw how serious I actually was. But he's right. Chasing him all the way to Boston isn't serious-- it's silly. I would have been better off staying in California and singing in cafes and working with my charity."

"You have a charity?" Kurt asks, intrigued. "What is it?"

"It's called Songbirds in Schools. The Warblers -- you remember, I told you about them at lunch? -- go to inner city schools and help supplement the music education with student choirs and music theory classes and other stuff like that." Blaine shrugs. "I like making art, you know? And helping people."

"And you founded the charity?" Blaine just grows more interesting with everything Kurt learns about him, and Kurt's starting to think that Blaine just doesn't realize what his strengths are -- or how he can use them.

"Well, all the Warblers sort of came up with it, but I got it organized and I generally contacted the schools we went to, and my parents gave the first donation, so I guess I did." He gives Kurt another shrug. "I had the connections to implement it, so I did."

"So what about that isn't serious? Or smart? Or good?" Kurt tilts his head to the side, raising an eyebrow at Blaine. He knows he's being a little aggressive, but the Blaine on his couch right now seems so apathetic, and it's just *wrong*. Blaine's usually so vibrant. Well, Blaine's usually more vibrant than *this* anyway; Kurt has a feeling Blaine's been holding back a lot since he moved to Boston. There are things Blaine's told him about his life in California that fuel that feeling, the way Blaine's eyes light up when he talks about the Warblers and performing and living in a place where it didn't rain so much.

"It's not like we were feeding the hungry or clothing the poor. We were a bunch of preppy college boys who thought we could fix everything with a song." Blaine gives a harsh laugh, and Kurt winces slightly in response. "That's not very serious. It's --"

"It's not silly," Kurt interjects. Blaine looks at his knees again. "I can think of twenty different classmates from my high school who'd disagree with you. Something like that to look forward to every day or every week might have actually kept them coming to school. You *were* helping people, and that is always serious. That is *always* a good thing." Kurt sighs, frustrated. There's a glimmer of an idea in his brain. "Blaine, listen to me. Just because you came here for one reason doesn't mean you can't stay here for another. Do you want to be a lawyer?"

"I -- maybe. I didn't think I would, but it's all been really interesting, even when it's difficult."

"Well, you know, a well crafted argument is a kind of art... and lawyers definitely help people, when we use our powers for good. I think you could be really talented at law." Blaine's eyes light up as he's talking, and Kurt knows he's almost got him, so he leans in towards Blaine a little. "And wouldn't that really piss off everyone who thinks you aren't good enough."

Blaine smiles a little and Kurt feels like his resolve could be a lot stronger than this but it's not; he's about to melt into a puddle of goo because of the smile of a *twenty-two year old*. "You really think I'd make a good lawyer?"

Kurt nods, his eyes flicking to the mug on the table; he has to bite his lip to keep from making an inappropriate comment. "Just think about it, okay? I'll be here when you make a decision, to help you study or whatever you need," he offers. Kurt reaches out and grasps Blaine's hand for a moment before pulling away.

"Thanks," Blaine says with a smile. "It's nice to hear that someone has faith in me."

Kurt stands up and grabs Blaine's mug to take it back to the kitchen. "I should probably be getting you back to the dorms. You can wear those home -- I just want them back eventually."

"Of course." Blaine leans down and picks up the bunny ears from the table, his thumbs running over the soft material. "Thank you again," he says quietly, "for last night, and this morning, and just... everything you've done."

Kurt takes the bunny ears from him (and he tries not to remember what it felt like to have Blaine's fingers interlaced with his last night) and hands Blaine his shoes. "I'd... like us to be friends," he says hesitantly. "If

you're still in the market for some. I know you have your friends back in California, and oh god, I'm probably making assumptions, aren't I? It's just -- in the library, you said --"

"Kurt," Blaine cuts in. "I'd like that."

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Wes gets back from his pre-Halloween candy shopping excursion (his classmates have warned him that the local children are vicious when denied their spoils) to a voicemail from Blaine. He wants to listen to it as soon as he sees it on his phone -- David's been keeping him apprised of the situation at Harvard (as much as he can), but this is the first he's actually heard from Blaine, and, well.

He's not sure if that's good or bad.

But instead he puts away his purchases and grabs a mineral water from the fridge before sitting down on the couch with his phone and taking a deep breath. Whatever has compelled Blaine to finally call him has to be big. He wants to be prepared for whatever it is.

*Hey Wes --*

*Um, I know it's been awhile since we've talked. I'm sorry about that. I guess I thought if I told you about it, it would make it more real. It's -- it's actually been pretty awful. Sebastian's dating someone, a girl who hates me, and no one here will talk to me except when they absolutely have to in class, and all of that was fine as long as I got Sebastian back, but... I'm not going to get him back. There was a party, and we both got pretty drunk, and we almost had sex, but we didn't. And I'm not gonna try to get him back anymore, because all I ever was to him was someone to have sex with. I don't know what I'm going to do now. Kurt -- he's this guy I met because I bought his coffee and he graduated a couple years ago -- he's trying to get me to actually commit to law school, give it my all, and I think maybe he's right? I don't know. I just -- I really need to talk to you. I need some advice.*

*\*beep\**

Wes automatically saves the message before carefully putting his phone down on the coffee table and letting his head fall onto the back of the couch. The message was sort of incoherent, but it's obvious that Blaine needs him -- and as soon as possible. He's not really in a position to actually fly out to Boston --

even though he can afford the ticket, he can't miss as many classes as it'll take to fix Blaine -- so he'll have to do the next best thing.

He gets on Skype.

But Blaine isn't online, so that's out. Okay, over the phone it is. It's not his preferred method of sorting Blaine out -- this sort of thing always works better when he can see Blaine's face -- but he's done it before (the spring break right before Blaine's junior composition was due, the time Wes couldn't make it to the meet so Blaine ended up in charge of fencing club inadvertently) and he can do it again.

Only Blaine isn't answering his phone either. Blaine always answers his phone, unless he's in class or in the middle of things Wes doesn't want to think about with Sebastian. And since it's Saturday and Blaine's voicemail would seem to indicate that Sebastian is not an option, Blaine should be answering his phone.

Wes sighs and leaves a message on Blaine's phone, then tries the phone another seven times (though he doesn't leave any more messages). When it's clear that Blaine is not going to answer any time soon, Wes goes to the next level. He calls David.

Unfortunately, the last time David talked to Blaine was the beginning of the month, so all he can tell Wes is that Blaine's classes are fine but his classmates suck, and that Sebastian's dating a girl named Santana (a shock to everyone, to be sure) but that Blaine has been cautiously optimistic about his prospects.

Wes tries not to panic, but four years' habit is hard to break and he's out of practice at calming his own worrywort tendencies. When he gets through to Blaine, Wes is definitely going to yell at him for scaring Wes like this.

*'I got a pocket, got a pocketful of sunshine --'*

Wes grabs his phone from the coffee table and hits the call button. "Oh, thank god. Where the *fuck* have you been?"

"Nice to hear from you, too, Wes. You called?" Blaine replies, slightly tinny through the phone. He mumbles something that sounds like 'eight times', but Wes can't be sure.

"You called me first, and it sounded like you needed me. I was worried," Wes replies, starting to relax now that he can actually hear Blaine and figure out that he's not about to do anything dumb.



"Oh. Yeah. Um..." Blaine trails off. "There's just so much to tell you, and I'm not really sure where to start." Wes can hear Blaine sigh deeply.

Wes shrugs even though Blaine can't see him. "Start at the beginning," he replies, offering what he feels is pretty sensible advice. "What happened when you got there?"

He listens as Blaine describes the past two months of law school and his pursuit of Sebastian, heart aching a little for Blaine as Wes comes to understand just how difficult it's been for him -- unable to make his classmates like him, pursuing someone who keeps sending him mixed signals. And now last night's party has happened, and it sounds like that's put him off Sebastian for good. Wes can't help but be a little relieved that Blaine finally seems to be over Sebastian, but he can't in good conscience let Blaine go on thinking that Sebastian never loved him.

"Blaine, I think it's a good thing that you've decided to stop going after Sebastian -- it's healthy, and I think you're better off without the confusion he's been bringing into your life lately -- but I want you to know, I watched you guys for three years, and no matter what's happening now, I'm positive that he loved you. You can't fake that kind of emotion, not that well." Wes sighs. "So what about this Kurt you mentioned? You said you bought him coffee?"

"I did -- he was behind me in line at the coffee shop my first day of class, so I bought his coffee. We talked a little then, and then he lent me a book, and we got lunch together the other day, and last night--" Wes hears Blaine sigh loudly over the phone. "I ran into him when I was still pretty drunk and dressed like a bunny and he took me back to his apartment and let me sleep on his couch. He graduated a couple of years ago, and he works for Professor Callahan now, and he's trying to convince me I'd make a good lawyer, but I don't know. I think maybe I'm actually not serious enough for law school."

Wes furrows his brow, wanting to convey his argument as effectively as possible. Since the first time Blaine said he wanted to go to law school, the concept of him as a lawyer has been percolating in Wes' brain. Wes knows Blaine. He knows what Blaine's capable of. He knows Blaine's strengths (he's smart, he's charismatic, he's creative) and Blaine's weaknesses (he's oblivious, he's too hard on himself, he's too trusting). What Blaine's done in the last year to even *get* to Harvard has pretty much convinced Wes that Blaine would make an excellent lawyer. He just has to convince Blaine of that.

"Blaine, you can convince pretty much anyone of anything, notwithstanding your classmates who must have magical powers to hold out against your charm and persuasion. I know you might have been

internalizing what Sebastian said about you not being smart enough or serious enough, but I know how hard you worked to get your degree. I know how difficult the Show Choir major actually is, and I think you're one of the smartest, most determined people I know. If you did decide to become a lawyer, I think you'd be amazing at it. I think you'd blow everyone else out of the water."

Blaine snuffles quietly. "You really think that about me?"

Wes smiles fondly. "I really do. If you want to be a lawyer, I'm behind you one hundred percent. And I think if you give it a real chance, you'll love it. It's all about nuance and crafting the perfect argument -- it's like composing, which I know was your favorite part of your major."

"That's true."

"Just give it a real chance for the rest of the semester, really commit to your classes and everything, and if Christmas comes around and you can't stand it, come back home to California and become a musician or a choir director, and no one will say a thing. We'll all love you no matter what you do."

"I love you too, Wes." Blaine snuffles a little more loudly. "And Wes?"

"Yeah?"

"You're still my favorite."

Wes grins. "Call me sometime," he says dryly. "I know we're chained to our law books but I'm still here for you, buddy."

"Once a week?" Blaine suggests tentatively. "If Kurt lets me. He offered to help me study. I'm not sure how strict he'll be."

Wes laughs. "Tell you what," he says. "Next time I call and you're together, put him on the phone."

"Okay," Blaine says slowly. "Why?"

"If you're in the market for a Boston favorite, Blaine, he's going to need my stamp of approval."

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Blaine gets to Callahan's class a little early on Monday sans hair gel and bow tie. The sweater he's wearing is from his newer wardrobe but he's wearing it out of necessity more than anything else -- Boston is a lot colder than he'd ever thought it was going to be and it's taken him until now to really feel that. Everything feels a little colder.

Santana walks into the room holding Sebastian's hand and Blaine has to fight the urge to roll his eyes. Blaine doesn't expect Sebastian to have told Santana about what happened on Friday night, but it isn't necessary for her to continue to stake her claim quite so blatantly anymore. Blaine doesn't want Sebastian back.

Sebastian and Santana settle into their seats directly in front of Blaine (a seating arrangement Blaine had been rather pleased with for the last month, but now...) and start to unpack their bags. It takes Blaine a minute to figure out what's off about Santana and realizes that she's got a pretty red beret perched on the top of her head (and Blaine hates that he still wants to compliment her on it, even after everything she's put him through).

It's not until they're halfway through class (Callahan's giving a lecture on the purpose of diminished capacity) that Blaine lets himself look at the pair of them again. Sebastian rolls his shoulders back uncomfortably several times and Santana takes notice; she reaches her hand over to rub at the base of his neck (and she can have that now; Blaine doesn't want that, either). Sebastian looks over at her gratefully and gives her a faint smile; Blaine starts to look back up at the blackboard when he sees it.

Santana's wearing a diamond on her left hand.

Blaine blinks and looks back her hand where it's still massaging Sebastian's neck. The diamond's a marquise and has to be at *least* four or five carats (it might be more, actually), sitting just there on her ring finger, big and loud and making a statement.

Sebastian asked Santana to marry him.

Blaine *can't* tear his eyes away now, can't breathe or think or pay attention to anything Callahan's saying (god, he hopes he doesn't get called on). He watches as Santana's fingers fall delicately from Sebastian's neck and return to her work, her books and laptop; Sebastian reaches over to squeeze her hand, turning to face her but then --

He's looking at Blaine instead and Blaine knows he should have some sort of show face on, shouldn't be looking at them and should shift his attention back to Callahan but he can't, he just can't. Sebastian looks just as caught off guard as Blaine feels, worries his lip between his teeth before turning his attention back to the blackboard. He's back to rolling his shoulders again, obviously uncomfortable.

Blaine's muscles twitch, his fingers shake and the very *second* Callahan dismisses them, Blaine's bag is packed and he is the first one out the door.

Blaine just wants to hit something.

He gets down one hallway and rounds a corner into the second; he tries to repress the memories of meeting Sebastian here last week and getting *this* close to making real progress. He walks as fast as he can, desperate to get out and to the gym and a punching bag. He's so focused that it startles him when Sebastian catches up to him, long legs keeping up with Blaine's paces easily. "Blaine, wait." Blaine ignores him and keeps walking, but Sebastian keeps following him. "Can we talk?"

Blaine barely tilts his head toward Sebastian in acknowledgement and doesn't stop walking. "I have nothing to say to you."

Sebastian reaches out for him then; he makes a grab for Blaine's elbow and tugs him under a darkened alcove. "Well then will you just listen?"

Blaine yanks his arm out of Sebastian's grasp. "Fine," he says bitterly, not bothering to keep his voice down. "What do you want to talk about?" he asks, folding his arms over his chest. "Do you want to talk about how we wasted three years of our lives by being together?" Sebastian blinks at him, clearly surprised, and physically recoils away from Blaine. "Do you want to talk about how I did *everything* right in trying to be what you wanted and how it didn't make a difference?" Sebastian shifts his weight from one leg to the other and rolls his shoulders back again but doesn't break eye contact (and Blaine wishes he would because this would be so much easier if he didn't have to look into Sebastian's eyes). "Or do you want to talk about how you wanted to *fuck me* Friday night," Blaine says, lowering his voice and taking a step closer to Sebastian, "and then you went and asked Santana what I thought you were going to ask me a year ago?" Blaine's voice breaks a little at the end of his tirade but he refuses to cry in front of Sebastian over this.

Blaine steps away from Sebastian and clutches the strap of his bag as tightly as he can. "I don't know what game you're playing," he says, his voice only shaking a little, "but I don't want to play anymore." He gives Sebastian a once-over before setting his jaw. "I'm done being hurt by you."

Sebastian looks away from him just as Blaine brushes his past him towards the doors that lead out to the courtyard. Sebastian doesn't call after him, doesn't follow him or try to stop him, and Blaine finds himself grateful for that. Every breath Blaine takes is slow and measured but it's not easy; his eyes and his throat are still thick with the imminent onslaught of tears. He doesn't want to give Sebastian (or Santana, but mostly Sebastian) the satisfaction of knowing he's made Blaine cry, but Blaine doesn't think he can hold out much longer. He's angry, he'll admit that, but he thinks he's allowed to be hurt. As much as it pains him to admit it now, he *did* love Sebastian.

Gym. He needs to go to the gym.

If he's going to cry, he at least wants to be able to hit something at the same time. And maybe this time, he can actually do it picturing Sebastian's face.

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Sugar tugs on a zebra-print jacket and clips barrettes in her hair to keep her hair out of her face. She's getting restless waiting for Blaine; he's not late (a gentleman never is) and it's not quite two o'clock yet but she just wants him to be here already. The sooner she gets started on her lessons, the sooner she can tap into her full potential and charm the pants off of Rory.

More than anything else, though, Sugar's nervous. It's been *years* since she's had anyone over, much less someone she knew was actually her friend. She spent most of her middle school years learning the hard way that being her father's daughter comes with a price: most of the people she'd thought were her friends ended up using her for her money. She sighs and flops back onto her bed spread eagle. Blaine isn't like that, and Sugar *knows* that, she does, it's just --

She wasn't kidding when she said she wasn't good at turning heads. She's hot, she'll admit that, and she carries herself with the kind of confidence a Motta should, but having Blaine around sort of opened her eyes to how lonely she's been. She pretends like seeing Stacy and Jessica and Laurie at the bar doesn't sting when it does, she pretends like she knows how to flirt with Rory when she doesn't -- Sugar pretends a lot. She doesn't feel like she has to do that with Blaine, though. He's always been the one needing her

advice. He wants her to listen and fix him drinks and make him laugh; he doesn't want her house or her pool or her money or the pride that comes with knowing a Motta intimately. And now he wants to help her.

Sugar almost doesn't know what to do with him sometimes. It's kind of strange having a friend.

There's a crackle of tire on gravel in the driveway; Sugar bolts upright and grins before wrenching open her bedroom door and sprinting down the hallway. She comes bounding down the stairs just after Alfred closes the door behind Blaine. "I've been waiting for you!" she announces with a flourish, grabbing his hand and dragging him across the foyer. "Come with me to the study -- I want you to meet Daddy." Blaine lets her drag him along down a long, dark hallway; she turns to the right at the end of it and knocks impatiently on the door.

A low voice beckons, "Come in," and Sugar doesn't waste any time in turning the handle and tugging Blaine inside.

"Daddy, this is my friend Blaine," she announces, pushing Blaine forward and standing behind him a little.

Daddy raises his eyebrows and Blaine tucks his hands behind his back and shifts uncomfortably, smiling uneasily. "Hello," Blaine offers quietly.

"Blaine's here to give me singing lessons," Sugar informs her father.

"Ah." Daddy turns his attention back to the newspaper on his desk. "And you need me to write your little friend a check, Sugar?"

Blaine wrinkles his nose, confused and looks over at Sugar. Sugar's face falls a little. "Well, no," she says hesitantly. That's not why she brought Blaine into the study, but as long as they're in here, it makes sense for Daddy to pay him -- he is giving her lessons, after all. "I mean, I guess so, but --"

"How much?"

"Oh no," Blaine cuts in, flashing them both a smile. "I was doing this as a favor, Sugar, after what you did for me, remember?"

Daddy blinks up at them and raises his eyebrow at Sugar. "And what was this favor, Sugar?"

Sugar rolls her eyes. "Daddy, when are you going to stop treating me like a child?" she huffs, crossing her arms over her chest. "I'm twenty-two years old, I'm not a little girl anymore." Daddy's eyebrow just shoots up even more. "I gave him advice," Sugar explains, irritated. "And I made him a costume. He gave me some advice and offered to give me singing lessons. It's what friends do, Daddy."

Daddy looks over at Blaine. "And what exactly was this advice about?"

Blaine's face turns red and Sugar scowls at her father. Why is Daddy trying to scare off the only friend she's had in ages? "I moved out here from California a few months ago and was having a little trouble adjusting. And there was this whole mess involving my ex -- not that any of that was Sugar's fault," he adds quickly. "Sugar was just... very kind to me. She was the first real friend I made out here."

"I see." Sugar watches as Daddy looks Blaine up and down and it finally occurs to her what's going on.

"Daddy?" she says dryly. He *hms* at her and doesn't break eye contact with Blaine. "Blaine's gay."

Her father blinks over at her, surprised. "What?"

Blaine looks from Daddy to Sugar and back again before turning an even darker shade of red. "Oh," he laughs. "Yeah, one hundred percent gay. Sugar and I are just friends."

Daddy finally seems to get the picture and rises from his chair; he holds out his hand to Blaine and Sugar smiles in satisfaction. "It's nice to meet you, Mister...?"

"Anderson," Blaine supplies helpfully, shaking her father's hand.

Sugar tugs at Blaine's elbow. "We're gonna be in the parlor, okay? I made sure the piano was tuned -- that's a check you can write, Daddy," she says sweetly, grinning.

He chuckles at her. "Will you be joining us for dinner?" he asks Blaine.

Blaine looks over at Sugar, and she tries not to look too hopeful. "If I'm invited," he says slowly.

"Invited!" Sugar says quickly before he can change his mind. "You know where we are if you need us, Daddy. Just send Alfred." She drags Blaine out into the hallway and makes her way to the parlor, breathing

a little easier. "I think he likes you," Sugar decides after a moment. "At least I think he does. It's hard to tell." She ushers him into the parlor spins around to face him. "Okay," she says brightly. "What first?"

Blaine sits down at the piano bench, fingers dancing across the keys. "Scales first. I need to know your range. Did you have an idea of what you might want to sing? A song or an artist or a particular style?"

Sugar's eyes light up. "Can I do Adele?" she asks hopefully. "I sound just like her."

"Um." Blaine scrunches his eyebrows a little. "A lot of Adele's music is about heartache," he says after a minute. "I don't think that's what you're going for."

"No, I guess not," Sugar says sadly.

He runs her through scales ("it's the difference between low and high, not quiet and loud") and tries to teach her how to breathe properly (his hands press against her stomach -- no, *diaphragm* and it feels super weird); they use Adele as practice and he has to tell her not to sing through her nose and that she sounds affected (and she didn't really get what that meant until he told her she was trying too hard to sound just like Adele). It's frustrating because she doesn't know what she's doing, she's never been taught any differently and she's *trying*, she really is. Blaine's patient with her though, at least for the first hour and a half.

He finally sighs and runs a hand over his face. "Okay, I want you to try something for me," he says evenly. Sugar's mouth twitches as she focuses on what he's saying; she doesn't want to disappoint him. "I want you to close your eyes." She does as he commands and tries to remember everything he's taught her. She takes a deep breath. "Picture Rory -- " Sugar smiles involuntarily. "Actually, no," Blaine says, changing his mind. "Just... picture the guy you dream about. Maybe it's Rory, maybe it's someone else. What does he look like? What does he sound like? Why do you dream about him? What makes him so special?"

"He's Irish," Sugar says automatically, fingers relaxing at the edge of the piano. "Our family went to visit when I was four and I loved it. It was *beautiful*." She's got an entire collection of books on Ireland on the bottom shelf of her bookcase up in her bedroom. She'll have to show them to Blaine at some point. She sighs and fidgets with her necklace. "He's Irish and he's -- he's sweet, and he makes me laugh. He'll wait on me hand and foot but he'll let me do stuff on my own if I want. He'll watch *The Godfather* with me and he won't be afraid of Daddy and he won't --" She trails off, fingers twisting the necklace nervously now. "He



won't care about the money," she says quietly. "He'll believe that loving me is more important than anything else."

Blaine doesn't say anything for a moment; when he does, it's one soft-spoken word: "Sing."

So Sugar opens her mouth and tries out her favorite Adele song again. *"I wish I could lay down beside you when the day is done and wake up to your face against the morning sun."* She's nervous and excited and calm all at the same time. She knows what she wants and doesn't think she should have to compromise to get it, but no matter how hard she tries, Rory's face keeps coming into view and Sugar knows she's grinning like an idiot. *"But like everything I've ever known, you'll disappear one day. So I'll spend my whole life hiding my heart away."*

She bites her lip to fight back the smile. "Good," Blaine says quickly. "That was good." He sounds different, so Sugar opens her eyes to see what the problem is and --

She made Blaine cry.

"That's not good," she protests, kneeling next to him and resting a hand on his knee. "You crying is not a good thing."

"No," he says, half-laughing. "It is -- you're getting better, I promise. I just..." He smiles pitifully at her. "I did say Adele's music was about heartache. It hit a little too close to home that time, is all."

Sugar reaches out and wraps her arms around his neck and squishes him into a hug. "I'm sorry," she says. "You're being so nice, trying to help me get Rory's attention and you're still upset after what happened at the party and everything." Blaine just cries *harder* and Sugar panics a little. "Okay," she says, pulling away and tugging at his hand. "Come with me."

Sugar drags him upstairs into her bedroom and settles him onto her canopy bed before searching for a box of tissues. "Your room is pink," he babbles.

She offers him the box and smiles a little. "I thought it might cheer you up." Blaine smiles faintly at her, dabbing his face with a tissue before flopping onto his back and spreading his arms. Sugar crawls onto the bed next to him and mirrors his position. "Sebastian's a jerk." Blaine breathes in too loudly next to her and she can tell he's going to try and tell her she's wrong but she won't let him. "No, I'm right," she says firmly, looking over at him. "Look, I know you loved him, but that doesn't change the fact that he's a jerk."

Blaine scoots up further on the bed and curls up with her Hello Kitty throw pillow. "He wasn't always like this. He -- it's like he was an entirely different person when I knew him. He was a good person, Sugar. We were in love and I just -- I don't feel like I know him anymore." He bites his lip. "I never told you this," he says quietly, "but when he broke up with me? I thought he was going to propose."

Sugar raises an eyebrow at him. "Do you wish he had?"

Blaine shakes his head. "It wouldn't have changed anything. I'd still be stuck out here trying to be someone I'm not." He buries his face into the pillow and groans. "I don't even know who I am anymore."

"That's ridiculous." Blaine looks up at her and frowns. "If that were true, Blaine, then that means Sebastian defined who you are. And I don't think that's true."

He tilts his head to the side. "You don't?"

She shakes her head. "No." She sighs and sits up, crossing her legs and reaching for his hands. "You're kind and smart and talented. You're my friend and you like helping people. Pink is your favorite color and you like musicals. I'm pretty sure all of those things are true whether or not you're with him." She reaches out and ruffles his hair. "He's not holding you back anymore." He smiles a little at her. "I have an idea." Sugar crosses the room and pops her *Chicago* DVD into the player. "This is perfect," she declares, bouncing a little as she plops back down on the bed. "This will make you feel better and you can pretend you're studying."

Blaine raises an eyebrow at her. "How is this studying?" he laughs.

"It's about law!" she argues.

"And murder," Blaine adds, still laughing. "Sugar, Sebastian may be a jerk and I definitely don't want him back, but I don't want to *murder him*."

Sugar glares at him. "Are you turning down watching a musical?"

Blaine pouts and folds his arms over his chest before scrunching down against the pillows. "No," he mumbles.

If she has to watch a musical, she's glad it's this one (it's her favorite). She grabs one of her decorative tiaras off of her vanity when Mama starts singing (Sugar relates to her the most -- all power and no imprisonment) and doesn't mind when Blaine curls up against her side and cries steadily through "Mr. Cellophane."

By the time Alfred comes to summon them for dinner, though, they're standing barefoot on Sugar's bed wearing hats and belting "I Move On" into hairbrushes along with the credits.

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Kurt looks over when Blaine falls silent. He's focused on his phone, texting furiously with someone.

Kurt pokes Blaine in the arm with the pencil he's holding. "Hey, focus. Stop texting."

Blaine blinks up at him and worries his lip. "I will, just give me a second. I need to send this while I still remember." He finishes typing out the message and then tosses his phone to the other side of the bed, turning to face Kurt. "Okay," he sighs, shoulders slumping. "I'm all yours."

Kurt considers him a moment. "You're distracted," he observes.

Blaine sighs again and glances over at the cage on the far side of the room. "I'm worried about Pavarotti," he admits. "He won't sing and he keeps losing his feathers. I think he might be sick."

Kurt softens a little and smiles fondly over at him. "You're worried about your bird."

Blaine looks down at his hands and shrugs his shoulders. "It's silly, I know -- "

"It's not silly," Kurt interjects. Blaine looks over at him gratefully. "It's... kind of adorable."

Blaine flushes bright red and ducks his head a little and Kurt *wishes* he'd stop doing that; it makes it ten times harder to be just Blaine's friend right now. "He was a going away present from my friend Wes -- I told you about him -- and he just... he means a lot to me. That was who I was texting, Wes. I thought he might know what to do." Blaine's phone vibrates at the edge of the bed; Blaine casts a glance over at Kurt, who waves a hand at him. Blaine dives for it, his fingers working furiously across the screen to read the message. "Oh," he says quietly. "Wes thinks he's molting."

"So he'll be okay," Kurt deduces.

"I think so." Blaine sets his phone on his nightstand and settles back against his pillows, gazing up at the ceiling. "Okay, now I'm really all yours."

Kurt fights back a smile and leans sideways in Blaine's desk chair to dig in his briefcase. "I thought we could review today," he suggests. "There's a lot of terminology and concepts and it's easy to mix things up or forget something." He straightens in the chair and holds out a few stacks of index cards bound together with rubber bands.

"What are those?"

"Flash cards," Kurt explains, setting them on Blaine's desk. "I made them when I went here to help me retain everything. It's a little elementary but it works."

Blaine shifts his gaze from the pile of flash cards to Kurt; his face lights up with a grin. "I think you're my new favorite."

Kurt blushes. "Is that a thing with you, having a favorite?"

Blaine laughs. "Sort of? It was more of a joke with the rest of the Warblers than anything else. Thad always thought he was everyone's favorite but David said I was, and Wes was *my* favorite."

Kurt raises an eyebrow. "So I'm replacing Wes?"

Blaine shifts on the pillows and looks back up at the ceiling, folding his hands over his stomach. "I guess so. Except Wes is straight." He glances over at Kurt for a minute. "Don't tell Thad," he whispers conspiratorially.

Kurt laughs. "I would never. I barely know who he is, anyway." He sighs and picks up a stack of flash cards, trying to focus on the task at hand. He can't keep getting distracted by Blaine's colorful stories and ridiculous smile. "Define *malum prohibitum*."

"*Malum prohibitum*," Blaine says, closing his eyes as he thinks and oh *god*, why is he so cute? "An act prohibited by law."

“Good. Example?”

“Mmm,” Blaine hums, “jaywalking.”

“And malum in se?” Kurt prompts.

“An act that’s evil in itself,” Blaine answers immediately, opening his eyes. “Assault, murder --” He lolls his head to the side and flashes a grin at Kurt. *Stop it*, Kurt thinks. *Stop it, stop it, stop* -- “White shoes after Labor Day.” Kurt dissolves into laughter and Blaine frowns. “Stop laughing at me,” he grumbles.

“I’m not laughing at you,” Kurt protests, tossing the cards onto the desk and reaching for Blaine’s hand. Kurt’s not laughing anymore but he can’t help smiling. “It’s just -- it’s so *true*.” And there’s Blaine’s smile again, bright and wide. Kurt swallows and withdraws his hand. “You have a really good memory.”

Blaine’s smile grows wider. “Yep,” he quips, sitting up and crossing his legs. “You’re definitely my new favorite.”

“Is that how you kept Wes around?” Kurt says dryly, arching an eyebrow. “You showered him with compliments?”

“You complimented me first,” Blaine points out. “You called me adorable.”

Kurt’s lips twist in an effort not to smile. “Yeah, well...” He reaches out and tugs on one of Blaine’s curls. “I’m still getting used to this.” Blaine colors a little but smiles at him, clearly pleased. Kurt releases the lock of hair and settles back into the desk chair, shuffling the flash cards. He likes Blaine, there’s no denying that. He doesn’t *want* to deny it (although he might tone down just how much he likes Blaine if anyone asked), but there’s a difference between owning up to how he feels and actually doing something about it. Kurt’s sort of glad that their schedules haven’t aligned until now. He doesn’t know all that much about Blaine’s relationship with Sebastian but he knows more than he did before; he knows enough to hold back. Blaine’s not a small personality but his confidence has taken a big hit and his heart is still clearly on the mend. Kurt doesn’t want to be Blaine’s rebound, but he also hasn’t been in a relationship in three years. He’s a little out of practice with this whole thing (which is just ridiculous; he’s twenty-seven years old, for crying out loud, he should know how to flirt by now).

Kurt clears his throat. “Summarize the case of *Russell v. Sullivan*.”

Blaine closes his eyes again, thinking, and tosses his phone back and forth between his hands. "It determined that Russell was legally the child's father even though he was just a sperm donor."

"Good." Kurt glances up at him and grins. "I shouldn't be telling you this, but..."

Blaine opens his eyes and grins back, leaning in a little. "But?"

Oh god. Kurt's never going to be able to say 'no' to Blaine, is he?

"At the end of each semester, before finals, Callahan does a sort of mock trial with each of his classes," Kurt explains. "It's more of a discussion than anything else -- he tries to get everyone to participate and argue both sides of a case you've covered in class or something similar to it. He never uses the same topics and cases for each class in a semester, but he does have a list he rotates through every few years." Kurt glances down at the flash card. "He hasn't done this one in a while, the sperm donor/parental rights issue. He might use it for your class."

Pavarotti chirps from his cage in the corner; Blaine glances over at it before turning his attention back to Kurt, smiling warmly. "Yep," he affirms. "Definitely my new favorite."

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It's almost eight o' clock in the evening when Theodore Anderson finally retires to his study with his scotch, his briefcase, and his well-worn copy of *The Great Gatsby*. Dinner was pleasant as ever -- the Powells came over and Marisol made an absolutely delicious lamb stew. Still, it's been a long day and he's brought work home with him, so Theo really just wants to relax for a few minutes with his drink and his book before he has to focus on work again.

*\*ring\**

Theo frowns at the phone on his desk. It's the private line -- it doesn't ring anywhere else in the house, just in his office. Not very many people have the number. He sighs as he picks up the receiver. The chances of this being good news are somewhat slim.

"Hello, this is Theo," he says, even though it's pretty much guaranteed the person on the other end knows who they were calling.

His son's voice answers. "Hi, Dad," Blaine replies. Theo smiles, heartened to hear from his son after practically no contact since he went off to Harvard. Harvard. His son's at *Harvard Law*. Amazing.

"Blaine! It's wonderful to hear from you. How's law school?" Theo knows it's probably futile to hope that Blaine is making something of himself at law school (Blaine applied so he could be reunited with his ex-boyfriend, after all), but Blaine's surprised him in the past. Theo didn't ever think Blaine would apply to law school, let alone get in or attend, and look what's happened.

"It's -- it's okay. It took me a while to find my footing, but I think I'm doing okay now. That's actually why I'm calling," Blaine says, and Theo feels something inside of him relax. Blaine's doing well.

"Oh?" Theo replies. Blaine can occasionally take forever to get to the point, but somehow Theo doesn't think this is one of those times. Blaine called him, after all.

"Yeah... I know we'd talked about me coming home for Thanksgiving, but I just don't think I'll be able to. There's a lot of reading and I have a couple of papers to write – plus, finals are practically as soon as we come back from Thanksgiving. I'd be no fun if I came home."

Theo frowns; he doesn't think Blaine is telling him the whole story, but then, that's nothing new. Blaine's been holding things back from Theo and Marisol since he was nine. "Are you sure, son? We'd let you study as much as you needed to."

"Yeah, dad, I'm sure. I just need to stay focused."

Theo's brow furrows as a thought occurs to him. "So you'll be spending Thanksgiving alone?"

"No, actually. I'm staying with a friend."

Theo bites his lip briefly. "Sebastian?"

Blaine's 'no' is swift and adamant and it catches Theo off guard. Blaine clearly doesn't want to talk about his ex and Theo can't help but wonder what went wrong there. His son has never been particularly good at handling rejection, but something about this feels different. Blaine's decided to stay in Boston so he can 'stay focused' on his coursework. Something doesn't quite add up, unless... Unless Blaine took Theo's advice to heart last fall when he'd told Theo and Marisol about wanting to apply to Harvard. Theo tries not

to get his hopes up; he'd be *thrilled* if Blaine actually ended up being a lawyer, but he also remembers how happy his son had been when they'd relocated to California and, well, Boston isn't Malibu.

"Okay," Theo says slowly. "We understand, Blaine, but hopefully we'll see you at Christmas?"

"I hope so, Dad. I'll let you know, okay?" Blaine sounds like he might be smiling a little, so Theo smiles back.

"Of course," Theo says, resigned to going at least another month before seeing his son again. "Don't be a stranger, son. I'd love to hear from you more often."

Blaine laughs a little. "I'll try. Love you, Dad."

"Love you, too, Blaine. Goodnight."

"Night."

There's a soft knock on the study door before it opens and Marisol pokes her head in. "Hi sweetheart," she greets quietly, crossing the room with a steaming mug. "I brought you tea to help you relax while you finished up work, but I see you haven't finished your scotch," she teases, setting the mug down. She leans down and kisses him briefly. "Who was on the phone?"

Theo sighs and opts for the tea. "Blaine."

Marisol's face lights up. "Oh!" she says brightly. "Did he tell you when he's thinking of flying in for Thanksgiving?" she asks, leaning against the edge of his desk.

Theo shakes his head and rests a hand on her knee. "He's not coming."

Marisol's face falls. "But -- why? He'll be all alone on Thanksgiving then."

"He'll be okay," Theo assures her. "He's staying with a friend." She arches an eyebrow again and opens her mouth but Theo shakes his head. "*Not* Sebastian."

His wife looks confused. "If he's not staying for Sebastian," she asks slowly, "then why is he staying in Boston?"



Theo switches out the tea for the scotch. "I think... he's trying to be a lawyer."

## Chapter Five

The slip for the package is waiting for Blaine in his mailbox when he goes to check it the Monday before Thanksgiving. He hasn't been expecting anything, so it's a more than a little surprising.

When he retrieves it from the kind people behind the counter, the return address tells him it's from Wes. Blaine frowns. He and Wes had their weekly phone call two days ago; Wes didn't say he was sending anything.

Blaine makes himself wait until he gets back to his dorm to open the package, settling onto his bed and slicing the tape open with a pair of scissors. At the very top of the box is an envelope that says *Read Me First!*, so Blaine does.

*Dear Warbler Blaine!*

*You've seemed a little sad lately, and you're too far away for us to cheer you up with hugs and songs, so all the Warblers (with an able assist from your parents and a certain other lone Warbler) worked together to make you this care package. In it are all the essentials, plus a few awesome surprises.*

*Hope it brightens your day!*

*The UCLA Warblers*

Blaine starts to smile, excited to find out what's actually in the box, now that he knows what it is. The first thing he pulls out is a tin container of that's almost as big as some of his textbooks; he opens the top, and staring up at him is a tiny gingerbread Wes next to a tiny gingerbread Jeff. Thad, David, Trent and Nick are all there in gingerbread form as well -- though how they got them so distinct he has no idea. Once he's pulled out all the gingerbread, there are still a dozen snickerdoodles underneath. He feels tears prick at the corners of eyes. They remembered his favorite cookie.

Blaine carefully places the gingerbread Warblers back in the tin and puts it aside, wondering how he can possibly bring himself to eat tiny versions of his friends; it's certainly a dilemma. Next he pulls a brightly patterned bag from the box, and when he tugs it open, there are at least 10 different novelty stress balls inside courtesy of Wes: he can see a brain, an apple, and even a tiny gavel. There's even a note granting

Blaine permission to throw one or two at Kurt's head if he ever gets particularly obnoxious (and that makes Blaine smile because Wes and Kurt have *bonded*).

After the stress balls, there's a Burberry cage cover for Pavarotti from 'all the Warblers' (Wes must have mentioned he's been worried about the canary's health in the cold Boston weather) and a CD of guitar covers of some of his favorite showtunes that his mother compiled for him. Her note says that she hopes it helps with the studying.

There's something soft at the bottom of the box, but on top of it -- under the cage cover and the CD -- is his father's copy of *The Great Gatsby*. Blaine remembers opening his eyes in the hospital after the Sadie Hawkins dance to see his father flipping its pages slowly and quietly. When Blaine had moved slightly, his father had smiled at him, tears and relief mixing on his face. He'd gone back to the beginning of the book, and read it out loud as Blaine recovered. Blaine picks the book up now, reverently, and holds it close to his chest.

He's not sure he can take the emotions one more gift might give him, but he should really finish looking through the box before he calls everyone to thank them. He pulls out the soft wrapped package from the bottom of the box, and places it in front of himself on the bed, setting aside the now empty box. He tugs open the strings holding it closed and pulls apart the wrapping. Inside he finds what looks to be the warmest patchwork quilt he's ever seen. He finds another note from his mother. This one simply says *Stay warm, sweetie*.

Blaine carefully unfolds the blanket and wraps it around himself. It is amazingly warm, and for a moment it feels as if his mother is actually giving him a hug. He sniffles slightly and tugs the blanket in a little more before picking up the book from his father and opening it to the first page.

*In my younger and more vulnerable years, my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.*

*'Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages you've had.'*

*He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgements...*

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"Here, Blaine," Sugar huffs, dusting off her hands and situating Blaine in front of the cutting board. "You can knead the dough for a little while -- my hands get sore if I don't take breaks and I don't want to lose my magic touch."

Blaine laughs and mock-salutes her. "Yes ma'am." He coats his own hands in flour as she washes it off of hers; she dries her hands and ruffles his hair just as he starts to knead the dough. "I've got my eye on you," he says sternly. "If you get flour in my hair, this means war, honey."

"Sugar," she corrects automatically. "And as if," she drawls, twirling on the spot. "I am not risking ruining this outfit. I don't care if it only cost seventy dollars -- do you know how hard it is to dry clean *tweed*?"

Blaine grins and shakes his head as she stands up on tiptoe to kiss her father on the cheek before retreating from the kitchen. Blaine works the dough, folds and kneads and drops it onto the wooden cutting board with a quiet *thud* while Mr. Motta stirs his beef and pork mixture for the lasagna. With Sugar absent, they're both quiet for a few minutes until Blaine tentatively ventures, "Thank you again, Mr. Motta, for inviting me to spend Thanksgiving with your family. It's really nice of you."

Mr. Motta waves a hand at him. "My Sugar is rather attached to you, Mr. Anderson," he says, sounding amused. "I like my little girl to be happy." He gives Blaine a once over and adjusts the heat on the stove. "I was a little surprised you didn't go back to California for the holiday."

Blaine shrugs. "No rest for us lawyers," he quips. "Plus, Sugar wanted me to go to her party tomorrow."

"Ah, yes," Mr. Motta muses, setting the tall wooden spoon he's been using down on the spoon rest. "Is that what the singing lessons have been for?"

Blaine ducks his head. "Maybe."

"She's trying to impress that boy."

Blaine whips his head up and drops the dough onto the board with a loud *thunk*. "How did you --?"

"Her cousin works with her. Anthony." Blaine just blinks at him because oh my god, Sugar's dad has his own network of *spies*. "My Sugar isn't dumb, Mr. Anderson -- naive, maybe -- but she does wear her heart on her sleeve."

Blaine swallows thickly. "We have that in common."

Mr. Motta sighs and leans against the counter. "I realize that I may seem a little... over-protective of my Sugar sometimes. But she's all I've got and she's been hurt before. I'm just looking out for her."

Blaine drops the ball of dough back into the bowl and washes his hands in the sink, thinking. "I understand, Mr. Motta," he says carefully. "But Sugar's an adult. She needs to be able to make her own choices, her own mistakes."

"And you don't think this is a mistake."

Blaine shakes his head and dries his hand off on a towel. "No," he says. "I don't. She may wear her heart on her sleeve, Mr. Motta, but at least she's following it."

"Like you followed yours?" Mr. Motta pries. Blaine looks away and shifts uncomfortably. "You followed your heart all the way across the country and got it broken, Mr. Anderson. My Sugar's helping you put the pieces back together."

Blaine forces a smile. "You're very perceptive."

"True," Mr. Motta allows, "but like you said, you also wear your heart on your sleeve. And I remember things, Mr. Anderson. I remember you saying you had trouble adjusting out here." He pauses before adding, "My Sugar told me you're not from California, originally."

"Ohio, actually."

Mr. Motta *hms* at him. "I take it you were... out of place there as well?" Blaine rubs at his shoulder and nods once. *Where* is Sugar? "You're always welcome here, Mr. Anderson. I know it's not much, but we're a family here, me and my Sugar. If Boston's your new home, you'll need roots here."

Blaine smiles warmly at him just as Sugar comes waltzing back into the kitchen, singing, "*If you wanna ride, just name your price. Don't play cheap with your heart.*"

“Diaphragm,” Blaine reminds her, switching spots with her and pulling her shoulders back as she sets to work on the dough again. *“Don’t make a bet if you can’t write the check for me, for me.”* He shifts his hands to her torso and smiles as he feels her breathe in.

*“Cause I can be bought, but you’ll pay the cost,”* she continues quietly. She’s tense, he can feel it, and he has to wonder if she’s looking for her father’s approval. Blaine wraps his arms around her waist and hooks his chin over her shoulder, snuggling close; his voice joins hers on *if you can afford me.*

Mr. Motta taps the side of his pot with the wooden spoon and turns the burner off. “Bravo,” he laughs, returning the smile they both flash at him. “Are you sure you don’t want compensation for your services, Mr. Anderson? You’ve turned my Sugar into a supernova.”

Sugar beams at him as she grabs a rolling pin for the dough but Blaine shakes his head. “You’ve done enough,” he says kindly, shooting Mr. Motta a meaningful look. “And Sugar’s already bright enough,” he adds, elbowing her in the side. “She is making a sparkling cranberry pie, after all. Maybe the way to a man’s heart *is* through his stomach.”

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Blaine takes another drink from his glass of water and watches Sugar twist the gold bracelets she’s wearing as she trains her eyes on the door. “He’ll be here,” Blaine assures her.

Sugar doesn’t look away from the door. “But what if he doesn’t come?”

Blaine sighs. “You asked him to come to the post-Thanksgiving party tonight. He nodded. That meant yes. I was there, Sugar, I saw it.”

“But what if he changes his mind?”

Blaine rolls his eyes. “He’s had an entire year to change his mind and chase after someone else, Sugar. Trust me, he’ll be here.” He takes hold of her shoulders and turns her to face him. “You know, for a girl wearing bright red pants, you’re sure lacking confidence.”

Sugar looks down at her pants and then back up at Blaine, horrified. “Is it too much?” she asks, clearly worried. “Oh god, it’s too much. I have to go home and change --”

Blaine tightens his grip on her shoulder and swivels her around to face the door again. "Too late," he says, pointing at the door where Rory's just walked in.

"I can't do this," Sugar whines.

"Yes, you can," Blaine insists. "Just remember what I taught you. Remember how it felt. He's *right there*." He ushers her from the bar to the stage and gives her one of the karaoke microphones.

"I --"

Blaine turns her around to face him one last time. "Sugar," he says clearly. "Go to the mattresses."

She smiles brightly at him. "You quoted from *The Godfather*."

"Yes," Blaine says dryly. "My love for you knows no bounds. Now --" He spins her back towards the stage. "Go get him." Sugar stumbles up the stairs to the stage. The music starts to play but Sugar doesn't sing; she just stands on the stage, hands clutching the microphone and staring wide-eyed at the bar patrons.

*Oh.*

Sugar has stage fright.

The song starts over, giving her a second chance to begin, but she doesn't open her mouth, doesn't *move*, and Blaine can only think of one thing to do.

He grabs the second microphone from the karaoke machine and climbs onto the stage next to her, gesturing to the man at the side of the stage to start it over. Sugar stumbles to the side a little, blinking at him as the music cues up a third time, and Blaine starts to sing. "*Can't buy me love, love, can't buy me love.*" The atmosphere shifts with his voice, people relaxing at their tables, and Blaine arches his eyebrows hopefully at Sugar, who's still just staring at him. "*I'll buy you a diamond ring, my friend, if it makes you feel all right.*" Sugar finally starts to look relaxed so he keeps singing, carrying through the next couple of lines and into the refrain; he starts dancing circles around her, being deliberately ridiculous, and she actually laughs at him.

"*I'll give you all I've got to give if you say you love me too,*" she sings back, letting him spin her, and the patrons are into it, now, clapping and cheering them on. He rejoins her at the chorus, both of them

practically *crowing* with glee, and Blaine's grin threatens to split his face in two when he sees her lock eyes with Rory on *tell me that you want the kind of things that money just can't buy*.

They close the song to a loud smattering of applause, Blaine hoisting Sugar up by the waist and throwing her over his shoulder before carrying her off-stage, his laughter mingling with her squeals and protests of, "Put me *down*!"

"No," he laughs. "This is payback for calling me cute and compact. You're one to talk, honey."

"My name," she huffs out, twisting enough that Blaine is forced to put her down if he wants to maintain his balance, "is *Sugar*." She still beams at him once she's on her own two feet again, though, holding his hands tightly.

He can't help but match her grin with his own and he tugs her forwards into a hug; over her shoulder, he sees Rory watching them from a close distance, puzzled. "He's watching you," he murmurs into Sugar's ear. He pulls back and turns her around, hands firm on her shoulders; he leans down and points in the general direction of where Rory's standing. "You should go talk to him and make sure he knows you're available." Sugar squeaks at him but Blaine just laughs, squeezing her shoulder gently before pushing her forwards. "I just mean you should tell him that I'm gay. Right now he probably thinks I'm his competition." Sugar darts forwards immediately, weaving her way through the crowded tables and chairs towards Rory.

Blaine keeps an eye trained on them as he makes his way back to the bar. He smiles as he settles onto a stool, watching as Sugar talks too-fast. There's a break in her tirade before she gestures to the filling dance floor; Rory just nods, smiling, and Sugar takes his hand as an old Cobra Starship song starts to play. And then they're *slow-dancing* to Cobra Starship and Blaine buries his face in his hands, laughing --

"Your show choir major is showing." Blaine twists on his stool to find Kurt grinning at him. "Friend of yours?"

Blaine nods, gesturing at the empty stool next to him before turning his attention back to Sugar. "She's been into that guy -- Rory -- for like a year. I'll have you know I used my degree to help her court him."

"Blaine Anderson, matchmaker extraordinaire," Kurt teases, nudging Blaine's shoulder with his own.

Blaine smiles, shrugging. "I found a way to --" He tapers off when Sugar pulls away from Rory, though, eyes wide as she looks up at his face (and oh wow, the height difference between them is too comical); a beat,



and then she's got both hands on either side of his face, yanking him down and planting a firm kiss on his lips. "Damn," Blaine huffs out. Kurt is laughing next to him, his body close and warm and his elbow brushing against Blaine's every so often.

Sugar says something to Rory and gestures over to one of the tables before darting over to where Kurt and Blaine are sitting. They pull far enough away from each other for her to slide between them and she literally *catapults* herself over the bar, sliding against the polished wood and landing gracefully on the other side. She reaches for a bottle of vodka and spins in a quick circle before leaning forward and planting a kiss on both of Blaine's cheeks. Kurt looks like he's trying very hard not to laugh at Blaine, whose face colors. "He's *Irish!*" Sugar gushes. "Blaine, he's perfect!"

"Wait," Blaine says slowly, ignoring Kurt's snickering. "How did you not know he was Irish until now? Has he --" He pauses, glancing over his shoulder at Rory. "Has he never *spoken* to you?"

Sugar shakes her head. "It's always been the Post-It notes."

Kurt reaches for one of the drinks she's mixing. "Why?"

Sugar blinks at him and then looks over at Blaine. "Oh," Blaine says, flustered. "Sugar, this is Kurt."

Sugar's eyes light up. "Kurt!" she says, her voice far too chipper. "I've heard a lot about you. It's nice to finally meet you." She shakes Kurt's hand the same way Blaine remembers her shaking his own; Kurt looks somewhere between taken aback and amused. She looks over at Blaine and mouths the words 'he's cute' while Kurt takes a sip of his drink; Blaine covers his eyes with his hand and shakes his head. "He's wanted to ask me out all year," Sugar explains, answering Kurt's question. "But he was afraid I'd make fun of his accent."

Blaine smiles. "So I guess it's safe to say you guys are hitting it off, then?"

Sugar nods and picks up two glasses before sashaying around the bar and pausing next to Blaine. "Thank you," she says quietly, leaning in awkwardly and hooking her chin over his shoulder. "Thank you for getting up there with me." She pulls away and looks down at her heels. "I -- I didn't want to tell you because I thought you wouldn't teach me if you knew."

"Everybody gets nervous," Blaine assures her. "Even me." She looks up and smiles at him. "Go," he laughs, nudging her arm with his own. "Your Irish boy is waiting." Sugar's face lights up and she hurries off to the

corner table to rejoin Rory; she leans in as she sets the glasses on the table and kisses him again before settling down next to him.

“She’s practically in his lap.”

Blaine looks over at Kurt and shrugs. “I don’t blame her. It’s been a year. They have chemistry.”

“And now alcohol.”

Blaine grins. *“She said, ‘What you need is love potion number nine.’”*

Kurt smiles. “You know,” he says after a moment, taking another sip of his drink, “you’re actually really good.”

Blaine beams at him. “You think so?”

Kurt nods. “Technically, you were good, of course, but you’re also engaging. The crowd was loving it.” Blaine blushes and ducks his head a little. “I’m serious,” Kurt laughs. “You’re really good at the whole ‘making art and helping people thing.’ You’re going to make a great lawyer.” Kurt smiles at him, warm and genuine, and Blaine looks away, unable to fight the warmth that floods his chest.

“What would it take,” he says carefully, sipping his water, “to get you up there?” He glances back over at Kurt slowly and puts on his best show face.

Kurt’s lips twist into what’s supposed to be a scowl but ends up looking more like a smile. He glances down at his drink. “Another one of these,” he says resolutely. “Or maybe something a little stronger. And it has to be something I know and I am *not* going up there alone.”

Blaine shoves at his shoulder playfully. “Come on,” he laughs. “Live a little. It’s Thanksgiving break.”

“I don’t get a break,” Kurt says dryly. “I already did the whole law school thing, remember? It’s gonna take a little more to get me to let loose.”

“Well,” Blaine says thoughtfully, grinning, “I do enjoy a challenge.”

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The door to Callahan's classroom clicks open quietly and Blaine takes a break from listening to Sebastian's argument to watch Kurt sneak into the room and hand Callahan a manila folder. Callahan murmurs something to him and Kurt nods before retreating to the far side of the room and settling into a chair against the wall. He glances around the room until he catches Blaine's eyes; Blaine grins at him and offers him a little wave. The corner of Kurt's mouth turns up in a smile.

"There's precedence for it, though -- *Russell v. Sullivan*, for one. And according to *Swinney v. Neubert*, Swinney -- who was a private sperm donor -- was allowed visitation rights as long as he came to terms with the hours set forth by the parents," Sebastian continues as Blaine turns his attention back to the discussion. "So if we're sticking to past precedent, Mr. Latimer wasn't stalking. He was clearly within his rights to ask for visitation." It's a fair point, Blaine will give Sebastian that. It's smart, too -- it shows that Sebastian's retained a lot of the information they've read over the semester and knows how to use it to back up his argument. It makes Sebastian out to have the markings of a perfect future lawyer.

Callahan doesn't seem all that ready to dole out praise just yet, though. "But Swinney was a one-time sperm donor," Callahan points out. "Our defendant was a habitual sperm donor, who also happened to be harassing the parents in his quest for visitation."

"Well, yeah," Sebastian allows, "but without this man's sperm, the child in question wouldn't even exist."

Callahan smiles; he looks pleased. "Now you're thinking like a lawyer."

Blaine's face twists in concentration, trying to follow Sebastian's logic. It's not that the argument is invalid; it's more that the argument is flawed. Blaine gets the point Sebastian's trying to make, but he's obviously been around Santana far too long (or maybe not long enough, depending on how it's looked at). Blaine raises his hand.

Callahan looks surprised. "Yes, Mr. Anderson?"

Blaine draws in a breath and sits up straight. "Mr. Smythe makes an excellent point," he allows, sugar-coating his voice. Sebastian and Santana turn around to look at him. "I have to wonder, though, if the defendant kept a log of every sperm emission made in his life."

There's a collective, quiet snicker throughout the room that Blaine resolutely ignores. He has a point, he knows he does, and he's going to make sure Callahan lets him make it. "Interesting," Callahan says, clearly trying not to laugh. "Why do you ask?"

Blaine perks up a little, encouraged. "Well," Blaine starts, "unless he did, he doesn't have any claim over this child. I mean, why now?" he argues. "Why *this* sperm?"

Santana narrows her eyes at him, but Callahan seems to like the counterargument. "I see your point."

"And if we follow the standard Mr. Smythe has set," Blaine continues, forcing a smile in Sebastian's direction, "and the logic that goes with it -- that the child is the product of only the sperm -- then what does that say about emissions where the sperm clearly isn't seeking an egg?"

Callahan raises his eyebrows. "Such as?" he prompts.

Blaine fights back a smile. He may have been annoyed that Callahan constantly called on him in this class, but Blaine likes putting in the effort. He likes working hard and he likes proving himself. Callahan finally seems like he's satisfied with Blaine's work -- or, at the very least, is glad that Blaine is finally speaking up and being opinionated.

"Masturbation," Blaine says clearly, listing the reasons on his fingers. There's more snickering but Blaine can see Kurt grinning out of the corner of his eye, so he keeps going. "And any non-heterosexual sexual encounters," he argues. Callahan looks a little skeptical and Sebastian looks *more* than uncomfortable; Blaine *has* to keep going. "You can't make the claim that all sexual encounters could result in a child because that's assuming that defendant is straight. I mean, he could be gay or bisexual." He looks pointedly at Sebastian before looking squarely back at Callahan.

"Okay," Callahan laughing and waving a hand at the class to get them to quiet. "So what does that tell us about emissions of that nature, Mr. Anderson?" he asks. "Besides the fact that Mr. Smythe's argument is a little flawed?" Sebastian rolls his shoulders back uncomfortably, obviously disgruntled.

Blaine looks directly at Sebastian again and doesn't care that he's being obvious because *damn*, if this isn't going to feel good. "It provides us with a case against Mr. Latimer's request for visitation," he says brightly. "You could term such emissions as reckless abandonment."

Santana clucks in disapproval and spins around in her seat almost immediately. Sebastian's shoulders sag and he doesn't look smug anymore; he doesn't look particularly annoyed that Blaine's poked a thousand holes in his argument, either. He looks like he took it personally (which is fair, because Blaine *meant* for him to take it personally after the way Sebastian abandoned *him*) but there's something about it that doesn't sit quite right with Blaine.

Blaine shrugs it off and turns his attention to Kurt, who's doubled over in his chair and hiding his face behind his hand, clearly trying to stifle his laughter. And then Blaine looks to Callahan and his professor looks *impressed*. "In all the years I've taught this class, Mr. Anderson," he says, "and in all the years I've used this example, I've never had anyone use that argument before." He actually *smiles*. "I believe you just won your case."

Blaine flushes, pleased, and lets himself bask in it a little while Callahan reminds the class about the structure of their final in two weeks. Blaine takes his time in packing up his bag, unable to wipe the grin off his face, and barely notices Santana briskly dragging Sebastian out of the room. A few of their classmates linger to ask Callahan a few questions, so Kurt remains in his seat against the wall. Blaine jogs down the stairs, setting his fedora back on his head now that class is over. "You," Kurt laughs quietly, "are my new favorite."

Blaine bows a little and beams at Kurt. "So I'm doing okay with this whole law thing?"

Kurt grins at him. "You are doing *more* than okay. You deserve a *trophy* for putting Sebastian in his place like that. You're done with classes for the semester, right?" Blaine nods. "Come over tonight," Kurt offers. "I'll cook you a celebratory dinner. You know, congrats on getting through your first quarter at Harvard Law and everything."

Blaine ducks his head a little. "That's not fair," he protests. "I buy you *coffee*. You supply me with entire meals."

"I'm not taking no for an answer," Kurt says in a sing-song voice.

Blaine blushes and smiles. "Fine," he laughs. "You win. Six-thirty?"

"Seven," Kurt says. "I'll tell you what -- you can bring dessert."

"Ah, Kurt," Callahan interjects, crossing the room towards them. "Scouting out potential hires, I see." Kurt smiles politely at him but doesn't reply. "Of course, I can't consider you a candidate, Mr. Anderson, if you don't apply for the summer internship. Do you have a resume?"

Kurt glances over at Blaine and arches an eyebrow; Blaine can tell he's trying not to smile. "Yes," Blaine affirms, tugging open his messenger bag. "Let me just see if I can find -- here you go." He hands a copy of his resume over to Callahan and glances over at Kurt, who is full out *grinning* now.

Callahan stares at the resume. "It's pink," he says flatly.

"It is."

Callahan's eyes scan the page. "You majored in show choir."

"I did."

Callahan blinks up at him and Blaine tries to make himself appear taller. He's proud of his resume, he's done well in Callahan's class; if Callahan's being serious about considering him for the internship next summer, Blaine's favorite color and previous subject of study shouldn't be counted against him. If anything, they make him stand out, and -- just like Kurt told him on his first day -- that's what Callahan's looking for. "Thank you," Blaine says pleasantly, holding out his hand, "for your consideration. I'll see you at the final?"

Callahan looks a little confused but he mostly just seems amused; he nods and shakes Blaine's hand. "I'm looking forward to it."

Blaine waves at the pair of them on his way out the door. Kurt turns his back to Callahan, holds up seven fingers and raises his eyebrows in silent question. Blaine grins and nods slightly before turning around and rounding the corner into the next hallway. He's leaving the last class with Professor Callahan before the final a little overwhelmed and a lot excited. He did well today, he knows that. Still, Callahan's final is nothing to sneeze at, and Blaine's a little worried about preparing for it.

He turns to head back to his dorm when he hears someone trying to get his attention from a few feet away. "Hey, Anderson!" Tina Cohen-Chang calls enthusiastically. "Come here."

Blaine sighs -- he was looking forward to getting back to his dorm, but somehow that seems less and less immediately in his future at the moment. He turns around to find Tina and Josh -- the child prodigy with the amazing t-shirts -- standing together and looking at him excitedly. He tamps down the part of him that's really excited about his classmates voluntarily speaking to him and gives them a charming but professional smile.

"What can I do for you?" he says pleasantly.

Tina and Josh exchange a glance, seeming to have a wordless conversation. "We were hoping you'd join our study group for finals, especially for Callahan's class," Josh says, shrugging a little. "You really seem to have a handle on what we've been studying, and, well, we think you're pretty cool."

"You were amazing in class today," Tina adds with a tiny smirk. "I particularly enjoyed the look on Callahan's face when you mentioned masturbation."

Blaine smiles a little. "That may have been one of my more inspired ideas."

"It was the best idea ever, dude," Josh says. "Man, if I could find a way to mention masturbation in every class I took, I'd be set for life." He grins. "So, study group?"

"If you guys are sure," Blaine says tentatively. "When did you want to meet?"

"This Saturday? Ten at the library?" Tina offers. "We can commandeer one of the giant tables just for the three of us." She grins roguishly. "Nautical term."

Blaine tugs his bag higher up on his shoulder. "Sure," he agrees. "I think I'll leave the bunny ears at home this time, though."

Tina grins at him. "Tell you what," she says. "You bring me one of those cool fedoras instead. We can start a trend."

Blaine laughs a little. "I don't think Harvard is really the place to start trends. Boston's not exactly Malibu."

"See, but that's why it's cool," Josh explains. "Because you do your own thing and you don't care what anyone thinks."

That's not strictly true (at all, really) but Blaine doesn't argue the point. A study group doesn't necessarily mean he's made new friends, but Josh and Tina seem to like him well enough, so Blaine's hopeful. "It's just a hat," he says awkwardly. "I'm not making any big changes here or anything."

"Not yet," Tina says, nudging his arm with her elbow and passing him a ripped piece of notebook paper with her phone number and e-mail on it. "Let's pass finals first."

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Kurt texts Blaine around six-thirty to tell him that the door will be unlocked when he gets there and he should just come right in. Still, Blaine doesn't feel right going in without at least knocking, so he raps sharply on the door precisely at seven. There's no reply; he shrugs and tries the door. It is unlocked, so he turns the knob and pushes it open, looking around for Kurt.

"Hello?" he calls when he doesn't see Kurt. The living room is empty, but he can hear something sizzling on the stove, so he peeks in there. There's a pan full of sauce bubbling slightly, and a pot of something boiling next to it, but no Kurt, so Blaine goes back to the living room to wait for Kurt. He bypasses the dining table (there are stacks of binders and papers and books) and sinks down on Kurt's couch. He'd forgotten how comfortable it is.

He means to just sit and wait for Kurt to emerge from wherever he is, but sitting still with nothing to do isn't exactly his strength. Blaine starts to look around him for something to do or read. He spots a DVD case on the coffee table (who even has DVDs anymore, anyway?) and picks it up to look at it, intrigued.

"It's my favorite movie," Kurt says, startling Blaine. He's dressed casually -- jeans, a button down, and a vest -- and he's towelling his hair dry as he talks to Blaine, clearly just out of the shower. "I always identified with Amélie, because of her mother. And, well, because I'm a little weird, too."

Blaine shrugs. "I've never seen it." He remembers David telling him he should, something about it being right up his alley, but he never really found the time. He was always a little too preoccupied with Sebastian, anyways. Maybe he should watch it now.

"Oh, you have to see it, Blaine. You can borrow that one, if you want. I have two more copies." Kurt smiles. "It's a classic."



Blaine tucks the DVD into his satchel and grins back at Kurt. "So, what's for dinner? It smelled delicious when I peeked into the kitchen."

"Oh, just pasta and meat sauce and some baby carrots, nothing too fancy." Kurt suddenly looks alarmed. "You do eat meat, right?"

Blaine laughs. "Of course, Kurt. I love meat," he replies, half expecting the joke Sebastian would have made in reply.

Kurt just sighs in relief, though, and moves towards the kitchen. "Good. It's should be just about ready."

Blaine follows Kurt back to the kitchen, where Kurt turns off all the burners and dumps the boiling water and pasta from the pot into a colander in the sink. "Farfalle?" he asks, curious. "Why not spaghetti?"

Kurt blushes a little. "They...made me think of you? I figured maybe they were your favorite, what with all the bowties you wear."

Blaine smiles, oddly charmed. "You know I didn't *actually* wear bowties before I came to Harvard, right? I thought they'd make me look more lawyerly."

Kurt bites his lip, clearly fighting back a laugh. "Well, they look good on you." He eyes Blaine's satchel on the couch. "What'd you bring for dessert?" he asks, serving them each a portion of pasta.

Blaine grins. "Cookies," he says brightly. Kurt raises an eyebrow at him, but Blaine just smiles wider. "No, Kurt," he laughs. "These cookies are special. Trust me, you'll appreciate them."

Kurt lights up, grabbing glasses from the cupboard. "Please tell me you went to the bakery down the street," he says hopefully. "They make the most *amazing* thumbprint cookies. You can get all sorts of flavors of jam -- apricot's my favorite."

"Nope. Noted, though. These are Californian cookies."

"You don't mind, do you?" Kurt asks, opening a bottle of merlot. "I know you're not drinking --"

"It's fine," Blaine assures him, reaching for his own glass and taking a sip. "Iced tea is just fine."

Kurt hums into his glass as he sips his wine, sighing happily. "I could get used to this," he quips. "You had dessert *imported*."

Blaine laughs. "They were a gift, actually -- from the Warblers. Gingerbread. They're... decorated," he says cryptically.

Kurt wrinkles his brow in confusion as he takes a bite of his pasta; he chews for a moment, thoughtful, before swallowing quickly and almost choking. "Oh my god," he rasps, reaching for his glass of wine. "They're decorated as your *friends*, aren't they?" Blaine taps his nose and takes a bite of his own pasta. "Is there one of Wes?"

"Mhm," Blaine affirms, crossing his legs and settling an elbow comfortably on the island. "I figured I'd let you have the honors and bite his head off. You know, as payback for him letting me throw all of those stress balls at you."

Kurt smirks at him and nudges Blaine's foot with his own. "Yeah, you're definitely my new favorite."

## ***Chapter Six***

Blaine tosses the apple stress ball into the air as Kurt closes the last textbook with a resounding *thump*.

"So, what's the verdict, counselor?"

"You're ready for your finals. I predict you'll pass, probably with flying colors," Kurt replies, smiling.

"Congratulations."

"I don't know about flying colors..." Blaine demurs.

"You're prepared, you're talented, and you're smart, so as long as the zombie apocalypse doesn't come during your finals, you're going to be fine. And if the zombies do come, I have faith that your charm and amazing singing would deter them. Somehow."

Blaine frowns, trying to understand how Kurt got from finals to zombies, but failing. He means to ask Kurt to explain, but there's suddenly frantic knocking on his door, so he rolls off the bed to answer it.

Unfortunately, he's out of practice at rolling out of beds -- his relationship with Sebastian *was* good for some things -- so he ends up on the floor, Kurt laughing at him like a sort of adorable hyena. Blaine throws the stress ball at him, but it doesn't stop Kurt from laughing.

Blaine gets to his feet and opens the door; Sugar flings herself at him as soon as it's open, sobbing hysterically. She's saying something, but Blaine can't tell what. "Sugar, honey, I need you to breathe, okay?" Blaine says, exchanging confused glances with Kurt. Sugar can be a little high strung, but she's not usually hysterical and unintelligible.

She gasps in a few heaving breaths before sobbing more. "They're sending him away!" she wails, voice reaching an almost painful pitch. "Rory's getting --" She collapses into another sob. "-- deported!"

Blaine guides Sugar to the bed, gesturing for Kurt to drape the care package blanket around her. "Okay, breathe, honey," he says soothingly, rubbing her back. "Just breathe."

Her sobs taper off slowly. "It's Sugar, Blaine," she says, voice rough from crying. "But good try on cheering me up."

He pulls her into a hug, rearranging the blanket to cover both of them, while Kurt settles on the end of the bed quietly. "Tell me what happened, sweetie."

Sugar takes a deep breath. "He has to renew his visa, but it's a work visa, and he's not allowed to renew it because he isn't working with cars anymore. And if he can't get it renewed, he has to go back to Ireland." She gulps. "Without me."

Blaine squeezes Sugar tightly, kissing the top of her head. "I'm so sorry."

"I just don't know what to do," Sugar says pitifully. "I thought maybe my dad could buy Ireland, but apparently that wouldn't help."

Blaine feels his mouth twitch before he successfully suppresses his urge to smile. He's pretty sure Mr. Motta can't buy Ireland, but it's a little funny how Sugar clearly disagrees. Blaine sighs. "Well, I don't know much about visas, but I'm going to help you and Rory, okay?"

Sugar snuffles into his shirt. "Thanks, Blaine. You're the best friend a girl could ask for."

Once Sugar's calmed down a little more, Blaine sends Kurt out to get some tea to calm Sugar down. Blaine grabs a blank notebook and pen for a little brainstorming session. "Okay, so the goal is to make sure Rory can stay, right?" Blaine asks. "And we think the only way for that to happen is to renew his visa."

"Exactly," Sugar replies. "And he can't renew his visa because he doesn't work with cars any more. Do you know how hard it is to find a mechanic's job around here? He works at UPS to make ends meet, but that doesn't help when it comes to getting the visa."

Blaine sighs. "Short of finding him a new job, marrying him, or hiding him in your basement, Sugar, I'm not sure there's a way you can keep him here. I mean, we can ask Kurt when he gets back, but --"

Sugar's eyes light up. "That's totally the solution!" she exclaims, sitting up.

"Well, Kurt *is* a lawyer, he knows more than I do --"

"No, not that," Sugar snaps dismissively. "Come with me!" She shrugs the blanket off and takes Blaine's hand, dragging him from the bed and wrenching open the door. She runs straight into Kurt, paper cup in hand.

“Oh!” Kurt says, surprised. “What are you --”

“Come on, come on,” Sugar urges, towing Blaine down the hallway.

Blaine looks back over his shoulder at Kurt. “Close the door,” he calls.

Kurt does as he’s instructed before following him down the hallway. “Where are we going?” Blaine shrugs and turns to Sugar to ask, but she ignores them all the way downstairs and out into the parking lots, gesturing for them to climb into her Escalade.

When they pull up to the Sugar Shack, she’s out of the car and into the bar without a backwards glance, texting furiously on her phone. “Sugar,” Blaine huffs, grabbing her elbow in the midst of the crowd. “What are you doing?”

“I need your help,” she announces, grabbing his hand and dragging him over to the karaoke machine, Kurt trailing behind, paper cup still in hand. “I need you to think of the biggest, most epic and romantic love song of all time.” She gasps. “The song from *Titanic*!”

“Um,” Blaine says awkwardly, looking over at Kurt. “That’s... sort of depressing. I mean, it *is* about saying goodbye, but --”

“No, no, I can’t do that,” she says distractedly, flipping through the catalogue.

Blaine leans over her shoulder, eyes scanning the pages. “Sugar, what exactly are you trying to say to him?”

“I don’t know,” she sighs. “That I’ve been looking for him my whole life or something?”

“Etta James,” Kurt supplies helpfully, peering at the catalogue from Sugar’s other side. He glances up and smiles at Blaine. “What? It’s perfect,” he argues. “Her heart’s all wrapped up in clovers and everything.” Blaine laughs and smiles back as Sugar grabs one of the microphones and queues the song. Blaine calls after her as she clambers onto the stage, but the music starts and she can’t hear him -- or, she can, and is choosing to ignore him. Kurt nudges Blaine with his elbow. “Let her have her moment,” he says encouragingly, leaning in close so Blaine can hear him. “You can’t fix everything with a song, but it might make her feel better.”

Blaine smiles gratefully at him and turns his attention back to Sugar, still slightly perplexed at how she could go from a sobbing mess to an eager songstress in such a short period of time. He follows her gaze to the back of the bar where Rory's just walked in. She holds eyes contact with him through the entire song, manages to keep her vibrato under control and mostly remembers to sing from her diaphragm. Etta James is a little too big for Sugar, but she's not murdering it, and the bar patrons seem amused at her romantic serenade. She beckons Rory on stage with a waggle of her finger and Rory obliges, though not without blushing furiously. Blaine tries to figure out exactly what her plan is as the song comes to a close -- *for you are mine at last* -- but he keeps coming up blank. He didn't have any helpful advice or suggestions outside of asking Kurt for help, but he hasn't even gotten a chance to do that yet --

Sugar drops down on one knee, and Blaine feels his stomach drop out.

"What is she doing?" Kurt murmurs into his ear. "She's not --"

"She is," Blaine breathes, chest tight. "Oh my god, I can't believe she's doing this."

"*This* is her solution?" Kurt asks incredulously. "She was a mess not twenty minutes ago. Where did she even get an idea like this?"

"I didn't mean it," Blaine gasps. He looks over at Kurt, who merely raises his eyebrows. "I was joking. I didn't think she'd actually do it." He turns his attention back to the stage, trying to figure out what's going on. He can't hear Sugar at all above the whistles and catcalls of *Say yes!*; there's a group of young women in the corner booth with their jaws hanging open, but Sugar only has eyes for Rory. Rory's eyes have gone misty as Sugar reaches for his hand.

"He's not going to say yes, is he?" Kurt asks just as Sugar bounds to her feet and throws her arms around Rory's neck. The bar breaks out into thunderous applause, and Blaine sinks into a chair. "I guess there's my answer," Kurt sighs, taking the seat next to him. "This is a little..."

"Insane?" Blaine supplies.

"I was going to go for spontaneous," Kurt laughs. "Maybe even romantic."

"But insane," Blaine insists. "They haven't even been together for three weeks!"

Kurt smiles faintly at him. "You're trying to look out for her."

“Well, yeah, that’s what friends do --”

Kurt pats his hand. “Friends are also supportive.” Blaine opens his mouth to protest but Kurt shakes his head. “I’ll look into it and see if there’s any way around it, but in the meantime? Try and be in her corner. I can’t imagine what Al Motta’s reaction is going to be when he finds out his little girl is getting married.”

Blaine’s shoulders sag a little as he looks over at the side of the stage where Sugar has dragged Rory for a slightly more private kiss. She looks beyond thrilled and rather pleased with herself, beaming up at Rory and refusing to let go of his hand. Blaine’s not -- he’s not jealous, not really. He remembers what it was like when he thought he might be getting married but he doesn’t wish for it. He feels like he’s learning to stand on his own now, calling the shots in his own life and really trying to make something of himself. Someday, when his heart has mended all the way and he’s found someone new, Blaine wants to be able to do what she’s just done.

Blaine sighs and rests his forehead on Kurt’s shoulder with a slight groan. “Do you still have that tea? I think I might need it.”

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*Alfred Motta cordially invites you to the wedding of his daughter*

*Sugar Antonella*

*to*

*Rory Brendan Flanagan*

*December 29th, 2017, at the home of the Motta family.*

*RSVP no later than December 15th.*

Blaine looks up from another set of mock invitations to find Sugar and Mr. Motta very pointedly not talking to one another. He sighs. Mr. Motta has been cautiously supportive of the whole spontaneous wedding plan -- he *does* want Sugar to be happy -- but Blaine knows he's just been waiting for an opportune moment to try and talk his daughter out of it.

"I'm only suggesting that perhaps you wait a little longer to marry this boy, Sugarplum. I'm sure he makes you happy, but do you really want to marry someone you've only been dating for a few weeks?" Mr. Motta asks.

Sugar frowns. "We're in love, Daddy, and while a December wedding wouldn't be my first choice, Rory has to go back to Ireland if we don't do this. I'll do it on my own if I have to, but I'd really like you to be involved."

Blaine sighs and shuffles the set of mock invitations aside; he drags one of his textbooks closer to him, idly flipping through the pages. He's pretty sure his brain can't absorb any more at this point and that he's as prepared as he's going to get, but he needs a distraction.

Still, it's hard to tune the Mottas out. They are rather... loud. "Sugar, you hardly know him," Mr. Motta argues. "Have you considered that the timing of all of this is a little too convenient?"

Blaine half-glances over at Sugar, who narrows her eyes dangerously. "Don't even go there," she says icily. "Rory's not that kind of guy. He's not using me, Daddy."

Mr. Motta huffs, clearly frustrated. He turns to Blaine. "Do you still think this isn't a mistake?"

Blaine blanches and looks between them. This isn't really a conversation he wants to be listening to, much less be dragged into. He thinks Mr. Motta has a point but he also knows that once Sugar's set her mind to something, there's no stopping her. He's torn between encouraging Sugar to follow her heart and trying to talk some sense into her. "I think your concerns are valid," he says slowly, addressing Mr. Motta. Sugar's face falls immediately, and Blaine hastens to continue. "But you can't use what happened to me to justify them. It's not -- it's not the same thing. Sugar may be rushing into this, but... she *is* an adult," he reminds Mr. Motta gently. "She needs to be allowed to make her own mistakes."

Mr. Motta surveys him for a moment before arching an eyebrow, apparently amused. "You didn't really answer the question."



Sugar casts one last look at Blaine, slightly disappointed, before she turns to her father. "Blaine is looking over invitations right now, which means he's being supportive even if he doesn't agree with me." She moves to grab her father's hand, and Blaine looks around for some way out of the room. "You're my father. Can't you just support me?"

Mr. Motta slumps, just barely, and nods. "Of course, Sugarplum. I just want to be sure you're sure, okay? And if you are, if this is the decision you've made, then I'm behind you. One hundred and fifty percent."

Sugar beams at him as Blaine tentatively slides an invitation across the table. "I like that one," he offers quietly. "Pink's my color. I think lavender could be yours."

"Not green?" Mr. Motta quips dryly.

Sugar rolls her eyes at him and turns her attention to Blaine. "Thank you," she says, smiling at him. Blaine returns it meekly. "They should be ready in a couple of days. Will you make sure Kurt gets his?"

Blaine nods, reaching for his phone as Sugar turns her attention back to her father. "Okay, so we have to decide where in the house is best for an aisle and an altar," she starts.

Her voice fades away as Blaine taps out a text to Kurt.

*dinner wednesday?*

Kurt's reply is swift.

*sure! dining in or out?*

Blaine smiles a little.

*out. my turn to treat you. i have a wedding invitation to deliver.*

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Sugar locks up the last cabinet behind the bar and leans on her elbows. "What are you doing Thursday?"

Blaine blinks up at her from his copy of *The Great Gatsby* and furrows his eyebrows a little. "Um, I'm not sure," he admits. "I was going to come over to your house on Saturday -- you said your family has something special they do on Christmas Eve. But I'm done with finals, so I don't have any plans Thursday. Why?"

She sighs and rests her cheek on her hand, training her eyes on the bar. "I wanted to go to Neiman Marcus," she says hesitantly, "you know, to pick out a dress. It's the next best option I have since I don't really have a lot of time. I -- I was looking at some of their designer options online and found a few I wanted to try on, if they had them at our branch. There's a Marchesa that's to *die* for --"

Blaine sighs and dog-ears his page before shutting his book. "Sugar --"

She stands up straight and busies herself with double-checking the rest of the bar again even though it's clean and locked up. "Look," she says seriously, "I know you think I'm crazy. I know you don't think I should be doing this even though it was *your* idea --"

"It was not!" Blaine protests.

"That's not my point," Sugar huffs, turning to face him and planting her hands on her hips. "How is this any different than what you did? You followed Sebastian all the way out here because you believed in what you had together."

"It's not the same," Blaine argues. "Sugar, Sebastian and I were together for almost three years. You and Rory have been together a *month*."

"I've been in love with him for a year," she insists. "I'm going to do this and I would appreciate some help. *Your* help," she adds, softening. "You're the only friend I've got. Don't tell me you're going to back out now. I can't get married without a man of honor."

Blaine closes his eyes because *ouch*, if that doesn't hit him where it hurts the most. He *is* a man of honor, he always has been. It's something he's always prided himself on as an Anderson, as a Warbler -- as a person, really. He runs his fingers over the cover of his book and thinks of his father; Blaine's always identified with Nick but he's definitely got a little bit of Gatsby in him too, the romantic readiness that endears him to the narrator and the reader. Blaine believes in love: he always has and he always will. He's always been a romantic (sometimes to a fault) and he's always followed his heart where it's led him. Being

at Harvard, at law school has altered Blaine's perceptions of the world a little. He's been forced to look at things a little more logically but his motivation and drive are still the same: at his core, he still just wants to help people. He's still just a silly romantic.

He opens his eyes and smiles a little, laying his hand on the bar, palm facing the ceiling. "Of course I'll go with you." She smiles at him, big and bright, and reaches across the bar to take his hand.

The door to the bar clicks open, letting in a brief gust of wind before it closes behind Rory and Kurt. Sugar lights up and steps out from behind the bar to greet them, arms wrapping around Rory's neck and leaning in for a brief kiss. "This is a nice surprise," she says pleasantly. "I know you didn't have to work today but you said you had plans."

Kurt shrugs off his coat and folds it before dropping it on the bar. "That was my doing, Sugar. I'm sorry."

She and Blaine both look over at him in surprise. "It's okay," she says slowly. "What did you need him for?"

Rory tilts Sugar's faces towards his and smiles faintly. "I can stay."

She laughs and tugs on his scarf. "Well of course you can stay, silly," she teases. "That's why we're doing this."

Rory shakes his head. "No, I can *stay*. I found the right kind of job. Well --" He glances over at Kurt and smiles wider. "Mr. Hummel did."

Sugar turns back to Kurt. "You did?"

"That's only partially true," Kurt says hesitantly. "I mean, I did help him find the job, but I didn't do *everything* -- it's complicated," he laughs.

"Mr. Hummel -- Kurt's father," Rory explains, "he owns a garage in --"

-- Roxbury," Blaine finishes, blinking in surprise over at Kurt. "You got him a job working for your dad?"

Kurt blushes a little. "No," he insists. "I just -- I looked into Rory's case and it's the right field. My dad's been looking for someone who specializes in foreign models ever since Jerry retired earlier this year. I... might have mentioned your tragic love story and arranged an interview."

Rory shakes his head but grins all the same. "Mr. Hummel wanted to test my skills, see what I could do -- that's where I was today, Sugar."

"And he offered you a job?" Sugar asks incredulously. "That's -- that's..."

"Wonderful," Blaine supplies, smiling at Rory.

"There's still paperwork to be filed," Kurt reminds them. "It's not my area of expertise but I have a colleague at the firm who handles these sorts of cases. He's willing to work with your family attorney, Sugar. It's a little more complicated than some cases since Rory applied for a fiance visa, but Derrek should be able to sort it out."

"Kurt," Sugar breathes, "that's -- *thank you*." She untangles herself from Rory and wraps her arms firmly around Kurt's torso, burying her face in his chest.

"I -- *oh*." Kurt's arms hang awkwardly in the air for a moment as he glances over her shoulder at Rory and Blaine, clearly caught off guard. "It's really nothing," he says, patting her back clumsily.

"Sugar," Blaine ventures slowly. "Does this mean -- are you still going through with this? The elopement? Because you don't have to, at least not now."

She pulls away from Kurt and turns back to Rory, eyes wide. "I --"

Rory's smile is small but he reaches for Sugar's hand and squeezes it gently. "It's okay," he says quietly. "It doesn't change anything between us. I don't expect you to. But this is my home now. It's -- I've been away from my family for a long time. Coming in to see you every week made a place that's a thousand miles away from Ireland feel like home."

Sugar's face falls a little as she takes a step closer to him, pulling his hand up to rest against her chest where her heart is. "We're just postponing it," she says firmly. "I still want to do this." Rory opens his mouth to protest but Sugar shakes her head. "No. I don't -- I don't care how crazy it is," she insists. "I've been waiting my whole *life* for you. I wasn't going to let you get away then and I'm not letting you get away now. This doesn't change things between us."

Rory tugs her in close and buries his nose in her hair, breathing in deep and closing his eyes. Blaine grips the edge of the bar tightly in an effort not to cry. It's crazy, he knows it's crazy. They hardly know each

other and there's still so much to learn, so many hurdles to get past. They'll fight and change and adjust, but it's like they don't care. Blaine's sat at this bar and watched Rory listen to Sugar talk; he's seen the way Rory's eyes are always bright with interest, the way his lips are always curved into a smile around her. Sugar trusts him and Blaine knows with certainty now that she doesn't have any reason not to. Rory doesn't need Sugar to stay, but he's staying *because* of her. It's ridiculously romantic.

"Postponed indefinitely?" Kurt asks tentatively. "Or did you have a date in mind? I want to make sure I take the day off," he says, smiling.

Sugar pulls back just far enough to look at them but stays tucked tight in Rory's arms. "Valentine's Day?" she suggests, biting her lip and looking up at Rory. "It's my favorite holiday and it's *super* romantic. Is that okay?" Rory nods and Sugar grins as she leans in for another kiss, Rory's hands anchoring at the small of her back as she arches against him. She hums happily as they break apart and reaches for Rory's hand. "We should tell Daddy."

"Sugar," Blaine says, reaching for her elbow. "I think I'm going to sit Christmas out, if that's okay."

She frowns at him. "But --"

"It's okay," he assures her, holding up a hand. "I just think you guys could use the time alone, you know? That way your dad can get to know Rory better and everything."

Sugar bites her lip. "Okay... but you're still coming to the wedding, right?" she checks.

"I wouldn't miss it," Blaine insists, drawing her in for a hug. "Man of honor, at your service."

Sugar beams at him and digs a key out of her pocket. "Lock up when you leave, okay?" She and Rory head for the door where Rory helps Sugar into her winter coat. "Thank you again, Kurt," Sugar gushes. "Really. Tell your dad I'll be by soon to thank him in person, okay?" Kurt nods and smiles after them as they retreat into the cold.

"I can't believe you did that."

Kurt turns to face Blaine, his face coloring again. "I didn't," he says again. "I just did a little digging and asked my dad to at least see what Rory could do. He... didn't exactly need very much persuading once I

told him their story. He's a bit of a romantic," Kurt admits with a laugh. "He and my mom got married after they'd known each other three months."

Blaine smiles a little and ducks his head. "Still, if you hadn't done what you did, they'd --"

-- still be doing what they're doing now?" Kurt finishes, still laughing. "They're still getting married, Blaine."

"Well, yeah, but at least they're waiting a little longer." Blaine bites his lip. "You really didn't have to do this."

Kurt shrugs. "It's my job," he says. "This is what we do. And I didn't even handle the legal side of things."

"You didn't do it because it's your job," Blaine argues. "You did it because you wanted to help."

"That's why I do my job," Kurt reminds him. "My job is helping people, when I can."

"They're not even your friends." Blaine's brow wrinkles in confusion. "Sugar's my friend and I know Rory a little but you hardly know them at all. Why --" He pauses, swallowing. "Why did you do it?"

Kurt smiles a little at him. "I know what a broken heart looks like. I wouldn't wish that on anyone."

Blaine nudges Kurt's arm with his own. "What a team we make," he teases. "I go around playing matchmaker and you go around mending broken hearts."

Kurt laughs dryly. "Oh, I don't know about that."

"You helped mend mine."

Kurt blushes an even darker red and shakes his head. "I helped you study," he says awkwardly. "I didn't --"

Blaine closes the distance between them and wraps his arms around Kurt's waist, pulling him in for a tight hug. Kurt stops talking and Blaine hooks a chin over his shoulder, grateful. He doesn't think Kurt really *gets* how freely he gives. Blaine wants to help people and likes doing it -- he always has -- but Kurt really *does it*, does it in ways that mean more than just perpetuating art. Kurt helps people when they can't help themselves. Kurt helps people who don't have a voice. He helped Blaine find his again, and that -- that

means more to Blaine than he can even *begin* to express. Kurt wasn't alone in helping put the pieces of Blaine back together but the way he helped was probably one of the more important ones: if he hadn't helped Blaine find his voice again, Blaine wouldn't have been able to help Sugar find hers. Kurt's one of the most moral, compassionate, *selfless* people Blaine's ever met. He feels lucky, lucky that he ended up in front of Kurt at the coffee shop on his first day and lucky that Kurt took the time to thank him, lucky that they kept running into each other and lucky that Kurt reached out a hand to help him.

Blaine pulls away a little and his eyes drift down of their own accord and --

Oh.

*Oh.*

Kurt has really pretty lips.

Blaine kind of wants to kiss them.

Blaine breathes in and tries to focus but he can't tear his eyes away from Kurt's lips. Blaine's heart is suddenly *racing* and oh, Kurt's hands are warm and firm and solid against his back. Blaine blinks and Kurt's lips are moving now and that means he's talking but Blaine hasn't been listening. Blaine pulls back a little more but that just makes Kurt's hands fall to his waist and that's still really distracting. Blaine licks his lips and swallows thickly, forcing himself to look up at the rest of Kurt's face. "Sorry," he mumbles. "What were you saying?"

Kurt tilts his head to the side and wrinkles his nose (and oh *god*, even his nose is cute) but doesn't pry. "I was saying," he says slowly, "that you don't have anywhere to go for Christmas now."

Blaine blinks at him. "What?"

Kurt raises an eyebrow, clearly fighting back a smile and why are his hands so *warm*? "You told Sugar you weren't spending Christmas with her."

"Oh. I guess I did." He shrugs. "I'll probably just try and book a flight home --"

Kurt shakes his head. "No," he disagrees. "You won't. There's a huge storm coming in overnight. Trust me, you getting home to California is going to be near impossible at this point." He bites his lip (and no, that's not okay because now Blaine's looking at his lips again and he *still* wants to kiss Kurt). "Blaine?"

"Sorry," Blaine says again, feeling his face grow hot.

Kurt's smiling now and oh *god*, Blaine's stomach is twisting in knots. "I asked if you wanted to spend Christmas with me."

"With you?" Blaine asks blankly.

Kurt nods a little, still blushing. "I mean, it's nothing all that special," he says with a shrug. "It's normally just me and my dad and his girlfriend and her son, but her son's deployed this year so it's just the three of us."

"O -- oh," Blaine stammers. "Um --"

"It's nothing compared to a holiday with the Mottas, I'm sure," Kurt adds quickly. "We cook a few cornish game hens and, well, I *do* make a pretty mean green bean casserole, if I do say so myself. We watch the game and play Apples to Apples, which... can get a little ridiculous once I've had a few glasses of Merlot, but, you know, it's Christmas. It's family."

Blaine smiles a little and ducks his head. "If you think your dad wouldn't mind..."

Kurt grins at him. "He's been dying to meet you, actually," he drawls. "And Carole will be glad to have someone to dote on in Finn's place."

"Do *you* want me to come?"

Kurt's smile falters and Blaine immediately regrets asking because Kurt should *always* be smiling. Kurt's hands shift at Blaine's waist and wrap back around to the small of his back, tugging him in for another hug. "Of course I do," Kurt answers quietly. Blaine turns his face into Kurt's neck and breathes in; Kurt even *smells* good right now, this is completely unfair and Blaine doesn't know what to do --

He pulls away too-fast, inhaling sharply and looking down at his feet. "We should go," he murmurs. "Before the storm hits."



"Sure," Kurt says slowly. "Do you... want a ride back to your room?"

Blaine nods and tugs his jacket back on, fidgeting uncomfortably. "Sure."

Kurt tugs on his own jacket and heads for the door as Blaine shuts off the last of the lights and digs out the key Sugar left him with. Kurt turns abruptly at the door, causing Blaine to run straight into him; Kurt's hands are at his arm, his waist, and Blaine can't *breathe*. "Please say you'll come," Kurt murmurs. "I can't stand the thought of you being alone on Christmas."

Blaine smiles in spite of himself. "Yeah," he breathes. "I'll come."

Kurt beams at him and reaches down to squeeze Blaine's hand briefly before pushing the door open. Blaine follows him outside, turning his back to Kurt; Blaine fumbles with the key as he tries to lock the door, panic starting to settle in.

What is he going to *do*?

The door clicks shut quietly and Blaine slumps against it with a sigh, closing his eyes.

He wants to kiss Kurt.

He's not even sure how that happened, or why, and his heart starts to race at the thought of it again. Kurt's always been nice to him (and, admittedly, Blaine's always found him sort of attractive) but this goes so far beyond that. He likes studying with Kurt, likes buying his non-fat mocha (and Blaine knows his coffee order, when did that happen?). He loves that Kurt stands for something good and doesn't look down on Blaine. He thinks about how much Kurt's made him smile in the last few months, how *good* he's made Blaine feel -- about law school, about himself -- and slumps a little further down the door.

He needs help.

Frantically, he dives for his bed and opens his laptop, drumming on his knees impatiently as he waits for it to turn on. He logs into Skype and has never been more grateful to see the small green icon next to Wes' name. Wes will know what to do. Wes always knows what to do. The ringing is too loud and too long while he waits for the call to connect, and even when it does, the video takes forever to load and there's a slightly muffled, unintelligible sound coming from Wes' end. "Hang on," Wes' voice calls out to him, sort of garbled. Blaine shifts uncomfortably on his bed, shrugging off his winter coat and fiddling with one of the

stress balls Wes sent. He tosses it from one hand to the other, anxious, until there's a flicker of light and color in the box designated for Wes' webcam. "Okay," Wes sighs, adjusting the computer to get a better view. "On --"

"I think I have feelings for Kurt," Blaine blurts, air coming out of him in a rush.

Wes freezes where he's bent over a desk, still adjusting the laptop. It's quiet for a moment before a different voice on Wes' end answers back. "He what?"

Blaine's eyebrows knit in confusion. "Was that... David?"

Wes glares at someone over his shoulder. "Nice one," he snaps. "Way to ruin the surprise."

"What --" Blaine's jaw falls open as Wes moves away from the camera, revealing the rest of the Warblers. "You're home," Blaine breathes. "You -- you're home for Christmas and you --"

"We were *trying* to surprise you," Wes explains, clearly annoyed. "Your mom called and said you weren't coming home for Christmas, so --"

-- so we were going to bring Christmas to you," Thad finishes for him.

They're *all* there: Wes, David, Thad, Trent, Nick, Jeff -- all of them. Blaine can hardly breathe. "You were what?"

"Are you okay?" Trent asks, leaning closer to the camera from where he's perched on the couch in the Warblers' living room.

"I --" Blaine looks from Trent to Thad to David, who looks up at Wes. Wes is arching an eyebrow at him but Blaine can tell he looks worried. "Wes..."

The group turns as one to look at their former leader, but Wes only has eyes for Blaine. He moves from the back of the couch to the front of the group, moving a chair in front of the desk and sitting back down again. The rest of the Warblers crowd closer, still sort of in view, and Blaine feels like he's in a fishbowl. "What happened?" Wes pries quietly. "Did something happen with Sebastian? Are you --" Blaine shakes his head, and Wes' lips thin into a line. "You gotta talk to me, buddy. I can't help you if I don't know what's going on." He glances over his shoulder at the rest of the guys. "We all want to help. What's going on, Blaine?"

Blaine feels a little tension melt out of his shoulders (these are his *friends*) but he still feels anxious and panicky, his stomach twisting into knots. He swallows and takes a deep breath, squeezing the stress ball between his hands. "I think," he says slowly, trying not to let his voice shake, "that I have feelings for Kurt."

Most of the Warblers look at each other, surprised, but Wes' face is impassive. "What brought this on?" he asks, clearly reserving judgement.

Blaine drops the stress ball and rubs at his eyes, burying his face in his hands. "I don't know," he groans. "I just -- all of this drama was going on with Sugar and her wedding, and then Kurt found a way to help out when he really didn't have to. It was just so nice of him and I went to hug him tonight and -- and when I pulled away I just..."

"-- wanted to kiss him?" Trent supplies helpfully.

Blaine looks back up at the screen and bites his lip before nodding. "And I don't know what to do," he whines, falling over and burying his face in one of his pillows.

"What exactly is the problem here?" Thad asks. "Isn't this a good thing? I mean, it means you're over Sebastian, right? And I thought we were cool with Kurt."

"Stop talking," David instructs impatiently. "Just... stop."

"Blaine?" Wes prompts gently. "What *is* the problem? I don't have a problem with Kurt, but you clearly do -  
-"

"No!" Blaine protests, sitting back up. "It's not that at all. Kurt -- Kurt's *amazing*, Wes. I think I might really like him but I just --" He sighs and rubs at his shoulder, uncomfortable again. "I'm scared," he admits quietly.

"Of what?" Wes asks.

"Of getting hurt, you idiot," David snaps, smacking Wes' arm.

Blaine shakes his head. "No," he says slowly, causing both David and Wes to blink at him in surprise. "It's -- look, I haven't dated anyone since Sebastian. It's been a while, and I don't -- I don't want Kurt to be my rebound, you know? I like him too much for that."

"Oh, Blaine," David laughs, his smile fond but grainy through the mediocre connection. "That's... not gonna happen."

"It's not?" Blaine asks, confused.

Thad shakes his head, but it's Trent who speaks up next. "We hate to break this to you, hon, but what happened with Sebastian at that party right before Halloween? That *was* your rebound."

Blaine considers them a moment. "You really think so?"

David nods. "Look, the whole point of a rebound is to have the time and the space to get your ex out of your system. I'm pretty sure you've done that at this point."

Blaine settles back into his pillows, thinking. Wes reaches out a hand and touches his screen where Blaine's face must be. "It's okay to move on, Blaine," he says, and Blaine can almost feel Wes' hand on his shoulder.

Blaine smiles faintly at him. "I don't know what I'm going to do," he admits with a sigh.

"Don't plan anything," David suggests wryly, grinning at him.

"He's too impulsive for that anyway," Thad tacks on.

"Look, Blaine," Wes says, talking over the rest of them. "You want some advice? Trust yourself. You've always followed your heart where it's led you. Right now, it wants you in Boston."

"Yeah," Thad agrees, smirking. "We know you miss us, Blaine, but I think we're not the ones you want to kiss. Stay in Boston and stick your tongue --"

"I agree with David," Wes announces loudly. "You should definitely stop talking, Thad." Thad grumbles and settles back onto the couch, slightly put-out. "I'm sure Kurt would appreciate a little more finesse than that, Blaine."

"Yeah," Blaine laughs. "He probably would." He picks up the stress ball and starts tossing it between his hands again. "He invited me to spend Christmas with his family."

"I thought your friend Sugar was getting married," Trent says, confused.

"She was -- she still is, but it's --" Blaine sighs. "It's complicated. She's still getting married, but not until Valentine's Day. I just... need some time to process everything." He tugs the blanket his mother sent him over his legs and brings his computer onto his lap. "Can we talk about something else for a little while? You said you had a surprise?" he remembers, intrigued.

Nick grins first, then Jeff. One by one, all of Blaine's friends smile at him and take their spots back on the couch, Wes settling in at the back with his pitch pipe. The image makes Blaine's heart ache a little (god, he misses being part of this) but mostly he's glad his friends haven't given up trying to make him feel better through song. It might not solve everything, but it *does* help, even if only to make Blaine stick around a little longer. Kurt's story about his less-than-fortunate classmates in high school comes back to Blaine, and Blaine wishes he could get back to California before New Year's to thank his friends in person. But he can't, he's stuck here for Christmas instead, stuck with Kurt, and Blaine... really can't complain.

There's a hum and then a wonderfully resounding harmony before Jeff opens up his mouth and starts to sing. It's not a classic, which makes it harder for Blaine to recognize, but by the time Nick joins Jeff on the refrain -- *'cause you say that, you say that things will be alright, but I've heard that, I've heard that so many times* -- he recognizes it as Colbie Caillat. It's something that really only his Warblers would do, stuck in California where their winter is better suited to the likes of her mellow sounds instead of Bing Crosby's *White Christmas*.

The wind howls loudly outside and Blaine glances out his window to see the snow beginning to fall. The snow's a little late this year but it's making up for it by falling in spades. He turns his attention back to his friends, trying to focus. Wes is singing alone on the bridge -- *it's hard 'cause I feel so alone and I just want you to come home* -- and Blaine absolutely can't help it anymore; he cries steadily, overwhelmed and too high-strung. He misses his friends desperately and is still ten days away from seeing them after four months of being apart; Sebastian is marrying someone else, Sugar's eloping and Blaine has to figure out what to do with these feelings for Kurt alone. It's not at all how Blaine had envisioned his life being at this point. He's not -- he's not unhappy, but he's definitely confused and really, really tired. He's been working so hard for the last year: he worked hard to get into Harvard; he worked hard to try and get Sebastian back; he worked hard to get over Sebastian; he worked hard to prove himself in his classes; he worked hard to help Sugar.

Kurt's been the one fixture in Blaine's life the last few months that Blaine hasn't had to work so hard at, which is nice but... If Blaine had the choice, he'd rather put in the effort. Being around Kurt has always been easy, comfortable, but it's also taught Blaine a lot. Kurt likes to work to get what he wants; he wants it to feel earned. Blaine doesn't expect this to be easy; he's not even sure if Kurt feels the same way. But Kurt... God, Kurt makes Blaine want to *try*. He doesn't dismiss Blaine's ideals and feelings of romanticism. Blaine's not used to being the one doing the pursuing -- Sebastian had made all of the advances and been rather obvious and sort of aggressive about it. Kurt's been fairly reserved, although Blaine thinks that's really how Kurt is with everyone; he'd noticed how awkward Kurt had been when Sugar had hugged him earlier. It strikes Blaine in small bolts: he remembers how warm Kurt had been to him when they'd first met; he remembers how easily Kurt smiles around him; he remembers how not awkward it had been to have Kurt's arms wrapped around him the night of the party; he remembers how freely Kurt had shared his story with Blaine; he remembers each and every time Kurt's initiated touch, has reached out for Blaine's hand; he remembers the way Kurt had relaxed in his arms earlier tonight, the way his hands didn't leave Blaine's waist, and he remembers Kurt drawing him in for a second hug, his hands clinging to Blaine's arm and waist and back.

Blaine glances over at the nightstand and spots the DVD that Kurt leant him; he reaches for it gingerly and smiles as David closes out the song -- *all your friends are smiling; it's Christmastime*. Blaine claps quietly, burrowing under his blanket and letting the computer shift closer to his face. Thad opens his mouth eagerly but David's hand is in his face before he can speak, silencing him. Blaine laughs as Wes rolls his eyes and settles back down in the chair in front of his computer. "Hey," Wes says quietly, dragging the computer closer so the other Warblers don't overhear him. "Text me while you're there, okay? The guys mean well but they don't know Kurt like I do. If you start to panic, just call me. I don't want you to run away this time."

Blaine nods, fingertips touching the screen reverently. "I'll try."

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Blaine lifts the bag of flour and tips it carefully, keeping an eye on the line he's supposed to hit on the measuring cup. He glances over at the living room briefly and then does a double-take when he realizes that Kurt's back downstairs and in the living room with his father. They've spread a long sheet of wrapping paper across the coffee table, the roll hanging off the edge. Kurt pries a small box from his father's hand and shakes his head, smiling bemusedly as he kneels next to the table. His face and smile are

warm and bright as he cuts off a portion of the paper; he glances up for a brief moment and meets Blaine's eyes. They exchange a smile before Kurt returns to his task, and --

"Blaine?"

Blaine jumps a little and blinks over at Carole. "Yeah?"

She smiles crookedly at him. "I think that's enough flour."

He looks down at the measuring cup to find it overflowing. "Oh," he stammers, flustered. He stops pouring immediately and hastens to clean up the mess. "I'm so sorry, I --"

"It's alright," she laughs, shooing him away from the island. "Why don't you go to the counter and butter the pan for me?"

Blaine nods and moves out of her way, blushing furiously; he resolutely doesn't look back out into the living room. He hasn't figured out how to make a move yet, *if* he's going to make a move; they're around Kurt's family and it's Christmas and this is all so new, the feelings and wants and the way his stomach flips whenever Kurt looks at him. He hasn't felt this caught off guard or flustered in years and it's completely jarring. Kurt hasn't changed at all in the last few days but Blaine sees him so differently now. Kurt isn't just Kurt anymore: he isn't just someone Blaine bought coffee for; he isn't just a lawyer; he isn't just a study partner. He's... He *is* just a friend, but --

"You got banned from mixing duty."

Blaine glances over his shoulder a little as Kurt sidles up next to him and bumps his hip against Blaine's. Blaine blushes. "I've never been much of a baker."

"I could always drag you away for wrapping duty," Kurt says, grabbing his elbow and throwing a grin at Carole.

"Don't you dare," Carole says, shaking a finger at him. "You're already on duty for the casserole. I'm not letting you do anything else. You're supposed to be relaxing, Kurt. It's Christmas."

"It's Christmas Eve," Kurt corrects.

“How the hell do you work this thing?” Mr. Hummel’s voice demands from the living room.

Carole smiles, but Kurt rolls his eyes. “You just roll it, like the white-out tape -- oh my god, nevermind.” He hides his face against Blaine’s shoulder (and god, he’s so warm and so *close*). “He’s hopeless, Carole, I don’t know what you plan to do with him.”

Carole just grins wider. “Love him,” she sighs dramatically. “That’s about all I can do.”

Kurt lifts his head from Blaine’s shoulders, his eyes warm and his smile fond. Blaine wants to kiss him so *badly* but he can’t, not with Carole in the room and Mr. Hummel just on the other side of the wall, not without talking to Kurt, not without a plan. “I’ll go teach him how to use the tape dispenser,” Kurt sighs. “It’s got to be easier than that time I tried to teach him to make paella.” He rests a hand on Blaine’s shoulder and Blaine suddenly has a lot of trouble swallowing. “Let me know if she overworks you, okay?”

“Oh please,” Carole scoffs, throwing a handful of flour across the kitchen, narrowly missing Kurt as he nimbly dodges out of the way and scurries out of the kitchen.

“This means war!” Kurt crows as he runs back into the living room. Blaine smiles to himself as he washes his hands in the sink. He and Carole are quiet for a few moments; she works her newly-made dough on the cutting board as Blaine washes and cuts up a variety of vegetables. It’s comforting in the way that home and family always are: it reminds him of early morning runs with his father and singing with his mother. It also makes him a little homesick, desperate for a patch of California sunshine and a familiar face. He misses the sense of safety that came with living there, misses how intimately his parents and friends had known him (and Sebastian, at one point). He misses caroling with the Warblers at Christmastime; he misses helping his mother decorate the house. Boston is home for now, though, Boston and Harvard, Sugar and the Mottas, Kurt’s family and... Kurt. Blaine’s not sure if he’ll stay here long term, but for now, they’re his roots.

“He seems very comfortable with you.”

Blaine blinks up at Carole, surprised. “I’m sorry?”

She doesn’t look up at him as she digs a few cookie cutters out of a drawer. “Kurt. He seems very comfortable around you.” She cuts out a few different shapes and places them on the pan strategically before finally looking over at him. “It’s just a little unusual, is all.”



Blaine remembers Sugar launching herself at Kurt. "I've noticed."

Carole purses her lips and considers him a moment. "I'm not his mom," she says slowly. "I don't try to be. I -- we're friends, and that works for us. I didn't watch him grow up, though. I don't know him like Burt does. Burt and I started seeing each other about six months before Kurt graduated from Harvard. He'd been single for a year at that point." Blaine flushes and turns his attention back to the vegetables in front of him, slicing slowly so he doesn't cut himself. "In some ways, it's better that I don't know him as well as his father does. It means I see things Burt doesn't."

"Like what?" Blaine asks, unable to help himself.

"Like the fact that he doesn't really like to touch," Carole says casually, as if she's talking about the weather. "He stiffens when other people touch him and he doesn't go out of his way to initiate contact. I think it has something to do with his mom."

Blaine sets the knife down carefully. "And he's comfortable with me." He looks up at Carole slowly.

She smiles at him. "You have that effect on people."

Blaine smiles a little at her, he can't help it. "I've only been here a day," he laughs. She waves a hand dismissively at him and cuts a few more cookies out of the dough; Blaine notices one in the shape of a bowtie and warms a little at the thought that Kurt might've added that one this year. He did make farfalle.

"It's nice," Carole says after a moment. "He seems relaxed." She hesitates before adding, "Happy. His dad worries about him pushing himself too hard, isolating himself. You're good for him."

Blaine flushes, pleased. "My life can be a little dramatic sometimes," he admits with a half-laugh. "But I try to enjoy myself. Kurt sort of got dragged into that."

Carole's mouth twists up into a slow smile. "Not unwillingly, I think."

"I'm glad I can help," Blaine says. "He's done a lot for me. He's -- he's been a really good friend to me. I might not still be in Boston if it weren't for him."

Kurt comes skirting into the room then, unearthing a wine glass from the cupboard and pouring himself a glass of merlot. He takes a sip and throws Blaine an auspicious look. "Do I need to get you out of here yet? Any unfit working conditions?"

Blaine flashes a smile at Carole. "I'm good." He nods towards the bow tie cookie cutter. "I take it that's a new addition from you?"

Kurt colors a little. "Maybe."

There's a loud *chirp* from upstairs that makes Blaine smile. "I'm gonna go check on Pavarotti," he announces, washing his hands in the sink.

"Bring him downstairs," Kurt suggests. "We can do a group rendition of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. He's not a partridge, but he'll do."

Blaine grains wickedly at him. "Does that mean I finally get to hear you sing?"

"Get the bird," Carole stage-whispers. "I'll keep the wine flowing."

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A soft knock wakes Kurt from sleep in the middle of the night between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. He drowsily pulls himself out of bed and pads over to the door, opening it quietly. Blaine is standing there, bouncing a little and wearing the most *adorable* pink pajamas, with tiny teddy bears holding presents and candy canes strewn all over them. He has a large flat box in his hands.

"Hi," Blaine whispers, grinning. "It's midnight. Merry Christmas."

Kurt blinks. Right. "Come in, then," he whispers back, opening the door a little further and waving Blaine in.

Blaine glances briefly around Kurt's room and then at Kurt before he settles on the end of Kurt's bed. Kurt smiles to himself and shakes his head. Blaine really is too cute.

"Here," Blaine says, thrusting the box towards Kurt as Kurt takes a seat on the bed. "This is for you."

Kurt takes the box and runs a hand over it. "Oh!" he exclaims, reaching down to the bottom drawer of his bedside table. He pulls out a perfectly wrapped package he stored in there earlier this afternoon. "Here," he says, handing it to Blaine. "For you."

Blaine lights up. "Really? You didn't have to get me anything. I mean, you're already letting me stay with your family, and you're the only reason I passed anything this semester --"

"Blaine. You would have passed without me just fine. I just kept you focused. And it's Christmas -- I got you a present because I wanted to. Besides, you got me something. You didn't have to do that, either." Kurt runs his hands over the flat box again. "Can I open it?"

Blaine nods. "Please," he says, looking at Kurt eagerly. "I hope you like it."

Kurt pulls off the lid and carefully folds back the tissue paper lying just underneath. On the very top is a gorgeous silk tie and matching pocket square in pale pink. He gently sets them to the side to look at the suit beneath them.

It's stunning. The suit is dark grey and wool -- the tag at the collar tells him it's entirely wool, in fact. He carefully unfolds the jacket, and runs his fingers over the buttons, one, two, three. He looks at the tag again.

"You got me an Armani suit?" he asks Blaine, stunned. "How much did this cost you?"

Blaine shakes his head. "I can afford it. It was going to be for the wedding, and it still can be, but..." He runs his thumb over the tie. "You can wear it to work. You should look perfect in court."

"Blaine," Kurt says thickly. "I can't --"

"Of course you can. Try it on. You should see how you look in it."

Kurt sighs. He does want to see how it looks on him. It's not everyday he gets to try on an Armani suit. He ducks into the bathroom across the hall, trying not to look in the mirror while he changes. He wants to see it as a whole in the full length mirror back in the bedroom.

Blaine's eyes widen when Kurt walks back in, which Kurt hopes is a good thing. "Wow."

"Wow?" Kurt repeats. "Do I clean up well?"

Blaine gets up off the bed and turns Kurt to look at himself in the mirror. "You look amazing." He tugs at the suit slightly, settling it onto Kurt better.

"I look like Sebastian. Or Callahan," he says wryly.

"You look like a debonair, high-powered lawyer," Blaine says with a smile. He fidgets a little. "I mean, I guess comparisons could be made between you and Sebastian, but you'd come out on top. You're amazing, Kurt. I don't need to see you in a suit to see that."

Kurt feels his breath catch in his throat slightly. Blaine is looking at the mirror -- looking at *him* -- so earnestly, so passionately. He can see the light in Blaine's eyes, remembers the way Blaine had taken an interest when Kurt told him he could help people by being a lawyer, remembers the way Blaine had looked at him at the bar. Kurt wants to bask in that regard, let it soak into his bones and wash away any doubts he's ever had about his chosen career and relative talent. He tugs at the edges of the suit, fidgeting to stop from reaching out to Blaine and tugging him into a kiss. Blaine's not ready, may not ever return Kurt's feelings, and Kurt has to let him make the first move, if it's ever going to happen. He has to.

"You should open your present," Kurt says finally, after they've been silently looking at the mirror for a little while. "It's not quite an Armani suit, but I hope you like it."

Blaine moves back to the bed and picks up the package. Kurt settles on the other end and watches as Blaine carefully pulls at each meticulously placed piece of tape and carefully unfolds each fold of wrapping paper. "'Lawyer... will work for cupcakes,'" Blaine reads from [the coffee mug](#). Kurt hadn't been sure about the mug, but Blaine has always seemed amused by Kurt's collection. And the inside of the mug is pink. It's perfect for Blaine.

"Look inside," Kurt suggests.

Blaine peers into the mug and tugs out the bowtie Kurt put in there. "A bowtie?" he asks with a little bit of a smile. "Aww, it has christmas trees on it. That's adorable. I'll have to wear it tomorrow." He grins at Kurt, and Kurt feels his heart unclench. Blaine likes the gifts.

"I know they're not quite as nice as what you got me --"

"I love them. I'll use the mug all the time, and the bowtie is wonderful." Blaine puts a tentative hand on Kurt's knee. "I wouldn't have wanted something expensive, anyways. These are perfect and thoughtful." He draws back, but Kurt grabs his hand.

"Thank you," Kurt says, squeezing Blaine's hand. "This is one of the nicest things anyone's ever done for me, bar none. I'm practically speechless." He pulls Blaine into a hug and squeezes tightly. "Thank you."

Blaine mumbles something unintelligible into Kurt's shoulder.

"Hmm?"

Blaine blushes and pulls away. "Oh, I was just thinking I should probably let you get back to bed. I bet you're a nightmare when you don't get enough sleep."

Kurt snorts, starting to untie the gorgeous silk tie. "Just make me coffee in the morning and no one will get hurt."

Blaine smiles. "Deal."

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Kurt wakes up at a little past eight on Christmas morning to the sight of a large, rectangular box on his nightstand. He closes his eyes and smiles to himself.

Blaine.

Kurt's afraid to open the box again, afraid to touch the suit or put it on. He knows Blaine had to have spent a fortune on it, but he also knows that Blaine probably doesn't see it that way. Blaine's sort of adorably oblivious sometimes. Of course it seemed sensible to him to buy Kurt a nice suit for Christmas. Of course it seemed practical.

He rolls out of bed and rubs at his eyes as he makes his way downstairs, yawning. The house is eerily quiet -- his dad and Carole are usually awake by now. It is a holiday, though, so it's entirely possible that they could've slept in. He only finds Blaine in the living room when he reaches the threshold at the bottom of the stairs, though, still in his ridiculously adorable pink pajama pants. "Morning," Kurt yawns.

Blaine looks over at him from his spot on the couch and smiles. "Hi," he greets quietly. "Merry Christmas... again."

Kurt laughs. "You too." He eyes the pair of mugs on the coffee table. "Is that coffee?"

Blaine nods. "I was hoping you'd get up soon." He gestures to the empty spot next to him, which Kurt takes gratefully. He reaches for the mug and breathes in, reveling in the smell and the warmth before taking a sip. Kurt smiles -- Blaine knows how he likes his coffee.

"I assume we're the only ones awake?" Kurt asks. "They're usually up by now, but --"

Blaine shakes his head. "There was a note in the kitchen," he explains. "They went out for a little while. They said they'd be back before noon, in time to help start dinner."

"Ditched by my own father and his girlfriend on Christmas morning," Kurt sighs dramatically. "Welcome to my life. At least you stuck around," he teases, nudging Blaine with his elbow.

Blaine blushes and ducks his head a little before reaching for the remote on the coffee table. "I was going to watch a movie," he says hesitantly, "if that's okay with you."

"By all means," Kurt says amicably, settling into the couch more comfortably. "The game's not on until later and I lost interest in the parade by the time I was like, twelve."

"I've been to that parade," Blaine says with a grin, hitting the play button. "It's more impressive in person."

Kurt rolls his eyes and turns his attention to the television. The opening credits start to play, and he can't fight the smile that spreads across his face. "*Amélie*."

"You said it was your favorite."

"I did."

They spend the rest of the film mostly in a comfortable silence, knees brushing against each other every so often. Blaine seems both at ease and on edge; he's clearly got something else on his mind, but Kurt doesn't pry. If Blaine wants to tell him, he'll do it when he's ready. Halfway through, Blaine tentatively ventures, "I understand why you identify with her. She devotes her life to helping people."

Kurt shrugs but smiles all the same. "She's you, too," he observes. "Look at her go, playing matchmaker."

Blaine laughs. "Are you comparing me to a cute little French girl?"

"No!" Kurt protests, laughing. "She's not really my type, anyway."

Blaine bites his lip. "And what exactly is your type, Mr. Hummel?"

"Men, for one," Kurt says dryly. Blaine rolls his eyes. "I don't know," Kurt says with a shrug. "Someone who will make sure I don't take things too seriously."

"The first step to solving a problem is admitting you have one," Blaine teases. "Any other criteria?"

"Oh, I don't know," Kurt sighs, turning his attention back to the screen. "Someone like Nino, I guess. Creative. I want someone who will keep me on my toes. A little surprise is nice every now and then." Blaine *hmm*s into his mug as Amélie wrenches the door open, presses a hand to Nino's mouth and grabs his lapel to tug him inside. "This part's my favorite," Kurt admits with a happy sigh. "It's different, you know? Simple, but still intimate." Amélie kisses the corner of Nino's mouth, his jaw, his eyebrow --

Kurt glances down at his empty mug and draws in a breath before hitting the pause button. "Two minutes," Kurt insists, pushing himself off of the couch. "I want more coffee before he does it back." Blaine offers him a half-smile before looking back down into his own mug.

In the kitchen, Kurt pours himself a second glass and adds a couple of spoonfuls of sugar and a little creamer, stirring in slow circles. He knows that part of Blaine wishes he were with his family for Christmas, and Kurt's tried his best to supplement Blaine's family with his own. It's not the same, and Kurt knows that, but it's the best he can do, the only way he could think of to help. The thought of Blaine alone and curled under his mother's quilt isn't one Kurt could stand. Blaine seems like he's been settling in, much happier with Boston and Harvard and himself. Kurt wants to make sure he stays that way. He likes it when Blaine smiles. He sets the spoon down in the sink with a quiet *clink* and turns to head back into the living room.

He runs straight into Blaine in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room and laughs a little, caught off guard. "I didn't spill any on you, did I?" Blaine clutches Kurt's arm to right himself and shakes his head. "Did you want more coffee too?"

“No.” Blaine swallows and he looks nervous, far too on-edge for Christmas morning.

“Are you okay?” Kurt asks, concerned. “Maybe coffee wasn’t such a good idea. I could make you tea or something else instead, if you --” But Blaine shakes his head again, still silent. His eyes drift up and then back down quickly, his whole face turning bright red. Kurt looks up at the mistletoe hanging from the frame. “Oh,” Kurt laughs. “I forgot that was there. My dad hangs it up *everywhere*, like Carole doesn’t kiss him enough as it is--” Blaine bites his lip and Kurt rests a hand on his arm. “It’s okay,” he says gently. “It’s not like it’s a law, Blaine,” he adds, laughing.

But there’s something in Blaine’s eyes now, tentative and gleaming, and Blaine pauses only briefly before leaning in and planting a barely-there kiss to the corner of Kurt’s mouth. Kurt offers him a faint smile. “I think you’re safe,” he quips. “Santa’s not really known for wrath anyway --” But then Blaine leans in again, lips a little more firm against the spot where Kurt’s jaw and neck meet --

*Oh.*

Kurt’s fairly sure his heart stops beating as Blaine’s lips move to his eyebrow and Kurt has to keep his eyes open to convince himself that this is actually happening. Blaine pulls away, blushing furiously, and worries his lip (perfect, soft, Kurt knows that now, oh god) between his teeth. Kurt’s fairly sure he looks like a deer caught in headlights right now and his stomach is twisting in knots because Blaine is -- he’s going to --

Blaine rushes forward and presses his lips to Kurt’s, applying the briefest pressure for half a moment before pulling away.

Kurt nearly drops his mug of coffee to the floor. He can still hardly breathe, can’t think of a thing to say because Blaine just kissed him -- “Here,” Blaine says softly, prying the mug from Kurt’s hands and setting it on the kitchen island. He fidgets uncomfortably for a moment, running his fingers through his curls. “I -- I’ve wanted to do that for days.”

Kurt barks out a laugh, causing Blaine to look up at him in surprise. “I’ve wanted to do that for *months*. And you -- you just did it.”

Blaine colors and ducks his head. “I’ve been told I can be a little impulsive.”

Kurt’s heart starts beating again, too-fast at first and then too-slow. He can’t keep up, can’t breathe right, can’t think and he doesn’t even care because the man he’s been into for the last few months just kissed



him. Kurt feels like he could fly. "I did say I wanted someone who could keep me on my toes." Blaine smiles at him, slow and hesitant, and Kurt actually *can't* resist any more; he reaches out and tugs Blaine towards him by the arm, crashing their lips together a second time. And Blaine -- Blaine wraps his arms around Kurt's neck immediately, rolls his body forward so that their chests are pressed together; Kurt can feel him rise up on his toes a little to get a better angle (Kurt's never dated anyone shorter than him before and wow, that should not be as hot as it is) --

"Kurt, we're back! Are you -- oh!"

It's Blaine who breaks the kiss, startled and jumping in Kurt's arms a little; he loses his balance and falls against Kurt's chest a little, arms clinging tighter in an effort to find purchase. Kurt's arms are just full of him, close and warm, but Kurt has the distinct feeling that Blaine's looking to shield him as much as he's looking to be held. Kurt helps him stand back up a little but doesn't let go. "Carole," he says, fighting and failing to keep his voice even. He looks over at her and tries his best to give her a nonchalant smile. "Where have you guys been?"

"The garage," his dad's voice answers as he joins them, dusting a little snow off of his shoulders.

Kurt releases his hold on Blaine a little and gives Carole a look. "You let him go into work?" he sighs, aggravated. "Dad, it's Christmas. One day isn't going to kill you -- Mrs. Perkins hardly ever uses her Oldsmobile --"

"Kurt," Carole interjects softly, reaching for his hand and pulling him towards her a little. "Your dad proposed."

Kurt's heart stops for a second before he blinks over at his father. "You did it at the garage?" he asks incredulously. "That has got to be the most unromantic thing I've ever --"

"Hey!" his dad snaps defensively. "That's where we met! It's plenty romantic!"

"Wait," Carole says slowly. "You knew?" Kurt grins at her. "Of course you knew," she laughs. "And here your dad let me go on and on about how worried I was about telling you --"

Kurt laughs and pulls her into a hug, beaming. "Oh please, as if I'd let him ask anyone less fabulous than you." He pulls back and raises an eyebrow at her. "Acid washed denim aside. Are you going to tell Finn when he calls later?"

"Of course, of course," she laughs, color in her cheeks. She pauses and glances over at Kurt's dad. "Unless he already knows." Kurt's dad grins at her too and she gasps in mock-indignation. "Did everyone know but me?"

"I didn't." Kurt turns slightly at the sound of Blaine's quiet voice. "But I only got here Friday afternoon, so." He looks slightly uncomfortable but he's smiling at Kurt's dad and Carole. "Congratulations."

"Burt," Carole says abruptly. "Why don't we let the boys make coffee for everyone and then join us in the living room? I thought I saw something on --"

"*Amélie*," Kurt tells her. "We were just at the end. The game's probably on soon."

Carole drags his dad towards the living room while Kurt rolls his eyes; his dad reaches for his hand as he goes, squeezing it briefly before following her into the living room. Kurt draws in a breath and turns to Blaine. "You okay?"

Blaine shrugs a little, smiling faintly. "It's just -- they're the third couple I know who've gotten engaged in the last two months. I --" He looks down at the floor, cheeks coloring.

Kurt closes the space between them and reaches for Blaine's hand, tangling their fingers together. He swears he can hear Blaine's breath hitch at the contact. "I'm not going to ask," Kurt says gently. "They're going to want to celebrate, though --"

"No, no, of course," Blaine says in a rush, looking up at him. He hesitates for a moment before venturing, "Do you think Carole would appreciate a mimosa instead?"

Kurt laughs and wraps a hand around Blaine's neck before pressing a soft kiss to his lips. It's partly to make Blaine feel better, to make him relax -- Blaine's adorably flustered and nervous -- but it's also for himself. Kurt's spent the last few months holding back because he had to; he sort of wants to kiss Blaine now just because he *can*. Blaine's back hits the island as Kurt deepens the kiss slightly and Blaine fists a hand into Kurt's shirt near his waist.

Kurt rests his forehead against Blaine's as he breaks the kiss, exhaling slowly. "I'm just gonna take a page from your book," he breathes, "and be a little impulsive, okay? Just so you're not totally caught off guard when I do that again."

“You’re planning to be impulsive,” Blaine says blankly. “That’s --”

-- exactly what you do,” Kurt laughs. “You’ve spent the last few days wondering how to do that, haven’t you?”

Blaine blushes. “The Warblers did tell me not to try and plan anything.”

Kurt grins at him and leans in a little closer, prying Blaine’s hand from his waist so that both sets of hands and fingers are twined with Blaine’s. “I think I like your friends,” he muses, glancing down at Blaine’s lips. “And I think I like you better this way.”

Blaine grins and uses the fact that they’re holding hands to tug Kurt closer; he kisses Kurt hard on the lips once for good measure. “I think I like us better this way too.”

## ***Chapter Seven***

Blaine gets a lot of funny looks when he walks off of the plane at LAX, and it takes him until he steps out of the air-conditioned building and out into the sunlight for him to realize it's because he's still wearing his winter coat. It's seventy degrees outside and there isn't a cloud in the sky. Blaine smiles.

California.

Home.

He takes the shuttle bus to the car rental place (texting Kurt along the way -- *landed!*) where he's supposed to walk down the block to the Denny's to meet his mother, but she isn't the one who greets him - his father is. "Dad!" he says brightly, releasing both of his bags and standing on tiptoe to hug his father. "I wasn't expecting you."

His father lingers a little longer in hugging Blaine than perhaps he normally would, but Blaine doesn't mind. He sort of expects it. "Last minute meeting with one of her volunteer groups before the end of the year -- she should be there when we get back." His father pulls back and beams at him. "You look older."

Blaine grins. "I feel older."

His father laughs and helps Blaine load his suitcases into the '59 Chevy they rebuilt together nearly a decade ago (a failed attempt at bonding, from *before*). They climb into the car, both of them mostly silent but smiling. Neither of them makes much of an attempt at a real conversation until after they're off the 405 and on the 10 heading towards the PCH. It's his father who speaks first. "We missed you, you know."

Blaine nods absently, adjusting his sunglasses on his face. "I know. It's been... busy."

"Your mother has a lot of questions."

Blaine glances over at him and gives him a look even though his father can't see his eyes. "Just Mom?"

His father sighs. "You can understand why we're curious, Blaine. We haven't heard much from you since you moved to Boston. And while we don't expect a play-by-play, we want to know how you are."

"I'm okay," Blaine says honestly. "Boston was... an adjustment. It took awhile. It's not California."

“It’s not Ohio, either.”

Blaine rubs at his shoulder a little. “Thank god for that.”

“I’m not -- I’m not going to ask a lot of questions, Blaine,” his father says. “Your mother will ask plenty anyway and I’m hoping you’ll have answers for most of them.”

“But?” Blaine prompts. There’s always a but.

His father starts to drum his fingers against the steering wheel. It’s enticing and irritating all at once: Blaine wants to find a song that matches the beat so he can sing along, but it also reminds him of Sebastian breaking up with him, his fingers drumming out the rhythm of a song he couldn’t identify then (*theirs*, Blaine knows now, after some thought). “Give me something to work with.”

Blaine sighs. “What do you want to know?”

“What’s off-limits?”

Blaine closes his eyes and throws his head back, the top of the seat cradling his neck. “Sebastian,” he says automatically.

“Blaine,” his dad says, the barest hint of ‘I’m your parent and you’re being petulant’ in his voice. “You can’t -- we don’t understand,” he says finally. “You followed him to Boston and now you won’t even talk about him.”

“Dad,” Blaine pleads, “please, please do not make me talk about him, okay?” He looks over and sees his dad’s jaw set in frustration. Blaine sighs and digs his fedora out of his messenger bag, tucking it securely on his head so it doesn’t fly away. “Suffice it to say that I was never going to be what he wanted. End of discussion.”

His father glances over at him; Blaine can’t see his eyes behind the sunglasses but the rest of his father’s face makes it clear that he’s still confused. “Are you... okay?”

Blaine nods and settles back into the seat, basking in the warmth of the sun. He’s missed this. “I’m fine. We both moved on.”

His father turns his attention back to the road. "Anything else that's off-limits? Are we allowed to ask about your classes? Your friends?"

"Of course." He's missed his parents, missed his father's quiet companionship and his mother's sweet voice, missed the sun and the sea and the guarantee that he not only has a place to come home to, but people who will take care of him as well. "Like I said, I've been busy. It's been a little... dramatic."

"So it seems," his father says, laughing. "Your mother said you were going to be in a wedding."

Blaine laughs too. "I was -- I am, still, but it got pushed out to Valentine's Day."

"So you could've come home for Christmas."

Blaine shakes his head. "There was a snowstorm -- I ended up spending Christmas with Kurt and his family. Trust me, if I could've come home sooner, I would've." He glances down at his phone and notices that Kurt's texted him back (*how was the flight? glad you're home safe. x*); Blaine smiles and types out his reply. "I think the timing was right, though. I needed a little longer in Boston before I came home."

"Nice of your friends to let you spend the holidays with them," his father comments, fiddling with the dial on the radio. "Is Kurt at Harvard with you?"

"No, he graduated a couple of years ago," Blaine says distractedly, shrugging out of his second, thinner sweater. "I bought his coffee on my first day."

"Your mother will like that," his father says. "Although expect her to pry a little since you won't let her ask about Sebastian."

"Dad --"

"You said you'd moved on." Blaine blanches a little and clamps his mouth shut. "I'm not wrong, am I? This Kurt, you've been --"

"Off-limits," Blaine says breathlessly, gripping the door handle.

His father's quiet for a few minutes. "Okay," he says finally, resigning. "I'll try and steer the conversation away from your love life," he quips dryly.

"It's not that I'm trying to keep things from you and Mom," Blaine explains, relaxing his grip on the handle a little. "I just -- it's new, and I don't want to get ahead of myself yet."

His father grins. "You may not have full-disclosure with us, Blaine, but we do know you."

"I don't --"

"You do wear your heart on your sleeve." Blaine shuffles down in the seat, tucking his knees up and resting them against the dashboard. "It's not a bad thing," his father laughs. "It's just -- you don't really do anything half-hearted, son." Blaine colors but offers his dad a small smile. "Okay, off-limits. But for your mother's sake -- Kurt: Harvard graduate, late twenties, and you haven't been seeing each other that long, right?"

"Since Monday," Blaine mumbles.

His father takes the exit off of the highway into town, looking over at Blaine when they stop at a red light. "So really new, then." Blaine nods. "That should be enough for your mother."

They're quiet as they drive the few streets down to the house; when they pull into the driveway, Blaine's mother is waiting for them, her face lit with a smile. "She'll probably have pink lemonade for you out by the pool," his father says as he puts the car in park. "Let's try and lead with classes and then transition to your friend's wedding. See how that goes."

They walk around to the trunk of the car, tugging out Blaine's suitcases; his father closes the trunk with a loud *thunk* and a quiet *click*, and Blaine reaches out to touch his father's arm. "Dad," he says quietly, taking the handle of one of the suitcases from his father. "Thank you. Not -- not just for keeping Mom's questions at bay, but for just --" He tapers off and rubs at the back of his neck. "I know you and Mom didn't exactly think I'd do well out in Boston. But I am -- I'm trying, and I want you to know that. I listened. I don't want you to think it's a waste of time or money." He doesn't say *I don't want to be a disappointment* out loud.

His father hears it anyway and beams at him. "Oh Blaine," he sighs. He reaches out and tugs Blaine into a one-armed hug, chin resting gently on Blaine's shoulder (*that* shoulder). "The only thing you ever had to do to make me happy was come home at the end of the day."

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Blaine ambles up to the front door of the Warbler house on New Year's Eve and quietly unlocks it, thankful that the lock and hinges are as well-oiled as ever. He eases the door open and peers into the front hall, grinning at the sight of the familiar staircase and chandelier. In the living room off to the left, he can hear the homey sounds of the Warblers settling down to watch something together; he suspects they're watching *A League of Their Own*, missing Blaine as much as he's missed them. It's perfect timing for his plan.

*"I'll be home for Christmas. You can count on me."* Blaine hears rustling and several thumps as the Warblers rush to the doorway of the living room, faces beaming. He grins at them. *"Please have snow, and mistletoe, and presents on the tree."*

Wes is one of the last Warblers to the doorway and the fond look he gives Blaine makes Blaine's own grin even bigger. *"Christmas Eve may find me where the lovelight gleams,"* Wes joins in, matching Blaine note for note.

*"I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams,"* the rest of the Warblers finish with them. Blaine has barely finished singing when his fellow Warblers descend upon him for a group hug. Jon grabs him up in a big bear hug and spins before setting him down into Jeff and Nick's waiting arms. When everyone has hugged him as much as they need to, they drag him willingly into the living room.

"You don't have anywhere to be, right?" Trent asks worriedly. "You can watch the movie with us?"

Blaine can't stop smiling. "Of course I'll watch with you guys. It's Warbler tradition." He squeezes onto the oversized couch with Nick, Jeff, Trent and Thad. Trent tucks him beneath an arm as Blaine wiggles his toes beneath Jeff's thigh; other Warblers settle into the armchairs and loveseats and onto the floor in front of him. Jon leans back against Blaine's knees and grins up at him. David passes down a tin of homemade fudge (he just gives Blaine a look when Blaine perks up and asks, "Nuts?"). It's warm and familiar and Blaine's pretty sure he could fall asleep just like this, buried in and surrounded by his friends, Lynn Cartwright's voice lulling him to sleep. It's a fairly boring way to spend New Year's Eve by most standards but Blaine resolutely does not *care*; he glances over at Wes and blows a kiss in Wes' direction. Wes rolls his eyes, props his legs up across David's lap, and hits play.

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Blaine flops onto the brightly colored beach towel, dropping the frisbee on to the sand.



"You're a beast, man," he says tiredly to Wes. "I give up."

"You've just gotten sedentary in Boston, that's all. Too much snow. I can whip you back into shape," Wes replies confidently, flashing a grin at Blaine.

"In our copious amounts of shared free time?" Blaine asks wryly, grinning back up at Wes.

Wes sits down next to him and lightly whacks him on the shoulder. "I wield a mean Skype call."

"I know." Blaine knocks his knee against Wes' companionably. "Thank you for this. I love the other Warblers, but --"

-- they can be a bit much, I know. They just miss you -- us, really -- now that we're not here all the time." Wes shrugs. "I miss you, too."

Blaine yanks Wes down to hug him. "I miss you, too, Wes. But I think you were right. Boston's where I need to be right now."

"Speaking of Boston... how's Kurt?"

Blaine tips his head back and lays down, looking at the cloudless blue sky and basking in the sun. "Good," he says after a moment. "His parents seem to think he's a lot more relaxed than he usually is."

Wes *hms* next to him. "I could see that. He seems pretty dedicated to his work." He pauses. "You do provide the perfect distraction."

Blaine glares at him. "I'm not trying to be a distraction," he whines. "I'm just --"

"Blaine," Wes laughs, shoving his shoulder. "Calm down. I didn't mean it like that. I'm just saying if his parents think you're good for him, then you probably are."

Blaine considers him a moment. "Do you think he's good for me?"

Wes trains his gaze out onto the water for a time, sand sifting through his fingers. Finally, he settles all the way down next to Blaine, their shoulders brushing. "I think you know the answer to that. I don't -- I know you look to me for guidance, Blaine. But this is your choice."

Blaine smiles at him a little. "As a friend," he says. "Just give me your opinion as a friend."

Wes sighs. "I do," he allows.

Blaine nudges Wes with his elbow. "But?"

Wes worries his lip between his teeth as a collie goes running by them into the water. "I just want you to be sure," he says hesitantly. "You started getting over Sebastian in November, that's not -- Blaine, your rebound rate isn't that fast."

"I kissed him, Wes, I didn't ask him to marry me," Blaine quips dryly.

A smile plays at Wes' lips. "Yet."

Blaine shoves at his shoulder hard, causing Wes to roll over. "You're awful. Remind me why I'm friends with you again?"

Wes lifts his face from the towel and arches an eyebrow at him. "Remind me who helped you get into Harvard in the first place?"

"Mmm, it's your job," Blaine hums happily, throwing an arm over his eyes and letting the warmth of the sun wash over him. "You know, since you're my favorite and everything."

"I thought Kurt and I shared that title now."

Blaine smiles. "You do. But I wasn't going to -- how did Thad phrase it? -- stick my tongue down *your* throat. You'll have to settle for fencing and law school and frisbee and Skype calls."

"I'll leave you and your tongue with Kurt, thanks," Wes says dryly. "I hope you went with the 'more finesse' option -- although, I don't know exactly how smooth you can be when you're as impulsive as you are."

"Hey!" Blaine says defensively. "You were the one who told me my heart wanted me in Boston."

"I know," Wes says slowly. Blaine looks over at him. "It wanted you in Boston because that's where Sebastian was. I just -- I don't want you to forget that, okay? None of the other guys were there the first six months you and Sebastian started seeing each other. They don't get it like I do."

Blaine considers Wes a moment, his father's words echoing in his mind. *You don't do anything half-hearted.* "I'm over him," he assures Wes.

"You loved him," Wes argues.

"He doesn't love me anymore," Blaine says quietly. "I stopped wasting my time on him. I'm not -- I'm not dragging him into this thing with Kurt. I'm moving on."

Wes meets his eyes for the briefest of moments before nodding and flipping over on his back, shielding his eyes from the sun. "Okay," is all he says. "I trust your judgement."

"Thank you," Blaine huffs. "I was afraid I was going to have to start divulging details about how much I like Kurt, what kissing him is like --"

"This isn't *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*," Wes deadpans. "I know why you like him."

Blaine grins and mirrors Wes' position. "And I know that you actually watched that film because you've had a crush on Jenna Boyd since you were like, ten. Which, you know, I get, because she's really pretty and she's even probably going to be nominated for an Oscar this year --"

He feels Wes shift next to him and it's a matter of seconds before he's being hoisted into the air. "Hey!" he exclaims indignantly, kicking his feet wildly as Wes throws Blaine over his shoulder. "Put me down! I'm not cute and compact, I don't care what Sugar says --"

"It's the ocean for you," Wes declares. "And if Kurt asks what happened to you, I'll just tell him you tragically drowned." He stumbles into the water a little and starts to put Blaine down --

"Oh no," Blaine says mischievously. "If I'm going down, you're coming with me." He clings to Wes' shoulders and tugs firmly as Wes drops him; together, they plunge into the ocean, a mess of tangled limbs.

When they break the surface, it's the first time in a long time that Blaine feels like he can fly.

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Sugar's waiting for Blaine when he gets off the plane (she'd called Tuesday and told him to fly into LaGuardia in New York instead but wouldn't say why); she's leaning against the side of a long, sleek black

limo, a mischievous grin lighting up her face. She beckons him forward with a waggle of her finger as her driver takes Blaine's suitcases from him. "Get in loser, we're going shopping."

Blaine raises an eyebrow at her. "Where are we going?" he asks, letting her drag him into the back of limo.

Sugar settles into the seat with a happy sigh. "Kleinfeld's."

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Sugar walks out in an A-line gown first, which is nice, but -- "It looks like you're going to prom," Blaine says after a moment.

"It's boring, that's what it is," Sugar sighs. "No bling or anything. I need something more going on."

The next dress is very flattering on Sugar, but it also has a plunging neckline nearly to Sugar's belly button and a slit up to her thigh. Mr. Motta takes one look and shakes his head.

"No."

Sugar pouts in the mirror, but sighs and turns to go back to the changing room. Blaine shrugs at her as she passes.

She walks back out in a blush-colored dress with what looks like a thousand giant flowers on the skirt. Blaine gasps and grins into his hands. "It's pink!" he exclaims.

Sugar grins back at him. "I had a feeling you'd approve."

"I don't know, Sugarplum. What's wrong with traditional white?" Mr. Motta asks.

"I like that it's different, Daddy."

"But is it what you really want?" Blaine asks. "I love it, but this is your wedding and your dress, and if it's not exactly what you want then you shouldn't get it. Even if it is pink."

Sugar nods decisively. "Let's try something else."

She's smiling when she walks out in a ball gown, her hands toying with the tulle skirt. Blaine glances over and sees Mr. Motta's face light up. "Oh Sugarplum, you look like a princess."

Sugar grins at him. "Well of course I do." She spins in a circle, watching the skirt rise and fall in the mirror. "Blaine?"

Blaine offers her a smile. "You do look like a princess."

She wrinkles her nose a little. "But you don't like it."

Blaine can feel Mr. Motta's eyes on him; he shifts uncomfortably on the couch. "I didn't say that."

"What's wrong with it?" Mr. Motta asks as Sugar looks at her reflection again, brow furrowed in concentration.

Blaine sighs. "It just... makes you look a lot younger, is all. And I know that bothers you."

Sugar bites her lip. "That's true." She catches her father's eye in the mirror and stands a little taller. "I don't want to rule this one out though. I still have a few dresses left to try on. Come on, Diane," she says briskly, grabbing her consultant's hand and marching off of the runway.

Mr. Motta turns to face Blaine. "She's my little girl."

Blaine smiles at him and settles back against the couch. "I know," he says quietly. "And if Sugar wants that dress, then she should get it. I just -- look, I'm not saying I know your daughter better than you do. But I probably understand certain things about her that you don't. She wants to be treated like an adult."

Mr. Motta raises an eyebrow at him. "And you think that letting her decide to marry Rory on a whim like this isn't treating her like an adult?"

Blaine shakes his head. "It's not about that," he explains. "Rory sees her -- loves her -- for who she is. And that means a lot to her." He swallows a little and looks away. "No one takes her seriously."

A man in a suit comes whizzing behind them (Randy, Blaine thinks, but he can't be sure) but Blaine can still feel Mr. Motta's eyes on him. Neither of them say anything for a long time until Randy goes by a

second time. "I'm glad she has you." Blaine blinks up at him, blushing, and adjusts his hat. "You indulge her where I wouldn't. You really -- you really understand her."

"We're not that different," Blaine reminds him as Joan follows Randy back across the salon. "She has just as hard of a time saying no to you as you do to her. I just... want her to be happy, you know? And I know you want that too."

Mr. Motta offers him a half-smile as Diane rejoins them. "I request the man of honor."

Blaine looks over at her in surprise. "Me?"

Diane nods and casts an apologetic look towards Mr. Motta. "Come with me," she beckons with her finger. Blaine shrugs at Mr. Motta's questioning glance and rises from the couch, following Diane back to the fitting rooms. It's not until they're down a hallway and out of earshot that she addresses him again. "She found the dress," Diane explains. "She fell in love with it as soon as she saw herself in it. I could see it all over her face."

"Okay," Blaine says slowly, fighting to keep up with her pace. "So what's the problem?"

"She wouldn't come out," Diane sighs. "I brought Randy in to jack her up and everything, had Joan come and talk to her. She refuses to step out on that runway. I thought she could use some moral support. She says you're her best friend."

Blaine gestures in front of them, his heart warming a little. "Lead the way."

Diane knocks on the dressing room door quietly. "Sugar? Blaine's here. Do you want to --"

The door opens immediately but Sugar only pokes her head around the corner. Blaine can see part of a shoulder-length veil but nothing else. "Hey," he greets, smiling at her. "Are you gonna come out or do you want me in there?"

Sugar bites her lip and takes a moment before answering. "I'll come out," she decides. "Just... close your eyes, okay?"

"Okay," Blaine laughs, obliging. He hears the rustle of fabric and feels her move past him to the pedestal in front of the small mirror.

“Okay,” she says. “You can open them now.”

He’s not expecting what he sees, not one bit. She’s in a mermaid gown that flatters her figure and makes her look her age, maybe a little older. There’s a little bit of beading and the bottom of the veil tickles her shoulders.

She looks like a bride.

And she loves this dress, Blaine can see it in the warmth behind her eyes, the faint blush in her cheeks; she’s trying not to smile but it’s there, playing at the corner of her lips. It’s almost the happiest Blaine’s ever seen her, clearly comfortable in her own skin, sure of her decision. “This is your dress.”

Her smile breaks free, lighting up her face. “I love it. But --” She sighs. “I don’t think Daddy’ll like it.”

“I think he’ll like it when he sees how much you love it, honey,” Blaine offers, taking Sugar’s hand. “You’re beautiful.”

Sugar bites her lip. “Can you maybe go convince him not to see it before the wedding? Tell him I want it to be a surprise for him?” She turns her head to look at the mirror again. “I just don’t know what I’d do if he didn’t like it.”

“Whatever you need, Sugar,” he says, giving her a careful hug. “Just part of the man of honor service.”

“You’re the best man of honor ever,” Sugar replies, squeezing him back tightly.

Blaine grins at her as he darts back out of the changing room and prepares to convince Mr. Motta to buy a dress without seeing it.

Should be a piece of cake.

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Kurt turns a page in his book with his thumb as the furnace makes a clicking noise (he’ll have to call the super again; he’s not having the heat go out in January). Blaine shifts slightly against Kurt’s chest, snuggling closer, and Kurt smiles absently as his free hand falls to Blaine’s head to card through Blaine’s curls. The snow keeps falling outside and it’s quiet for a little while longer (another eight pages to be

exact) before Blaine shifts again, groaning slightly. His head moves under Kurt's hand as Kurt tugs the ribbon attached to his book into the centerfold and tosses the book onto the coffee table. Kurt smiles down at him. "Hi."

Blaine hums and moves higher, nuzzling his face against Kurt's neck. "Hi," he mumbles.

"Nice nap?"

Blaine nods and blinks open an eye. "Is it still snowing outside?"

"Mhm," Kurt affirms. Blaine groans again and tugs the blanket up from his hips to his shoulders, throwing his arms around Kurt's torso and tangling their legs together more. "You are so spoiled," he laughs. "At least the heat's still working. It's not that cold."

"California," Blaine says, his voice muffled.

"Didn't you live in Ohio before that?" Kurt asks.

"Not the point," Blaine whines, pulling back a little so he can look at Kurt properly. "I haven't been around snow since I was thirteen. That's almost a decade."

"Poor you," Kurt teases, tapping Blaine's nose affectionately. Blaine pouts, sticking out his lower lip, and Kurt can't help but laugh as he bends down to kiss him. He tugs Blaine closer to him after that, though, enjoying the way Blaine sort of permanently attaches himself to Kurt's side. Kurt loves the weight of Blaine's torso pressing down against his chest; he loves the way Blaine's fingers curl at his hip. Kurt hasn't felt this comfortable around someone in over four years, since -- well, since Jeremy.

Kurt hasn't thought of Jeremy in a long time, doesn't miss Jeremy, doesn't love him anymore. Things didn't end on bad terms -- Kurt has to remind himself of that often -- but somewhere in the back of his mind, Kurt knows the dissolution of their relationship has affected him more than he'll ever care to admit. Jeremy was the last man Kurt was ever *really* in love with, the last person he was comfortable living with, the last person he'd really let his guard down around. Being with Jeremy was easy: they almost never fought and didn't see too much or too little of each other; they had the same sense of humor and an affinity for red wines and a guilty pleasure for *Antiques Roadshow*. When the rest of Kurt's life was coming together -- undergraduate degree from Tufts and the first year or so at Harvard Law, Callahan's internship



-- and he overworked himself and stretched himself too thin, Jeremy was the one thing in Kurt's life he didn't have to work at.

That, Kurt realizes now, was probably what led to their demise: they didn't work at it. They only lived together for a year and a half and never made a point to schedule each other into their busy lives (because then it made the relationship feel like a chore or an obligation and that wasn't something Kurt wanted). It never really bothered either of them, and it wasn't too much of a surprise towards the end of the relationship that they couldn't keep up with the changes, couldn't quite recognize the people they'd been when they'd met, couldn't reconcile each other with the people they were becoming. It should've hurt more, ending things with Jeremy, but it didn't. Somehow it was just as easy to fall out of love with Jeremy as it was to fall in love with him.

It's what makes Kurt a little terrified of being with Blaine. He's been attracted to Blaine since they met. Kurt *likes* Blaine, Kurt's comfortable with Blaine. They've settled into a decidedly comfortable domesticity (or are at the very least headed in that direction) and they've only been seeing each other a little over a month; it's not -- it's not too serious, not yet, but it's not like anything else Kurt's ever gotten himself into, either. He's been interested in Blaine from the start, but there was a lot in between then and Christmas that Kurt hadn't counted on keeping them apart (Sebastian, namely, but also Blaine's need for a friend and some guidance more than anything else). Kurt thinks he could love Blaine, he does, but he's afraid of falling too hard too fast. Blaine's rebound rate isn't anything like Jeremy's and Kurt...

Kurt doesn't want to screw this up.

He breathes out loudly through his nose and closes his eyes. His dad would say he's over-thinking this, and he'd probably be right. Kurt's trying, he really is, not to err so much on the side of caution and just let himself enjoy this, let himself be happy and let himself be comfortable with Blaine. Blaine makes Kurt forget a lot of things, makes him worry less and makes him feel a lot younger than the twenty-eight he actually is.

Blaine leans up and presses his lips to Kurt's jaw before trailing kisses up to Kurt's ear. "Stop thinking so hard."

Kurt grins in spite of himself. "No," he says, pulling back a little to look down at Blaine. "You've been napping for far too long. You should pick up a book or something."

"Kurt," Blaine groans, laughing a little and readjusting himself so their eyes meet. "The quarter just started last week. Cut me some slack, would you?"

Kurt shakes his head and grins wider. "Nope," he says, pushing at Blaine's shoulder and trying to get him to sit up. "Go be productive."

"In your apartment?" Blaine quips dryly, raising an eyebrow and resisting Kurt's hand. Kurt rolls his eyes but stops applying pressure to Blaine's shoulder and relaxes against the cushions of the couch a little. "Can't I just... stay here?" Blaine suggests, dropping his voice and leaning back in to press wet, open-mouthed kisses along the column of Kurt's neck. Kurt's eyes flutter shut involuntarily as his body enjoys the attention Blaine's lavishing it with, but Kurt doesn't want to give in that easily. "Can't... *this* be productive?" Blaine continues, slotting his leg between Kurt's and pressing up a little.

Kurt hisses and arches his back. "You're a terrible influence," he complains, and he knows he's losing the will power to continue resisting. "Or maybe I am, I don't know. I can't really think properly when you're doing this."

He feels Blaine smile against his neck. "I like to think of myself as goal-oriented," Blaine quips. "You taught me that." His fingers started to work the knot of Kurt's tie loose, twisting and tugging as Kurt's hands flex at his waist. "It's cold," he mumbles against Kurt's skin, tossing the tie aside and working open the buttons of Kurt's vest. "You're warm."

Something twists in Kurt's gut as he watches Blaine's fingers trail down his torso; he can feel Blaine's breath against his neck -- hot and damp -- and hear Blaine's breathing grow increasingly irregular in his ear as he shifts his leg again. Kurt swallows. "I won't be warm if you keep undressing me," he quips half-heartedly. Jokes are hard right now. Words are hard right now. *Kurt* is hard right now.

Blaine pulls away from him a little and gives him a look. "You're being deliberately obtuse."

Kurt chuckles, he can't help it. "You're kind of cute when you're annoyed." His fingers trace circles around the buttons of Blaine's cardigan before he pops open the first one midway down Blaine's torso. "I suppose taking this off won't help matters," he sighs, undoing another button.

"You catch on quick," Blaine says with a grin, propping himself up as Kurt undoes the rest of the buttons; he shrugs the cardigan off and drops it to the floor before crowding in close again.

"I'm a fast learner," Kurt throws back, reaching up to grab Blaine's arm and *whoa*. Kurt runs his fingers over the muscle there, falling from the thin material of Blaine's short-sleeved polo to bare skin and back again. Blaine's lips are on his neck again, tracing up his jaw to the corner of his mouth. Blaine's leg is back to pressing between Kurt's, hips just barely rocking against Kurt's hip and *oh*, Blaine's sort of hard too. Kurt feels absolutely *covered* and too-warm, Blaine's weight pressing against him, muscles shifting under Kurt's hand. Kurt's eyes flutter shut again as Blaine's mouth covers his own. Blaine tugs Kurt's shirt out of his pants, hand reaching for Kurt's belt -- "Okay," Kurt gasps, breaking the kiss. "Slow down."

Blaine nuzzles Kurt's nose with his own, humming pleasantly. He rests his palm flat against Kurt's stomach, though, waiting. "You should probably make up your mind," he breathes, stilling his hips. "We're either hot or we're cold."

"That metaphor doesn't apply anymore," Kurt huffs, gripping Blaine's arm more tightly. "I don't know if hot means hot or if hot means cold, now."

Blaine pulls back and settles himself on his elbow. Kurt immediately misses his warmth but at least Blaine's cock isn't pressed against him anymore, so Kurt can think a little more clearly. "Do you... not want this?" Blaine asks hesitantly.

Kurt closes his eyes and shakes his head, running his fingers over the skin on Blaine's arm. "It's not that," he assures Blaine, fighting to breathe normally again. "It's just a little fast."

"It's... been more than a month."

Kurt cracks open an eye and glances over at Blaine; his brain is sort of working again but Blaine's hand is still on his stomach, his leg still hooked over Kurt's and his warmth transcending between them. It's still sort of distracting. "I sound like an old prude, don't I?"

Blaine smiles faintly and leans in to press a kiss to Kurt's jaw. "Not a prude," he says. "Old, maybe."

Kurt smacks his chest lightly. "Five years," he whines. "I am not that old."

"You're almost thirty!"

Kurt opens both eyes only to narrow them dangerously. "Watch it," he snaps. "I've still got two years."

Blaine grins. "I've got seven." His smile fades a little, though, as he reaches out to toy with the buttons on Kurt's vest again. "I don't -- I just want you to be comfortable with me," he admits. "And I *know* you are, which is why I don't understand this."

Kurt softens a little. "You want the truth?" Blaine nods, his eyes bright with interest and *damn*, if that doesn't make Kurt's stomach flip. "Wes talked to me."

Blaine's eyebrows shoot up. "Wes?"

Kurt nods. "After Christmas, he called and basically gave me the 'he's my best friend -- break his heart and I'll break your face' speech. And he... told me some things."

Blaine looks torn between being amused and worried. "What sort of things?"

Kurt bites his lip. "Not a whole lot," he admits. "Nothing too specific. He just... gave me a little insight into your relationship with Sebastian. Neither of us wanted a repeat of that."

Blaine's jaw sets a little and Kurt can tell he's actively trying not to get upset. "A repeat of what, exactly?"

Kurt sighs. "He said you walked away from that relationship feeling... used," Kurt says slowly, choosing his words carefully. Blaine looks away from him, fingers toying with a stray thread on the inside of Kurt's vest. "And I *saw* that," Kurt says emphatically. "I saw you hurting. That's the last thing I want -- I don't want to be him. I don't want to hurt you."

Blaine looks up at him slowly (and Kurt really, really hates Blaine's stupid, stupid long eyelashes right now), fingers stilling against Kurt's chest. "You're not," he says quietly. "You won't."

Kurt smiles faintly and tries to tug Blaine up a little so that their faces are closer. "You have a lot of faith in me."

Blaine shrugs, a faint blush appearing on his cheeks. "I like to have faith in people. I believe in the good in them." And Kurt knows that about Blaine. It's a little naive and a little too trusting but it's also endearing; it's one of the things that drew Kurt to Blaine in the first place, one of the things Kurt identifies with, and one of the things Kurt loves most about him now. Blaine glances up at him, a slow grin spreading on his face. "Plus, I figure it's good to put my faith in my elders."

Kurt tries to frown but he can't; it's like every time he tries, he ends up smiling instead. He can't help it. "You're sort of a brat," he laughs. "Has anyone ever told you that?"

Blaine's jaw falls open a little. "No," he gasps. "That's so *mean*!"

"It's not any more mean than you teasing me about my age," Kurt argues. "You're the one who kissed me, remember? If anything, I should be teasing you about having a thing for older men."

Blaine *hums* and presses his lips to Kurt's. "Nope," he hums. "Just you."

Kurt flushes, pleased, but cups Blaine's neck with his hand, forcing Blaine to meet his eyes. "I like you," he admits, and his voice is a lot softer than he'd intended but he can't take it back now. "And that sounds... childish, but I just need you to understand why I'm slowing things down. I don't want this to be just about sex."

Blaine smiles and leans in to kiss Kurt again, softly at first but a little more firmly after a moment; he shifts his weight against Kurt's body for the briefest of moments before pulling away and curling up against Kurt's side, huffing in annoyance. "My best friend is cock-blocking me and he's more than three thousand miles away. I feel like I should be angrier about this."

Kurt presses a kiss to the top of his head and tangles his fingers in Blaine's curls again, reaching for his book with his free hand. "Anger's overrated." He pauses and then glances away from the book and down at Blaine. "Don't tell my boss I said that."

Blaine grins. "Your secret's safe with me."

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# The Boston Globe

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2017

## BROADWAY STARLET FOUND BRUTALLY SLAIN IN HOTEL ROOM



HOMETOWN HEROINE TRAGICALLY DEAD  
-- LOCAL MAN A SUSPECT

Boston native Rachel Barbra Berry -- half of Broadway's 'Dream Team' -- was found dead in her Boston hotel room late Saturday night at the age of twenty-eight. Dispatchers received a call at 10:23 P.M. from Berry's husband

**STARLET, A2**

## Chapter Eight

Blaine follows Josh and Tina into the coffee shop sleepily, rubbing ineffectually at his eyes. The semester's barely two weeks old and already Blaine feels like he has no time for anything besides readings and studying and the occasional making out on the dorm bed or couch with Kurt before stumbling back to his dorm room or sending Kurt back to his own apartment. On top of all of that, he's helping Sugar plan her wedding in the space of mere weeks and it's a little... exhausting. Even on a Saturday morning like this one -- it's sunny out and actually above freezing, which is rare for February -- Blaine is dragging without his usual medium drip.

"Oh, Blaine, have you met the new barista?" Tina asks when they get to the counter. "He makes the best drinks, *and* he dances while he brews them. Isn't that awesome?"

Josh is grinning at the barista in question, who is bouncing a little behind the counter. "Hey man, Tina and I'll get our usuals, and Blaine here just gets a medium drip, the wuss."

"With an extra shot," Blaine mutters.

"With an extra shot, apparently," Josh adds. "Blaine's moving up in the world."

"As you wish," the barista says brightly. "So that's a triple shot mocha with whip -- extra whip -- a large chai soy, and a medium drip with an extra shot. Anything else that looks interesting today?"

Blaine looks up after Josh has paused for a long moment to catch the tail end of what appears to be a once-over from Josh directed at the barista. "What would you recommend?" Josh says cheekily. "Actually, you pick something for me to try." He grins. "I'm sure I'll love whatever it is."

The barista blushes a little, either embarrassed or charmed by Josh's flirting -- Blaine can't be sure which - - and looks intently into the pastry case. "Well, I guess it depends on whether you'll be eating it by yourself or sharing it."

"Oh, I'm pretty sure I'll be sharing it with Tina," Josh replies with a glance to Tina. Blaine frowns -- he likes pastries too. "Blaine likes to keep his pastries for himself."

The barista finishes his perusal of the pastry case and nods decisively. "Chocolate hazelnut cookie it is. You both seem like people who like nuts, and you can never go wrong with chocolate."

"Oh yes, we're very fond of nuts," Tina says.

"Anything else?" the barista asks after a moment, smile bright.

Blaine looks at the pastry case and his eyes light on the chocolate scone. "Can I have one of those scones, please?" he asks, pointing as politely as he can.

"Oh man, those are awesome, that's a great choice," the barista says enthusiastically. "You want me to warm it up for you?"

Blaine bounces a little, excited even without any caffeine. "Absolutely. Thank you so much."

"No problem, man. That's gonna be \$23.47, guys."

Blaine reaches past Josh and Tina -- who have both pulled out money -- to hand the barista two twenties. "I'm paying for whoever orders next, and you can keep the rest."

"Thanks," he replies, looking down at the money before holding out a hand to Blaine. "My name's Mike."

"Blaine." He pauses, glaring over at Josh. "Obviously."

"Yeah, I got that part," Mike says with a grin. "Thanks for the tip. Why don't you guys find a table while I make your drinks?" He dances away towards the espresso machine, twirling once before grabbing the cups and starting the process.

"He really does dance when he makes drinks," Blaine observes. "I didn't think you meant that part literally."

"Mmm, it's quite the sight," Tina replies as they move towards the tables. When they've settled in -- Josh sprawls over two chairs while Tina and Blaine keep themselves fairly contained -- Tina looks at Blaine seriously. "So. Tell me everything."

Blaine looks at her confused. "About?"

"Oh, the national debt, Callahan's internship, the Red Sox' chances next season, the quality of the latest snowfall." She swats him lightly on the arm. "The guy you've been seeing! And don't try to deny it -- you



came to class completely flushed and your hair was twice its normal volume. You've obviously been getting your mack on." Blaine flushes at the memory of Kurt's lips and hands on him last week and stares resolutely into his coffee. "How's life with the new boyfriend?"

Blaine shrugs, smiling a little. "We're both pretty busy, but it's...nice," he says, blush creeping into his cheeks. Nice is an understatement.

"Nice?" Tina asks with a raised eyebrow.

"Really nice," Blaine offers, too tired to be more eloquent.

He's saved from Tina's continued questioning when Mike sets their drinks and pastries on the table. "Just give me a holler if you guys need anything else," he says as he moonwalks back towards the counter.

Tina's gaze lingers on him a moment before she turns back to Blaine. "Alright, I'll let it go for now, but don't think I won't interrogate you later, Anderson." She sighs. "Speaking of the internship, I think I'm freaking out a little. My resume's excellent, and I did well in his class, but who knows?" she says, shrugging her shoulders.

Blaine nods in agreement. "I know what you mean. I think *maybe* I have a chance of getting it, but everyone's really smart, and I didn't really speak up as much as I should have."

They both look expectantly at Josh.

"Oh, I didn't apply," Josh informs them, his tone indifferent. "I'm just going to Harvard Law because I can, and it's fun, but I'm gonna go to Harvard Medical School next, I think. At least then I'll have a built-in hot guy to drool over." He nods towards Mike. "He's hot and smart and he has rhythm. It's like he's a triple threat."

Tina smacks Josh on the arm this time. "Stop objectifying the hot barista, Josh, it's not becoming."

"Stop pretending you're my mother, Tina," he says, swatting her arm lightly in return. "It's not particularly attractive on you, either."

"Oh shut up."

"Can you two just... give the caffeine some time to kick in before you continue bickering like an old married couple?" Blaine mutters, sipping his coffee.

Tina and Josh exchange a grin before Tina reaches for the cookie. She holds it up tantalizingly between them, and Josh leans forward to take a bite.

"You know," Blaine says dryly, settling back in his chair and picking up his chocolate scone, "if you're competing for his attention, I think you're doing it wrong."

His friends exchange another grin before Tina makes a pleasant *humming* noise around her bite of cookie. "Or so, so right."

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Weddings are a series of moments.

There are the moments that make people laugh, the moments that make people cry, the moments where people do both because they can't decide which is right. There are the moments captured on film, the moments when words mean a lot, and the moments when sometimes no words mean that much more. There are the moments people remember by touch and taste and smell and sound. There are the moments where disaster strikes and crises are averted, the moments people would rather forget. There are the moments that are the favorites, the moments that are cliché moments, and the moments that people don't expect to be a *moment* at all. There are the moments that aren't really moments at all, the moments that turn into hours that pass in an alcohol-induced haze.

There are the moments before the wedding, too. There's the moment Sugar breaks down into tears because her hair won't curl. There's the moment Sugar makes fun of Blaine for his choice in tuxedo, not because of the color (the vest and tie and pocket square are all pink, of course), but because it means that he and Kurt are going to sort of match. There's the moment he pulls out the hair product and uses a small dollop to give his hair just a little bit of hold and control, and there's the moment he gets the brilliant idea to use some of it on Sugar to give her hair some personality. There's the moment she slips into her dress and doesn't cry, and there's the moment she blots her lips after applying lipstick that's her *moment*, the one where it hits her that *she's actually getting married*. There's the inevitable panic that follows ("I'm getting *married* --") and the rush of joy that settles in soon after ("I'm marrying an Irishman!").

There are the moments during the wedding, the ones that are more striking to Blaine than he'd expected. There's the moment that Mr. Motta gives Sugar away, the moment that it hits Blaine that Sugar's getting married, and he feels a surge of pride. There's the moment he catches Kurt's eye during the ceremony and can't breathe because Kurt looks like something out of a dream, ethereal and bangs swept up off of his forehead and styled, his eyes misty and his smile warm. There's the moment Burt reaches for Carole's hand, the moment Kurt fumbles in his pocket for his handkerchief. There's the moment when Rory and Sugar are pronounced man and wife, the moment where Sugar yanks him down into a kiss that's not entirely appropriate, the moment no one cares and the moment her foot pops.

There are moments at the reception (at the Sugar Shack, because where else would it be?), the ones that stand out to Blaine the most. There's the moment that Kurt curls around Blaine as Blaine studies the set list for the night (he's singing the first two songs and maybe a few more throughout the evening, but the music entertainment is, for the most part, being left to Sugar's cousin Anthony and a playlist of songs on an iPod). There's the moment Sugar says something during their first dance (Blaine does a take on "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You") and then she blushes, embarrassed, and the moment that follows, when Rory just smiles and laughs and Blaine sees him mouth the words *I love you*. There's the moment Blaine takes a break between the first song and the second to take a drink of water, the moment the music for the second song starts to play and Blaine turns to the stage, bewildered.

There's the moment Mr. Motta offers Sugar his hand, the moment that Kurt starts to sing. It's the moment that moves Blaine (figuratively, of course, not literally, because he's rooted to the spot, staring, transfixed). There's the moment Carole sidles up next to him and says that Kurt stole the song because it reminds him of Blaine. There's the moment Kurt's eyes find Blaine's across the bar, the moment *the smiles returning to their faces*.

There's the moment Blaine steals Sugar away for a dance, cradling her against him, his hand on the small of her back. There's the moment they sing along (*love me, love me, say that you love me*), the moment they laugh until their cheeks hurt. There's the moment he twirls her in endless circles, the moment she dips him and his legs get tangled up in the skirt of her dress. There's the moment she wraps her arm around his neck, the moment they dance cheek to cheek and he murmurs, "What am I going to do without you for a whole month?" into her ear.

There's the moment that Blaine sits at the bar, nursing his glass of champagne, the moment Kurt's arms wrap around his waist, his lips moist against Blaine's neck. There's the moment Kurt asks how much longer Blaine wants to stay, the moment he asks if Blaine wants to come back to his place. There's the

moment Blaine teases Kurt about having a waiting period and how weddings must do it for him, the moment Kurt groans into his shoulder about being out of practice. There's the moment Blaine turns to face him, the moment that's charged and electric and heavy with want.

It's the moment he's been looking for.

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Blaine wraps his arms around Kurt's waist while Kurt tries to unlock the door to his apartment, his teeth nipping at Kurt's earlobe. The keys clash against the doorknob as Kurt gasps, hand scrambling against the door for purchase. "Stop that," he breathes, fumbling with the keys some more. "I can't concentrate when you're doing that." Blaine ignores him and presses up behind him; he knows Kurt can feel him growing hard against his ass, can tell by the way Kurt makes a half-choked sound and grabs at the door knob again. Blaine presses him further against the door and pries the keys from Kurt's fingers; he kisses down the side of Kurt's face -- the corner of his eyebrow, his eye, his cheek, his mouth, his jaw -- and unlocks the door.

Kurt falls forward into the apartment clumsily, tugging Blaine along with him. It doesn't take him long to right himself though, and within seconds he's got Blaine backed up against the inside of the door, deadbolt clicking into place. His mouth is on Blaine's instantaneously, tongue seeking out Blaine's, hands working between them to unbutton Blaine's suit jacket. Blaine lets Kurt take the lead for a little while, mimics Kurt's actions as they toe off their shoes and socks in the front room and toss their jackets onto the couch. It's not a battle for power or dominance, not like it was with Sebastian; it's *need* more than anything. It's want. And Blaine hasn't let himself really want something in awhile.

Their belts are discarded in the hallway on the way to the bedroom, fingers fumbling to undo the buttons of their vests. Blaine's the last to shrug his off, hot pink falling to the floor in the doorway of the bedroom (Kurt's might've ended up on the floor of the bathroom across the hall, Blaine can't be sure). Kurt breaks the kiss to focus on unbuttoning Blaine's dress shirt, swearing. "It's too dark," he huffs out. "I can't see. Can I just --" His hands leave Blaine for a moment to turn on the small lamp on the nightstand and Blaine misses him almost instantly. He's not even sure where this is coming from, the pent-up desire and craving. Blaine hasn't felt needed -- wanted -- in a long time, but this is so much more than that. It's -- it's *Kurt*, pale and smooth and perfectly sculpted; Blaine wants their mouths fused together again and Kurt's ass under his hands. Kurt makes him feel his age, or maybe even a little older, and Blaine loves that. He loves feeling like he's finally growing up and he loves that Kurt doesn't take himself too seriously. Kurt loves his sense of honor, his muscles. Kurt makes him feel like a man.

Blaine cups Kurt's head in his hands and pulls him in for another kiss, wet and over-eager but *god*, he could spend the rest of his life kissing Kurt. Kurt tastes like mint and champagne and Blaine can smell his cologne, the scent thick and heavy on his neck. Blaine just *wants*. Kurt arches into it, undoing the buttons of Blaine's shirt; Blaine shrugs it off impatiently and reaches for the hem of his undershirt. Kurt just gapes at him, hands feather-light at Blaine's hips. "God, you're gorgeous," he breathes. "You're so trim and your *arms* --" He lets out a half-choked sound as he runs his hands over Blaine's biceps and licks his lips.

Blaine tackles him to the bed, hand furiously working open Kurt's dress shirt. Kurt's face colors a little once Blaine has the buttons undone and sits up a little, straddling Kurt's waist. Kurt is *perfect*, all hard, firm lines, his hair askew. He looks so *good*, and Blaine chuckles a little at the thought that crosses his mind. "What?" Kurt asks, breathless. "Why are you laughing?"

Blaine shakes his head and reaches for the button and zipper of Kurt's slacks. "It's nothing," he murmurs, leaning in for a kiss.

Kurt places a hand firmly against Blaine's chest. "Tell me. I promise I won't get mad."

Blaine bites his lip but can't help the smile that spreads across his face. "I was just thinking that age has been really good to you."

Kurt squeezes his eyes shut and whines. "Why would you say that?" he groans. "That is not what I need to hear right before sex."

"It's a compliment," Blaine says dryly, trying to appease him. "You were the one who insisted I tell you." He dips his thumbs beneath the waistband of Kurt's pants and tugs a little. "I still want these off. Does that make you feel better?"

The corner of Kurt's mouth turns upwards and he lifts his ass off the mattress, letting Blaine take his pants off. Kurt's legs are lean but defined, his calves curved and muscular; Blaine can't take his eyes off of them as he tosses Kurt's pants over his shoulder. He runs his hands over Kurt's calves, up and around and behind Kurt's knees -- "Hey," Kurt says, poking at Blaine's arm with his toe. "Pants?"

Blaine hums at him, peppering kisses down the inside of Kurt's calf. "So good to you," he murmurs against Kurt's skin.

"Blaine," Kurt gasps, arching a little off the mattress again. "Take your pants off and get up here *right now*." Blaine sits up on his knees and fumbles with his button and zipper, shucking his pants down and kicking them off of the foot of the bed before crawling back up towards Kurt. Kurt reaches a hand around and grabs Blaine's ass, tugging him in close --

It occurs to Blaine then, with Kurt's hand on his ass and their cocks pressed together, two layers of thin fabric separating them, that he's actually going to do this. He's going to have sex for the first time in sixteen months and it's not with Sebastian. Blaine's last memories of an encounter like this aren't exactly bad, but they're riddled with the reminder of how badly Blaine had interpreted all of the signs. The last time he was in bed with someone *knowing* he was going to have sex, Blaine thought he was going to get married and god, he just came from Sugar's wedding --

"Hey," Kurt murmurs softly, hand caressing absently at Blaine's side. "You with me?"

He blinks down at Kurt and exhales heavily. It's Kurt, Kurt, *Kurt*, not Sebastian. Kurt isn't Sebastian. Kurt's nothing like Sebastian. Kurt isn't going to break up with him. Kurt wants him, wants to be with him. Kurt has been putting this off because he wanted to make sure Blaine understood that this relationship is about more than just sex. Kurt has always, always taken care of him.

"Shit," Kurt hisses, hands flexing at Blaine's waist. "It's too soon -- I shouldn't have assumed that --"

"Don't," Blaine murmurs, running his thumb up and over the apple of Kurt's cheek. Kurt's eyes flutter shut and he inhales sharply, leaning into the touch. "I want this," Blaine insists, pressing his lips against Kurt's. "I want you."

Kurt kisses the inside of Blaine's palm and drags Blaine's hand down to his chest where his heart is *pounding*. "You have to be sure," Kurt says airily. "Because once we start, I can't stop. It's... been awhile."

Blaine kisses the corner of Kurt's lips, his neck just below his ear, his eyebrow; he feels Kurt smile and they both start to relax a little. "So we go for round two later," he mumbles. "Right now..." He rolls his hips down and has to fight back a gasp at how good it feels; he wants to stay like this always, fused to Kurt, muscles strung too tight. Kurt's hand tightens on his ass and Blaine rocks down again, burying his face in Kurt's neck and sucking at the skin there. Kurt pants underneath him, breath hot and too-loud in Blaine's ear; he arches again, spine curving so his body molds to Blaine's and he cants his hips upward, matching each of Blaine's thrusts. Blaine takes his time to set a rhythm, tries to build and enjoy and make it last; he

works a hand between them to try and toy with the waistband of Kurt's boxer briefs. Kurt's hand immediately flies up to grip at Blaine's shoulder, nails digging into the material covering Blaine's ass. His fingers are shaking and his hips have stilled, so Blaine pulls back to look at him properly. Kurt's eyes are squeezed shut and he's worrying his lip between his teeth, breathing loud and fast through his nose. "Are - are you close?"

Kurt nods, whimpering slightly. "I'm sorry," he gasps. "It's just -- it's been four years, I knew I wasn't going to last."

Blaine's eyes widen a little. "Four years?"

Kurt lips thin into a line. "I really am a prude, aren't I?" he sighs. "I'm ruining this, I'm talking too much and --"

"Kurt," Blaine laughs. "It's not that. It's flattering, it's just -- this really means something to you, doesn't it?"

Kurt's eyes are warm when he opens them, warm and fixed on Blaine in a way that makes Blaine's stomach flip. "Yeah," Kurt breathes, "you do."

Blaine darts down to kiss him again, fast and hard and desperate; he grips Kurt's hip tightly and rolls his hips again, over and over as Kurt's nails dig into him. Blaine wants this, he wants it so badly; he wants Kurt and he wants to make Kurt happy, wants to give back as much as he's been given. Kurt closes himself off to so much of the world, to people and passions and whims, but he's let Blaine in and that's -- it doesn't make any sense. Blaine doesn't get it, doesn't understand what he did that makes Kurt want him so much, but that's also sort of the best part, because it means that Blaine doesn't have to be something he's not. Blaine wraps his hand around to the small of Kurt's back and trails his nails lightly down the curvature of Kurt's spine, wanting to be closer --

Kurt breaks their steady stream of kisses and pulls away with a sharp, loud gasp, tossing his head back against the pillows and arching impossibly closer off of the bed and into Blaine's body. Blaine feels Kurt come against him, feels the pulse between them and the wetness against their boxer briefs; he flattens his palm against Kurt's back and waits for Kurt to come down, resisting the urge to kiss him again. Kurt's grip on his ass finally relaxes and his whole body goes slack, falling back onto the mattress. Blaine's lips fall to Kurt's clavicle, pressing feather-light kisses there. "I haven't come like that in years," Kurt pants, rubbing a

hand over his face. "From just -- just this. I swear I had to have been a teenager." Blaine smiles against his chest because Kurt is *adorable* when he's flustered and rambling --

Kurt's fingers hook under Blaine's chin, tilting his head up so their eyes meet. "And I swear to god, Blaine Anderson," he says seriously, "if you make one joke about my age, I am pushing you out of this bed and onto the floor."

Blaine grins at him and curls in closer, lips trailing across Kurt's cheek. "Where did you get the idea that I'd do something like that?"

Kurt groans and pushes against Blaine's shoulder, rolling them so that he hovers over Blaine and *damn*, if that doesn't make Blaine's stomach twist and his dick impossibly harder. "Kurt," he chokes out, guiding Kurt's hand to the waistband of his boxer briefs. "Touch me."

Kurt glances down and grins; he reaches a hand down and trails his knuckles over the outline of Blaine's cock, the touch barely-there and Blaine needs *more* -- "Like this?" Kurt asks impishly. Blaine whines and pivots his hips up a little. "I did start this," Kurt sighs. "I suppose I should --"

*Kurt, Kurt, Kurt, not Sebastian --*

"Don't finish that sentence," Blaine pleads, reaching up quickly and pressing two fingers to Kurt's lips. "Please, don't." Kurt arches an eyebrow at him in silent question, but Blaine just shakes his head. He's hard and unbelievably turned on and he just wants *Kurt*. Kurt smiles a little before puckering his lips to kiss Blaine's fingers; he opens his mouth and little wider and sucks both digits in, tongue flicking against the pads of Blaine's fingers. Blaine chokes out a groan, his hips rocking up again of their own accord. "Please," he breathes again. "I want you so bad."

It's finally enough for Kurt, who releases Blaine's fingers with a too-loud *smack*, hooking his fingers into Blaine's waistband and tugging down. "Lift your hips," he whispers. Blaine obliges and Kurt tugs his boxer briefs down, discarding them god knows where. Kurt's hand wraps around his dick and Blaine's breath hitches. "Sorry," Kurt laughs, removing his hand and fumbling through a nightstand drawer. "Dry, let me just -- there." He unearths a bottle of lube and coats his palm before crawling back towards Blaine.

"Wait," Blaine breathes, sitting up a little. Kurt sits back on his heels and watches as Blaine climbs into his lap and wraps his arms around Kurt's neck. "Like this. I want us like this." Kurt smiles and envelops



Blaine's mouth with his own; he slides his tongue into Blaine's mouth as he snakes a hand between them, hand wrapping around Blaine's cock again. He strokes a few times, hard and firm, causing Blaine to buck into his grasp.

"Like this?" Kurt asks against his lips, stroking a little faster.

"Yes," Blaine gasps. "But -- closer."

Kurt places his free hand on the small of Blaine's back and tugs him closer, leaving barely enough room between them to actually do this effectively but Blaine doesn't care, not at all. It's Kurt, warm against him, happy and sated because of Blaine, returning the favor because this is what Kurt does; Kurt makes Blaine happy. Kurt's hand is moving again, faster now and Blaine can't fight back the sounds that escape him, the moans and whines and breathless pants as Kurt holds them together, Blaine fucking into his hand. He's wanted this for so, so long, to be this close to someone, to have someone want him this way again, it's just - it's so -- "Yes," Blaine says again, keening. "Yes, yes, *yesyesye* --"

Kurt kisses him again, hot and open-mouthed and swallowing Blaine's gasps. Blaine presses himself impossibly closer, dragging his teeth along Kurt's bottom lip as he breaks the kiss with a groan. Blaine falls forward -- his weight tipping Kurt onto his back and against the pillows -- and comes all over Kurt's stomach and hand. Blaine's muscles ache, he's shaking all over and he can't stay like this anymore; he detaches himself from Kurt and flops onto his back, breathing hard.

He starts a little when he feels something cold and damp on his skin; he opens his eyes to find Kurt smiling at him, washcloth in hand. He's naked now too, underwear probably in the bathroom or on the floor. "I was messier than you were," Kurt says, laughing slightly. "But I figured as long as I was cleaning up --" He turns slightly on the bed and looks at the bathroom as if it's offended him. He lifts his hand and tosses the washcloth across the hall and into the bathroom. It lands on the side of the tub with a loud *smack*. "Good enough," Kurt sighs, tugging the comforter up over them both. "Is this... okay?" he asks, fingers curling around the edge of the blanket. "You don't have to stay --"

"I want to stay," Blaine assures him. "I just -- can we talk for a while?"

Kurt raises an eyebrow at him, apparently amused. "You're not exhausted?"

Blaine shuffles further under the comforter and takes comfort in the pillow. “No, I am,” he admits. “I just... want to fall asleep knowing I’m with you.”

Kurt smiles. “So what -- twenty questions?” Blaine laughs, tentatively hooking his ankle over Kurt’s. Kurt doesn’t pull away. “What do you want to know?”

Blaine shrugs. “I don’t know,” he sighs. He closes his eyes, leans in close and tries to orient himself to the way Kurt smells, the way his body feels under Blaine’s fingertips. *Kurt, Kurt, Kurt* -- “Why’d you sing tonight?” he asks, opening his eyes. “Why now?”

Kurt bites his lip and closes his own eyes, breathing out loudly through his nose. “Oh,” he says faintly. “*That* kind of pillow talk.”

“You don’t have to answer that,” Blaine says quickly. “I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

Kurt opens his eyes slowly and considers Blaine for a moment. “But it’ll make *you* comfortable.” He’s quiet for a little while, eyes taking in Blaine’s face, his neck and arms and chest. Blaine reaches over and takes hold of Kurt’s hand, and it’s only then that Kurt speaks. “My mom,” Kurt answers quietly. “I used to sing with her all the time when I was little. After she died, it just... hurt too much.”

“So why tonight?”

The corner of Kurt’s mouth turns up into a barely-there smile. “You were happy. That made me happy.”

And *there’s* the Kurt Blaine’s been trying so hard to cling to for the last hour, selfless and beaming and trusting. Blaine leans in and kisses Kurt, soft and slow, and the apartment feels a lot warmer than it should. “Twenty questions,” he says, nudging a knee between Kurt’s legs to get closer. “Ask me something. Teach me a thing or two about pillow talk. I’ve never been very good at it.”

Kurt grins at him. “Favorite vegetable.”

Blaine laughs. “Radishes.”

“Seriously?”

“Hey!” Blaine whines. “They’re totally neglected.”

Kurt's eyes widen a little. "They're neglect -- oh my god," he chuckles. He closes his eyes and shakes his head before cupping Blaine's cheek with his hand and pulling him in for a kiss. "You're adorable." Blaine feels a faint blush creep onto his cheeks which is ridiculous: they're in bed together, they're naked, they've just had sex, why is he blushing? "Your turn," Kurt prods, nudging Blaine's nose with his own.

They trade questions and answers and kisses for a while longer, hands and legs pressed together beneath the warmth of the comforter. Kurt doesn't pull away, and Blaine stays. He stays and talks until his throat starts to hurt and his eyelids start to droop, and Kurt indulges him. Blaine stays and he stays awake, because awake is here and now and Boston and Kurt, and this is so much better.

Blaine stays and falls asleep, the sound of Kurt's heartbeat in his ear.

\*\*\*\*\*

The first thing Kurt notices when he wakes up is that he's boneless. Boneless, weightless, well-rested and sated. It's the best he's slept in ages: his muscles don't ache and he doesn't feel like he needs to sleep more; he's not cold and he's --

He's not alone.

He blinks his eyes open blearily and shifts his head a little. Blaine's curled into his side, half on top of him with an arm slung around Kurt's waist, face nuzzled against Kurt's chest. Blaine's always been a cuddler.

He's also naked.

Kurt can see the dip of his shape, his muscles and bones just beneath the comforter. A quick glance at the clock on the nightstand tells Kurt he's slept in (only a little, maybe an hour or so). His eyes flutter shut again as he drifts somewhere between sleep and consciousness, fingers carding through Blaine's now loose curls; he lets his mind wander, remembers his impulsiveness and the tangled limbs and searing kisses. He'll never admit it to Blaine, but weddings *do* sort of do it for him. Blaine looked amazing, yes, but he looked happier than Kurt's ever seen him, relaxed and at ease and proud. For the first time in a long time, Kurt didn't worry. He didn't stress, he didn't plan.

A quarter of an hour's passed by the time Kurt's really ready to get up; Blaine's half-hard cock is pressed against his thigh and it's starting to get a little distracting. He leans down and presses a kiss to Blaine's

forehead before withdrawing; Blaine whines a little but curls up with a pillow in lieu of Kurt and continues to sleep.

Kurt tugs on a pair of sweatpants and the shirt he'd lent Blaine months ago and tries not to think about exactly how much money is sprawled out on the floor of his apartment in designer clothes. He brews a pot of coffee and settles onto a barstool sleepily with his mug (*ask me about my briefs*) and his laptop, clicking the link for his online subscription of *The New York Times*. He's absorbed in the middle of an article on the current case the Supreme Court is reviewing when --

"Morning."

Kurt glances over at the hallway and finds Blaine shuffling towards him sleepily, yawning and rubbing his eyes. He's thrown on his briefs and dress shirt from the night before but isn't wearing anything else. None of the buttons are done up; he's not even wearing his undershirt. "Hi," Kurt breathes, smiling against Blaine's mouth as he leans in for a brief kiss. Blaine drops his head to Kurt's shoulder and scoots closer.

Yeah, Kurt could get used to waking up to this.

"Why didn't you sleep longer?" Kurt laughs, hand rubbing absently at Blaine's back.

"Wanted to be with you," Blaine mumbles. "You were out here."

"We can always go back to bed," Kurt suggests. "You said your morning class was cancelled today, and I took the day off because of the wedding. We have until what, two o'clock?"

"Mmm, twelve-thirty," Blaine corrects, yawning again. "Need to go back to my room. Shower, change, get books, check on Pavarotti. Afternoon class is at two."

"That's still more than three hours," Kurt points out, anchoring his hand at the small of Blaine's back, the smooth material of the shirt sliding against their skin. "Are you hungry? I can make breakfast." Blaine makes a noncommittal sound into Kurt's shoulder, his fingers toying with the hem of Kurt's t-shirt. Kurt rolls his eyes but grins anyway. "You just want to go back to bed."

Blaine shakes his head and kisses up Kurt's neck slowly, lips soft and moist against his skin; Kurt has a momentarily vivid flashback of Blaine's mouth there the night before, hot and wet. "Don't have to," Blaine

says, nudging Kurt's legs apart with his knee so that he swivels on the bar stool. "Can do this right... here." He cover Kurt's mouth with his own, hands gripping Kurt's hair.

Kurt leans into it and has to try really hard not to fall off of the bar stool and into Blaine's arms. "What do you want?" he asks, hands skirting beneath Blaine's open dress shirt to touch the warm skin beneath.

Blaine trails kisses from Kurt's mouth to his cheek and back to his ear, crowding in close. "Want to blow you," he murmurs. "Want to blow you so *bad*. Didn't get to touch you at all last night." He drops a kiss to Kurt's shoulder and presses the heel of his palm against Kurt's crotch; Kurt's cock spasms a little at the attention, growing harder. Kurt loses himself in Blaine's touch again, threads his fingers through Blaine's hair and moans a little into Blaine's ear. He's absolutely incapable of saying no to Blaine.

Blaine sinks to his knees and licks a stripe over the material covering the hard line of Kurt's cock; Kurt's hips buck up of their own accord and he has to grip the edge of the island to keep from falling to the floor. "Think you can last a little longer?" Blaine asks, not tearing his eyes away from the bulge in Kurt's pants. The honest answer is probably no, but Kurt can't bring himself to say it as Blaine mouths at the head of his cock through the fabric.

"Condom," Kurt gasps, knuckles turning white. "Do -- do you have a condom?"

Blaine pulls away a little, still not meeting Kurt's eyes; Kurt can see his mouth watering and *god*, Kurt just wants to take his pants off and let Blaine do what he wants. "No," Blaine mumbles, heel applying pressure to Kurt's cock again while his mouth resumes its attention to the head.

Kurt closes his eyes in frustration and very, very begrudgingly tugs at Blaine's curls. "Neither do I," he pants. "And I'm really not comfortable doing much more without one."

Blaine looks up at him and blinks a few times, clearly trying to focus. "I -- but -- four years, right? And I haven't, not in over a year --"

"No, I know," Kurt breathes, head clearing a little. "I just -- until we're sure, you know?" Blaine buries his face against Kurt's thigh and whines. "There's plenty we can do to keep ourselves occupied."

"Like what?" Blaine mumbles against Kurt's pants.

Kurt rolls his eyes and tugs at Blaine's hair so that they're looking at each other again. "Like talking," he says with a laugh. "You seemed to be a fan of that last night." Blaine smiles at him. "And breakfast," Kurt adds when Blaine's stomach growls. "I can cook or we can go to the bakery down the street --"

"The one with the apricot thumbprint cookies?"

Kurt grins at him. "You remembered."

Blaine hums and pushes himself to his feet. "I think we should stay in," he suggests. "You could teach me how to cook something and we could curl up on the couch and maybe..." He toys with the hem of Kurt's shirt again, looking up at Kurt through his lashes. "Maybe we could repeat last night. That was okay, right?"

"Hmm, are crepes okay?" Kurt asks, draping his arms around Blaine's neck.

Blaine leans in for another kiss. "Only if they come with a side of you."

"Oh my god," Kurt laughs against his lips. "Your pick-up lines are as bad as mine."

"Or I could just --" Blaine hooks his arms around Kurt's waist and tugs forward, trying to pull Kurt off of the bar stool. "Pick you up and take you to the couch myself."

"No -- no!" Kurt yelps as Blaine tugs again, successfully unseating him. The angle is awkward and Blaine can't quite hold him up like this; together, they go tumbling onto the floor, Kurt reaching around to cradle the back of Blaine's head in his hands so it doesn't hit the linoleum floor.

They laugh into each other's mouths, trading kisses, and compromise by staying on the kitchen floor.

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They don't leave the apartment until one-thirty.

They stumble downstairs into Kurt's nine-year-old Navigator after putting on real clothes (the torn-up jeans and henley Kurt throws on doesn't make it any easier to leave) before heading to the coffee shop. Blaine pays for them both as well as the person behind them; they hold hands while they wait for their

coffee (Blaine's medium drip and Kurt's non-fat mocha), Kurt's lips peppering kisses on his ear and neck, an arm slung around Blaine's waist.

It takes an extra five minutes, four attempts at good-bye, and three really, *really* long kisses for Blaine to get out of the car again, Kurt grinning after him. Blaine's got less than ten minutes to run up to his room before class. He tosses his suit jacket and vest onto his bed, whistles cheerfully in greeting at Pavarotti, grabs his messenger bag and coffee and rushes back downstairs, hoping he hasn't kept Tina waiting too long.

Tina's waiting for him outside of the building, leaning against the brick, a pair of sunglasses shielding her eyes. "Hey," Blaine greets breathlessly. "I'm sorry I'm late."

She lolls her head down and peers at him over the frames of her sunglasses, a grin slowly spreading across her face. "Look at you," she drawls cheekily. "Doing the walk of shame. I'm almost proud." Blaine glances down at his wrinkled slacks and button-down before meeting her gaze again, blushing furiously. She laughs and offers him her arm. "Come on, Anderson. We can do it together."

It takes him until they're inside the building and halfway down the hall for him to realize what she's implying. He glances over at her, past where their arms are linked. Her hair is pulled back in a clip, tangled and messy, the blue sticking out brilliantly; her camisole is wrinkled and she's wearing a button-down that is far too big for her over it, tied at her belly button. "That," he says pointedly, "is a men's shirt."

"Fashion knows no gender," Tina says airily.

"Walk of shame?" he parrots, flashing her a grin. Her mouth twitches a little. "Josh?"

"And Mike."

Blaine stops walking. "Wait, *what?*"

She pushes her sunglasses up on top of her head and rolls her eyes at him. "Nuh-uh," she says in a sing-song voice, tugging him towards the door the their afternoon class. "If you don't have to share your dirty little secrets, neither do I."

"My secret isn't dirty!" he argues, holding onto his cup a little more tightly so he doesn't drop it. "And it doesn't involve two other people!"

Tina raises an eyebrow. "If it isn't dirty, I'm not sure you're doing it right."

\*\*\*\*\*

Blaine intends to see Kurt again the next evening, but Kurt is swamped with some new case as soon as he gets back from his day off and can't find a free moment to come see his boyfriend in person for a solid two weeks. And Blaine doesn't really mind -- he's been busy since the semester started, and even with Sugar's wedding out of the way, he finds that every minute is filled with classes or writing papers or study group or gossiping with Tina or chatting with Wes. He and Kurt text when they can -- mostly at bedtime, brief exchanges of *just got home, exhausted. miss you. x* and *i'm drowning under mountains of paperwork* and *remind me why i went to law school again* and *i miss the way your body feels against mine*. It's not what Blaine would prefer, but it's not bad at all. He has a wonderful boyfriend and new friends and is actually doing really well in his classes.

But it does get a little frustrating for both him and Kurt that they can't seem to find a moment to see each other, so they plan an honest-to-god, scheduled a week in advance date for the first Friday of March. Blaine sends him a text to cheer them both up (*you will not believe which one of my friends is involved in a threesome*), and Kurt's reply makes him grin from ear to ear.

*idle gossip sounds perfect right now. dinner fri night? we can order take-out and put on a movie and not watch it.*

Blaine colors a little, squirming, and sends his reply.

*sounds perfect. i went ~shopping~*

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Blaine walks out of Professor Fielder's class with Tina to find a commotion around the bulletin board. Everyone has e-mail and smart phones and Twitter and Facebook, but Harvard Law is still so encumbered by history and tradition that some things are only ever posted in hard copy. It's endearing -- and frustrating.

He makes his way to the edge of the group crowding around the board and nudges the person next to him. "What's all the fuss about?"



“You know that murder that happened on New Year’s Eve? The Broadway star? Callahan’s defending the guy accused of killing her and he needs help with the caseload, so he’s hiring his interns early. He just posted the list.”

Blaine looks at Tina, who followed close behind him and heard the whole explanation. Together they squeeze their way to the front of the pack and manage to look at the list.

## INTERNSHIP AT CALLAHAN, BROWN, AND HUNTINGTON

2018

BLAINE ANDERSON

TINA COHEN-CHANG

SANTANA LOPEZ

SEBASTIAN SMYTHE

“Oh my god,” Blaine says quietly, shocked. He’d submitted his resume, tried hard in class, worked his ass off, but he hadn’t actually thought he’d *get the internship*. Not when so many other qualified students had applied too.

“Oh my god,” Tina echoes. She looks at him and grins.

“Oh my *god*.”

Tina yanks him into a hug. “You deserve this,” she says in his ear. “Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

“You too,” he says back. “You’re amazing and awesome and I knew you’d get this from the very beginning when you stood up to Callahan’s whole spiel about emotions in the courtroom.”

“So did I,” she replies, still grinning as she pulls back. “We’re gonna rock this internship.” She offers him a fistbump.

"Absolutely," he says as he meets her fist with his own. They hug once more, and then separate to head off to their next classes. Blaine wanders towards his next class, content to bask in the emotion of the moment. *He got the internship.*

He turns the corner and straight into Sebastian, who makes a grab for Blaine's elbow immediately to right him. "I'm sorry --" they both start and then stop, hesitating. Sebastian's back in green again, fedora atop his head, and the image is a little jarring for Blaine, who can't quite reconcile the Boston version of Sebastian with the California one.

Sebastian lets go of Blaine's arm, and they both shift uncomfortably, silent. They've hardly interacted at all since Callahan's last class -- Blaine had stayed in Boston for a good portion of his winter break (his trip to California only lasted a week), but he didn't run into Sebastian at all. He knows Sebastian's family usually spends their Christmas skiing in Vail; Santana probably went with them this year. Blaine only shares one class with Sebastian this quarter -- he doesn't have any with Santana at all.

Blaine rubs at his neck awkwardly and nods towards the hallway he's just come from. "Did you see the --"

"-- the list? Yeah, I saw it," Sebastian says. "I was actually looking for Santana. I don't think she's seen it yet. She's going to be ecstatic. She's worked her ass off. She really deserves something like this."

Blaine's not sure if Sebastian's implying anything there (namely that maybe Blaine hasn't worked as hard, doesn't deserve it), but Sebastian doesn't say anything more and Blaine doesn't really care what Sebastian thinks, anyway (well, not much). "Right," he says evenly.

It's Sebastian's turn to rub awkwardly at the back of his neck now, and he hoists the strap of his messenger bag a little higher up on his shoulder. "I... guess I'll see you Monday, then." He starts to move forward again, their shoulders brushing, and Blaine's stomach twists at the thought of walking into Callahan's conference room on Monday and seeing Sebastian there, how awkward and uncomfortable it's going to be to spend that much time together again --

"Wait," Blaine says quietly, reaching back and grabbing Sebastian's arm. Sebastian turns to look at him, eyebrow raised in silent question. "Can we just... be professional about this?" he asks quietly, pleading a little.

Sebastian's brows knits in apparent confusion. "Why wouldn't we -- oh." He rolls his eyes a little but there's a hint of a smile on his face. "By we, you mean Santana."

Blaine bites his lip. "Can you really blame me?"

Sebastian snorts a little. "She's generally pretty good about toning it down when the situation calls for it." Blaine just gives him a look, and Sebastian sighs. "Fine, I'll talk to her."

"Thank you," Blaine says.

Sebastian nods and straightens a little, offering his hand out to Blaine. "I guess I'll see you Monday?"

Blaine offers him a half-smile and his hand in return. "Monday."

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*To: theodore.anderson@gmail.com*

*From: blaine.anderson@gmail.com*

*Subject: Internship!*

*Hey Dad,*

*E-mailing you from my phone; class just got out and I have a few errands to run before I see Kurt tonight, but I wanted to share my good my news with you and Mom! One of my professors from last quarter -- Callahan -- he's one of the top defense attorneys in the state. He's defending the guy accused of murdering Rachel Berry, you know, the Broadway star Mom and I spent most of my visit home listening to? (Have Mom play you some of her stuff -- she and Jesse St. James sound like something out of a dream together.) Anyway, Callahan usually hires interns over the summer, but his caseload for this is huge so he hired them early, and he picked me! My friend Tina got chosen, too (and Sebastian, but don't mention that to Mom, it'll be fine, we're going to be professional about it, don't worry, okay?). Getting this internship is sort of a big deal around here and it'll really help me get a foot in the door later once I graduate and pass the bar.*

*I probably won't be able to make it home for spring break (I'm swamped with work for my classes as it is and now I've got the internship on top of it), but reassure Mom that I'll be home in May when some of the Warblers graduate, okay?*

*Love, Blaine*

## Chapter Nine

Blaine raps on the door of Kurt's apartment, beaming, box in hand. Kurt opens it after a moment and greets Blaine with a tired smile. "Hi!" Blaine says brightly, whisking by him into the apartment and setting the box down on the kitchen island. Kurt shuts the door behind him quietly and turns to face him. Blaine spins and sighs happily before reaching forward, cupping Kurt's face in his hands and kissing him soundly. "Hi."

"Hi," Kurt greets breathlessly, sagging onto one of the bar stools.

"I am having... the *best* day," Blaine announces, untying the ribbon on top of the box with a flourish and opening the box. "I brought dessert," he adds, flashing Kurt a grin. "Your favorite from the bakery down the street."

Kurt smiles faintly at him. "That's -- thank you."

Blaine hums and nudges his way between Kurt's legs, draping his arms around Kurt's neck. "I wasn't even thinking about the summer internship, you know? Because he's got so many people to choose from and I -- I know I've been applying myself, but I just -- I never thought --" He stills his fingers at the nape of Kurt's neck, pausing in his movements of playing with Kurt's hair. "Did you know?" he asks. "Did you know he was going to pick me?"

Kurt inhales sharply and shakes his head. "No," he says seriously. "I didn't even know he was hiring interns until lunch today. He dropped the list in front of me while I was eating my chicken salad sandwich and told me he'd already posted it."

Blaine grins. "So we were both pleasantly surprised, then." He fights down the happy noise that threatens to escape him because he finally feels like his life is coming together. He finally feels like his hard work has paid off. He feels like he's earned this. "Come on," Blaine urges, reaching down and tugging at Kurt's hand. "Let's figure out what we want from the Chinese place and curl up on the couch and celebrate --"

"Blaine." Kurt's hand doesn't loosen in his but he doesn't budge off of the stool.

Blaine moves in close again, thumb running over Kurt's knuckles. "What's the matter? Are -- aren't you happy for me?"

"Of course I am," Kurt breathes, squeezing Blaine's hand. "It's just -- Callahan made me co-counsel."

Blaine blinks at him. "What?"

"He made me co-counsel," Kurt repeats, a little breathless, and he looks like he's trying to fight back a smile but his eyes are also shining with tears. "And if -- if things go well, if we win this case, he's going to make me an associate."

Blaine beams at him. "But that's amazing!" he laughs, squeezing Kurt into a hug. "That's good, right? That's what you've wanted --"

"Yeah," Kurt affirms faintly. "It's -- I'm really lucky --"

Blaine shakes his head. "You're not," he insists. "I mean, maybe a little, but you've earned this. You've been working towards this almost your whole life, Kurt. This is huge." He hooks a chin over Kurt's shoulder and closes his eyes, tightening his arms around Kurt's body. "I'm really proud to be with someone like you." Kurt exhales, his hands shaking on Blaine's back. He pulls away too quickly, eyes downcast. "What's wrong?"

Kurt glances up at him and bites his lip; he inhales through his nose as if he's steeling himself. "We're going to be working together."

Blaine's brow wrinkles a little. "I guess we are," he says slowly. "And?"

Kurt's face falls at the same time his shoulders do, and his voice is quiet when he speaks. "And I don't -- I don't think we can keep seeing each other."

Blaine freezes, his whole body feels like it's gone ice cold and he can't be touching Kurt anymore, he can't. He drops Kurt's hand and steps away, gripping the edge of the kitchen island until his knuckles turn white. His stomach turns and he can't blink or turn away and his heart feels like a *knife's* gone through it --

No.

No.

"What?"

"I just --" Kurt's hand fidgets on his knee, clearly struggling not to reach out and take hold of Blaine's hand again ( -- *Sebastian's hand twitches on the table in a wildly transparent effort not to reach across the table for Blaine's hand again -- Kurt, Kurt, Kurt, not Sebastian --* ). "It's not professional," Kurt says after a moment, clearly uncomfortable. "It's not professional for you and I to continue to see each other while we're working together."

"So what?" Blaine asks quietly, and he can feel the onslaught of tears in his throat and *this can't be happening*. "You're breaking up with me?"

"No!" is Kurt's immediate answer, and his hand does reach out for Blaine's now, seemingly out of reflex more than anything. "It's not -- I don't want us to see other people," he admits, flushing and rubbing at the back of his neck awkwardly.

"Then... what are we doing?" Blaine asks, letting Kurt hold his hand but refusing to clutch back.

Kurt's lips twist as he tries to think of an answer. "We're taking a break," he answers finally. "We're just... hitting pause. Is that okay? I want --" He sighs and tugs at Blaine's hand a little, silently beckoning for Blaine to come closer. Blaine does, but he's hesitant, hesitant to put his hands on Kurt or let himself be touched, hesitant to get too close. "I want to pick up where we left off," he says softly, mimicking Blaine's earlier actions and running his thumb across Blaine's knuckles. "After the trial's over."

Blaine tries to mull it over in his brain, tries to formulate some sort of thought or opinion or response or reaction to it all, but he keeps coming up with the same thing, so he finally just asks, "Why? Is it --" He swallows and shifts his weight from one leg to the other. "Is it because of Callahan? Are you worried he won't hire you as an associate if he knows?"

"No," Kurt says again, the answer almost immediate; he colors a little and looks at the island for a moment. "A little," he says, backtracking. "But that's not the only reason. That's not why I'm concerned."

It's that that breaks down Blaine's walls a little, the fact that Kurt *cares* enough to really do this right; Blaine allows himself to crowd back into Kurt's personal space, standing between his legs and taking Kurt's head in his hands again. "What are you so afraid of?" he breathes, resting their foreheads together.

"You," Kurt says softly, nudging Blaine's nose with his own. "I'm worried about what it means for you."

Blaine pulls back a little, shaking his head. "I don't understand."

Kurt's lips thin into a line. "It's -- I know it seems shallow, worrying about image and how this might look to people, but -- I just -- I don't want people to think you didn't earn this. Because you did," Kurt emphasizes. "You earned this. And I don't want to take that away from you."

Blaine closes his eyes and it's all suddenly *there*, in the forefront of his mind, flooding his system, consuming him --

*-- You... got into Harvard Law? -- Halloween's next week, B -- Check out Mr. October! -- Hey, what's up Doc? -- Well, well, well, if it isn't Pinkie Pie -- you look like a gay Hugh Hefner's wet dream -- You're such a brown noser -- you're used to everything being easy for you -- you're used to getting your way -- didn't have Daddy around to drop a name or throw some money at the school -- you don't belong here --*

Blaine opens his eyes, his blood boiling a little. "I see your point."

Kurt bites his lip, clearly unconvinced. "I just --"

"No, I get it," Blaine snaps, pulling away fully now. He's not -- he's not mad at Kurt, really, he's not. He's just so tired of feeling like he has something to prove all of the time. He thought he was past this. "I mean, nobody believed I was actually smart enough to get into Harvard -- Santana thinks I bought my way in or had connections or something. It's not a far leap from that to assuming that I'd sleep with someone to get a job, right?" he says bitterly.

"Hey," Kurt says gently, reaching for his hand again. "I don't think that. I just --"

"-- don't want to give anyone else reason to, yeah, I know. I get it." He shakes his head and pulls away. "I don't think I can be here right now. I'll see you on Monday, okay?" He turns to go, but Kurt reaches out and grabs his arm gently.

"I still want to be with you, Blaine. I'm not -- I'm not giving up on us. I'm not saying goodbye to you. I just don't think it's a good idea for us to see each other outside the office right now. Please tell me you understand." Kurt looks at Blaine pleadingly, and Blaine sways towards him for a moment (*-- I'm not ready to give up on us -- I don't expect you to understand --*) before stepping back.

"I'm sorry. I can't. I can't understand how you can want to be with me and not want to be with me." It's somehow almost worse than Sebastian -- at least Sebastian just broke his heart and left it at that. Kurt is



trying to be noble and it just pulls Blaine apart in the worst way. And on some level, Kurt might even be right, but that doesn't change how much this hurts.

"Blaine --"

"When you're ready to be with me again, I'll be there, ready and waiting, but until then, I just can't be around you like this, I can't. So I'm going to go. I'll see you Monday." He grabs his bag from the barstool and strides towards the door.

"I'll be there, too, Blaine, I promise," Kurt says from behind him.

Blaine looks back at him over his shoulder and sighs. "I know." He opens the door and steps outside, closing the door firmly behind him before slumping against it. He pulls out his phone and hits speed dial number two as he walks down the stairs. Wes will know what to do. Wes always knows what to do.

*The voicemail box of the person you are trying to reach is full.*

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Monday morning, Blaine slides on one of his plainer suits, puts just enough gel in his hair to keep it from chaos, and ties his tie in a perfect Windsor knot before heading for the firm. He's the first to arrive (it *is* twenty minutes before Callahan told them to be there), so he waits patiently in the lobby, hands clutching the handle of the briefcase his father had overnighted as a celebratory gift.

Tina shows up ten minutes later with two paper cups in her hands, tea for herself and coffee for Blaine. Blaine accepts it with a faint smile, humming in answer to her buzzed and excited chatter. Sebastian and Santana arrive five minutes after that; Blaine compliments Santana's pearl necklace, and it's with her usual sarcastic bite that she informs him it was a gift. Sebastian elbows her and she rolls her eyes before gritting out a terse *thank you*.

They all sit in an awkward silence for the last five minutes before Kurt appears at the top of the stairs. "Follow me," he says, beckoning them up the stairs. The four of them trot up to him before he heads down the hall. He leads them into a conference room and gestures for them to take seats around the table. "You've probably seen me around campus, but for those who don't know, I'm Kurt Hummel and I'm co-counsel on this case. Mr. Callahan will go into more detail when he gets here, but he asked me to give you all a brief overview in the meantime."

He walks around the table and hands them each a tablet. His fingers brush against Blaine's when he gets to Blaine's spot at the table; Kurt pulls away quickly, flushing, and Blaine grips the tablet a little too hard. Blaine scrolls through the assembled photos and documents as Kurt keeps talking. "The case you've been brought in to assist on is the murder of Broadway star Rachel Berry. We are defending the man accused of killing her, Noah Puckerman. He claims that he didn't do it, but he is either unable or unwilling to provide us an alibi. The state's case against him, while not airtight, is compelling, and without an alibi, we're going to be hard pressed to keep him out of prison for a long time unless he takes a deal. He has also refused to do that, since he maintains his innocence." Blaine looks up from the tablet to find Kurt beaming at the group of them hopefully. "Mr. Callahan is hoping that you all might be able to either get an alibi out of him or convince him to take the plea bargain."

"What's the evidence against him?" Tina asks, frowning.

"It's mostly circumstantial, but without an alibi, it will likely be enough to sway the jury," Kurt replies.

"Her husband, Jesse St. James, came into their hotel room and found Mr. Puckerman kneeling over his dead wife, who'd been bludgeoned to death with a blunt object," Callahan says as he walks into the conference room. "The police also found a letter from the deceased on Puckerman's person once he'd been arrested."

"Was he holding the murder weapon?" Sebastian asks.

"Do we even know what the murder weapon was?" Santana tacks on, and Blaine's torn between rolling his eyes and smiling because no matter how professional Santana is, she's still, well, Santana.

"No --" Kurt starts.

"No," Callahan says, talking over him. "The medical examiner's office examined the head wound and determined that she was hit with a blunt object. Given the rest of the objects in the hotel room, it's likely Mr. Puckerman employed the use of a candlestick or something of that nature --"

"Allegedly," Tina interjects. Callahan ignores her, but Blaine flashes a smile in her direction.

"Mr. Puckerman refuses to give an alibi," Callahan says, clearly frustrated. "I'm sure I don't have to explain to you all how that looks." Blaine makes the mistake of catching Kurt's eye as Callahan says that; Kurt turns his attention back to their boss, jaw setting a little, a faint blush appearing on his cheeks. "Your job is

to find a way to relate to him,” Callahan explains. “Get him to trust you. You’re closer to him in age than I am -- see if that helps.” He pushes a stack of papers towards Kurt and beckons them all silently to the door. Kurt scrambles to transfer the stack into his briefcase and hastens to follow; the rest of the group starts to do the same.

Blaine clutches the handle of his briefcase tightly as they make their way into the elevator (he’s not sure why they’re taking the elevator down when they took the stairs up -- Callahan, probably) and out of the building. Their groups gets a lot of second looks from associates and interns and assistants (again, probably Callahan), and it makes Blaine uneasy. He’s suddenly hyper-aware of everything, how he’s dressed and if his hair is tame enough and the way he walks, if his posture’s good enough. And he hates this, hates fitting into the same mold, hates having to hide himself and pretend that he doesn’t like music and art and helping people. He hates being wedged between Sebastian and Santana and Kurt, hates feeling like he’s constantly trying to play a game of catch-up.

He’s always going to have something to prove.

He sits in his car for a few moments before following the rest of his co-workers to the jail; he closes his eyes and tries to get into a better headspace, tries to just breathe.

*You’re not your job. You’re not how much money you have in the bank. You’re not the car you drive. You’re not the contents of your wallet. You’re not your fucking khakis. You’re the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world.*

Somehow, he thinks breaking out into showtunes won’t go over very well with his boss.

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Blaine enters the small, dull meeting room at the jail after his co-workers. It’s going to take some getting used to to refer to them as that, because Callahan was his professor, Tina’s his friend, Santana’s... Santana, Sebastian’s his ex, and Kurt --

Blaine sucks in a breath as Sebastian’s arm brushes against his, and then he almost runs into Kurt’s back as he eyes the table to find a spot to sit down. He exhales slowly in an effort to keep himself collected as he digs out a notepad and pen. He looks up to see their client donning an orange jumpsuit and looking back over his shoulder --

Blaine knows that mohawk.

He'd know that mohawk anywhere.

He clamps his lips shut and resolutely does not speak, but he knows immediately what their client's alibi is (Puckerman, it's Puckerman, Blaine has to force himself to think of him that way and not --).

"Have a seat, Mr. Puckerman," Callahan says, tugging the chair out with a loud *screech*. "This is my co-counsel, Kurt Hummel," he introduces, indicating Kurt. Kurt offers their client his hand and a small smile; Puckerman returns the handshake, the handcuffs rattling a little, but he doesn't smile back. "And these," Callahan announces with a flourish, "are my interns. They'll be working on the case with us. I thought you all might want to get to know each other a little."

Puckerman raises an eyebrow at him. "Not to be rude," he drawls, "but shouldn't we be working on my defense?"

Callahan purses his lips. "I'd love to," he snaps, "but I can't do that without an alibi."

Puckerman sighs and leans back in his chair. "And I already told you, I can't give it to you." Blaine bites his lip hard. "But I didn't do it."

"You were seen standing over her dead body," Callahan reminds him, pacing the room, over and over again in small circles. "That combined with not having an alibi and the letter they found? That doesn't look good. That makes our job harder, Mr. Puckerman. You hired me to help you. I need you to help me so that I can help you. Why did you go to Ms. Berry's hotel room, if not to murder her?"

"She texted me," Puckerman explains, his immediate answer surprising Blaine a little. He didn't expect Puckerman to be this forthcoming with answers and information. "She wanted me to meet her there. Check her phone records. I showed up and found her like that. I checked to see if she was breathing or had a pulse, found the letter, and then Jesse showed up. I don't even know what he was *doing* there --"

"Okay, so Mr. St. James found you over her body and called the police," Callahan sighs. Blaine shifts uncomfortably in his chair; he can tell this is something they've already been over and it's not something Callahan wants to waste time on.

"Was it illegal?" Santana asks without pretense. Puckerman looks over at her, surprised. "Whatever you were doing at the time of the murder, was it illegal? Is that why you won't give up your alibi? Because whatever it is, I'm sure it's not as bad as murder --"

"You're assuming he's innocent," Sebastian mutters under his breath, quiet enough so that Puckerman doesn't hear him, but Santana does. So does Blaine. Tina smiles encouragingly in Santana's direction and mouths the words 'keep going.'

"Why would I kill Rachel?" Puckerman asks abruptly. "She's been one of my best friends since we were kids. This is garbage."

"A love affair, jealousy, pure, unadulterated hatred -- believe me, the DA will come up with plenty of reasons," Callahan explains. "I can work against whatever they're going to throw at us, but I can't do that without an alibi."

"Well I can't give you one," Puckerman says again. "And if you put me on the stand, I'll lie."

"If you confess," Sebastian cuts in, clearly trying to stem Callahan's temper before it flares up, "the DA will probably cut you a deal. You'd do less time."

Puckerman narrows his eyes at Sebastian. "I'm not going to confess to something I didn't do," he says coldly. He looks up at Callahan. "Where the hell did you find these people?" Sebastian shifts uncomfortably in his chair, clearly offended and uncomfortable; Blaine nudges Sebastian's elbow and casts him an empathetic smile.

"They're at the top of their class at Harvard Law --" Kurt starts to explain, a little defensive.

"Alibi," Callahan snaps, clearly at his breaking point. "I need an alibi or you make their job ten times harder and we go into this unprepared and blind."

"Not gonna happen," Puckerman says a final time, setting his jaw squarely. "You're the top defense attorney in the state. I'm sure you'll figure something out -- it's what I'm paying you for."

"I think we're done here," Callahan announces. He sends for the guard and sweeps from the room without another word.

Kurt lingers a little longer, gathering his things, and offers Puckerman his hand again. "I'm sorry," he says genuinely. "I know he can be a little... impatient sometimes." That gets a smile out of Puckerman. "We're conducting interviews," Kurt informs him. "Depositions and all that. We *are* trying, Mr. Puckerman. We want to see justice done for Ms. Berry, and --"

"Thank you," Puckerman says shortly. "I appreciate that." Kurt nods and leaves, then, gesturing for the rest of the group to follow him. They all leave, Tina first followed by Santana and then Sebastian. Sebastian sneezes on his way out, and Santana digs around in her purse before handing him a small packet of tissues.

Blaine pushes himself up a little, making to leave his chair, but as soon as Sebastian's out of sight, he sits back down. Puckerman looks at him, really looks at him for the first time since he walked in the room, and his face slowly splits into a grin. "Gatsby."

Blaine feels his shoulders relax, and it's the first time in days that he feels like he can breathe at all. "Saw."

Saw's -- Puckerman's grin grows even wider. "It's been what, five years almost? Last time I saw you, you were a tiny thing." He gives Blaine a once over and smirks. "Not much has changed."

"No, it hasn't," Blaine agrees, unable to fight the smile that spreads across his face. "You're still an asshole."

Puckerman snorts and reaches over to shove lightly at Blaine's shoulder (*that* shoulder, and it's a gesture, a nod to the old injury and the life they once knew together, the secrets they shared). "What the hell are you even doing out here, man? You one of my lawyers?"

Blaine ducks his head a little and shrugs. "Sort of. I'm in law school. I work for Callahan."

Sa -- Puckerman rolls his eyes. "Well at least there's someone on this legal team who understands me."

It's Blaine's turn to snort with laughter. "I don't think knowing how to dodge your right hook is really going to help us out here."

"Dude!" Puckerman says, his voice low. He glances over his shoulder at the guard waiting outside of the room before turning his attention back to Blaine and dropping his voice even further. "Rules number one and two!"

Blaine scoots his chair closer and leans in a little. "Is that what it is?" he asks quietly. "I figured it was -- as soon as I saw you, I knew." He leans in even closer and nudges Puckerman's hand with his own. "This isn't a game," he says seriously. "This isn't -- this isn't a club or a social gathering. You could spend the rest of your life in *jail* --"

Puckerman shakes his head violently. "You don't get it," he whispers. "It's different here. It's not like it was back out in California. They take their shit seriously out here, man."

"You talk about it like they're the mob or something."

"They are," Puckerman insists. "It's -- they're like a cult out here."

"You can get protection," Blaine says slowly. "If you're afraid of what they'll do to you if you tell."

But Puckerman shakes his head again. "It's not just me I'm worried about. My kid -- I'm worried about my kid. I don't want anything to happen to her or her mom."

Blaine blinks at him in surprise and settles back into his chair. "You have a daughter?"

Puckerman nods, smiling faintly. "Beth. She's almost twelve now. I missed the hell out of her when I was out in California. Came home every chance I could."

"How old were you when she was born?"

"Sixteen," Puckerman says with a laugh. "Sixteen and an idiot. Q and I couldn't make things work between us, but we're friends. She got into Yale, real estate. I went to UCLA for the nursing program. We -- we try to do right by our kid, you know?" He closes his eyes for a moment before sucking in a breath and leaning in towards Blaine. "You've got to help me," he says earnestly. "Please. My kid needs me, okay? I can't -- I can't just leave them out to dry like this. I'm not gonna end up a deadbeat like my dad was." He reaches for Blaine's hand, the angle and grasp awkward with the handcuffs in the way. "Please, Gatsby."

Blaine swallows and offers him a weak smile. "You should probably start by calling by my real name." He shakes Puckerman's hand a little. "Blaine Anderson."

Puckerman smiles. "Anderson," he says, and it sounds foreign to Blaine. "I know you can keep a secret."

Blaine tightens his grip and inhales sharply before nodding once. "You have my word."

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-- *"Your job is to tell me the alibi!" Callahan roars --*

-- *"Are you crazy?" Sebastian hisses. "Just tell him the alibi!" --*

-- *Tina's concern and Santana's rolled eyes and Kurt's blank stare melt into one another, disapproving expressions pricking at Blaine's skin and turning his emotions stormy and turbulent. He looks from one person to another to another and finds no support, no belief --*

"Blaine, wake up," Kurt says, and Blaine opens his eyes, shifting uncomfortably in the passenger seat of Kurt's navigator.

"Sorry," he offers. "I guess I haven't been getting a lot of sleep."

Kurt looks at him, concerned. "Is it because of..." Kurt trails off, obviously uncomfortable. He clearly doesn't want to talk about their current non-relationship.

"Mostly it's trying to be an intern and keep up in my classes at the same time," Blaine says, avoiding the subject. "And it doesn't help that Callahan is angry with me." Blaine doesn't want to make Kurt feel guilty - their 'break' certainly is part of the problem, but telling Kurt that isn't going to help.

"You could tell him the alibi," Kurt suggests tentatively.

"Not an option," Blaine answers shortly. He's getting a little tired of having his judgment questioned by everyone around him.

"I'm sure that's the case, but then I'm afraid I don't have any other suggestions. I told you my one and only tip for getting Callahan to like you months ago," Kurt says with a wry grin.

"Well, why does he like *you*? He obviously thinks you're good enough to give you an internship and a job, so maybe I can follow your example." Blaine doesn't know if this conversation is a good one for them to be having -- it might be too personal for the work colleagues they are pretending to be -- but they're going to be in the car together for another ten minutes and Blaine doesn't want to spend it in an awkward silence.



"Did I ever tell you he kicked me out of class?" Kurt asks. Blaine frowns. Kicked him out of *class*?

"Because he liked you?" Blaine guesses, confused.

"Something like that -- another student didn't do the reading for the first day of class, because he didn't realize there *would* be reading for the first day. Callahan was all set to kick him out, but I argued that it wasn't an unreasonable assumption to make. He asked if I'd be willing to take the punishment for the other student, and I said yes. So he kicked me out in his place," Kurt explains, shrugging his shoulders.

"And he liked that you'd stood up to him."

"I told you he likes the opinionated students the best," Kurt points out as they turn on to a side street. "I guess he thought I showed potential." They come to a stop at a red light. "He likes you," Kurt adds after a moment.

"Doesn't feel that way," Blaine grumbles, folding his arms over his chest and scooting down in the seat a little. He'll probably wrinkle his suit a little but he's already fallen asleep wearing it, so he figures it doesn't really matter.

"He does," Kurt insists as the light turns green. "He was impressed with your arguments at the end of last quarter -- it's why he hired you."

"Then why does it feel like I'm doing everything wrong?"

Another red light and Kurt glances sideways at him, biting his lip. "You're not," he says carefully, and Blaine hates this, hates that they're walking on eggshells and holding back. He hates not being with Kurt, hates having hide himself, hates that people want him to be someone he's not. He's not the type of person to break a promise. He's just not. "You did exactly what he asked you to," Kurt argues after a moment. "You gained Puckerman's trust. And by not giving up his alibi, you're keeping it."

It's Blaine's turn to bite his lip now, and the light turns green. "Are you saying you agree with me?"

Kurt drums his fingers on the steering wheel (-- *Sebastian drums his fingers on the table in a familiar rhythm and Blaine watches his fingers move* --), considering. "I'm saying I understand your intentions. Your heart's in the right place."

"I won't tell him you said that," Blaine says quietly. Kurt lets out a slight laugh as if he can't help it, and Blaine wants to kiss him.

Blaine always wants to kiss him.

Kurt parks the car in front of a charming little one story house. Blaine sighs, mentally shifting to the task at hand. Quinn Fabray may be a long shot -- she probably doesn't know anything that will help them with Puckerman's defense -- but Callahan believes in being incredibly thorough, so Kurt and Blaine have been dispatched to take Ms. Fabray's deposition.

Kurt raps sharply on the door. It's pulled open by a brunette preteen girl wearing a leather jacket and Doc Martens. She looks them up and down once, then turns toward the interior. "Mom! Lawyers!" she calls loudly, making them both wince slightly. Her voice is... piercing.

"Yes, Beth, I know," a blonde woman who must be Ms. Fabray says as she walks into the entryway. "Why don't you go knead the dough for the challah while I talk to them, okay sweetie?"

Beth Puckerman rolls her eyes. "You know I can hear you from the kitchen, right?"

"Yes, dear, but humor me anyway," Ms. Fabray says fondly. Beth sighs in exasperation and tromps towards the kitchen. "Thank you, honey." Ms. Fabray gestures to her left. "Why don't you gentlemen join me in the living room?"

Kurt and Blaine settle onto the couch while Ms. Fabray takes the armchair. She folds her hands in her lap as Kurt and Blaine exchange a glance.

"Thank you for speaking with us, Ms. Fabray. We know you have a busy schedule," Kurt says.

"It's not a problem. I'm sorry I couldn't come down like we'd planned -- my babysitter fell through at the last minute."

"I'm almost twelve," Beth calls from the kitchen, sounding irritated. "I don't need a babysitter."

"Do I need to remind you what happened the last time I left you alone?" Ms. Fabray calls back.

"...In my defense, Dad left his open gym bag here. The nunchucks were calling my name."

"Exactly," Ms. Fabray says with a sigh. "I'm afraid if I leave her alone again, she'll dye the dog's fur pink. And we don't even *have* a dog." She turns her attention back to Kurt and Blaine and sits up a little straighter. "I want to help Puck's defense in any way I can," she says, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear. "What do you want to know?"

"How long have you known Mr. Puckerman?" Blaine asks.

"Well, I met Puck and Rachel in 9th grade. I switched to Newton North for high school, and we all ended up in Freshman English together. Rachel and I bonded over *Twelfth Night* -- we read it out loud in class, and she was Viola. I was Olivia." She looks down at her lap for a moment before straightening. "She and Puck were friends from temple. Puck and I tried dating for about six months in sophomore year, and, well, that's where Beth came from." She gives a wry smile. "Not that I would give her up for anything."

"I love you, too, Mom," Beth calls out.

"Go back to your bread, sweetie," Ms. Fabray calls back. "We graduated from high school, Puck and I went off to college, and Rachel left for a performing arts school in the bright lights of New York." She gestures in the air, as if the lights of New York are here in the room with them. "That's where she met Jesse."

"And what would you say Mr. Puckerman's relationship with Ms. Berry was?" Kurt asks.

"Well, Rachel's our daughter's godmother -- she's basically the best friend either of us ever had. He would never have killed her, not for any reason." She's vehement, shaking her head in denial. Blaine feels for her - one best friend in jail, the other dead, supposedly at the hands of the first. Blaine thinks it might break someone else, but Quinn Fabray sits in front of them like a queen, battered but powerful. Regal.

"So you believe he's innocent," Blaine asks, heartened that he's not alone in believing in Puckerman's innocence. It stands to reason that Ms. Fabray knows him better than anyone, so she's probably the best judge of what he's capable of, and she says he wouldn't have done it. Even knowing Puckerman's alibi, Blaine had had the smallest kernel of doubt, but now he's even more sure of his innocence.

"Absolutely," she replies, conviction in every line of her body. "I'd hope you do as well."

"I do," Blaine insists. He speaks before he really thinks it through, and he feels Kurt tense next to him.

"I know he won't give you an alibi," she says. "And before you ask -- no, I don't know what it is." Blaine bites his lip and looks away, trying to appear nonchalant.

"As a formality," Kurt asks, "where were *you* on the night of Ms. Berry's murder?"

Ms. Fabray's hands clench for a second before relaxing. "I was with Beth at her Girl Scout Troop's Mother-Daughter Sleepover. It's cookie season."

"Thank you very much, Ms. Fabray," Kurt replies, getting to his feet. "I think that's all we need for now. Please let us know if you think of anything else that could help us with Mr. Puckerman's case." Blaine stands as well, trying to smooth the wrinkles out of his suit jacket.

Ms. Fabray ushers them to the door. "I hope I was able to help. Please keep me up to date about what's going on? Puck's not telling me much -- I think he's trying to protect Beth and me -- but I'd really feel much better if I knew what was happening."

"We'll do our best," Blaine offers, wanting to give her something. "Thank you for your time," he says as they walk onto the porch. Ms. Fabray just gives them a smile and closes the door quietly behind them.

"Another promise you can keep," Kurt says quietly. He hesitates for a moment, eyes meeting Blaine's for a second before he makes his way back to his Navigator.

Inside the house, Blaine can hear Beth and her mother singing Rachel Berry's famous ballad from *Melancholia*.

*Break it like you broke my heart...*

Blaine tugs his messenger bag onto his shoulder and makes his way down the stairs towards the front of the classroom; he's the only person left in the room, except for --

Sebastian sits three rows in front of him on the aisle seat and is currently sluggishly packing his own bag, textbook slipping from his fingertips. He pushes himself to his feet just as Blaine reaches the row; Sebastian's knees buckle and Blaine reaches out a hand instinctively. "Hey," Blaine says, ducking his head around Sebastian's arm to get a better look at his face. "You okay?"

"Fine," Sebastian says, shaking his head and shrugging out of Blaine's touch. "Just a cold."

Blaine's not entirely convinced but he takes a step back to let Sebastian move past him. "Okay..." Sebastian takes two steps down towards the door and then pauses, his hand reaching out for something to hold onto.

Blaine takes Sebastian's hand.

Sebastian looks down at their hands and then up at Blaine, his eyes heavy and lidded. "I'm fine --" he starts.

"You're not," Blaine argues. "Let me just walk you to your room, okay?"

Sebastian seems like he wants to protest but his fingers clutch Blaine's hand tightly. It's awkward but familiar, too-warm and sweaty and their palms don't fit together quite the same way anymore. Blaine leads him out of the building and across the courtyard to the dorms; Sebastian's eyes droop further with each step and by the time they reach Sebastian's room, Sebastian barely looks conscious. "Hey," Blaine says quietly, nudging Sebastian with his elbow. "Key?"

"Pants pocket," Sebastian mumbles, wavering slightly.

Blaine sighs. Of course.

He digs his hand into Sebastian's pocket and pulls out a keyring. Sebastian's dorm room key isn't that different from his own, small and gold. Blaine unlocks the door and ushers Sebastian inside, closing the door behind them and helping Sebastian settle onto the bed. "You should sleep," Blaine advises, taking Sebastian's book bag and depositing it on a chair. Sebastian merely grunts at him and Blaine has to resist the urge to roll his eyes. He'd almost forgotten what a complete pain in the ass Sebastian is when he's sick. Blaine minded less, before, when he was barely twenty and completely head over heels.

Now? Now Blaine's a little older and he's -- he's not angry with Sebastian, not anymore, but he's not in love with him either. The man he thinks he could love -- Kurt -- doesn't want to be with him right now; his friends are three-thousand miles away; Sugar is on her honeymoon in Ireland and Blaine?

Right now, Blaine has Sebastian.

Sebastian sways slightly and Blaine's instincts kick in. "Come here," Blaine sighs, sinking to his knees in front of Sebastian. He works Sebastian's shoes and socks off, reaches for the hem of Sebastian's sweater

and tugs. "Lift your arms," he instructs patiently. Blaine lifts the sweater up and over (blue, it's Sebastian's favorite shade of blue, official UCLA blue) and drops it to the floor. He reaches for the buttons on Sebastian's shirt and starts to undo them from top to bottom, tips of his fingers brushing against Sebastian's skin.

"What're you doing?" Sebastian mumbles.

"Trying to get you comfortable," Blaine explains. He starts to reach under the material of the shirt to slide it off of Sebastian's shoulders but that puts him too close to Sebastian's face. Sebastian blinks up at him and it's only then that Blaine is close enough to see the dark circles under Sebastian's eyes; he looks so *tired*, more worn down than Blaine can ever remember seeing him. Their lips are close, almost as close as they were four or five months ago, and Blaine can only think of Kurt.

He misses Kurt. He misses Kurt the way he used to miss Sebastian, misses seeing the smile on his face and hearing Kurt's laugh in his ear; Blaine misses the way Kurt's fingers tangle with his own, misses the way Kurt kisses.

"B," Sebastian murmurs, snapping Blaine out of his thoughts.

Blaine pulls away and rests a hand on Sebastian's shoulder. "Change," he says slowly. "Get into bed. Where's your phone?"

"Pants."

Blaine does roll his eyes this time and holds out his hand. "Give it to me." Sebastian digs in his pocket, disgruntled, but hands over his phone and starts to unbuckle his belt. He turns around while Sebastian finishes getting undressed and scrolls through the list of contacts until he finds the name he's looking for. It rings once, twice --

"You're go for Snix."

"Um, Santana?"

There's a pause on the other end of the line. "Sebastian?"

"No," Blaine says hesitantly. "This is Blaine."

"Why are you calling me on his phone?" Santana asks, and her voice sounds thin.

Blaine suppresses a sigh. He doesn't really feel like dealing with Santana's hateful judgment right now. "He's sick." Blaine turns around to find Sebastian curled up under his sheets. Blaine reaches out a hand and presses the back of it to Sebastian's forehead. "He's warm," Blaine murmurs. "He probably has a fever."

"Are you with him?"

"Yeah," Blaine answers slowly, confused. "In his room --"

"I'll be there in fifteen." There's a click and then her voice is gone.

Blaine sighs and sets the phone down on the nightstand, frowning down at Sebastian. "Hey," he says, prodding Sebastian's arm. "Do you have any over-the-counter stuff you could take in the meantime? Tylenol or something?"

Sebastian waves a hand towards the nightstand. "Top drawer," he mumbles.

Blaine finds the bottle easily and rattles two pills into his hand, unearthing a bottle of water from Sebastian's mini-fridge and unscrewing the cap. "Here," he says, holding his hand out and settling on the edge of the mattress. "Take these. It'll help with the fever a little." Sebastian does as he's told, still half-asleep and curled under his duvet. Blaine screws the cap back on the bottle and sets it on the nightstand; he moves to push himself up off of the bed --

Sebastian's hand fumbles blindly across the mattress for a second before finding Blaine's and latching on. "Don't go."

Blaine hesitates. "Santana's on her way," he says, shifting uncomfortably.

"Stay until she gets here?" Sebastian asks, blinking blearily up at Blaine.

Part of Blaine wants to leave. He doesn't want to share a bed with his ex, isn't comfortable around him despite how professional they've been lately. He doesn't want to put up with Sebastian's complaints and he doesn't want to be around when Santana gets here. Blaine's tired -- he's tired and lonely and over-worked. No one is being supportive when it comes to his decision not to give up Puck's alibi -- least of all

Sebastian -- and Blaine doesn't want to be reminded of a version of himself that gave a little too much of his heart away.

Sebastian's hand is clammy in his, and part of Blaine wants to stay. He wants to help. He wants someone to take care of. He wants to be needed. He wants something, anything to do. He wants something familiar, something comforting. Right now, Sebastian's all he's got.

Blaine stays, settling more into the mattress and running his thumb over Sebastian's knuckles. Sebastian's eyes flutter shut again, and Blaine can tell he's trying to sleep but he can't. Blaine sighs and glances around the room: there's a hat stand in the corner with a few fedoras and a couple of beanies; a framed photograph of Sebastian and Santana sits on the nightstand, taken for their engagement (the diamond is clearly the focus of the photograph). On the far side of the room, Blaine spots the DVD case for *Return to Me* (it's Sebastian's favorite), and he smiles a little faintly as an idea occurs to him.

*"You push me,"* he sings quietly, continuing his gentle movements on Sebastian's hand. *"I don't have the strength to --"*

"Don't," Sebastian croaks. Blaine blinks over at him in surprise, lips thinning into a line. "You can sing, B," he allows, back-tracking. "Just... not that, okay?"

It's a fair request that Blaine will grant (he wouldn't want to be reminded if he were in Sebastian's shoes, of them and what was theirs), but it was worth a shot. "Any requests?" he quips dryly.

Sebastian chuckles a little, his laugh breaking off into a series of coughs; he curls the duvet closer, shivering, and Blaine actually feels sort of bad for him. He's never seen Sebastian this sick before. Blaine glances around the room once more before spying Sebastian's *Bombshell* poster hanging on the wall. He smiles a little and shifts his hand in Sebastian's, singing softly. *"Through missing keys and broken strings, the music was our own."* Sebastian makes a quiet noise of approval, his fingers twitching in Blaine's grasp as he shifts uncomfortably beneath the blankets. *"Something second hand and broken still can make a pretty sound."* Sebastian's breathing starts to even out and Blaine thinks he might *actually* be asleep. *"But that second hand white baby grand still had something beautiful to give."*

Sebastian's hand stays clutched tight in his just as the door clicks open. Blaine looks up at Santana in surprise. "You have a key."



"Of course I have a key," she snaps. She eyes Blaine and glances down at the bed where their hands are still joined.

Blaine resists the urge to roll his eyes and makes to stand up. "I guess that's my cue to leave." He starts to pull away but Sebastian won't let go of his hand. Blaine looks back at him, unsure of what to do.

"Here," Santana sighs, moving closer to him. "Switch with me." She slips her hand into Sebastian's grasp just as Blaine pulls his own away; Sebastian doesn't seem to mind. He mumbles something unintelligible as Santana takes Blaine's perch on the bed. "Go back to sleep," she instructs quietly. It's the kindest Blaine's ever heard her, patient and soft. He reaches for his bag and heads to the door when she speaks again. "Anderson."

He pauses and sighs, turning in the doorway to face her. "Hmm?"

She keeps her gaze trained on Sebastian, hand brushing hair out of his eyes. "Thank you."

Blaine leans against the doorjamb. "I'm sorry, I just hallucinated," he says dryly. "What did you just say?"

She glares at him but it's not nearly as scathing as it has been up until now. "I'm not going to repeat it, Pinkie." Blaine rolls his eyes. "I'm surprised you didn't call his parents to ask for the family physician's number."

Blaine rubs at the back of his neck awkwardly. "I've never met his parents. You seemed to be the safest choice." She inhales sharply at that and looks back at her fiancée, unanswering. "You really love him, don't you?"

Santana's jaw twitches. "Not that I owe you any explanation, but he's the only person I trust. He has been since we were fourteen." She looks back over at Blaine for a moment. "So yeah, I do."

"You were right."

Santana looks over at him in surprise. "I know that." A beat, and then, "About what?"

"About why I came out here," Blaine admits, shifting uncomfortably. "I wasn't counting on him being with someone else and I didn't -- I didn't really take into consideration how you might've felt about each other. I'm sorry for that."

Santana looks simultaneously amused and uncomfortable. "And this matters why, exactly?" she drawls. "I know we agreed to be professional when it comes to the internship, Anderson, but you don't always have to play nice when it comes to stuff like this."

Blaine shakes his head. "You don't get it. I'm over him. I can't convince you to believe me. But if you tell me you love him, I'll take your word for it. Just..." He glances back over at Sebastian, who coughs a little in his sleep. "Just take care of him, okay?"

Santana nods. "Let me worry about him. You and I? We have a case to win. And you didn't exactly make that any easier."

Blaine sighs and straightens, hoisting his bag further up his shoulder. "Goodbye, Santana. I'll see you at the firm tomorrow. I hope he gets better soon."

She digs in the pocket of her leather jacket (and that's even weirder, the fact that she's wearing a leather jacket, Blaine hadn't noticed that until now) and unearths her phone. "Always polite."

Blaine smiles dryly at her and gives her a parting shot before he leaves. "One of us has to be."

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Blaine can't always be polite.

He tries to be, he was raised to be polite and to have manners and to treat people decently. He's -- he's a *good person*, and he likes to believe in the good in people, but he's human. Sometimes, he just... snaps.

And when he does, he has coping mechanisms. He sings. He boxes. He runs away (he's not proud of that one). He talks (to Wes, to his father, to Sugar, to Kurt). He used to drink, sometimes (he's not proud of that one, either). None of them have failed him yet, but he's losing them one by one and he's not quite sure what he'll do when he loses them all. He doesn't feel like singing much, these days. It feels less right with Sugar in Ireland and the Warblers preparing for their spring concert series (and real warblers don't sing alone, anyway). Being isolated has weakened a little of his resolve. He's been spending most of his free time at the gym -- the only friends he has to hang out with right now are Mike and Tina and Josh, but unless they're in public, he sort of feels like the unnecessary fourth wheel on a tricycle. But he's losing that, too, losing the energy and the motivation to go after he's continually ignored at work every day and he spends his nights buried in mountains of books and paperwork instead of spending time with anyone.

He's -- he's *tired*, more than he has been before, but he doesn't want to run away, not yet. He *knows* he can do this, and he has reasons to stay, he does. He has his work, his promise to Puckerman and to Quinn and to Beth, and Blaine's a man of honor, he keeps his word. He has Sugar, when she comes back from Ireland, and Kurt, when the trial's over. He just... has to wait it out.

There's a quiet, polite knock on his open dorm room door, and Blaine glances up to see who's there. "Santana." She nods at him in greeting. "You're here for the notes for Sebastian, I take it?" Another nod. He sets his book down and digs around in his messenger bag for them. "How is he?"

"He'll live," she says shortly. "Antibiotics helped. He thinks he's more miserable than he actually is."

Blaine snorts with laughter. "Been there." His fingers freeze as his hand grabs the notes, the moment tense and awkward. He clears his throat and turns on his bed to offer them to her. "Will he be okay by Monday?"

She nods again, clearly her preferred method of communication at the moment. She crosses the room to take the notes from him and turns to leave. She pauses in the doorway. "Listen," she says slowly, half-glancing at him over her shoulder. "About the flowers you sent..." Blaine sucks in a breath. "It was a nice gesture," she says slowly. "But can you just... not do anything like that again?"

Blaine huffs at her disbelievingly. "I told you I was over him, Santana."

He sees her lips thin into a line. "I know."

"I was just --"

"-- trying to be nice," Santana finishes for him. "Yeah, I know."

"What is your *problem*?" Blaine snaps. "I know you don't see it as genuine, I know you don't think I deserve to be here, but it's just --" He sighs and runs a hand through his hair, frustrated. "I was raised to treat people well, even if they don't deserve it. I -- look, I don't like letting people walk all over me either. And you don't -- you don't even understand how difficult this has been for me. No one thinks I should be here, least of all you, and the whole thing with Puckerman? I get it, having an alibi would make winning this case easier, but I gave him my *word*, Santana, that means something to me. I don't understand why people look down on me for being nice and honorable and why that makes me less of a man and --"

"Whoa," she interrupts, holding up a hand. "Slow down, Pinkie Pie."

"No," he says through gritted teeth. "And stop *calling me that*. I know you've had to work hard for everything you've gotten -- you and Sebastian have made that clear to me. And I'm not saying you haven't, or that you don't deserve it. I've never thought that." She arches an eyebrow, clearly considering him. "Just because you worked hard doesn't mean I didn't. I had a 4.0, I got a 170 on my LSATs, I wrote an essay just like you did -- it was even about overcoming *adversity*. I even sent in a *video*, for crying out loud --"

She smirks. "Wanky."

"Oh my god, *no*," he groans. He falls back against his pillows and closes his eyes. "I sent in a video of a *performance* --"

"I bet you did."

-- a Warblers' performance," he says loudly, ignoring her. "*Firework*, I thought it'd make me stand out."

She laughs, just a little, and Blaine can tell by the sound that she's holding back (why, he has no idea). "Did you want to make them go *oh, oh, oh*?"

"Stop," he says seriously, looking over at her. "I don't get why you get pleasure out of making fun of other people."

"I'm teasing you."

"I know," he sighs. "I --" He stops and considers her a moment. "You're teasing me."

"Yeah," she says with a grin. "You know, for a guy who embraced the southern California lifestyle, you really need to learn how to fucking relax."

He shakes his head and trains his eyes to the ceiling. "I... really don't have the energy to figure you out right now, Santana. You have the notes for Sebastian. You've made it abundantly clear that you don't want me to even be nice to him because you're worried about how it *looks*, god --" He exhales heavily through his nose and throws an arm over his eyes. "Goodbye, Santana."

It's quiet for a moment as he waits for the tell-tale sign of the sound of her heels against the hardwood floors of the hallway, but it never comes. "It's better for all of us this way," she says quietly. "Trust me."

"I do," he replies. "That's not the problem. You don't trust me."

Nobody does.

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Blaine sets the cardboard box from the fancy bakery around the corner on his desk before tiredly setting his bag down on the floor. He doesn't really want to do anything except eat the cupcake inside and go to bed, so he slips into his pink teddy bear pajamas and opens the container. The cupcake is red velvet with cream cheese frosting, and Blaine smiles a little, looking at it. He may be alone on his birthday, but at least he has an amazing dessert to make up for it.

He pulls open the top right drawer and rummages through it for a candle and matches. There's a lone pink candle hiding near the back, underneath the big box of matches. He shakes it a little, just to make sure there's no dust on it, and sticks it in the top of the cupcake. He lights the candle.

*"Happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me. Happy birthday dear Blaine, happy birthday to me,"* he sings quietly.

He looks at the candle and sighs. He doesn't know what to wish for. He could wish for Kurt back, but Kurt wouldn't be the man he loves if he wasn't honorable and stubborn and all the things that are making Kurt stay away. And he loves Kurt, he *knows* he loves Kurt, because sometimes he can hardly breathe when he thinks about Kurt's eyes and he can hardly stand when Kurt's distance hits home. But he's not going to wish for Kurt back.

He could wish for his colleagues to take him seriously, but he's starting to think that's a lost cause, at least with Santana and Sebastian. Tina believes in him, he knows, even if she's a little confused as to why he's holding out about the alibi, and Kurt's made it clear that he has faith, too, but Professor Callahan is quietly furious in Blaine's general direction every time they're in the same room. He's pretty sure the only way he's going to be taken seriously is if a miracle happens or Blaine goes back on his word, neither of which is going to happen. He doesn't want to waste a wish on that.

In years past he's wished for a closer relationship with his parents, world peace, and one year -- he was six -- a pony, but he's actually talking to his parents a lot now, and the other wishes -- well, he doesn't really need a pony anyways.

But wishing on a birthday candle has never really been about what Blaine expected he would get. Sure, when he was six and all he really wanted was a pony or a trip to Disneyland, that's what he wished for, but eventually he started wishing just to put the wish out into the world. He didn't wish for stuff. He'd wish for abstracts and ideas. He'd wish for happiness, he'd wish he were a little less lonely. He'd wish to be safe.

Blaine breathes in slowly and eyes the flame of the candle. He knows what he's wishing for.

He blows the candle out.

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It's quiet in his dorm room.

It's *too* quiet.

"Pavarotti?"

## Chapter Ten

*farewell sweet prince*

Wes looks down at his phone as it dings, frowning at the message from Blaine.

Well, fuck.

As if it wasn't bad enough that Kurt broke up with him in the most passive aggressive way possible, and everyone is mad at him for being a stalwart, honorable person, now the damn bird has died when Blaine's support system is skeletal at best.

Good thing Wes is already on his way out to Boston.

It meant a brief *discussion* with his parents -- *you're going to Boston for the weekend? and a cross-country trip for your friend's birthday, and he doesn't even know you're coming? and where are you going to stay in Boston, hmm?* -- but they acquiesced in the end, and even paid for his flight.

But as much as Wes was looking forward to surprising Blaine as a belated birthday present, he thinks maybe he needs to sacrifice the surprise in order to make sure Blaine's okay -- and to make sure that Blaine knows that at least one element of his support system is ready to help.

He dials Blaine's number and wonders if it's going too far to get the mafia involved.

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Blaine pulls the strings of the hoodie tighter and burrows a little further under his comforter. There's a knock on the door, a weight off of his bed, a click and then --

"Oh my *god*," Sugar says seriously. "Is he *dead*?"

"He's in mourning," Blaine hears Wes snap.

"He looks like the *unabomber*," Sugar deadpans. "This is *tragic*."

"Leave me alone," Blaine mumbles from his sanctuary. "'m comfortable."

"It's a Stanford hoodie," Sugar gasps. "I thought we were *friends*."

"Hey!" Wes protests.

Blaine reaches out and blindly tries to throw a pillow at both of them -- Wes squawks a little and Sugar snickers. "Shut up, both of you."

"I'm glad you're back from Ireland," Wes mutters. "His break-up with Sebastian was bad, but this? I'm not sure I can handle this on my own."

"How long has he been like this?" Sugar asks.

"With me here? A few hours. His life's been falling apart for awhile, though, and the canary croaked --"

Blaine fumbles for another pillow and feels a surge of satisfaction when he hears Wes let out a disgruntled *oomph*. "Have a little respect for the dead, please," he murmurs, gesturing to his nightstand where the small shoebox is covered in the remnants of the Burberry cage cover.

"And the Stanford hoodie was *your* doing, I take it?" Sugar says icily.

"Late birthday present," Wes answers through gritted teeth. "He seems to be enjoying it."

"Birthday -- oh!" Blaine's eyes snap open when Sugar hoists him up into a sitting position, hands trying to push the hood off of Blaine's head. He bats at her hands to get her to leave him alone, but that doesn't stop her from taking his head in her hands and planting a wet, smacking kiss on his lips. "There. Happy birthday."

Blaine blinks at her in surprise before glancing over at Wes. "Um."

"Didn't you just come back from your *honeymoon*?" Wes asks.

Sugar rolls her eyes and plants a hand on each hip, staring Blaine down resolutely. He shrinks back against the pillow a little and tugs the hood down. "It's a gift," she sighs impatiently, like they're supposed to know. "There's this stone in Ireland -- Blarney something or other -- that's really famous. If you kiss it, it's supposed to give you the gift of gab."



"And you kissed it?" Blaine guesses. "Sugar, I don't think you really need --"

"No," Wes laughs, covering his eyes with his hand. "That's -- she did it for you." He looks up from his hand and actually smiles at Sugar, and Blaine relaxes a little. "I think she meant it to be transferable."

"Exactly," Sugar says, clearly pleased that someone's caught on. "I figured if you were going to be a lawyer, it might help. I mean, Kurt said --"

"*Don't*," Wes hisses, nudging her with his elbow.

"Don't *what*?" Sugar huffs, back to being annoyed with Wes. "Don't mention Kurt?" Wes just glares at her, and when she turns to look to Blaine for answers, he merely tugs the hood back up and tucks his knees against his chest. "He looked about ready to jump your bones on Valentine's Day. What --" She stops abruptly, and in his peripheral vision, Blaine can see her eyes narrow. "No. He did *not*."

"It's a little more complicated than that," Wes explains carefully. "And it's not the only thing that's gone wrong --"

"Amateurs," Sugar mutters, and Wes flinches a little, caught off guard. "I leave for a month and the whole world falls to pieces." She sighs and tugs at Blaine's elbow. "Come on. We're getting you out of this room."

"I don't --" Blaine starts to mumble, resisting.

"Nope," Wes announces resolutely, tugging on Blaine's other elbow. "I agree with Sugar."

"Thank you, Wesley," Sugar says as politely as she possibly can. Blaine glances over at Wes -- who's looking at Sugar like she's grown a third head -- and tries not to laugh. He's touched, really, that Wes flew all the way out to Boston and enlisted the help of a woman he's never met to try and make Blaine feel better. Add the clear animosity between them and good intentions and, well.

"Just don't fix him a drink," Wes instructs.

Blaine stumbles to his feet and latches onto Wes, hiding his face against Wes' chest. "My lips taste like cherry."

"Come on, boys," Sugar commands, opening Blaine's dorm room door. "Operation Pavarotti's Wake can't be a go until you tell me everything I've missed. We're going to my office."

"A wake?" Wes questions skeptically.

"I just married into an Irish family, Wes, come on, keep up."

The door clicks shut behind them and Sugar goes parading down the hallway, Wes and Blaine trailing behind her. "I know she's your friend, Blaine," Wes says slowly, "but she's a little..."

"Yeah," Blaine murmurs, hooking an arm around Wes' waist, "I know. Wait until you see her office. It's a karaoke bar."

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Blaine is alone at the Sugar Shack.

His two best friends dragged him out of the confines of his dorm room and forced him to be here, and now they've *ditched him*.

It's not like they did it immediately -- they did sit and listen patiently while Blaine recapped the tragedy his life's become over the last few weeks (mostly for Sugar's benefit, but Wes sat perched on the bar stool next to Blaine in solidarity the whole time). But Sugar didn't say a word, just sort of stared at him for a few minutes before grabbing her Louis Vuitton purse and sashaying out from behind the bar, snapping her fingers at Wes to follow her. Blaine had made to follow, but she'd forced him back onto his bar stool with a rather forceful hand and told him to stay put.

They've been gone a half hour.

Blaine runs his finger over the rim of the glass of his Shirley Temple, wishing a little that he could hold his liquor better. If this is Wes and Sugar's attempt to make him feel better, it's not really working. He's spent the better part of the last few weeks alone. He's starting to think he should try getting used to how it feels. Even his *canary's* left him.

"Good," Sugar huffs happily, startling Blaine out of his melancholy. "You're still here."

Wes slides back onto the stool next to him and waves a hand dismissively as if to say *don't ask*. "You've got us pretty well trained," Blaine says dully. "Besides, where would I have gone?"

"Hey!" Wes protests, indigent.

Blaine just gives him a *look*. "She snapped her fingers and you followed her."

"Yes, yes, he's very useful. I see why you keep him around," Sugar snaps dismissively. "Now." She sets a large cup in the shape of a trophy on the bar in front of him and beams at him. "This is for you."

"For what?" Blaine asks dryly. "A double Shirley Temple?"

Sugar rolls her eyes and pushes it a little closer. "No. This is the Snap Cup."

"The *what*?"

"The Snap Cup," she says again, clearly losing patience. "It's part of a Motta family tradition. On someone's birthday, it gets passed around and everyone fills it with compliments. Since we missed yours, we're doing it now."

Blaine looks over at Wes with an arched eyebrow, but Wes just shakes his head and nods towards the cup. "I still agree with Sugar. Just look in the cup, Blaine."

Blaine pushes his Shirley Temple aside gently and reaches for the Snap Cup. He tips it towards him and peeks inside to find a dozen or so small slips of paper. He dumps them out on the counter of the bar and reaches out for one to unfold it and read the message inside. The messages are simple and sweet at first -- *excellent fencer, snappy dresser, patient, gives good hugs*. They get a little thoughtful with each one, though, and soon Blaine finds himself reading notes that say *thinks for himself* and *committed to goals* and *adaptable* and *honest* and *considerate of other people's feelings*. There are a few that are familiar to him, written in Sugar's swirling handwriting – *good taste in music, kind, smart, talented, helpful to others*. He unfolds one that says *brave*, and he knows even without recognizing the handwriting that it's from Wes.

Sugar reaches across the bar for his hand, and Blaine has to wipe at his eyes with the sleeve of his Stanford hoodie. "Do you remember," she says quietly, "when you were giving me singing lessons, and you were trying to get over Sebastian? And you said you didn't know who you were?"

Blaine nods. "And you told me that wasn't true."

"These," she insists, brushing the notes into a pile and dropping them back into the cup, "are you. This," she says, moving her hand to his heart, "is you. That's true without Sebastian, that's true without Kurt. It's true without Wes and it's true without me." Blaine sees Wes' mouth twitch into a smirk out of the corner of his eye, but Wes still says silent, letting Sugar take the reins. "You gave me a voice," Sugar reminds him, pulling focus again. "You've forgotten that you have one too. Use it."

Blaine swallows and squeezes her hand a little. "I'm not sure I remember how."

Wes chooses then to speak. "First," he instructs, "you are going to take this cup. It's on loan from Buttercup here --"

"Excuse you," Sugar interjects icily. "If you're going to compare me to a Powerpuff Girl, at least have the decency to compare me to the right one. It's *Blossom*."

"Okay, early 90s teenage television star with a terrible fashion sense it is then," Wes quips, and he beams a little when Blaine actually laughs.

"Okay, I take the cup," Blaine continues, preventing the argument from going any further. "And do what with it? Put it on my nightstand and look at it while I fall asleep?"

"I know it *looks* like a tacky trophy, Blaine, but it's actually much more useful than that," Wes explains, and Sugar's lips thin into a line. Clearly, the solidarity on Blaine's behalf isn't going to hold out much longer. "We want you to take it into work."

"And what?" Blaine asks. "Get my team to use it?"

"Yes," Sugar enthuses. "Trust me, it'll work. I know you think everyone's mad at you, but I think it's more than that. They're all upset and frustrated and worried that they won't win the case. And they're taking it out on each other. Make them feel better about themselves."

"She has a point," Wes admits. "Think of it as a team building exercise. It'll build group cohesion. I bet this would've worked with the Warblers, regardless of whether or not we were getting along."

Blaine looks at them both doubtfully but tugs the cup closer to him. "Okay, what else? That was first. What's second?"

Sugar beams at him and stands up a little straighter. "You have a voice," she says again. "It's an asset. Use it to get Kurt back, even if he is being a frustrating, noble control freak."

"And how do you propose I do that?"

Sugar grins. "What's the way to a man's heart, Blaine?"

Blaine perks up a little and smiles at Wes, who taps his index finger to his nose. Together, the three of them chorus the answer.

"Through his ears."

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*To: theodore.anderson@gmail.com*

*From: blaine.anderson@gmail.com*

*Subject: Thank you*

*Hey Dad,*

*I know it's been a few weeks since you and Mom have heard from me; I'm sorry for that. A lot's happened since I e-mailed you about the internship (thank you for the briefcase, by the way -- I've been using it every day). Callahan made Kurt co-counsel on our case, which means that Kurt and I are working together. And Kurt -- well, he didn't think it was really professional for us to see each other socially while we're working together. Which -- you know, I get it, and I understand it, and after how hard I've worked to get people to take me seriously out here, I don't want to lose that. At work, our client wouldn't give up his alibi but I managed to get it anyway... at a price. I promised I wouldn't tell, and that put me on thin ice with my boss. There's more, nothing quite as serious (although Pav died -- Wes and Sugar helped me hold a wake for him), but I just...*

*I feel like I've lost myself, Dad, and I haven't felt that way since Ohio, not really. Maybe a little, when I first moved out to Boston, but that was nothing compared to this. I feel like -- I feel like I don't have any control over my life anymore. And everything that's been happening, I've just been sitting back and letting it happen. I haven't tried to stop it. I haven't tried to change it. And that's not me.*

*Do you remember, when you first read me Gatsby, and we talked about how Jay changed himself for Daisy? He turned himself into the person Daisy wanted him to be, and you told me that wasn't love. You told me that love is when someone doesn't just accept you for who you are -- they celebrate it. I tried changing myself for Sebastian. It didn't work. It didn't work for Gatsby in the long run and it didn't work for me. With Kurt, I've never felt like I've had to be anyone other than who I was. It's always been easy and comfortable. He's always taken care of me, in a way that Daisy never would've done for Gatsby or anyone else.*

*I think I love him. I think I love him and it scares me, scares me because I haven't loved anyone since Sebastian, scares me because no matter how hard I try or how transparent I am, I'm never going to feel like I'm any good at romance. But with Kurt, I don't think I have to be. Somehow my fumbling words and heart on my sleeve is enough for him.*

*Wes flew out a little late for my birthday, just for the weekend (I think he might come back out over his spring break, but I'm not sure), at the same time Sugar came home from Ireland and they -- I forget how lucky I am sometimes, Dad, to have them. They keep me grounded. They make me feel good about myself. I can trust them to be honest with me. It was Sugar who pointed out that I'd been letting life happen to me instead of living it.*

*Kurt and I -- we have a lot to talk about. But I know there's hope for us and I think I have the perfect conversation starter (and before you ask, yes, it involves music, but would you expect any less from me?). As for work, Wes and Sugar gave me some ideas to help the team's morale, and in the meantime, I'm going to stand my ground. I gave our client my word. I have a sense of honor and integrity. You instilled that in me. You taught me how important it is to keep someone's trust once you've gained it.*

*I know you and Mom will worry -- please don't. I'm okay for now, not great, but I'm working on piecing myself back together. Trust me. Have a little faith in me.*

*When we moved from Ohio, it felt a lot like running away. I realize now that it wasn't. You gave me a lot, Dad -- you and Mom both. I don't think I would've been able to stand up for myself if we'd stayed. I think I'd be a different person. By moving to California, you gave me a safe place to land. You gave me an environment*

*where I was comfortable enough to be myself. Without that, I wouldn't be able to stand up for myself like I'm trying to do now. Mostly, I just wanted to say thank you.*

*Send Mom my love, and reassure her that I'm still planning on coming home to visit for a week at the end of May for UCLA's graduation. At the end of the day, I'll still come home.*

*Love, Blaine*

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*would you be willing to help set up for our welcome home party tonight? xoxo sugar*

Kurt eases open the door to the Sugar Shack to find it empty. "Hello?" he calls out. "Sugar? I got your text --" Kurt doesn't notice Sugar until she's right next to him, grabbing his ear between two fingers. "Ow!" he yelps, swatting at Sugar's hand, but she has a firm grip, tugging him to a table near the stage.

Sugar deposits him in a chair and puts her hands on her hips. "I have so many things to say to you, Mr. Kurt 'I Make All The Decisions' Hummel, but I think Blaine should get the chance to say them instead, so you're going to sit there and listen for once, capiche?"

"Blaine? But I thought -- ow! Hey!" Kurt rubs at the back of his head and turns in the chair. He gets hit in the face this time and winces, eyes following the object to the floor.

Stress balls.

"The first one was for letting me cross a line," a voice informs him. Kurt blinks up in surprise. He knows that voice. "The second," Wes continues from behind the bar, "was for being an honorable, well-intentioned person."

Kurt frowns at him. "I'm not sure I deserved the second one."

Wes actually laughs at him. "No, you definitely deserved that one. You're so focused on doing the right thing that sometimes you wouldn't notice something until it hit you in the face. Case in point."

Kurt sighs in exasperation and turns his attention back to Sugar. "So I take it you don't need my help, then?"

The corner of Sugar's mouth twitches a little, like she wants to smile but won't let herself. "Sorry to take advantage of those good intentions, Kurt, but we had to get you here somehow." Kurt opens his mouth to ask why, but there's a soft noise coming from the direction of the stage, and Kurt's heart stops at the sight of Blaine hoisting himself onto a stool.

Sugar stalks to the karaoke machine and pushes a few buttons before turning to Blaine. "He's right there," Sugar tells Blaine very seriously. "Go get him." Blaine gives her a small smile from the lone stool at the center of the stage, and she presses one final button. The sound of a melody plucked out on guitar fills the Shack, and Kurt furrows his brow. He knows this song.

*"Don't know much about your life. Don't much about your world but don't wanna be alone tonight on this planet they call Earth,"* Blaine sings. Kurt feels like he should feel ambushed and out-numbered, and he does, a little. But it's sort of impossible not to be transfixed by Blaine, especially when he sings. And he's singing now. He's up on that stage singing for Kurt and Kurt shouldn't be here because – because...

Kurt can't really remember why he shouldn't be here.

*"But what do you say to taking chances? What do you say to jumping off the edge? Never knowing if there's solid ground below, or hands to hold, or hell to pay? What do you say?"* Blaine stands up as the drums of the backing track start to come in, and god, this is so unfair. Blaine's up there *wooing* him and making it impossible to say no. And Kurt can't help *wanting* to give in because he didn't really want to be apart in the first place. But they had to be, and this is why, because if Kurt isn't careful, he doesn't think and he lets himself get swept away.

But Blaine keeps singing -- *I just wanna start again, maybe you could show me how to try, maybe you could take me in somewhere underneath your skin* -- as he pushes himself off of the stool. He hops off the stage and keeps going, all through the bridge -- *and I've had my heart beaten down but I always come back for more* -- and the chorus again. It occurs to Kurt, then, that for all he's tried not to duplicate the outcome of Blaine's failed relationship with Sebastian, that's actually what he's done. Right down to the breaking up (but he doesn't really think of it that way), to the putting distance between them, to the awkward encounters in the interim and to *this*, Blaine putting his heart on the line the best way he knows how.

Kurt promised he'd never hurt Blaine.

He's done it anyway.



Blaine sinks into the chair next to him on the last lines, voice soft and quiet. As the music fades away, Blaine sets the microphone down on the table, and Kurt reaches for his hand. Kurt has to make Blaine understand that of course he stills wants to be with him, Kurt has to fix this because that's what Kurt *does*, he fixes things and -- and...

-- and Blaine is looking at him with those eyes, those stupid, stupid eyes, the ones Kurt has been very deliberately *not* looking into for the last few weeks because he doesn't trust his own resolve because --

Blaine's lips ghost over his and Kurt's brain short-circuits, his eyes starting to flutter shut on instinct.

There's a soft *thunk* as another stress ball hits him on the side of the head. "Get a *room*."

Kurt flushes at Wes' words and starts to pull away. Because of *this*, Kurt doesn't trust himself because of this, how dangerous and out of control it feels to turn his brain off and focus on how good it feels to be with Blaine. Blaine, surprisingly, snaps his head to the side and glares at Wes. His expression softens, though, when Kurt pulls away, and he squeezes Kurt's hand a little tighter. "No, hey," he says quietly. "Don't. I – I want to talk. Just talk. But can we do it somewhere with a little more... privacy? Your place, maybe?"

And Kurt remembers why they work so well together, because even though he doesn't have his wits about him and feels like an awkward, fumbling mess around Blaine, the chemistry is still there, and they still talk about things that are important. He hasn't been giving Blaine that opportunity. *Listen*, Sugar had said. He nods. "Okay."

Blaine pulls him to his feet and they stand there awkwardly for a moment, still holding hands. Blaine runs his thumb across the back of Kurt's hand and Kurt doesn't particularly feel like letting go. Blaine makes for the door but there's a hand on Kurt's shoulder, tight and firm as it twists him around, almost causing him to fall forward. "You listen with your ears, Kurt Hummel, not your dick. Got it?" Sugar snaps. "You don't get any south of the equator action again until you've sorted things out."

Blaine sighs and pries Sugar's fingers from Kurt's shoulder. "As much as I appreciate you looking out for me, Mrs. Flanagan, Wes has already performed cockblocking duties." His eyes go to Wes for a moment and then back to Sugar before he sighs again and says, "I need friends right now, not parents, okay? Trust me."

And, much to Kurt's surprise, Sugar *grins* at him, clacks her heels together and salutes him. "Yes sir."

They turn to leave again when Kurt gets another stress ball to the back of the head. "Sorry," Wes says sheepishly, coloring a little. "Habit."

Sugar bends down and collects the stress balls before glaring over her shoulder at Kurt and Blaine. "I'd suggest you boys leave," she says thinly, turning slowly to face Wes with a wicked grin. "We're about to start World War III."

Wes dives to the floor behind the bar, and Blaine tugs at Kurt's hand, his laughter ringing in Kurt's ears.

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"Are you sure we should've left them alone?" Kurt asks once the door to his apartment clicks shut. He's deflecting, he knows he is, but he's not entirely sure what Blaine wants to talk about (he wants to get back together, that much is obvious, but there's something else, something more) and it sort of terrifies him. "Sugar's a lot stronger than she looks, I bet she has a mean throw --"

"Wes will live," Blaine assures him, a smile playing at his lips. "And if she gets a few good hits in, well, it's nothing he doesn't deserve."

"That's probably true," Kurt laughs. He quiets after a moment, shifting uncomfortably under Blaine's gaze. He resolutely does *not* bite his lip and waits for Blaine to say his piece.

"You know what that all meant, right?"

Kurt smiles faintly at him. "*Taking Chances*, yeah, I got the gist of it."

Blaine colors a little and shrugs, propping an elbow on the edge of the kitchen island. "Go big or go home, right? I think Celine's as big as it gets."

"Platinum Weird," Kurt corrects. Blaine raises a questioning eyebrow at him, and Kurt chuckles a little. "Platinum Weird, they were the ones who originally did the song. Except, not really, because they were a fake band and -- I'm rambling, nevermind." He colors a little, feels the heat high on his cheeks and --

Blaine pushes himself off of the island, crosses the apartment to where Kurt's standing in the living room, and kisses Kurt full on the mouth. Kurt sways a little on his feet when Blaine breaks the kiss. He meets

Blaine's eyes for a moment before sinking down onto the couch. "You wanted to talk," he says weakly. "You have my attention."

It's Blaine's turn to blush again as he settles down on the couch next to Kurt. "Okay, maybe I overdid it a little."

Kurt cuts him off with a kiss before he can go any further. He's not going to do what Sebastian did. He's not going to let Blaine think he's unwanted. "No," he murmurs against Blaine's lips. "You didn't. You're just keeping me on my toes." Blaine's face is still a little pink when Kurt pulls away, and Kurt has to force himself not to reach out and touch again. If he does, he won't be able to stop, and he owes it to Blaine to listen. "I've never had anyone serenade me before. It was very romantic. I see why it worked on Rory."

Blaine smiles faintly and looks down at his lap. He looks a little uncomfortable. "We've learned a lot from each other, Sugar and I. She -- we're not that different." He looks up at Kurt. "You know that." Kurt opens his mouth to speak but Blaine shakes his head, sitting up a little straighter. "Don't, okay? Just -- just let me get this out, because it's important and I need you to understand."

Kurt tucks his legs up under himself on the couch and props his head up on his hand, elbow resting against the back of his couch. It's easier to restrain himself, to keep his wits about him and not let go so easily when Blaine is keeping him grounded, focused.

God, Kurt's been an *idiot*.

"You know what it's been like for me out here," Blaine says slowly, carefully. "You know that no one's taken me seriously, that no one thought I was capable of doing well at Harvard. It's -- people have treated me like a joke, like I'm not an adult, like I can't be trusted to make my own decisions. Sugar knows what that feels like."

"I think you've done a pretty good job of proving everyone wrong," Kurt says encouragingly.

"And part of that was because of you, because of the faith you had in me," Blaine explains, hand brushing against Kurt's for the briefest of seconds. "But Kurt... I don't think you trust me as much as you think you do." And *damn*, if that doesn't hit Kurt where it hurts the most, because as much as he *wants* to say that isn't true, he knows that it probably is, and he kind of hates himself for it. "I had to make the first move because you didn't think I was ready to move on --"

"That's not fair," Kurt protests. "You'd *just* gotten over Sebastian."

Blaine holds up a hand. "I know, that's not -- you always have good intentions, Kurt. You've always looked out for me. It's not that I don't appreciate that. But -- like with Wes in January, when he told you about my relationship with Sebastian. He was looking out for me then, too, but he shouldn't have done it the way he did. I realize I'm not always forthcoming with information, but you still should've heard it from me." *For letting me cross a line*, Wes had said, and Kurt's starting to see where this is going. "You put the brakes on and then you were ready to go the night of Sugar's wedding, you decided it wasn't professional for us to keep seeing each other --"

"I get it," Kurt says shortly, snapping his eyes shut. "I have control issues."

"Hey," Blaine says gently, his hand warm and heavy on Kurt's knee. Kurt opens his eyes with a sigh. "It's not that I've disagreed with everything or the reasons you've made the choices you have. But Kurt, we're supposed to be in this together. And we've talked about some of it, but I haven't -- I've never taken my fair share in the whole decision making process. And it makes me feel like you don't trust me enough to treat me like an adult." He closes his eyes, then, and moves his hand from Kurt's knee to his hand, anchoring himself there. "I know I wear my heart on my sleeve, and I know I don't do well with rejection, but I'm not going to break," he says evenly, looking back up at Kurt. "People have tried and failed. I'm not fragile. *Please*, don't treat me like I am."

Kurt takes a breath to steady himself. This is so much bigger than work, so much more than image and good intentions. This is bigger than his career or the mortgage on his dad's shop. This is -- this is Blaine, this is them, this is what it means to be a partner, to be supportive. This is their exes and their differences, their lack of trust and Kurt's obsessive need for control. This is what it is to be in a relationship, to *want* something, someone so badly that he'll screw up seven ways to Sunday before he gets it right. And god *damn*, does he want to get it right.

Kurt laces his fingers with Blaine, breathes out, and makes his request. "Tell me about your relationship with Sebastian."

Blaine's brow wrinkles a little but his hand stays relaxed in Kurt's. "What do you want to know?" he asks hesitantly.

"Whatever you're willing to tell me," Kurt answers evenly even though his heart is *hammering* inside his chest. "You wanted me to hear it from you, so I'm asking. What did he do that made you feel used?"

Blaine's quiet for a few minutes, eyes trained on their hands, but Kurt has faith that he'll get his answers. He has to get answers. It's the only way he's going to fully understand where Blaine comes from, the only way he's ever going to have the courage to share his own secrets. It's selfish, completely inborn of his law school training, bargaining and compromising, quid pro quo, but he figures at this point, it's better than nothing. "October," Blaine answers faintly after awhile. "The night of that party, when you found me drunk and..."

"Dressed as a bunny, go on," Kurt encourages, fighting back a smile.

Blaine's cheeks turn a dark crimson but he sits up a little straighter, clearly determined to finish his story. "I'd dressed up for Sebastian," he explains, obviously choosing his words carefully. "I was trying to get his attention. And it worked, sort of."

"Sort of?" Kurt echos. "How does that 'sort of' work?"

"It got his attention," Blaine shrugs indifferently. "It got his attention and I got really, really drunk and kissed him and --"

"And one thing led to another?" Kurt guesses through gritted teeth, trying not to squeeze Blaine's hand too hard.

"Almost," Blaine says quietly. "We -- we got close, but we didn't want the same things. I wanted to get back together. He didn't."

"And you walked away feeling used," Kurt breathes, tension leaving him.

Blaine nods, just once, and adjusts himself on the couch, clearly trying to make himself more comfortable. "I stopped trying to figure out his mixed signals after that. I don't -- Kurt, I understand that you didn't want to be compared to him, but I don't see how you thought I ever could. You didn't even make the first move. Why would you think I'd assume you were in it for the sex?" he says, laughing a little.

"Your pint-sized best friend told you to use your assets," Kurt quips dryly. "And you did. I didn't know if that's how you thought people saw you. I didn't -- I don't. You mean a lot more to me than that. You *are* a

lot more than that.” Blaine leans in and kisses the corner of Kurt’s mouth, moves his lips to Kurt’s neck and then up to Kurt’s eyebrow, and Kurt practically *melts* against him. “Okay,” he says feebly. “There’s -- I know I’m supposed to be listening, but I think there are things about me you need to know, need to understand, and I can’t explain any of them if you keep doing that.” Blaine grins impishly at him but settles back on the other end of the couch, extending Kurt’s legs as he goes. He starts to massage Kurt’s calf, starting at the knee and working his way down. Kurt exhales shakily and tries to focus before he loses all resolve. “The night of Sugar’s wedding, when we --”

“-- did exactly what Sugar did that night, go on.”

Kurt’s lips quirk into a smile and he relaxes a little. “I told you I hadn’t been in a relationship for four years.”

“You did,” Blaine affirms, dropping a kiss to Kurt’s knee. “Bad break-up?”

“No, actually,” Kurt sighs, shaking his head.

Another kiss to his knee and Blaine looks like he’s restraining himself. “Tell me about him.”

“His name was Jeremy --”

“What did he look like?”

“Tall, blonde, very sarcastic. Are you going to let me tell this story or not?” Kurt teases. Blaine mimes zipping his lips shut, and Kurt has to fight not to lean in and kiss him. He settles for twining his fingers with Blaine’s on top of his knee. “We met when we were nineteen, as undergrads. We were together for five years.”

Blaine’s expression is unreadable when he says, “That’s a long time.” He pauses, and then asks, “So what went wrong?”

“Nothing,” Kurt sighs. “And I mean that -- nothing. We moved in together when I started at Harvard, and my life just got so *busy*. It was -- it was never difficult, with Jeremy. It was always very comfortable, very easy. A lot like it is with you. And I didn’t -- I didn’t want that to change. We never set aside time to be together. It felt like an obligation that way. Relationships aren’t supposed to be like that. Halfway through my second year at Harvard, we hardly recognized each other. So we ended things.”

“What does this have to do with me?”

“What does any ex have to do with a new relationship?” Kurt laughs dryly. “I didn’t want to make the same mistake twice. I wanted -- I want to put in the work with you. And it’s just been so *easy*. I don’t have to stress or plan or think, and that -- it was too much too soon, or at least that’s what I told myself.” He lets out a slightly self-deprecating laugh and awkwardly adjusts his hand in Blaine’s, unable to look Blaine in the face. “To tell you the truth, I think I just got scared. I -- I have control issues, Blaine, you weren’t wrong about that.”

“Because of Jeremy?” Blaine asks, confused.

“Because of my mom,” Kurt admits quietly. He pauses, just for a second, but Blaine takes advantage of his silence to readjust Kurt’s legs so that he can rest his chin on Kurt’s knees. It forces Kurt to meet his eyes while they talk, and it warms Kurt a little, how attentive Blaine is at the mention of Kurt’s mom. “There was *nothing* I could’ve done for her and that -- it drove me crazy, Blaine. Being a lawyer was the closest I could get to having control over situations where people normally feel helpless. I’ve spent my whole *life* working for this. I’ve hovered over my dad and devoted myself to my education and my work and whenever I get put in a situation where I can’t control the outcome, I panic. There’s so much to lose.” Blaine doesn’t look away, just studies Kurt’s face, and Kurt finally, finally gives in. He drops his legs open and tugs Blaine a little closer, cradling Blaine’s face in his hands. “And I could’ve lost you. I almost did.”

“You’re not gonna lose me,” Blaine breathes, and he crawls in a little closer. “I don’t go down without a fight. You should know that by now. That’s sort of the whole point of this -- I need to have a say. I needed to speak up.” And then Blaine is completely between his legs, body hovering over Kurt’s, and he leans down to press a searing kiss to Kurt’s lips. He kisses once, twice, again and again and Kurt can’t say no, doesn’t want to say no. His hands slide up and over Blaine’s shoulders on their way to hooking at the back of Blaine’s neck, and it just makes Blaine kiss him harder.

But it’s not over, not yet. Kurt places a hand between them, presses against Blaine’s chest to hold off his advances. “So where does this leave us?” Kurt asks breathlessly. Blaine’s lips are swollen, his face flushed and his eyes warm, and it takes all of Kurt’s resolve not to just keep kissing him.

It takes Blaine a minute to catch his breath, for his eyes to come back into focus. “I think we’ve officially hit play,” he says, and Kurt laughs. “I think it’s pretty clear we’ve both still wanted this even while we’ve been apart. And it’s not --” He sighs and props himself up on his elbows, putting some distance between their

lips. "I think your concerns about work are valid, Kurt, but it's not against company policy." He studies Kurt's face a moment before adding, "We don't have to be public about it until the trial's over, if you want. It's not -- Kurt, I honestly don't care about that. It's just -- I've *missed* you. My life's been kind of falling apart and I haven't really had anyone to talk to about it. I called Wes but it wasn't the same, and Sugar was in Ireland and I just -- you were the one person who really *got* what I was going through, Kurt. And while I've missed this -- missed being able to hold your hand and kiss you and be with you like this -- I've missed being able to *talk* to you more than anything else."

Kurt props himself up on the arm of the couch a little and tugs Blaine in close again. He presses one final, warm kiss to Blaine's lips before relaxing against the cushions and tangling his fingers in Blaine's curls. "Okay," he says. "I'm listening."

*In day seven of the biggest Boston trial of the decade, we have just learned that the prosecution plans to call the mother of the deceased as their next witness. Only time will tell what their plan is, but her testimony promises to be very, very emotional.*

*This is Robin Scherbatsky reporting from the Suffolk County Courthouse. Back to you, Enid.*

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MS. PLATT: The State calls Shelby Corcoran to the stand.

THE COURT OFFICER: Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

MS. CORCORAN: I do.

MS. PLATT: Please state your name.

MS. CORCORAN: Shelby Corcoran.

MS. PLATT: Ms. Corcoran, do you know the defendant?



MS. CORCORAN: Yes. He was friends with my late daughter, Rachel Berry.

MS. PLATT: Rachel Berry being the deceased in this case, the defendant being accused of killing your daughter, is that correct?

MS. CORCORAN: Yes.

MS. PLATT: Ms. Corcoran, do you recall your activities on Tuesday, December 26, 2017?

MS. CORCORAN: Yes, I was shopping with Rachel. We were doing some post-Christmas shopping.

MS. PLATT: Did you discuss anything significant that day?

MS. CORCORAN: Yes, we -- we had lunch at her favorite cafe, and she admitted to me that she was having an affair.

MS. PLATT: She was being unfaithful to her husband?

MS. CORCORAN: Yes.

MS. PLATT: Did your daughter seem at all conflicted about this? Did she express any feelings of guilt or regret?

MS. CORCORAN: Some, yes. She loved Jesse --

MS. PLATT: You're referring to Jesse St. James, her husband?

MS. CORCORAN: Yes. She told me she loved Jesse but that she'd fallen in love with someone else. She said she was thinking of leaving him.

MS. PLATT: Did you and your daughter discuss the matter further?

MS. CORCORAN: Um, yes, a little. She wouldn't give me any more details, but I tried to reason with her. I told her she should talk to Jesse first, to see if there were more reasons to stay than to leave. I told her she owed it him.

MS. PLATT: So you tried to talk her out of it.

MS. CORCORAN: Yes.

MS. PLATT: What happened next? Did you discuss the matter further?

MS. CORCORAN: No. We parted ways after that. She said she had someone to meet. She wouldn't tell me who or why.

MS. PLATT: And what did you do, Ms. Corcoran?

MS. CORCORAN: I followed her.

MS. PLATT: Without her knowledge?

MS. CORCORAN: Yes.

MS. PLATT: Why would you follow your daughter to a meeting you knew nothing about?

MS. CORCORAN: I had a feeling. I thought she might be going to meet this guy she'd been seeing.

MS. PLATT: Did your daughter notice you following her?

MS. CORCORAN: Not that I could tell.

MS. PLATT: When you followed your daughter that day, Ms. Corcoran, what was her destination?

MS. CORCORAN: Noah's apartment.

MS. PLATT: Noah Puckerman, the defendant?

MS. CORCORAN: Yes.

MS. PLATT: How did you know this was his apartment? Had you been there before?

MS. CORCORAN: A few times, yes, to visit with Rachel's god daughter, Beth.

MS. PLATT: Ms. Corcoran, this letter I am handing you is marked as Exhibit A and was admitted into evidence earlier in the trial. It was found on the defendant's person at the time of his arrest. It was confirmed as being written by the deceased, your daughter, after you provided a sample of her handwriting. Would you please read the contents of this document for me?

MS. CORCORAN: "Lu -- Saw 'On Board.' Headed back to the city after the weekend is over. I will miss you but I promise we will be together soon. -- Rach."

MS. PLATT: Ms. Corcoran, do you know to whom this letter is addressed?

MS. CORCORAN: I assume it was meant for Noah, if it was found on him. His middle name is Lucas.

MS. PLATT: "Saw 'On Board.'" Do you know to what your daughter was referring when she mentioned that?

MS. CORCORAN: 'On Board,' it's a new musical that was in previews here in Boston at the time. Rachel had friends who were in it. She had tickets to go both weekends, took a bunch of friends and family with her.

MS. PLATT: When was this?

MS. CORCORAN: We went to the Friday night showing.

MS. PLATT: Could you clarify who you mean by 'we'?

MS. CORCORAN: Um, myself, her dads Hiram and Leroy, Jesse, Beth, and Beth's mother Quinn.

MS. PLATT: So Mr. Puckerman was not in attendance?

MS. CORCORAN: No.

MS. PLATT: Ms. Corcoran, you returned to the city on Saturday morning, yes?

MS. CORCORAN: That's correct. I took the train back with Jesse.

MS. PLATT: And at this point you knew your daughter was having an affair. Did you have any idea as to who this person was?

MS. CORCORAN: After I followed her to the apartment, I thought it might be Noah. I -- that letter only makes me believe that more.

MS. PLATT: Ms. Corcoran, did you discuss this subject with your daughter's husband?

MS. CORCORAN: I -- I felt I had to, yes. I told him about it when we got back to the city.

MS. PLATT: The city?

MS. CORCORAN: I'm sorry -- New York.

MS. PLATT: What was his reaction upon hearing this information?

MS. CORCORAN: Well he was -- he was upset, understandably. He wanted to talk to Rachel. He wanted to see if they could work things out.

MS. PLATT: So Mr. St. James left your company that afternoon?

MS. CORCORAN: Late afternoon, yes.

MS. PLATT: Thank you, Ms. Corcoran. No further questions, your honor.

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Callahan sighs and rubs his fingers over his eyes before reaching out to slide a stack of papers into his briefcase. "I'm calling it a night," he announces, pushing himself out of his chair and closing the briefcase with a *click*. "If anyone finds anything useful, call me. I'll see you all tomorrow." He starts to make his way towards the door, stopping briefly to drop a folded up slip of paper into the Snap Cup (Blaine smiles at that) and drop a set of keys in front of Kurt. "Make sure you lock up."

The rest of them sit in silence for awhile, pages rustling as they sift through depositions. Blaine taps his pen against the hardwood table, glancing up at the cup every so often, until he finally gives in and ventures, "Was anyone else going to add to the cup tonight?" When no one answers him, he reaches for it and spills the week's contents in front of him on the table, beaming. He only put in one of these slips, which means either a good portion of their team is making contributions or someone else is really on

board with the idea (Kurt or Tina, most likely, but Callahan did just drop something in there, so Blaine has hope that they're all using it).

Tina straightens a stack of papers in front of her and props her feet up on a nearby empty chair. "Read them out loud," she suggests. "We might as well get something good out of having to stay late tonight."

Blaine grins at her gratefully and unfolds one of the slips. "Tina," he says, clearing his throat a little. "*Your being detail-oriented has been really helpful with this case.*" Tina smiles, genuinely pleased, and Blaine reaches for another slip. "Sebastian," he continues, fidgeting a little nervously in his chair. He didn't write this one, so he can only assume that it's come from Callahan or Santana. "*You're really good at backing up your arguments. You're going to make a great lawyer.*" Sebastian looks up from his tablet in surprise, eyes studying Blaine first (Blaine merely shrugs his shoulders at Sebastian) and then Santana (and Santana smiles into her coffee but Blaine can see her shake her head, which means she didn't write it either).

"Santana," Blaine says evenly, and he sees the cup hover next to her lips as she waits to take her second sip. "*I like that you are making the effort to see both sides of a story. I think our client appreciates it.*" Santana glances around the table before taking another, much longer drink of her coffee. Blaine shifts in his chair as he picks up another slip of paper, trying not to give himself away and silently hoping she appreciates the compliment. "Kurt," he says, and Blaine has to try really, really hard not to smile too wide even though this one isn't his. "*You are a godsend. Thank you for remembering everyone's drink orders!*" Kurt offers them all a small smile as they mumble in agreement, each of them clutching their coffee and tea cups a little tighter.

There are two slips left on the table in front of him. Blaine reaches for one and notices Callahan's name at the top. "For Callahan," Blaine says hesitantly. "*I like that you do whatever it takes to get the job done. I feel like we can all learn something from that.*" Blaine runs his thumb over the small slip of paper a few times before Kurt pries it out of his hands.

"We can leave it on his desk on the way out," Kurt suggests.

Sebastian nods at the last slip in front of Blaine. "Think that last one's for you, B?"

Blaine shrugs and tries not to smile. "It'd be nice," he admits, unfolding it. "That way we all have something nice said about us this week."

"This was a good idea," Santana says quietly. Blaine blinks up at her in surprise. "I -- look, you have to admit, even Callahan's been in a good mood, and he should be beyond stressed out and pissed off right now." She flicks her gaze over to Kurt, who merely laughs and mimes zipping his lips shut.

"Thank you," Blaine says warmly, flushing. "I'm... glad we finally agree on something." Santana rolls her eyes at him as Sebastian rolls his shoulders back; she reaches over and starts to massage at the base of Sebastian's neck, and Blaine feels something not unlike fondness at the sight. He looks back down at the last slip of paper, which *does* have his name scribbled across the top, and -- "Oh."

"What?" Santana asks with a laugh. "Complimenting you on your eternal and sometimes nauseating optimism?"

"Or on the fact that you had the balls to stand up to Callahan?" Tina guesses.

"Um, no," Blaine stammers, feeling his face grow hot. His first guess is that Kurt's written this, but it's so wildly inappropriate for a work setting that it *can't* be. It could easily be any of the rest of them -- a joke, maybe -- but it still makes him a little uncomfortable.

Kurt leans over his shoulder to read and promptly turns pink in the face. "Oh." Not Kurt, then.

"Oh for crying out loud," Santana sighs, clearly exasperated. "Give it here," she demands, snatching it from Blaine's fingers before he can protest. She barks out a laugh and looks up at him, eyes glittering, before reading it aloud. "*Nice ass.*"

There's a long pause -- Kurt's hand ends up on Blaine's knee under the table and Sebastian just *stares* at him -- before Tina bursts out laughing. Collectively, the rest of them turn to look at her. "What?" she says defensively, still laughing. "It's totally true. Anderson is *fine*. I've seen him in Spandex."

Santana's the next to snort out a laugh, and then Kurt, and then they're all laughing until they're red in the face and unable to breathe. They give up on being productive, after that, Sebastian calling it quits first. He takes Santana's hand as they leave and the smile Santana gives him on their way out makes a wave of nostalgia crash over Blaine. It's reminiscent of the way he and Sebastian were when they were a lot younger, nineteen and still getting to know each other, fingers intertwined. Tina's the next to leave, ruffling Blaine's hair as she strolls by and offering him an invite to Mike's birthday party late next week

("Yes, in *public*," she sighs dramatically. "Honestly, Blaine, we gave up on trying to get you involved when we realized someone else was already tapping that.>").

"Do you want help cleaning up?" Blaine offers.

"Sure," Kurt hums pleasantly, scooting his chair closer and wrapping his arms around Blaine's middle now that they're alone. "And then maybe you could come over?" he suggests. "We can order take out and relax and you can finally tell me about that threesome Tina's in -- I promise I won't start acting weird around her."

Blaine laughs and nods, turning his head to the side a little to capture Kurt's lips in a warm kiss. Together, they start to organize the rest of what's left on the conference room table. Blaine reaches for the last stack of depositions and slides them over to Kurt, noticing the name printed across the front of the one on top. "L. Fabray?" he asks curiously as Kurt takes the pile from him.

"Hmm? Oh, Quinn," Kurt answers absently, starting to pack up his own briefcase. "Quinn's her middle name. Lucy's her first name."

"Lucy," Blaine echos faintly, the name rolling on his tongue as he gets a feel for it. "Lucy Fabray. Luc-- Lu..." He tapers off, his whole body going rigid, and is struck with the memory of Rachel's mother testifying in court earlier today. "Do we have a copy of that letter?" he asks abruptly, shoving his own briefcase into the chair next to him.

"The lett -- the one Ms. Corcoran read in court today?" Kurt asks, bewildered. "Um, yeah, somewhere around -- here." He hands a copy of the letter to Blaine, who has to read it over three times before it really starts to sink in.

Lu --

Saw on board. Headed back to the city after the weekend is over. I will miss you but I promise we will be together soon.

-- Rach



"We have to go see Quinn Fabray," Blaine says in a rush, dropping the letter and making a grab for his briefcase. "Quinn -- Lucy -- Ms. Fabray," Blaine explains earnestly, fumbling over his words. "We have to go see her *right now*."

"O... kay," Kurt says slowly, reaching for his own briefcase and hurrying after Blaine. He falls behind while he locks the door, Blaine speeding down the hallway ahead of him. "Hey, wait," he calls out, jogging to keep up. "What -- do you think she knows something about the affair?" Blaine doesn't answer, just pushes the button for the ground floor and waits for the elevator doors to close. "Even if she does, I don't think it's going to help Puckerman --"

Blaine fists a hand in Kurt's lapel and tugs him close, planting a firm kiss on his lips. "Trust me," he murmurs.

Kurt swallows audibly, but he nods and reaches out to squeeze Blaine's hand reassuringly. "Okay."

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When Quinn Fabray opens the door to them, it's nearly nine o' clock. Kurt and Blaine are still in their suits from the day, but Quinn is wearing a pale pink pajama set, and Kurt notices Blaine break out into a grin. "Gentleman," she says hesitantly, clearly surprised. "It's late --"

"I know," Kurt cuts in, nudging Blaine with his elbow a little. "We're sorry for that -- we hope we didn't wake your daughter."

"Your daughter," Blaine repeats blankly. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he says, rushing to apologize. "Beth -- it's a school night, I didn't even think --"

"It's fine," she says, waving a hand dismissively. "She's staying at a friend's tonight. I thought she could use a little distraction from everything that's going on." She pauses, hand gripping the door frame, before stepping aside. "Did you want to come in?"

"Yes, please," Blaine says quickly, crossing the threshold and making his way into the living room.

Kurt follows a little more slowly, waiting until Ms. Fabray has closed and locked the front door before walking with her into the living room. "I believe Mr. Anderson had a few questions for you?"

She sinks into an armchair slowly as Kurt takes the empty spot on the couch next to Blaine. Blaine doesn't so much look at him, his eyes trained on Quinn Fabray, and Kurt tries to remember what they were even talking about before they got here. Blaine had been silent the entire drive over, refusing to give an explanation; he only clutched Kurt's hand in the dark over the center console and repeated his whispered plea of, "Trust me."

"Okay," Ms. Fabray says amicably, reaching for a steaming mug on the coffee table in front of her. "Did either of you want some tea?"

They both shake their heads, and Blaine leans forward a little, bouncing in his seat. "Rachel's mother testified in court today, Ms. Fabray," Blaine informs her without preamble.

"Shelby?" she says, wrinkling her nose a little. "Why?"

"She testified that her daughter admitted to having an affair," Kurt explains, hoping he's helping whatever point Blaine's trying to make, whatever direction they're going in. "She followed Ms. Berry to Mr. Puckerman's apartment, she read a letter aloud to support her suspicions -- the one they found on our client. She told Mr. St. James about it -- that's why he was here the night Ms. Berry was murdered."

Quinn Fabray's eyes narrow, and Kurt notices that her hands grip the mug a little more tightly. "That's *ridiculous*," she snaps, and Kurt's never heard her sound so angry. "Puck and Rachel have known each other since they were kids, they went to temple together. They tried dating after Rachel's bat mitzvah and it was a disaster. They both said it was like dating their sibling or cousin or something."

"Okay," Kurt allows. "Her presence at his apartment can probably be explained in a less incriminating manner, but with her admission to her mother, and the letter the police found on Mr. Puckerman --"

"Why do they think it was for him?" Ms. Fabray asks abruptly. "Is it just because he was holding it?"

Kurt shakes his head. "No, it was the address," he explains. "Ms. Berry addressed the letter to 'Lu.' Mr. Puckerman's middle name is --"

"Lucas, I know," Ms. Fabray says thinly. She exhales heavily and looks down into her mug. "He wouldn't do it," she insists. "Puck wasn't sleeping with Rachel."

"I know," Blaine says quietly, and Kurt looks over at him in surprise. Blaine hasn't spoken in awhile. "You were."

Ms. Fabray looks up from her mug quickly, eyes widened in surprise. She's quiet for a very long, tense moment before she breathes, "I can't believe Puck told you." Kurt's eyes fall to the monogram on the shirt pocket of her pajamas, his lips mouthing the letters as he reads 'RB' --

"He didn't," Blaine insists, scooting a little closer. Kurt sees his fingers twitch in an effort not to reach across the table, and Kurt can't *breathe*. "I figured it out on my own."

"How?" Quinn asks sharply.

"The letter," Blaine explains with a faint smile. "*Lu* isn't short for Lucas -- it's short for Lucy. And *Saw on board* -- she wasn't talking about the production. She was talking about Puckerman. It's his nickname, isn't it? Saw?"

"How do you know that?" Kurt asks softly. Blaine glances at him for a second and shakes his head, and Kurt figures it has something to do with their client's alibi. Quinn shifts uncomfortably in her armchair, eyes trained on her mug of tea again, and Kurt sinks back against the cushions of the couch, leaving Blaine to ask the rest of the questions. He's never not trusting Blaine again. This is *huge*.

"I didn't plan it," she says, the barest hint of a laugh in her voice. "I -- she was sort of annoying, Rachel, back when we were in high school. But we were friends and there were things I admired about her and -- she's Beth's godmother, for God's sake." She draws in a breath and sets the mug back down on the table before looking up at them again, chin held high. "I went to Yale. Puck went to California. Rachel went to New York. We kept in touch, she came back for every single one of Beth's birthdays, and then... she met Jesse."

"And you didn't approve?" Kurt guesses.

Quinn shakes her head, smiling. "No, it's not that. It's -- they were sort of perfect for each other, Rachel and Jesse. Very dramatic. Very passionate."

"So what happened?" Kurt asks.

"Between them? Nothing much, really. They fell in love and got married and it -- it all happened so fast." She bites her lip before continuing. "You have to understand -- Rachel and I, we'd been seeing each other less than a year. She and Jesse were married for nearly five years when she died. It's not -- I'm not what you think I am. Or maybe I am, I don't know," she groans, leaning back in the armchair and closing her eyes.

"How did it happen?" Blaine asks gently, and Kurt has to shift and sit on his hands to prevent himself from reaching out for Blaine's in that moment because *god*, Blaine is so good at this. Kurt knew he would be. This, this is why they've studied, why they've gotten into law. This is what it's like to help people, and Quinn Fabray isn't even on trial. Kurt wants to kiss him.

Kurt always wants to kiss him.

A faint smile appears on Quinn's lips as she looks back down at them, her eyes warm but distant. "Baking," she admits with a slight laugh, her cheeks tinting pink. "I -- we were baking cupcakes for Beth's birthday party and it got a little... messy."

"Flour fights," Blaine says seriously. "I've been there." Both Kurt and Quinn look over at him with raised eyebrows, and he hastens to explain. "In college, I was part of an all-male a capella choir," he begins, and Kurt looks at his lap, unable to keep from smiling. "Living with a bunch of preppy college-aged guys afforded a surprising number of... incidents," he finishes, choosing his words carefully. "Flour and sugar is hard enough to get out of curly hair, but egg -- ugh, that was the worst."

And Quinn, amazingly, smiles at him. "I started the fight, but she cracked an egg on my head and the kitchen was a *mess*..." She tapers off and shakes her head, smiling bemusedly. It's the happiest Kurt's ever seen her, for all that he's interviewed her twice now. "She had chocolate, right on her chin," she continues, thumb ghosting over her own chin. "I wiped it off for her and she told me I could kiss her if I wanted to." She looks up at them again, eyes brimming with tears, and Kurt's heart breaks for her. He knows what it's like to lose a loved one. "So I did," she says with a shrug, voice catching. "It's -- there's always been something between us, a chemistry, but nothing happened until then."

Kurt wrinkles his brow, concentrating. "So when she went to Mr. Puckerman's apartment after telling her mother about the affair..."

"She was coming to see me," Quinn affirms, sniffing a little. Blaine unearths a handkerchief from his pocket and hands it to her across the coffee table. "It's -- we were trying to be discreet. Puck knew, he was supportive -- that's what she meant by *on board*. She was planning on moving out, asking for a divorce, leaving Jesse."

"For you," Blaine says quietly.

Quinn nods. "I didn't force her to make that decision. She -- she loved him, I know she did. But when she was with me... I don't know, I felt like that was when she was happiest. She didn't have to worry about being Rachel Berry, you know? She was just... Rachel. She was carefree and sun-kissed and loved animal sweaters and --"

"And you loved her," Blaine supplies, subtly nudging Kurt's foot with his own.

Kurt *swears* his heart stops beating. They haven't talked about this yet.

Quinn squeezes her eyes shut and wipes at her face with Blaine's handkerchief furiously. "She was paranoid, the last few months she was alive. She swore Jesse was having her followed. She thought he knew. That's why we were sneaking around at Puck's and writing letters in code, *God*. She made me scared for her. That's why I wanted her to ask Puck for help. I wanted him to go down to the city with her, to help her pack up her things."

"Ms. Fabray," Kurt cuts in gently. "Why didn't you say anything?"

Quinn shakes her head and reaches for her mug again, resolutely not looking at either of them. "Beth," she says simply, her voice soft and quiet. "We wanted -- we wanted to wait until the divorce was final and the air was clear before we told Beth. We never got a chance to." She takes a deep breath and readjusts her hold on her mug. "You want me to testify, don't you?"

"It'd help," Blaine admits, and Kurt can hear it in his voice, hear how Blaine's choosing his words with care and treading lightly, sensitive to Quinn's heartache and concerns. "We know you want to help him. So do we. That's what we're here for. It's what we do."

She looks up at that, eyes focusing on Blaine. "You do want to help, don't you?" she muses. "Callahan, he's doing this because he's getting paid to do it -- probably for the publicity, too, with Rachel being the deceased and all. But you, Mr. Anderson, you actually want to help him, don't you?"

Kurt glances over at him, and Blaine takes in a deep breath. "He told me his alibi." Quinn's eyebrows arch clear to her hairline at that, and Kurt can see how uncomfortable Blaine gets at her reaction. "I swore to him I wouldn't tell anyone. I gave him my word."

"He trusts you," Quinn breathes. "Puck -- for whatever reason, he trusts *you*. He believes you're going to help get him out of this." She pauses and looks over at Kurt. "He mentioned you, the last time I visited," she says slowly, remembering. "He said you wanted justice for Rachel. I --" She closes her eyes and blindly sets the mug back down, sitting up straight. "Okay," she says evenly, opening her eyes.

"Okay?" Kurt parrots.

"I'll testify," she clarifies. "But first -- Beth. I need the time to be able to explain all this to Beth. I won't do it before then."

Blaine looks over at him and mouths the word *please*. "Of course," Kurt says quickly. "I -- do you think you could come in sometime tomorrow?" he requests. "So we can go over your statement and testimony with Callahan? We can probably get you on the witness stand by Friday. Is that... enough time?"

Quinn nods and rises to her feet, shaking each of their hands. "I have one more favor to ask."

"Name it," Blaine says eagerly, and Kurt can't find it in him to disagree.

"Promise me you'll look into Jesse."

"Her husband?" Kurt asks blankly. "Why? You said they loved each other. Why would he murder his wife? *How* would he have murdered her? She was dead when he got there."

"I'm... not so sure about that," Quinn says hesitantly. "It's -- they did love each other, and he would've done anything for her, but... When things don't go his way, it's never pretty. He has a temper. And if Shelby told him Rachel was having an affair..."

"That's a dangerous accusation," Kurt says carefully.

Blaine rests a hand gently on Kurt's arm. "Puckerman didn't do it," he insists. "If the accusation's dangerous for anyone, it's him." He turns his attention back to Quinn, who offers him his handkerchief

back. Blaine refuses and shakes her hand firmly, looking her square in the eye. “We’ll look into it,” he promises. “For you. For Rachel. For Puck. And for Beth.”

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“Anderson!”

Blaine pauses in the hallway and turns around to face Santana, who’s balancing a stack of files nearly a third of her height. Kurt pauses a few feet in front of him, waiting. “Callahan wants to see you,” she says breathlessly, shifting the weight of the stack a little in her arms. “Probably wants to sing praises about figuring out the whole thing with Fabray.” Blaine shifts awkwardly from one foot to the other and clutches the handle of his briefcase with both hands. “Relax, Pinkie,” she laughs. “It was good, what you did. It helped.”

Blaine smiles at her, relaxed and pleased, and moves to take a step forward. “Do you want help with that?”

“I can help,” Kurt offers kindly, retreating back down the hall and shifting half of the stack into his own arms. Santana offers Blaine a small wave and heads towards the conference room. “I’ll meet you in the parking garage?” Kurt checks quietly. Blaine nods and Kurt follows Santana down the hall and around the corner.

Blaine knocks on Callahan’s office door and is greeted with a rather pleasant, “Come in.”

Blaine pokes his head into the room and offers Callahan a small smile. “You wanted to see me?”

Callahan looks up and smiles, all teeth. “Yes, Mr. Anderson, come in,” he beckons, waving Blaine in. Blaine slides into the room and pulls the door to, the definitive *click* absent; his hands are still clutching the handle of his briefcase. Callahan barks out a laugh and shakes his head, waving at Blaine to come closer. “Set your briefcase down, Anderson. Loosen up your tie. Relax a little. I’m not angry with you.”

Blaine does as he asked and smiles a little, crossing the office to join Callahan near his desk. “Santana said you might be pleased.”

Callahan smirks at him, apparently amused. “And you weren’t counting on that?”

Blaine colors a little. “I know how hard you are to impress.”

"True," Callahan admits. He drains the last of his coffee and tosses the cup into a nearby trashcan. "Is that knowledge based on personal experience or do I have a reputation?"

"A little of both," Blaine laughs. "I know you like people who are opinionated."

Callahan shakes his head at that and loosens his own tie. "I like people who have guts, Mr. Anderson. Those aren't always the same thing."

Blaine remembers Kurt's story about being kicked out of class and his own defiance and obstinance a couple of weeks ago and fights back a smile. "You like it when people stand up to you."

"You can't be afraid to go after what you want," Callahan insists. "I hope that's something you've learned this year."

And that hits a little too close to home, brings back the memory of following Sebastian out here and the encouragement Blaine's gotten from people about sticking this out and how he'd make a good lawyer. When he was at his lowest, Blaine wanted the world back at his fingertips. He wanted Kurt, he wanted respect from his boss and his peers, and he got it. "Yeah," Blaine says faintly. "I did. I -- I learned a lot this year."

"I could tell when you started to really apply yourself. It was a nice surprise. And it... definitely got my attention, seeing you rise to the challenge like that."

Another faint memory (*I'm not afraid of a challenge*) and Blaine rolls his eyes a little, hoping it doesn't come across as rude. "You just like a blood bath."

Callahan laughs at that, and Blaine relaxes a little more, confident that he's not in any danger of upsetting his boss at this point. "Guts," Callahan reminds him, and Blaine smiles. "What you've done with this case, Anderson -- that took guts."

The smile fades and Blaine shifts his weight from one leg to the other, rubbing at the back of his neck uncomfortably. "I'm sorry if I made things more difficult," he sighs, "by not giving up the alibi. It's just -- I told you, I gave him my word, and that --"

"I know, I know," Callahan says dismissively. "That wasn't what I was talking about. I meant this week, with Fabray. I don't know how you knew -- I don't think I want to know, actually -- but you had an instinct



and you acted on it. That's what this profession's really about. You have to follow your instincts. You can't be afraid to do that."

"I'm not," Blaine says slowly, standing up a little straighter. "I think I've proved that."

"That's not my point," Callahan sighs, rising from his chair and rounding the desk to stand next to Blaine. "I'm picky and I'm tough, I'll own up to that. It takes a lot to really catch my eye. But you did, and I've noticed a lot about you, Mr. Anderson. I know you pride yourself on being moral. You haven't had to compromise yourself."

Blaine frowns a little. "I didn't think that was a problem for you anymore."

"It's not," Callahan agrees. "At least not at the moment. But that's the thing, Blaine, is that won't always be the case. And not just with me -- with anyone. I don't know if you've noticed, but the rest of the world isn't as morally sound as you are."

Blaine rubs at his shoulder, feels the phantom pain in his chest and tries not to let his discomfort show. "I have experience with just how ugly the world can be."

Callahan considers him a moment before leaning against his desk, hands gripping the edge. "Life is about compromise."

"I don't think I should have to --"

"Then don't think about it that way," Callahan suggests. He nods at the empty spot next to him, and Blaine cautiously leans against the desk, mirroring Callahan's position. "Think about it like... prioritizing. Sometimes, someone else's need is going to be greater than whatever you're standing up for. You have to make sacrifices. Trust me, you'll learn a lot of this in your second and third years. This is just a preview." Blaine looks down at his feet, and Callahan nudges Blaine's elbow with his own. "Lighten up," he laughs. "I'm just making sure that you're prepared. Not everyone is always going to have the same expectations as you. Sometimes people will surprise you." Blaine makes a questioning noise, but Callahan just gives him a look. "Harvard generally doesn't see show choir majors from California."

Blaine colors a little but manages a smile. "Harvard's always looking for something different, right?"

"True," Callahan admits with a laugh. "You *are* different. Do you want to know why I really like you?"

And there's a contrast, so different from earlier in the year when Santana had been so eager to offer up her reasons as to why she *didn't* like Blaine. Blaine shifts a little on the desk, turning to face Callahan, and grins. "The Snap Cup really got to you, didn't it?"

Another laugh and Callahan shifts too. "Morale's definitely up in there, I'll give you that. It's because I think you already knew most of what I told you tonight," he says, and Blaine ducks his head a little. "You know what people are like. You know what it takes. You know what has to be done, sometimes. You have to, given your background, where you come from."

Blaine smiles, just barely, and shrugs his shoulders a little. "Yeah, I do, but you didn't have to tell me all this. I know how helpful Ms. Fabray's testimony was. I'm glad I could help. The rest you could've left in the cup."

"Hmm, sometimes things go over better in person. And I owe you an apology for the whole alibi thing."

"Thank you," Blaine says sincerely, "but I don't think I'm the one you owe the apology to."

Callahan grins at him. "Priorities," he points out. "You've got them sorted out. You might actually make it in this shark tank."

Blaine beams at him. "Any other advice, while I'm here? Anything that might help me with an internship this summer or after graduation?"

"Mmm, more of the same, really," Callahan hums, shifting again. "I think you know what you're doing. You know to be prepared. You know to follow your instincts. Just make sure you know what weapons you have in your arsenal," he adds, gaze and voice dropping a little. "Know how to... *use your assets*." And then his arm is wrapped around Blaine's waist and his hand is on Blaine's ass and --

"What --?"

"Come on, Blaine," Callahan says, *and he's laughing, why is he laughing?* "You're fairly intelligent and you're eager to please. I know you. And I know what you want. I'm helping you to get it." His hand squeezes a little tighter and Blaine squirms uncomfortably --

"Is that the only reason you gave me the internship?" Blaine asks with a gasp, pushing himself away from the desk a little. "Everything you said you liked about me, all the things you said I was good at --"

"All true," Callahan says indifferently. "I just also happened to be admiring your, uh, assets," he says with a grin.

"It was you," Blaine breathes, closing his eyes. He's too horrified to even move at this point. "The Snap Cup -- that was you. I don't -- *why?*" he asks, eyes snapping open.

"I've always found you rather... amusing," Callahan chuckles. "But then you had to go and talk about masturbation and sex with men and it was a little... provocative."

"Is that all I am to you?" Blaine asks, stung. "Just one big joke? Was it --" He stops and swallows thickly, more aware of the the presence of Callahan's hand on his ass and it feels so *wrong*, Blaine trusted him -- "Was it fun for you? Are you -- do you think I asked for this?"

Callahan raises an eyebrow at him, apparently amused. "Do you expect me to believe this is the first time someone's propositioned you like this, Blaine?" he asks with a laugh.

And there it is, the final straw, and it all comes crashing down around him. Blaine tugs himself out of Callahan's grasp, hands trembling as he retreats and fumbles blindly for his briefcase. "It is," he says, voice shaking. "No one takes me seriously. No one thinks I could do this without manipulating the system or -- or doing... this. And I don't deserve to be thought of that way."

Callahan's eyes narrow as Blaine walks away from him, and Blaine's more afraid of him now than he has been in the last seven months combined. "Not everyone's going to have the same expectations as you do," Callahan repeats. "You're never going to get anywhere if you always play by the rules, Anderson."

"I'm not sorry," Blaine says, and his voice is shaking so *badly*. "I refuse to take advantage of people. I refuse to walk all over them." He pauses as his trembling hand finally finds the doorknob, and he stands up a little straighter, determined to walk out of Callahan's office with his head held high. "And I refuse to let someone else do it to me. I'm not for sale."

Callahan walks briskly back around his desk and settles into his chair, eyes trained on a file on the desk in front of him. "Goodbye, Mr. Anderson," he says shortly, and he sounds *bored*. "You can show yourself out. Don't bother coming back."

Blaine can't turn the handle fast enough.

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He has to get out of this office.

He has to get out of this building.

He has to get out of Boston.

Blaine rushes down the hallway, single-mindedly heading for the back stairs. He almost literally runs into Kurt waiting at the door to the parking garage, stopping short just before they touch.

“Hey, you,” Kurt says with a smile, reaching out a hand. Blaine tries to reply in kind, but he’s too upset, too angry, too horrified at what’s just happened. Kurt’s brow furrows, concern creasing his face, but Blaine can’t deal with the sharp edge of Kurt’s well-intentioned kindness right now.

“I -- I have to go,” Blaine says, pulling away and darting through the door. He strides towards his car, intent on getting as far from this night as possible, but Kurt is persistent, following him quickly.

“Blaine, what’s going on?” Kurt asks. “What happened? Where are you going? Blaine!” Blaine reaches the car and fumbles for his keys, dropping them on the ground. Kurt scoops them up and hands them to Blaine. “Can you please tell me what’s going on?” he asks, gripping Blaine’s hand.

Blaine’s hand clenches around the keys as he looks at the car. “I’m going home.”

“Well then let me drive you -- I don’t think you should drive when you’re this upset,” Kurt offers.

“I’m not going back to the dorm, Kurt -- well, I am, I guess, to pack, but I meant California. I’m going home to California.” Blaine pulls his hand out of Kurt’s and unlocks the car. “I don’t belong here.”

“That’s insane,” Kurt replies, reaching for his hand again. “Of course you belong here.”

“Apparently I don’t, because Callahan just fired me,” Blaine says angrily. “He gave me a few nice compliments, gave me some lovely advice, and then he groped my ass.”

Kurt drops his hand instantaneously. “He -- he what?”

“He -- “ Blaine can’t even say it again, can’t deal with even thinking about the way it felt, the way it made his skin crawl. “That was the only reason he kept me around as long as he did. I guess he’s not really used to being refused, because he fucking *fired* me when I said no.”

Kurt tries to grab Blaine’s hand again, but Blaine can’t look at him or hold his hand right now, can’t deal with his sympathy or shock. Blaine needs to be angry, needs to hold onto the heat of this emotion -- because the alternative is thinking about what he’s just lost. Kurt grabs Blaine’s shoulder instead, hand somehow unerringly finding Blaine’s long healed injury, and turns him so they’re face to face. “We can fix this, Blaine. We’ll find a way, we’ll do something. But don’t --” His eyes go soft and his hand tightens on Blaine’s shoulder. “*Please*, don’t go back to California. You’re meant to be here.”

Blaine feels his anger begin to ebb, and he slumps back against the car. “You’re the only one who thinks so,” he says miserably. “I don’t think I can do this anymore. I can’t keep trying to prove myself to people who are *never* going to change their minds. I’m a joke to everyone here except you. No one takes me seriously.”

“You’re not a joke,” Kurt whispers fervently, and he reaches down to tangle his fingers with Blaine, successful this time. “You’re not. You’re smart and resourceful and -- we wouldn’t have found out the truth about the affair without you.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Blaine insists. “It’s not -- I’m never going to be able to help people or get anywhere without -- without...”

“*Stay*,” Kurt pleads.

“It’s not really up to you, Kurt. You have to let me go.” He slips out of Kurt’s grasp and gets in the car. He pulls out of the parking space and drives away, refusing to look at Kurt in the rearview mirror. It’s not until he gets to the first stoplight that he starts to cry.

It’s the first time Blaine hasn’t wanted to run away, and he doesn’t really have a choice.

## Chapter Eleven

Blaine picks up [the mug](#) Kurt gave him for Christmas and stares at it, unable to either put it in his suitcase or toss it in the trash. His flight home isn't until tomorrow morning, and there's no way he'll be able to sleep before then, so it's not like he needs to rush the packing, but --

If he doesn't do something he'll have to think about what's happened and what he's leaving behind, and he can't. He just can't. If he thinks about it, he'll stay. And staying, it's -- it's just not an option anymore. Not after -- well. Not after tonight.

He lets the mug fall onto a sweater in his suitcase and collapses on the bed, blinking his eyes rapidly to stop the tears from coming out. Now's not the time for tears. He already cried tonight, and he knows he's going to cry when he gets home, but he doesn't want to keep crying constantly -- it'll just make him feel worse.

*\*knock knock\**

Blaine startles at the sound, raising his head to look at the door. It's probably Kurt, still trying to stop Blaine from leaving. He doesn't want to talk to Kurt, almost as much as he *does* want to talk to him. He always wants to talk to Kurt, even now, even after tonight. They've just gotten back together, just fixed their problems, and now Blaine has to go, has to leave Kurt behind and it's not *fair*. It's horrible, and heart wrenching, and he just wants to stay. But he can't.

*\*knock knock\* \*knock knock\* \*knock knock\**

Kurt obviously isn't going to go away. Blaine pulls at the ends of the sleeves of his Stanford hoodie and crosses the room to the door before easing it open. "Let me in, hobbit," Santana says, raising an eyebrow. "Don't make me keep knocking like an idiot."

Blaine blinks at her. What is she even -- "What are you doing here, Santana?" he asks tiredly. He doesn't have the strength for this.

"I was outside of Callahan's office earlier," she starts, and Blaine closes his eyes because *of course* Santana was still there, of course she was outside of Callahan's office, which means of course she -- "I overheard you guys talking. And I saw --"

Blaine sucks in a breath and tugs her into the room by her forearm, shutting the door forcefully behind her. "Santana, what you saw was --"

"-- was Callahan putting his grimy mitts all over you. And I saw *you*. I saw your reaction."

Blaine does a double-take, leaning against the door with a quiet *thud*. "Disappointed?" he asks bitterly. "Now that you know what really goes on behind closed doors? Well congratulations, Santana, you got your wish -- I'm going home."

"No, you're not," she counters, hands on her hips. "I'm not going to let you."

"Why?" Blaine says dully. "I'd think you'd be happy I was leaving Boston. It turns out everyone thinks I'm just as much of a brown-noser as you do. Guess you were right -- I'm not meant to be here."

"Seriously, Anderson, snap the fuck out of it," Santana snaps icily. "If you were the person I've been pretending you were, you wouldn't be here packing for California. You'd be back in Callahan's office getting fucked over his pretentious mahogany desk. Obviously I was wrong." Santana shrugs uncomfortably. "And I don't admit that very often, so treasure this moment."

Blaine's lips quirk briefly, but then he slumps more against the door. "As much as I appreciate the sentiment, Santana, Callahan fired me, or did you not overhear that part?"

"I heard," she says, and she almost sounds bored. "Look, Pinkie Pie, if you leave, you're letting him win, and that arrogant, sexist douchebag deserves to win absolutely nothing, okay? If you're going to let him run you out of town, maybe you are everything I said you were. But I don't think that's true, Anderson. Do you?"

*\*knock knock\**

Blaine feels the vibration of the knocks before he even registers hearing them. He blinks; this time it *must* be Kurt, and Blaine still doesn't know if he can handle Kurt right now, especially with Santana here. Kurt's already tried to convince him to stay, and now Santana's trying to do the same and if they team up --

*\*knock knock\**

"You gonna get that, Pinkie?" Santana asks dryly.

Blaine shifts uncomfortably but turns to face the door and rests his forehead on it for a moment before straightening and pulling open the door. Kurt looks relieved to see him on the other side of the door. "I was half convinced you'd already be on a plane back to California."

Blaine shrugs, opting to tell the truth. "Nothing left until the morning," he sighs. "I was trying to pack, but I just keep putting things in my suitcase, and then taking them out, and then putting them back in."

Kurt steps forward into the room, reaching out for Blaine before spotting Santana and dropping his hand. "Maybe that's because you know you shouldn't leave. Not because of what happened tonight," Kurt says.

"I've been trying to tell him that," Santana offers, "but I don't think I'm getting through to him. Maybe you'll have better luck, goody two shoes to goody two shoes."

Blaine laughs slightly, the sound leaving his throat in a harsh burst. "I knew the nice Santana couldn't last very long."

Kurt gives Santana a look before focusing on Blaine. "While I'm not sure about her methods, I can't say I disagree with her aims. You shouldn't go, and not just because I don't want you to -- though I don't -- but because I really think you're our one chance to save Puckerman from a wrongful conviction. He trusts you, Blaine, and you're the one who figured out who Rachel was really having the affair with -- I really believe you're the one who's going to win this case for us, and you can't do that if you go." Kurt pushes Blaine gently towards the bed, nudging him into taking a seat before sitting down himself. He takes Blaine's hands and looks him in the eyes. "Staying here and helping us win the case is the right thing to do, Blaine."

Blaine looks away, pulling his right hand from Kurt's grasp to wipe roughly at his eyes. He's not going to cry, not again. "Well, I'd love to help," he says, "but Callahan fired me. I don't have any right to be there anymore, even if I wanted to."

"Not as Callahan's intern, no."

Blaine frowns at Kurt. "What are you talking about? How else would I even be involved?"

"Oh my god, that's brilliant, Hummel," Santana says, sounding approving. "I may have underestimated you."



A fleeting smile passes over Kurt's face. "My life is complete, earning your approval," he quips. Seeing Blaine's confusion (and seriously, why are Santana and Kurt, of all people, bonding in front of him), Kurt explains. "A law student can represent a defendant in criminal proceedings if they're supervised by a licensed attorney. You've been a better defense attorney for Mr. Puckerman than the rest of us put together -- especially Callahan."

"Callahan *fired me*," Blaine reminds him again. "There's no way he'd supervise."

Kurt arches an eyebrow. "Right," he says, a little dryly. "And I busted my ass at Harvard and passed the bar for what again, exactly?"

Blaine sees Santana cast an approving smile at Kurt out of the corner of his eye. "What, you? You'd supervise?"

"Pretty sure that's what he's offering," Santana says, the barest hint of a laugh in her voice.

"You want me to defend Puckerman myself," Blaine says slowly. "And that's not going to just end with him in jail."

"Oh please, Pinkie, like you'd let Puckerman go to jail without doing everything you possibly could to stop it. You'd offer to go in his place if you had to."

Blaine considers the possibility for a second but ends up shaking his head, trying to ignore his hesitation. "I -- I'm going back to California. I'm just not cut out to be a lawyer. I'll go back to Malibu and help out with my charity, maybe get a job teaching choir somewhere. I can't -- I can't defend Puckerman."

"Blaine," Kurt says firmly, "I have faith in you. You're good at being what a lawyer should be -- you see things the rest of us miss, and you care about people more than you have to. You're going to win this case, but only if you stay here and fight." Kurt pauses, biting his lip. "Puckerman and Quinn and Beth -- they're counting on you to fight for them. I know you can, because that's what you do, Blaine. You fight for the people who can't fight for themselves. You don't go down without a fight. Don't let him break you." And there's the hesitation again, tugging at his heartstrings. Blaine doesn't particularly want to admit it, but Kurt's right.

"Plus you'll be sticking it to Callahan," Santana points out with a smirk. "Metaphorically speaking, of course."

"Can you just... not?" Kurt grits out, closing his eyes. Santana mumbles something that Blaine thinks is supposed to sound like an apology. Kurt takes a breath, clearly steadying himself, and adjusts the hand that's still holding Blaine's before opening his eyes and readdressing Blaine. "What do you say?"

Blaine takes a few deep breaths -- *in two three four, out two three four* -- and tries to think. He wants -- more than anything in this moment -- to just go, to run away, but... Kurt's right. Puckerman -- *Saw* is counting on him, and so are Quinn and Beth. He can't just let them down by running away. He always runs away from the things that hurt -- from Ohio, from the breakup with Sebastian, from Halloween -- but it's time to stop running and fight. Because a man stands up. And maybe -- maybe he wasn't running, before, or at least he wasn't running away. He was always running towards something, running headfirst into a new fight -- the promise of a safe place, the hope of being loved again. And maybe he did run away at Halloween, away from something -- someone -- hurting him, but he ran into something -- someone -- else. Kurt.

But this? This isn't running to something new or standing up and fighting. This? This is running away.

"Okay."

A smile breaks on Kurt's face, brilliant and blinding. "Really? You're staying? And you'll defend Puckerman?"

"If he'll have me," Blaine points out. "Have you run this by him yet?"

Santana straightens, looking rather pleased. "I'll go talk to him. You two stay here and figure out the game plan. And make it good, okay? I don't intend to be associated with a losing team." She strides to the door and leaves, pulling it closed with a thud.

"I didn't manage to pack much anyway," Blaine says, settling back onto his pillows.

Kurt reaches out and tugs on one of the cords of Blaine's hoodie, smiling a little. "I'm glad." He twists a little, sighing, before reaching over and pulling out the few items Blaine had managed to throw into his suitcase. He busies himself putting things back where they belong (and the familiarity with which he does it makes Blaine's heart ache in all the right places). They spend a long few minutes in a companionable silence, Kurt removing the suitcase from the bed and stuffing it back in the closet, Blaine tugging his knees up to his chest, fingers fiddling with the frayed ends of the cords on his hoodie.

"This is nice." Blaine looks up, startled, to find Kurt's fingers running over the pants of his dark navy suit. "You should wear it on Monday."

"Oh god," Blaine groans, pulling his hood up and hiding his face a little. "I didn't even think about having to plan an outfit. Everyone will be looking at me and I don't have anything that's --"

"We'll pick something out together," Kurt says, and he sounds so *calm*, how can he be so calm? "You can wear this suit, and, let's see --"

"Aren't you nervous?" Blaine asks in a small voice.

Kurt unearths one of his more colorful button-downs, a plaid pink number that Blaine's mother had given him for Christmas. "Of course I am," he says dismissively. "But this isn't my first time dressing for court. I was co-counsel, after all." He gives the shirt a once-over and nods approvingly. "Yes, this will complement the suit nicely."

Blaine pokes his face out from behind his knees. "Was?"

Kurt sets the shirt down on top of Blaine's dresser and turns to look at him. "You can't honestly think I'd still work for him after what he did to you."

"*Kurt.*" Blaine shakes his head, and his throat feels thick with the onslaught of tears. No. No more crying. "Kurt, you can't just quit."

"I can," Kurt insists. "I am. I will." He sighs and turns his attention back to the dresser, fingers reaching out to pull open one of the drawers. "Now about a tie --"

"I have one," Blaine says dismissively, reaching out a hand. Kurt sighs but gives in, sinking back onto the bed and letting Blaine grasp his hand. "Kurt, this isn't just some temp job you can walk away from. This is - - this is your career. This is getting your foot in the door and buying your dad and Carole a nicer place and paying off the mortgage on the garage. This is what you've worked for your entire life. I can't let you just throw that all away --"

"Blaine," Kurt says plaintively. "It's not. *This* -- what we're going to do for Puckerman -- this is what I've spent my whole life working towards. This is an opportunity to help someone. This is what I do. This is what I've always wanted to do. And it's what you want too, I know it is."

Blaine shakes his head again, the threat of tears all the way up to his eyes now. "Why are you doing this?" he whispers. "Why does it have to be me? What can I -- why do you have so much faith in me? Why --" He stops and swallows, breathes out, uneven. "Why do you want me to stay so badly?"

It's a long, quiet moment before Kurt reaches out a hand and pushes the hood away from Blaine's face and off of his head. He withdraws a little, hand coming to rest on Blaine's knee, before the corner of his mouth twitches up into a smile. "Because I love you, you idiot." Kurt pulls Blaine into a single kiss, cradling Blaine's face carefully in his hands. "And I will always want you to stay."

Blaine closes his eyes for a moment, overwhelmed. Kurt says that like he can't imagine a time -- can't even think of an instance -- when he wouldn't want Blaine near, and that kind of acceptance is -- it leaves Blaine speechless.

But Blaine doesn't need to speak right now. He's not quite ready to say the words back -- he loves Kurt, he does, but he doesn't want to say it just because Kurt said it. But he thinks he can say everything he needs to without spelling it out in words. He leans back in to Kurt and kisses him, bringing one of his own hands up to cup the back of Kurt's head. He pours everything he can't quite say yet into the kiss, fingers tangling in Kurt's hair as Kurt's hands card through Blaine's own curls. Blaine starts to lean back into the pillows, tugging Kurt with him, but Kurt pulls away a little.

"Are you sure you want to --" he starts, but Blaine cuts him off with another kiss.

"You are nothing like Callahan," Blaine insists, charmed by Kurt's concern despite himself. "I want you. Here, tonight, I want to see you, and feel you, and *stay* with you." Kurt's mouth drops slightly open, and Blaine can't help himself. He has to be kissing Kurt again.

This time Kurt goes with Blaine's pull, following Blaine down into the pillows, returning Blaine's kisses with his own and moving until he's sprawled out on top of Blaine, fingers tangling with Blaine's next to Blaine's head. "What do you want?" Kurt asks.

It's such a simple question, an expected one, but it knocks the breath out of Blaine as he looks up at Kurt's face, lips red and eyes warm. Blaine's never been afraid to go after what he wants, or rather, he's almost never hesitated. Leaving Ohio afforded him that luxury, that freedom. He lived his life as he pleased, went to his school of choice, picked an unconventional major, pursued his ex-boyfriend by applying to law school. But there's so much that Blaine has wanted that he feels like he's struggled to obtain. He wants to

make art and help people, he wants friends who understand him, he wants someone to celebrate his idiosyncrasies instead of asking him to change. He wants someone to love him -- and Kurt *does*. Kurt is what -- who Blaine wants, but he's so much more than that. He's a helping hand and a voice of reason, he's sacrificing everything for Blaine, because he loves Blaine. And Blaine wants that. He wants Kurt. He wants everything with Kurt.

Blaine squeezes Kurt's hand. "Anything," he says. "Everything."

Kurt bites his lip, smiling. "I don't think we have enough time for *everything*," he says, teasing, but they do. They so, so do.

"Well then maybe we should make the most of the time we do have," Blaine replies, smiling back. "Less talking, more kissing." He reels Kurt back in, grinning into another kiss, and another, and another, until there's no distinction between one kiss and the next. Kurt's hands trail down Blaine's torso, creeping under Blaine's hoodie and t-shirt to find his skin underneath.

"Can I?" Kurt asks, tugging on the clothes. "I want to see you." Blaine sits up slightly and shrugs both pieces of clothing off, shivering slightly in the cool room. Kurt's hand tightens briefly on Blaine's side. "I don't know how you get more gorgeous every time I see you like this." Kurt pushes a breathless Blaine back into the pillows, kissing him again before moving to his neck. Blaine grips Kurt's hair restlessly, hands shifting from head to neck to shoulders and back again as Kurt scatters soft kisses and small bites across Blaine's own neck and shoulders and further down Blaine's torso, lingering briefly over Blaine's heart. He presses the sweetest kiss yet there, resting his forehead on Blaine's chest for a brief moment and *god*, Blaine would take his heart out of his chest and give it to Kurt if he could. Blaine tugs on his hair, pulling him back up into a kiss that Kurt breaks with a mischievous smirk.

"I was in the middle of something," Kurt says with an innocent look that doesn't fool Blaine for a second. Kurt eases back down Blaine's body, tugging on the waistband of Blaine's pants. "I had a plan."

Blaine hesitates. It's not that he doesn't want a blowjob -- because, God, Kurt's *mouth* -- but, well -- "I bought supplies," Blaine blurts, face reddening in embarrassment. "I mean, before we went on a break. I bought, you know, *supplies*." He makes a vague gesture that he hopes will mean something to Kurt.

Kurt nods. "I remember." He draws in a breath and props himself up on his hands to put some distance between them. "I need you to be very clear right now, Blaine, because I'm done making assumptions about

what you want and what you need. You want me to fuck you, right? I mean, unless you wanted to fuck me, which is totally fine, by the way, I'm not like some exclusive top or anything. I mean, unless you only bottom, which is fine, as I said --"

Blaine kisses Kurt to stop the babbling, cute though it is. "I do. Want you to fuck me. Please?" he pleads, undoing the buttons on Kurt's shirt. "And I think," he continues, sucking a hot kiss on Kurt's neck, "we should both be much more naked for that." Kurt stands and sheds his clothes so quickly that Blaine has to laugh. "I'm not going anywhere, remember?" he says as Kurt settles back on the bed and tugs on Blaine's sweatpants. He lifts his hips to let Kurt pull them off, and then he cups Kurt's cheek, stilling him. "I want to stay."

Kurt kisses his hand, then his lips, pressing him back down into the pillows. "Where are these *supplies*, hmm?" he murmurs.

"Bedside drawer," Blaine replies, throwing an arm out in the general direction of the furniture in question. Kurt reaches over and pulls open the drawer, rummaging until he finds the condoms and lube hiding behind the pens, stress balls, and tissues. He tosses them on the bed and crawls back on top of Blaine, pressing the length of his body against Blaine's as he leans in for more kisses. Blaine arches up, revelling in all of the skin pressed against his. Kurt's just so solid -- so tall, and broad, and it just feels like he's all around Blaine, surrounding him from every side. Kurt's hands are warm against his torso as Kurt's hands smooth over Blaine's skin. The touch is electrifying, intoxicating, and Blaine feels drunk on it, arching closer. Kurt rolls his hips against Blaine's as they trade heated kisses, cocks sliding against one another. Blaine pulls away with a gasp. "Kurt, *please*."

Kurt smiles, eyes crinkling at the corners, and moves down the bed to kneel between Blaine's legs, nudging them apart as he goes. He traces patterns down Blaine's torso, and Blaine can't help but push into his hands, following Kurt's hands as they move. Kurt wraps one hand around Blaine's cock (and *god*, Kurt's hands are just *perfect*), stroking firmly. Blaine bucks up, and Kurt pushes down on Blaine's hips with his other hand, pressing him back into the bed. "Stay," he says.

And Blaine does. He stays while Kurt's hands keep teasing him and caressing him. He stays while Kurt slips a condom over Blaine's cock, leaning down to take Blaine in his mouth as his fingers slip further down. He stays as Kurt grabs the lube and slips one finger inside him, then two, twisting and stretching and making Blaine arch up again -- whimpering as Kurt gives him not enough and too much at the same time.

And there's nothing. There's no memory or flashback of Callahan, no ghost of Sebastian. There's only here and now and Kurt, in him and on him and all around him. It's Kurt's fingers and his mouth taking care of Blaine, like Kurt's always done, like he's doing now, like he always will.

Kurt takes his time and teases Blaine -- soft, barely there licks to Blaine's cock interspersed with two fingers stretching him open for what seems like forever before three push in firmly, filling Blaine almost to the brim. Kurt winds Blaine up and then brings him back, pushing him close to the edge one, two, three times. After the third almost orgasm, Blaine decides to take matters into his own hands, tugging Kurt's hair to get his attention. "Kurt, if you don't fuck me soon, I will not be held responsible for what I do."

Kurt blinks up at him innocently and drags his mouth up the length of Blaine's cock one more time, as if he hadn't even realized he was teasing. He twists the fingers inside Blaine one more time, then tugs them out. He grabs another condom from the pile and slips it on, slicking himself up with lube. "Sorry," he says, obviously not sorry at all. "Let me make it up to you." He tucks a pillow beneath Blaine's hips and hoists one of Blaine's legs up over his shoulder. He lines himself up, pushing slowly inside and --

"*God*," Blaine groans, hands clutching at the sheets beneath him.

"Okay?"

Blaine nods, exhaling slowly. Kurt's *big*, and even three of his fingers weren't quite the same as the stretch of his cock inside Blaine. "Yeah, it's just --"

-- been a while," Kurt supplies. He pushes forward a little more and lets out a choked out sound, teeth sinking unexpectedly into Blaine's calf. The sting causes Blaine's hips to buck up a little and Kurt bottoms out, eyes squeezing shut.

Blaine takes a breath to steady himself and closes his eyes too, letting himself adjust to the sensation again, to the knowledge that it's Kurt whose fingers are tickling at the hair on his legs, Kurt's who's inside of him, stretching him, filling him, making him feel warm all the way down to his toes. He opens his eyes and nods at Kurt. "Go."

Kurt pulls out almost as slowly as he pushed in, practically all the way, before pushing back in a little faster. He builds up speed, rhythm increasing each time he fucks into Blaine. It takes a few minutes for the burn of the stretch to fade until all Blaine can feel is full of Kurt, hard and warm as he drags his length in

and out. Blaine lets his leg drop from Kurt's shoulder and bears down. They rock against each other, Kurt leaning closer so that their chests are touching. He buries his face in the crook of Blaine's neck as they move, his whole body impossibly close and warm. Blaine feels dizzy with want, nails dragging down the expanse of Kurt's back, lips pressed to Kurt's shoulder.

Kurt wants him. Kurt has always wanted him, Blaine thinks, from that first day in the coffee shop. And he wanted Blaine for his heart, for the simple act of kindness that came in the form of a cup of coffee. He wants Blaine for all of the reasons that Callahan didn't, for reasons that weren't as important to Sebastian. Wes wasn't wrong -- up until now, Blaine's definitely felt used for his body. But this? This is different. This is Kurt, tentative and nervous and well-intentioned. This is Kurt, who hasn't slept with anyone else in four years because he doesn't throw himself around, doesn't touch anyone else like he touches Blaine. This is Kurt, and this is sex, and this is sex with Kurt. This means something to Kurt. *Blaine* means something to Kurt.

For the first time in a long time, Blaine feels like he matters.

It's almost too much for Blaine. He lets his legs fall apart before he wraps them around Kurt's waist, heels digging into the small of Kurt's back. Blaine reaches up to brace himself against the headboard as he abandons himself to the feel of Kurt inside him -- winding him up again, pushing him towards the edge, faster and faster, higher and higher until he can't take it anymore. He struggles to slip one of his hands between them and drags the condom off of his cock in a rush before stroking himself hard and fast a few times. He lets go in a rush and comes hard between them, gasping into Kurt's neck.

Kurt has enough courtesy to slow down as Blaine comes, lifting his head to pepper soft kisses across Blaine's cheek. Blaine drags his hand up Kurt's chest, nails scratching against Kurt's skin. Some of the come gets dragged along in the wake of his hand as Blaine takes a second to catch his breath, heart nearly beating out of his chest as Kurt's lips press feather-light against his skin. Blaine feels like his whole body is buzzing as he comes down, happy and a little shaken. Kurt's lips move to his ear, his voice a quiet whisper in Blaine's ear. "Can I just --" He pulls away a little, clearly struggling to speak. "I won't take long," he manages. "I know you're probably a little over-sensitive right now --"

Blaine kisses him quiet, free hand grabbing a fistful of Kurt's hair. He *is* over-sensitive right now, Kurt's not wrong about that, but Blaine doesn't care. Kurt is practically vibrating with need, every muscle and limb shaking with the effort to hold back. Blaine digs his heels in a little harder at the small of Kurt's back, a silent encouragement. So Kurt lets go and doesn't hold back, finally, *finally*, uninhibited. He snaps his



hips forward *hard*, picking up the pace and whining against Blaine's mouth. And it hurts, god, of course it hurts, but it hurts in the best possible way. They belong together like this, to each other, and Blaine would be a fool to do anything *but* stay.

It's when Blaine moves his foot and drags the tips of his toes across the swell of Kurt's ass that Kurt pushes into him one last time and tears his lips away, gasping. Blaine can feel him come, can feel it with every nerve, can feel it in the way Kurt's muscles tense under his touch. Kurt seems shocked by the magnitude of it, jaw hanging open as he struggles to breathe through it. It's as the last shocks of his orgasm start to fade away that Kurt starts to tremble almost violently, collapsing on top of Blaine. The tremors stop almost as soon as they start, Kurt's body going remarkably still as he catches his breath, cheek smushed against Blaine's chest. Kurt's head rises and falls with Blaine's chest as he breathes, and Blaine sifts his fingers through Kurt's hair again. "You okay?"

Kurt nods slightly against his chest and then stops, lifting his head and propping it up with his hand. His smile reaches all the way up to his eyes. "Are you teasing me about my age again?"

Blaine blinks into a smile whether he wants to or not, and he lifts a hand to trace his fingers across Kurt's hairline. "No." Kurt grins even wider but seems to accept his answer, moving his body up so that he can kiss Blaine properly again. His tongue licks across Blaine's lips, and it's when Blaine allows him entrance that Kurt pushes inside and presses his whole body closer, his hips moving in lazy circles. He moans into Blaine's mouth, and Blaine answers with a whine, hand grabbing at Kurt's shoulder. "Mm, Kurt, too much," he groans, trying to put some distance between them. "I actually am too sensitive now."

Kurt doesn't look all that happy to stop kissing him, but he obliges, propping himself up and withdrawing from Blaine's body. He discards the condoms and grabs the tissues from the drawer to clean them up, his movements slow, his smile lazy. He looks happy, sated, and Blaine reaches out for his hand. "Stay with me tonight?"

Kurt smiles and slips back under the pink comforter with Blaine, leaning in for a chaste kiss. "Always." Blaine curls in close, nuzzling his face against Kurt's chest. He closes his eyes and breathes quietly, focusing on the way Kurt's arms wrap around him and keep him cocooned. Kurt doesn't say anything else for a few minutes, not until he drops a kiss to the top of Blaine's head and pries gently, "Are *you* okay?"

"Fine," Blaine answers airily, leaning up to press a kiss to the underside of Kurt's chin. "I'm just... trying not to let anything ruin the afterglow. I don't want to think about what happened tonight or the fallout or

what I have to do on Monday or what I have to do to prepare for it or why Santana's suddenly being so nice to me --"

"Wow, okay," Kurt huffs, pulling back a little so he can meet Blaine's eyes. "Normally I'm the one who babbles when I'm nervous. Breathe."

"Sorry," Blaine sighs, wrinkling his nose a little. "I told you I was bad at pillow talk."

The corner of Kurt's mouth twitches into a smile. "Well, you're not talking about vegetables. That's an improvement."

"Hey!" Blaine protests. "You were the one who asked!"

"I never claimed to be any good at it either."

It's Blaine's turn to smile a little, and he drops a kiss to Kurt's clavicle in gratitude. "You're trying to distract me."

"Is it working?"

"A little," Blaine admits.

Kurt's hands are warm and large and comforting against his shoulder blades, and Blaine curls in close again, nose buried against Kurt's neck. "Don't worry about any of it tonight, okay? We have time to figure things out. Tonight, it's just you and me." Blaine nods against him and inhales, trying to steady himself. There's so *much* that he's feeling -- hurt and anger and fear and worry and confusion and a desire to do something good and love. God, he feels so *loved*, and it's on the exhale that he remembers just how good Kurt is for him. "Breathe," Kurt says again, and Blaine finally starts to feel comfortable in his own skin again.

"I don't know what I did to deserve you," Blaine mumbles sleepily.

Kurt smiles against his forehead. "You bought me a cup of coffee."

Blaine wakes up to silence and warmth. He stretches a little, wiggles his toes beneath his comforter and rolls happily onto his side before opening his eyes. There's a slip of pink paper on the pillow next to him,

and it takes Blaine a moment to prop himself up on one elbow and rub the sleep from his eyes. He reaches for the note and collapses back onto the pillows with a quiet *oomph*. The previous night comes back to him in small flashes as he reads.

Blaine --

I didn't have the heart to wake you before I left. I have a few errands to run -- there's paperwork at the office I think might help us with Jesse, and I have a few phone calls to make. I'll text you later to make more concrete plans, but dinner tonight at my place? Maybe stay over? We can sort through everything tomorrow for court on Monday.

Love you

-- Kurt

He tries not to think too much, tries not to remember feeling violated and dejected. Instead, he runs his thumb over the words -- *love you* -- and remembers what it felt like to be with Kurt last night, remembers his promise to Puckerman and Quinn, remembers how lucky he is to have people in his corner, remembers the --

There's a knock on his door at the memory of it, eerily timed, and it's with care that he sets the note down on the nightstand and pushes the covers off of himself. Another knock, a little louder this time, and Blaine finds himself stumbling out of bed, shivering at the drop in temperature. "Just a second," he calls, rummaging through the pile of clothes on the floor until he unearths his boxer briefs. He tugs them on just as the person outside of his room knocks a third time, and Blaine answers the door a little breathless. "Santana, hi."

"I... brought you coffee," she responds slowly, eyes sweeping over his mostly naked figure.

"Oh, um, that's nice of you. Here, come in, just let me get dressed --" He steps out of the way to let her pass and shuts the door quickly after her. He rummages through his drawers until he finds a pair of pajama pants and a t-shirt and throws them on haphazardly before turning to face her again.

Santana arches her eyebrows and smirks at him a little. "Nice pants," she says, gesturing to them with one of the coffee cups. Blaine glances down at the pink teddy bear and candy cane pajamas and blushes a little before joining her on the bed. "Medium drip, right? With cream and cinnamon and sugar?"

Blaine blinks at her in surprise but nods as he reaches for the cup. "Yeah... how did you know that?"

She waves a hand dismissively at him and takes a sip from her own cup, curling both hands around it. Blaine mirrors her, the pair of them sitting in an awkward silence for a moment. She doesn't look at him when she finally asks, "You okay? You know, after last night?"

"Yeah," Blaine answers quietly, keeping his eyes trained on the lid of his cup. "Is that -- is that why you stopped by with coffee?"

"No," she answers immediately, but she pauses and seems to think better of it before changing her answer to, "Partly."

Blaine fights back a smile and twists the cup in his hands. "How'd your visit with Puckerman go? Did he -- was he on board with all of this?"

"Isn't he always on board?" Santana quips, grinning at him. "Yeah," she affirms. "He said there were some rules he'd like to ignore when he sees Clarence Thomas on Monday." At Blaine's raised eyebrow, she adds, "My reference, not his." Blaine smiles and takes another sip to his coffee, choosing not to speak since

Santana obviously doesn't realize she's just made two references instead of one. "And... I also came to ask you something."

He looks over at her and wrinkles his nose a little. "What do you want, exactly?"

"The truth," she says. "That's all."

"About?"

She hesitates for a second and bites her lip. She looks him up and down again before venturing, "You and Hummel. Are you guys..."

Blaine considers her for a moment, curious and a little cautious, but he remembers her presence here last night and decides that life with Santana might be a little easier if they both compromise a little. He looks down at his cup again and nods. "Off and on since Christmas." More of her words come back to him -- *you're used to everything being easy for you* -- and he looks over at her in alarm. "It's not like that. Kurt didn't have anything to do with me getting the internship --"

"Relax, Pinkie," she snorts, nudging his elbow with her own. "I believe you."

"You do?"

"After last night? Yeah, I do." She looks over at him and he sees traces of kindness in her face. He's only seen her like this once before, really, with a sick Sebastian. "A lot's changed since last night." She looks away, down at her cup again, and it's the most uncomfortable he's ever seen her. "Thank you, for being honest with me."

"I've always been honest with you," he argues.

"Yeah, I know," Santana says dismissively, shrugging a shoulder. "But it means I can be honest with you."

Blaine's mouth twists into a half smile. "It's not like we're bargaining for information here, Santana."

"No," she agrees, corner of her mouth quirking up, "but it gave me the push I needed. I owe you the truth."

"The truth?"

Santana draws in a breath and squares her shoulders, adjusting the cup in her grasp. "We play on the same team."

"The same --" Blaine stops himself when he realizes what she means, and he can't do much more than stare at her. "But you -- you're *engaged*."

"Yes."

"To my *ex-boyfriend*."

"Yes."

"And you're --"

"Gay, yeah," she says, a small laugh escaping her. "Same team, all three of us." Blaine sighs heavily and rubs a hand over his face. "You honestly didn't know?"

"I didn't take you for a liar, if that's what you're asking," he snaps. He sighs a little and takes a breath to steady himself. "Sorry, I'm not -- I'm not mad, or anything. It's just early and I need coffee and this is kind of a lot to process."

Santana taps her cup to his. "Drink up, then. It's five o'clock somewhere."

He does as instructed, sips his coffee and lets the flavor settle in on his tongue, savoring the cinammon. The pause is enough for his shock to ebb, and it's with his tongue firmly in cheek that he says, "You're very convincing."

"Ooo, catty," she teases. "I'm almost proud."

Blaine flops back on the bed, cup cradled carefully between both hands and balancing on his stomach. "I just don't understand," he huffs. "*Why?*"

"I can't speak for him," she says, hedging, "but you and I aren't that different." She lies down next to him. "I can't stand being a disappointment."

He looks over at her at that, startled. It's probably the most honest she's been with him, the most vulnerable. He nudges her elbow with his own and offers her a small smile. "We have something in common."

"God forbid, right?" she laughs. "We run around like we have something to prove, we love that son of a bitch when no one else will --"

"I'm glad you're on my team," Blaine says, teasing her a little. "Sebastian said you deserved everything you've gotten. Maybe we'll actually win this thing on Monday."

"I don't think you need me for that."

"I can't do it alone," he admits quietly.

"Maybe, maybe not," she muses. "What exactly is your game plan, anyway? I wasn't kidding last night. I know Puckerman trusts you, but I sort of preemptively stuck my neck out for you."

"The husband," Blaine answers quietly, taking another sip of his coffee. "We're going after the husband."

"Why? You know, aside from the fact that you don't think Puckerman did it?"

"He didn't," Blaine insists. "And before you go there, it wasn't Quinn, either. Her alibi checked out, remember?"

"So what," Santana guesses, "they think St. James did it?"

"Quinn does, at least," Blaine sighs.

"He would've lied about something," Santana says. "An alibi or something."

"That's... actually helpful," he says, a thought occurring to him. He offers her a smile. "Thanks, Santana."

"Yeah, well." She takes a long drink of her coffee before shrugging a little, obviously trying to fight back a smile. "Maybe my first impression of you wasn't so wrong after all."

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When Kurt wakes in the middle of the night, he barely registers the two-thirty shining from the clock on his nightstand and rolls over to get more comfortable. Blaine's still and mostly silent body occupies the other half of the bed, curled up with his back to Kurt, and it's with a sleepy and contented sigh that Kurt goes to curl around him and fall back asleep. He snakes his arms around Blaine's waist and shuts his eyes as he rests his chin on Blaine's shoulder --

Blaine wakes up with a loud gasp, bolting up out of Kurt's embrace and into a sitting position, breathing hard. Kurt falls back against the pillows with a loud *oomph*, and he has to rub sleepily at his eyes before propping himself up on his elbows. "Hey," he mumbles. "I didn't mean to startle you. Go back to sleep." He reaches out to touch his fingertips to Blaine's shoulder, but Blaine shrugs out of the touch and buries his face in his hands, rubbing at his eyes with his palms. Kurt narrows his eyes in confusion and sits up a little. "What's the matter?"

Blaine doesn't answer, just sits there trying to catch his breath with the heels of his palms pressed hard against his eyes. Kurt reaches out to touch his shoulder again but thinks better of it and goes for the small of Blaine's back instead. He rubs against the warm skin there in small circles as his own eyelids droop and his body begs to go back to sleep. The touch seems to comfort Blaine, though, and his breathing starts to even out. He removes his hands from his eyes and doesn't look back when he says, "I came out when I was fourteen."

"To everyone?" Kurt asks. Blaine nods and Kurt can't help but chuckle a little, his voice low and thick with sleep. "So brave," he mumbles, taking a chance and moving in close again. He wraps his arms around Blaine's waist slowly, waiting for a reaction or rejection, but Blaine doesn't push him away. "I mean, I came out to my dad when I was fifteen, but I wasn't out to most of my peers until undergrad."

"I was still living in Ohio," Blaine says quietly, and Kurt nestles his face against the back of Blaine's neck, closing his eyes contentedly. "There was this dance, Sadie Hawkins --"

"Girls ask boys," Kurt supplies, unsure why they're having a discussion this important in the middle of the night but rolling with it anyway. "I remember. My best friend at the time -- Mercedes -- asked me to go with her. I ended up coming out to her in lieu of a good night kiss. She knew even before my dad did."

Blaine doesn't seem bothered by the interruption or the story. He reaches a hand down and laces his fingers with Kurt's, taking a deep breath to steady himself. "There was only one other guy out at the school at the time, so I asked him and we went together. After, we were waiting for a ride home and..." He tapers



off and rolls his shoulder back. Kurt opens his eyes and presses soft, moist kisses to the back of his neck to get him to continue. Blaine's voice is quiet when he continues, so quiet that Kurt has to press closer to hear him. "These three guys -- they beat the living crap out of us."

Kurt's eyes fall shut again but he's not sleepy at all anymore. "And that's why you moved to California?" he guesses.

Blaine shakes his head. "My dad got promoted and his company wanted him to relocate. Moving had been on the table for awhile. My -- what happened to me was just the deciding factor." His hand twitches in Kurt's before he speaks again. "They got away with it."

Kurt remembers Blaine's reaction to the story of the doctor responsible for the death of Kurt's mom and he inhales sharply before repeating it. "And that made you angry." Blaine's answer is the closer proximity he puts himself in to Kurt, his back tucked firmly against Kurt's chest as he seeks comfort. There's so much that makes sense now -- Blaine's commitment and drive and desire for better and *I'm not going to break, people have tried and failed*. But there's also so much that doesn't. "And yet you still believe in the good in people."

"I have to," Blaine all but laughs. "If I didn't, I would've let someone break me a long time ago."

"Why are you telling me all this?" Kurt asks, silently urging Blaine to settle back against the pillow with him. "Why now?"

"Flashback," Blaine murmurs, situating himself between Kurt's legs and reclining against Kurt's chest. "You woke me up in the middle of one. I haven't had one in years." Kurt resumes his circular motions, this time using his thumb on the back of Blaine's hand. "I've never told anyone about it, what happened. My parents knew, obviously, but no one else -- well, except Wes."

"His compulsive need to look after you makes a little more sense now," Kurt teases, trying for a joke. He sees Blaine smile, just a little, but he knows it's not enough. "Why not Sebastian or your other friends? Why me?"

Blaine throws his head back a little, resting it on Kurt's shoulder, eyes closed. His neck is completely on display like this, dimly lit and beautiful, Adam's apple bobbing as he swallows. "I don't -- I'm not perfect,

Kurt. There's a lot I don't like about myself. There's a lot I wish I were better at, a lot I wish I could change. This is one of those things. I don't like sharing it."

Kurt frowns a little. "That... doesn't exactly answer my question."

Blaine laughs dryly and Kurt can feel it beneath his hands, rumbling in Blaine's chest. He adjusts his position so he can look at Kurt again, his cheeks a little pink. "I guess that's my backwards way of telling you that I trust you enough not to be afraid. I can tell you things, show you the ugly parts, and I don't have to worry about you walking away."

"I think you have more of those people in your life than you realize," Kurt points out, but he's touched that Blaine's put so much faith in him.

Blaine leans in a little, touching their foreheads together. "I feel safe here, with you. You put so much faith in me. You trust me. I know what a big deal that is for you. I just needed you to know I feel the same way."

It's the closest thing to an *I love you* Blaine's ever said to him without actually being one, and somehow that almost means more to Kurt. But there's more behind Blaine's words, Kurt can tell, and he wonders when he got so good at reading Blaine. "You're nervous about court on Monday."

Blaine exhales heavily onto Kurt's face before pulling back and burying his face into the crook between Kurt's neck and shoulder. "I do wear my heart on my sleeve, don't I?"

"It's nice," Kurt assures him, running a hand up and down Blaine's back soothingly. "It's refreshing, in our profession. It might not always be wise --" Blaine groans and mumbles something close to *I'm not cut out for this* into Kurt's shoulder. "Hey, no. Stop. It's who you are, Blaine. And it's all of that -- your ability to care and help people and work your ass off for something -- that makes you perfect for this. You can see the heart behind everything." Blaine looks up at him then, and the wetness in his eyes betrays how frayed his nerves and emotions are. Kurt uses his free hand to cup Blaine's face, and he feels his heart burst through his smile. "You are everything that's good about this world," he murmurs. "And I want you in mine."

Blaine breathes out, steady and slow, before he shifts, pivoting himself so he's propped up on his hands and hovering over Kurt. His thumb makes its way over the apple of Kurt's cheek as he distractedly

mumbles, "They celebrate it." He shakes his head at Kurt's questioning noise and leans in for a kiss, finally, his body relaxed and warm and pliant under Kurt's hands.

Blaine's lips move to Kurt's neck and begin sucking hot kisses there, his hands flexing at Kurt's waist. The words are whispered between them -- *do you want* and *I always want* and *in the drawer* and *Kurt, Kurt, Kurt* -- and for the first time in his life, Kurt Hummel knows what it means to be loved this way. It's the first time he's felt like he's really mattered, that he's not just a tool, a means to an end. It's the first time he's really understood what it means to love someone unconditionally. Blaine trusts him -- trusts his work ethic and know-how, trusts his intentions, trusts that he'll be treated as an equal. For all that Blaine's shown Kurt some more of his broken pieces tonight, for all that Kurt's taking him apart with the touch of his fingers, Blaine is *whole*. He's always been that way, really. Kurt thinks he's just needed someone to show him.

In the reflection of Blaine's eyes, Kurt sees the best version of himself.

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Monday morning, Blaine slides into the navy suit and plaid pink button-down Kurt picked out for him, works a dollop of product into his hair, and dons the bowtie with gavels that Trent gave him for luck.

At the foot of the stairs outside of the courthouse, he grips the handle of the briefcase his father sent him and takes a deep breath before starting to climb the stairs. He's about two-thirds of the way up when he hears it, and it makes him stop dead in his tracks.

*"Batter up. Hear that call. The time has come for one and all to play ball."*

Blaine turns and finds them at the top of the steps, off to the side. It's Thad who catches his eye first, grin exploding across his face like fireworks on the Fourth of July. Then David, and Jeff and Jon and oh *god*, they're all here, standing outside of the Suffolk County Courthouse *singing*. Blaine launches himself up the rest of the steps, nerves gone, and throws himself into the arms of the first Warbler in reach. The briefcase hits Nick in the back with a loud *thunk* as they keep singing, and Blaine's passed from the arms of one Warbler to the next, his voice joining theirs on *he is not the one to use or need an alibi*. Trent tugs a little on his bowtie, beaming, but it's not until the end of the song that Blaine finds himself in Wes' arms.

"How did you know?"

"Real warblers don't sing alone," Wes mumbles into Blaine's hair. "The canary may have died, but you still have people in Boston who will help you use your voice."

Blaine pulls back a little and offers him a half-smile. "Sugar?"

Wes' mouth twitches but he nods in acknowledgement. "And Kurt. And before you say anything, this wasn't a Kurt-has-control-issues or an I-worry-too-much-about-you thing, okay? Kurt thought you could use some moral support, so he rallied the troops."

"I can't believe you came all the way out here," Blaine says with a shake of his head. "I mean, I know it's your spring break, but it's all the way across the country and --"

"It doesn't matter how far away you are, Blaine," Thad says. "We'll always hear you."

"Don't give in now," Wes whispers conspiratorially. "You'll just inflate his ego. He's already going to graduate with top honors and one of the flight attendants flirted with him pretty hardcore on the way here --"

"Hey," Thad says defensively, "he was totally into me! He gave me his number and everything! You're just annoyed because Jenna Boyd lost at the Oscars this year --"

"She was *robbed*," Wes hisses.

"Guys," Blaine laughs. "Can we maybe do this later? I kind of have a job to do."

"Right." Wes straightens a little and adjusts his tie before resting a hand on Blaine's shoulder. "Lead the way."

And lead Blaine does. It comes easily to him, it always has, but it's never something he particularly wants. He's friendly and personable, he has a knack for motivating people, but he doesn't always feel like he's capable of handling the responsibility that falls on his shoulders. It's different though, now. It has to be. He's agreed to this, agreed to the coup and the responsibility of proving one man's innocence (and, if he can help it, another man's guilt). He's agreed to keep secrets and promises, agreed to stand up for himself and to do the right thing. He's agreed to avenge the death of a loved one, agreed to do his best to keep a family together. It's not so different from the things he's used to doing, the promises he's used to making.

Maybe he's had it in him all along.

Together, the Warblers make their way past security and through the halls of the courthouse. When they round the corner into the right hallway, though, Blaine is startled by a sudden attack of pain.

"You. Absolute. Asshole, Blaine Anderson!"

"Ow, ow, hey, ow!" Blaine throws his arms up in front of him and uses his briefcase as a defense as Sugar attempts to continue her assault on him. She reaches down and swats at his legs with her clutch a few more times before straightening and folding her arms over her chest with a loud huff. "What was that for?" he asks indignantly, still hiding behind his briefcase.

"Did you really think you could just up and leave Boston without saying anything to me?" she asks seriously.

"Oh," Blaine says blankly, foregoing the use of his briefcase as a shield. "Oh, no, Sugar, I'm so sorry. I never meant -- I didn't actually -- Wait." He pauses and wrinkles his brow, confused. "How did *you* know I was planning on leaving Boston?" Sugar just gives him a look that plainly says *are you serious?*. Blaine's eyes trail over her shoulder to the wall behind her where Kurt is smiling at him. "Oh."

"Yeah, *oh*," she mimics, teasing him. "Honestly, the fact that people think they can keep anything from me is ridiculous. I need to be kept *informed*. Do you have any idea what it was like trying to throw together an appropriate outfit for today?"

Blaine takes a second to take her outfit in, from the pink blazer to the plaid skirt to the pink pumps on her feet, clutch and headband a complimentary fuschia. He beams at her. "It's pink."

Sugar's mouth twitches into a smile. "It is."

"I think I love you."

"I know you do," Sugar sighs dramatically, unable to fight back a grin. "But let's not lose focus here. One, you give me enough time to coordinate my outfits. Today we lucked out. Cute bowtie, by the way."

"Thank you," Trent gushes, beaming. "I thought so."

"Two," Sugar continues, "you don't pull a stunt like that again. The Blaine Anderson I know does not run away. Capiche?"

Blaine feels warm from his hairline all the way down to the tips of his toes, and it's with a smile wide enough to split his face that he mock-salutes her. "Yes ma'am."

Her shoulders relax, finally, and she steps forward to engulf him in a hug, arms tight and warm around his waist. "Oh god," she mumbles into his shoulder. "I am a ma'am now, aren't I? That makes me sound so old."

"Well, you know what they say," Blaine quips. "With age comes wisdom." He grins over Sugar's shoulder at Kurt, who merely raises an eyebrow at him and shakes his head. Blaine pulls away a little and rests his hands on her arms, beaming at her. "Any last words of advice before I head in there?"

"Go to the mattresses."

"Did she just say what I think she said?" Thad gasps.

"She did," Trent stage-whispers.

Thad sidles up next to them and holds out a hand. "I'm Thad."

Sugar waves her left hand at him. "I'm married."

Thad laughs at her and shakes his head. "I know. But anyone who can quote *The Godfather* in everyday conversations is okay in our book. Would you like an escort into the courtroom, Mrs. Flanagan?"

Sugar looks him up and down for a moment as if silently judging him before she looks over at Blaine for approval. He laughs and nods, releasing her from his clutches. "I think out of all of your Warblers, Blaine, this one's my favorite."

Thad whips his head around to look at Wes. "Did you hear that?" he asks excitedly. "I'm someone's *favorite*."

"Yes, yes, we know," Wes drawls, shoving at Thad's shoulder. "Now get in there and keep your mouth shut before we decide to stick you back on a plane with that flight attendant." The Warblers start to file into the courtroom with Sugar at the center of them, Thad and Trent on either side of her. She offers Blaine one

last smile and a wave before pointing two fingers at her own eyes and then directing them at Wes. "That girl is poison."

"Sugar, spice, and everything nice, with a little bit of chemical x mixed in," Blaine recites, nudging Wes with his elbow.

It takes Wes a moment, but he finally turns to look down at Blaine, an odd smile on his face. "I don't know whether to be proud or jealous."

Blaine shrugs, offering him a shy smile. "A little of both, maybe?"

The hallway starts to empty, people scurrying off into courtrooms or other parts of the courthouse, outside. It starts to quiet, the click of a man's shoes in the hallway next to them echoing loudly in the emptying space. Wes spares a scathing glare at the doors of the courtroom before turning his attention back to Blaine. "I almost wish I had a sabre," he quips dryly, "so you could challenge that bastard to a duel. You're not going to let him get away with it, right? Blaine, it's sexual harassment --"

Blaine just shakes his head and looks down at the floor. "Don't worry, I won't. But this isn't about him."

"No, it's not, is it?" Blaine looks up at Wes, brow knitted in confusion. He can tell by the tone in Wes' voice that he's not really talking about Callahan. Wes takes a deep breath, squares his shoulders, and says, "I think I owe you an apology."

Blaine's shoulders fall a little. "You don't," he insists. "Don't worry about the Kurt thing, okay? It's not --"

"That's... not what I'm talking about," Wes says slowly.

"I don't --"

"I wasn't exactly supportive when you told me you wanted to go to Harvard."

Blaine shakes his head. "That's crazy," he dismisses. "You were the one who helped me study for the LSATs. Wes, you were one of the only people who *did* support me."

Wes seems to consider this a moment before nodding a little. "Maybe," he allows, "but I'm not so sure I should I have. At least not for the reasons you wanted to go." Blaine just raises an eyebrow at him. "You

wanted to change yourself for Sebastian,” Wes explains, rubbing at the back of his neck, and it’s the most uncomfortable Blaine’s seen him in a really, really long time. “And I shouldn’t have supported that. That’s not love, Blaine. And -- god, you know, it kills me to say this, still, but Sebastian did love you. I just don’t think it was enough. It damn sure wasn’t healthy. If -- I think if you’d felt loved, Blaine, you wouldn’t have felt like you had to change who you were.”

Blaine takes a moment to really look at Wes, to think about what he’s said. It’s not all that different from what Blaine’s been told, what he’s figured out on his own. But the fact that it’s coming from Wes means so much more. Blaine wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for Wes. He wouldn’t have gotten his heart broken again, wouldn’t have found Sugar, wouldn’t be making something of himself at Harvard. He wouldn’t have --

Blaine stops, looks over his shoulder, and feels his heart skip a beat in his chest.

*They celebrate it.*

He wouldn’t have met Kurt.

It takes a gentle nudge to get Blaine to turn back around. “Should I give you two lovebirds a minute before you go in there and kick some ass?” Wes asks. His tone is light and teasing but Blaine knows him better than that, knows the honesty he’s just shared has shaken him a little.

Blaine answers with a quick nod before standing up on tiptoe and wrapping his arms around Wes’ neck. “You have nothing to apologize for,” he insists, voice quiet and soft in Wes’ ear. “You have always been there for me when I needed you. And when it really mattered, you let me figure things out on my own. I couldn’t ask for more than that in a best friend.”

“Except a Powerpuff girl,” Wes snorts, but his own arms tighten around Blaine’s torso before he pulls back. “It works both ways, Blaine. You were there for me freshman year, after Karina -- when I was ready to give up on the world, on myself, really. I needed a friend. I don’t forget.”

Blaine smiles warmly at him, beaming. “Consider us even, then. We both made sure the other’s potential didn’t go to waste.”

“It’s in the little things, right?” Wes sighs. “Making those count for more than all the bad stuff?”



"I'm starting to get concerned," Blaine says, faking seriousness. "Is your crush on Jenna Boyd so bad now that you're resorting to quoting *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*?"

"Hey, our love would be of *epic* proportions --"

"Oh my god, go," Blaine laughs. "Get in there before I put you on a plane back to California with Thad."

"Alright, I'm going, I'm going, jeez."

The courtroom door clicks shut and it's just the two of them in the hallway now, alone. Kurt offers him a hesitant smile before speaking. "This was okay, wasn't it?" he asks furtively. "I wasn't trying to control everything, or to make assumptions about how you felt. I just -- you seem to do better with people in your corner, and I wanted you to do your best. I thought you might appreciate it if Wes were here. He was the one who called the rest of the Warblers. And Sugar -- she was honestly kind of scary when I told her what happened, I think she was half planning on murdering Callahan and finding a way to make it look like an accident until I told her what we were planning and -- *mmph*."

Blaine closes the distance between them and kisses him hard on the mouth, a hand on either side of Kurt's face. He kisses until he feels the worry melt out of Kurt's face, and then he kisses some more because this is his Kurt, the Kurt who's selfless and considerate and a worrywart, the Kurt who tries so hard to do the right thing and rambles when he's nervous, the Kurt who's given up almost everything to be with him. This is the Kurt who loves him. The kisses turn softer and slower after a moment, and it's with one last wet kiss to Kurt's swollen lips that Blaine finally puts some space between them and says it. "I love you."

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Blaine pauses with a hand on the gold, brass handle of the courtroom door, closes his eyes and tries to breathe.

*Don't run. Stay. Fight.*

Blaine opens his eyes and exhales slowly. He's finally found direction, and it's through this door.

He can do this.

Blaine eases open the courtroom door and walks as confidently as he can towards the front, eyes trained on the defense table. The only person facing him is Puckerman, who briefly makes eye contact and smirks. "You're fired," Puckerman says as he turns back towards Callahan, loud enough for Blaine to hear. "I've found someone else to do your job for you."

Kurt leans back in his chair as Callahan encroaches on his personal space to confer with Puckerman. "Someone *else* to defend you?" he hisses. "Who?"

"Me," Blaine interjects, finally crossing the threshold and coming to a stop in front of the defense team's table. He shakes Puckerman's hand and raises an eyebrow at Callahan. "Mr. Puckerman has asked me to take over his representation." He squeezes his hand around the handle of his briefcase, just once, the only betrayal of his nerves (*give them a show face, Blaine*).

"You?" Callahan scoffs. "Mr. Puckerman, you can't be serious. Blaine can't represent you, he's just a law student."

"Actually," Santana drawls slowly, leaning over the railing and smirking a little, "in Massachusetts a law student can represent a defendant in criminal court if supervised by a licensed attorney. Supreme Judicial Court, rule 3.03. You'd think you'd know that."

Callahan narrows his eyes on her before turning his attention back to Blaine and Puckerman. "Well, I sure as hell won't supervise you," Callahan says scathingly. "As of Friday night, you don't work for me anymore, Mr. Anderson, which means he can't defend you, Mr. Puckerman."

"I think you're forgetting something," Kurt says quietly but firmly from his seat next to Callahan. Callahan turns his eyes to Kurt, and Blaine can see the last vestiges of control slipping with each look of surprise on Callahan's face. "I'm very much licensed, and I am ready, willing, and able to supervise Mr. Anderson, without reservation."

"I won't allow it," Callahan says firmly. "You *do* still work for me, remember?"

"Not anymore. I put my letter of resignation on your desk this morning," Kurt fires back, voice still quiet but somehow almost more dangerously so. He leans in close, speaking just loud enough for Blaine and Callahan to hear. "I decided I couldn't keep working for someone who abuses their power the way you do."

"I don't abuse my power," Callahan snaps defensively, obviously annoyed. "I just use it to my advantage."

“Yeah, and you take advantage of others while you do it.”

Callahan narrows his eyes, and Blaine shifts his weight from one foot to the other, repeating the same mantra in his head over and over: *Don't run*. “I do what I have to get my job done.”

“Don't you mean who?” Kurt corrects, lips thinning into a line.

Callahan's jaw sets. “Excuse me?”

“You do *who* you have to to get your job done,” Kurt elaborates. He pauses and leans in a little closer, a gesture that clearly makes Callahan uncomfortable. “I didn't realize that meant trying to screw innocent interns in your office.”

Callahan leans back in his own chair leisurely, and Blaine holds his breath, waits for the bloodbath. “No one is innocent.”

Kurt, incredibly, smiles, and Blaine exhales, relaxing. “And that's where you're wrong. Plenty of us are. *You* aren't.” Kurt flicks his eyes to Blaine and then to Callahan's chair before arching an eyebrow. “And you're in my co-counsel's seat.”

Callahan's eyes flick briefly to Blaine's, bright with fury. Blaine steels himself and doesn't flinch, barely. Callahan turns away with a huff. “Fine,” he says, disdain evident in his voice. “If you want to go to prison, Mr. Puckerman, be my guest. You're not my problem anymore.” He clicks his briefcase shut and moves to brush past Blaine, who keeps his distance until Callahan passes him so that they don't touch. Callahan crosses the threshold and makes a grab for the same gold, brass handles, the sound of the door shutting echoing in the courtroom.

“Counselors?” the judge calls. “What exactly is going on?”

Blaine summons his best show face. “Permission to approach, your honor?” The judge beckons him forward silently and Blaine approaches the bench, Kurt and Ms. Platt on his heels. “My apologies, your honor. I'm Blaine Anderson,” he says politely. “I'm a law student. Mr. Puckerman has replaced Mr. Callahan with myself as his representation. Mr. Hummel has agreed to supervise, as stipulated in rule 3.03 of the Supreme Judicial Court.”

The judge raises her eyebrows but merely glances over at Ms. Platt. "Does the prosecution have any objection, Ms. Platt?" She gives Blaine a once over before shaking her head, and Blaine feels Kurt's fingers settle tenderly on his elbow before he can even tense. "I'll allow it," the judge says, waving a hand to dismiss them. "Proceed with your case."

Blaine inclines his head, relaxing a fraction. "Thank you, your honor." He feels like he should be more at ease, like the hard part should be over. They've successfully orchestrated the coup without much of a problem, but as he returns to the table and sets his briefcase down, he can't seem to relax enough. Kurt offers him a folder and a tentative smile, mouthing the words *take it slow*. "The defense would like to recall Jesse St. James to the stand."

Jesse walks out of the side chamber and sits down in the witness chair. The bailiff holds out a Bible, and Jesse regally places his hand on it. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" the bailiff intones.

Jesse flashes a too-white smile in Blaine's direction. "Well, since the defense has requested an encore performance." The judge arches an eyebrow at him, and Jesse sighs but nods. "I do." The bailiff steps away, and Jesse sits back into his chair slightly, hands folded comfortably in his lap. Blaine moves in front of the witness stand, fighting the urge to make Kurt take over. This is only Jesse St. James, half of Broadway's Dream Team. The living half.

Blaine squares his shoulders and breathes out evenly. He can do this. Saw -- Puckerman needs him to. Beth needs him to. *Quinn* needs him to. Quinn's lost the woman she loved. Blaine knows what that feels like, to a certain degree. "Mr. St. James, I'd like to revisit your testimony regarding the night of Ms. Berry's murder," Blaine starts slowly. "You got to the hotel, and you went up to your room. What happened then?"

Jesse frowns, clearly caught off guard by the request, but he obliges anyway. "I went inside, and I saw Puck kneeling over my Rachel, his hands covered in her blood." There's a quiet murmur of sound from the crowd.

Blaine nods, mulling it over. "But he didn't have a blunt object in his hands? Nothing that might have caused the kind of injury your wife sustained?"

Jesse shrugs, seemingly unsure why it matters. "I imagine he'd already stashed whatever it was by then," he says, mostly indifferent but with just enough malice to his voice to evoke a few emotional whimpers

out of the jury. Blaine's reminded, then, why he likes Jesse so much. He's good at what he does, and *man*, is he getting ready to lay it on thick. "He probably drove ten blocks just to toss it in a dumpster before coming back to get rid of her body."

"Objection," Kurt cuts in, voice ringing high and clear across the courtroom. Blaine turns to look at him, fingers clutching the folder nervously. "That's speculation, your honor."

"Sustained," the judge rules.

Kurt offers him a smile and nods in the direction of the witness stand, and Blaine turns his attention back to Jesse, bolstered. He pauses for a moment, going over Jesse's words in his mind before raising an eyebrow -- the conjecture at the method of disposal is awfully specific, as if Jesse's spent a lot of time thinking about how the murder weapon could have been disposed of. But since the weapon hasn't been found at all, Jesse's odd specificity probably isn't the chink in his armor Blaine's looking for. "Okay, Mr. St. James. I'd like to understand exactly what happened that day. Walk me through everything, from the moment you woke up in your hotel room in Boston," he requests, hoping there will be some inconsistency in Jesse's story that will at the very least cast reasonable doubt on Puck's guilt, if not reveal Jesse's own culpability.

Jesse sighs a little dramatically as if he's put out by the request, and Blaine has to fight the urge to roll his eyes. "As you said, I woke up in our hotel room in Boston around nine o'clock. I kissed Rachel goodbye and met up with Shelby at the train station so we could go back to New York. When we got to the city, I went back to mine and Rachel's apartment, took a shower, met my agent for a late lunch. Shelby texted me after that to see if I wanted to grab coffee, which I thought was a little weird at the time."

"Why did you think it was weird?"

"Well, we'd just been on a train together for three and a half hours, you'd think she'd have mentioned wanting to get coffee later," Jesse says wryly, smiling. He's very charming, Blaine has to give him that. He'd had a so not major crush on Jesse when he and Rachel first made it big, just before their wedding, and Blaine would never admit to it now, but he spent a lot of time at the age of seventeen singing Rachel's lines in *The Lover's Lie*, one of her first duets with Jesse.

Blaine shakes his head and tries to focus. He's not seventeen anymore. "What did you and your mother-in-law talk about?" he asks.

"She told me that Rachel was having an affair," Jesse says quietly, and Blaine doesn't think he's faking the emotion in his voice. Regardless of what happened the night Rachel Berry died, Jesse certainly seems to have loved her.

"Did she say who she thought the affair was with?"

"She told me she'd followed Rachel to Noah's house, and she and I both assumed Rachel was having the affair with Noah." Jesse's eyes flick past him and Blaine follows his gaze to where Quinn's sitting quietly in the back corner. There's a slight tint of color on her cheeks, but she doesn't look away. "Now we know we were wrong, but it seemed the logical conclusion at the time."

"What did you do then?" Blaine prompts. "Ms. Corcoran had just told you Ms. Berry was having an affair with Mr. Puckerman. What was your response?"

"I decided I had to convince her to stay with me. I had to do everything in my power to remind her of how good we were together, and that our years of marriage were more important than some fling with her childhood friend."

"So what did you do?"

"I went to Tiffany's and I bought her a present -- a necklace with a gold star with a little lock in the center and an accompanying key covered in pink diamonds," he says, miming a lock and key. "Gold stars were sort of her thing," he says with a quiet laugh, looking wistful.

"And then?" Blaine prompts, trying to set aside the extraneous detail and focus on ones that might matter.

Jesse sighs, looking down at his hands. "I drove all the way back to Boston that night and went to the hotel room," he says slowly. "I opened the door, and there Noah was, covered in my sweet Rachel's blood."

Someone in the crowd gasps, as they did the first time Jesse described how he discovered Rachel's body. A tear rolls down Jesse's cheek, almost too perfect to be real, and yeah, he's laying it on thick now. Blaine feels a little bad for his cynicism -- Rachel was Jesse's wife, after all. But Quinn had seemed sure of her instinct, and there's something about the way Jesse's playing this that makes Blaine believe her. He feels -- he feels like he's being played. The words are all chosen too carefully, exaggerated for effect. He makes it sound like driving back to Boston was an extra hardship on his part, and -- "When did the train leave Boston, again? That morning?" he asks curiously.

"I think it left around nine fifteen."

"And when did you arrive in New York?"

"A little before one," Jesse replies, annoyance coloring his voice. "And Shelby and I had coffee at our favorite cafe and I went to the Tiffany's on 5th and I left New York again at four o'clock." He sighs again and shifts in his chair. "Not that I mind the repeat performance, but is there a reason for all these questions, Mr..."

"Anderson," Blaine supplies. He rocks back and forth on his heels but stands his ground. *Go slow*, Kurt had told him. "I assure you, Mr. St. James, I'm getting there," Blaine says, brain worrying at the details Jesse just provided. There's something there maybe, something not right. He flips through the file in his hand until he finds what he's looking for. "Mr. St. James, in the statement you gave to the police on December thirtieth, you said you arrived at the hotel at 10:20." He pauses and blinks up at Jesse, brow wrinkled in confusion. "It took you six and a half hours to drive from New York?"

Jesse frowns almost imperceptibly and *that*, at least, is genuine. "Um, no, I forgot," he says, clearly a little flustered. He clears his throat and schools his features back into a much more neutral expression, and Blaine closes the file in his hand, attentive. "Rachel and I did this thing with her high school show choir -- we helped them get this gig, a commercial spot." He smiles a little at the jury. "It's so important to give back." He turns his attention back to Blaine. "The director of the ad texted me, asking me to deliver a check to the choir for it, so I went and got it on my way to the hotel. It's a little out of the way, and that's why I didn't get there until ten twenty."

The crowd murmurs approvingly, but Blaine turns and moves back to where Kurt and Puckerman are sitting. He drops the file to the table with ease and flicks his eyes up briefly to meet Kurt's, smiling.

Jackpot.

It takes Kurt a second, but a grin slowly spreads across his face, matching Blaine's. Blaine spins on the spot and offers his best, cancer-curing smile to Jesse, hands folded primly behind his back. "Mr. St. James, you attended UCLA, did you not?"

Jesse blinks at him in surprise. "I did, yes," Jesse replies slowly. "I was a show choir major." He surveys Blaine curiously. "How did you know that?"

"I might be a little bit of a fan," Blaine admits, and now it's his turn to lay it on thick. Jesse smiles and flushes a little, clearly pleased. Blaine's fingers curl in anticipation. "You know, I was a show choir major at UCLA as well," Blaine says fondly. "And I loved practically every class. But there was one class that everyone hated -- I'm sure you remember which one."

"Show Choir Rules and Regulations," Jesse groans. "I hated that class."

"At least half of my class fell asleep at least once in that class," Blaine explains for the benefit of the jury and the judge. "But there was one rule that I always remembered, because the example the professor gave stuck in my brain. He told us about when he'd been a show choir director himself, and how his club made a commercial for a local mattress company, and the company sent the kids complementary mattresses in thanks."

"Objection," Ms. Platt cuts in, sounding annoyed. "Not to interrupt this little... class reunion, but I fail to see how this is relevant, or a direct line of questioning."

"I have a point," Blaine insists, turning his smile on the judge. "If Ms. Platt would be so kind as to let me finish."

"Get to the point, then, Mr. Anderson, and make sure there's a question at the end of it," the judge advises, but Blaine thinks he sees the corner of her mouth twitch as if she's fighting back a smile of her own.

"Now," Blaine continues, turning his attention back to Jesse and the jury. "You'd think this wouldn't be a problem, except the rules for amateur show choirs are very clear on this point. Amateur show choirs cannot receive compensation for performances, whether that compensation is monetary or otherwise. They had to return the mattresses." Blaine shifts all of his attention to Jesse and arches an eyebrow. "I never forgot that rule after that, and it seems odd to me that you would, Mr. St. James."

Blaine thinks Jesse's face loses a little color at that, and it takes a moment before Jesse opens his mouth to answer. "Well, I --"

"Which leads me to my question," Blaine continues, gaining momentum. The time to go slow is over. "What reason would you have for lying about that? And I come to the conclusion that there wasn't any check, was there?" Blaine stalks towards the witness stand, coming to a stop less than a foot away. "You didn't get a text from the commercial director, you didn't make any detour, and you didn't get to the hotel at ten



twenty. You didn't walk in to see Mr. Puckerman covered in your wife's blood because you arrived earlier than that, when she was alone and still very much alive." Blaine rests his hands on the edge of the witness stand, careful not to get too close. He doesn't want to get called out for badgering. "But that doesn't answer the question of why you'd lie about making the detour, or why your description of the disposal of the murder weapon was so specific. Unless you have something to hide, Mr. St. James."

"I don't," Jesse protests quietly, but Blaine can tell that's a lie easily, can hear it in the way Jesse's voice quivers, the way his eyes glaze over. The actor is finally falling.

"Here's what *I* think happened, Mr. St. James," Blaine says, pushing himself away from the witness stand and pacing the floor in front of it. His brain is racing a mile a minute, and he can't stop now, not when he's *this close*. "I think you arrived at your wife's hotel room earlier than you say you did, maybe around nine o'clock or so. I think you confronted her about the affair. I think you argued. I think she refused to listen to you, and I think it was *you* who killed her to prevent her from leaving you."

"I didn't mean to kill her!" Jesse yells, and then covers his mouth as if by doing so he can erase what he's just said.

Time stops.

"I'm sorry," Blaine says slowly, stopping in his tracks. "Can you repeat that for me, Mr. St. James?" he asks, ignoring the din of shock around him.

Jesse's lip quivers, a last ditch effort to hold the truth in, before he drops his hands and gaze to his lap, dejected. "I really did come to Boston to talk to her, convince her to come back to New York with me, but she didn't want to listen. She told me she wanted a divorce, that she was moving back to Boston to be with the person she loved, and I just, we were yelling and then I picked up the candlestick, and I -- I killed her. I killed the woman I loved." He looks back up at Blaine sharply, eyes on fire, and grips the edge of the witness stand tightly. "I stood to lose everything," he says breathlessly. "She was my other half. I would've lost my status and my career and my wife if she'd left me. Do you have any idea what that feels like?" he asks thickly, eyes welling with tears. "To watch the person you love *leave you*?"

Blaine's heart twists at the memory, and he swallows hard in an effort to steady himself. "I do, actually," he says, folding his arms over his chest. "And I did the same thing. I chased, I fought, I pleaded. But the similarities stop there. I didn't do what you did, Mr. St. James. I didn't kill him. I let him go."

The courtroom is silent for a moment, and Blaine exhales slowly. He did it. He got Jesse to confess.

*Oh my god. Oh. My. God. Ohmygod.*

No one moves for a moment, then the courtroom erupts into chaos, people chattering over one another and the judge banging her gavel furiously to calm the crowd. "Order!" she says in a booming voice. "Silence in my courtroom! Everyone sit down! Now!" Everyone settles back into their seats, the noise disappointing.

"Your honor," Kurt ventures, "in light of the witness' testimony and confession, the defense moves to have all charges against our client dropped."

The judge nods her assent. "Motion granted," she rules, turning her attention to the witnesses stand again. "Baliff, please arrest the witness. Jesse St. James, you are hereby arrested for the murder of Rachel Berry."

The bailiff pulls an unresisting, shellshocked Jesse out of the witness box and places handcuffs on him, directing him through the side door. "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say may be used against you in a court of law..."

The judge directs her attention towards the defense table. "Mr. Puckerman, you are free to go. We apologize for the trouble and inconvenience you've been put through."

"Thank you, your honor," Puckerman says.

"This trial is adjourned." The judge bangs her gavel firmly and stands, sweeping out through the door behind her.

Blaine walks back towards the defense table, trying to ignore the unsteady feeling in his legs, and offers Puck -- Saw a smile. Puckerman practically leaps up out of his chair to give Blaine a hug, lifting him up off the floor a little. Blaine lets out a slight *oof* into his shoulder and pats his back clumsily. "Thank you, Gatsby. I can't believe --" He stops and pulls away, tears in his eyes. "This is the best thing anyone's ever done for me. Seriously, I don't know how to repay you guys," he says, glancing over at Kurt.

Kurt waves a hand dismissively at him as he closes up his briefcase, a smile tugging at his lips. "I'm sure we'll see some of it, from working with Callahan. Consider today pro-bono from me." He offers Puckerman

his hand to shake before flicking his gaze over to Blaine for a moment. "Him, though, you can pay in cupcakes."

Puckerman raises an eyebrow at Blaine, clearly not in on the joke, but Blaine beams at Kurt, grin threatening to split his face in two. "Cupcakes are good. Lawyers totally work for cupcakes."

Kurt hands Puckerman a small white business card and offers a parting wave before crossing the threshold, where he's immediately swarmed by Sugar and the rest of Blaine's friends. Blaine smiles faintly at him before turning his attention back to Puckerman, who's giving him a shit-eating grin. "Please tell me you are tapping that, Gatsby."

Blaine blushes *hard* but is spared from having to answer by a light touch on his forearm. He turns to find Quinn standing in front of them. "Thank you," she says quietly, hands fidgeting with the strap of her purse.

Blaine returns the gesture, touch gentle on Quinn's arm. "You okay?"

Quinn sucks in a breath but nods, eyes lingering on the now empty witness stand. "At least he knows what it feels like to lose the person you love. Now he just has to live with the guilt of being the reason she's gone." She turns her attention to Puck and smiles a little at him. "Why don't you and I grab lunch?" she suggests, offering her arm for Puck to link his through. "And then you can come with me to pick up Beth from school."

Puck links his arm through hers, face lighting up at the mention of his daughter, and rests a hand solidly on Blaine's left shoulder before letting Quinn escort him out of the courtroom.

There's one person Blaine wants to see the most, so his eyes scan the courtroom for a moment before landing on Kurt's figure near the doorway. Kurt jerks his head towards the hallway and exits the courtroom, a silent beckon for Blaine to join him.

Blaine finds him in an adjacent hallway, where the din of people leaving the courtroom isn't quite so loud. Kurt's perched on one of the wooden benches that line the wall of the hallway, and he slides over to make room for Blaine. Kurt smiles easily and takes Blaine's hand. "No one could've done that but you."

Blaine colors a little and shakes his head. "I got lucky. Anyone who knew anything about show choir would've --"

-- been somewhere else," Kurt insists. "Most show choir majors don't exactly go on to law school."

"Well, there's Wes," Blaine argues. "I mean, it wasn't his major, but he probably knows enough to --"

"Blaine," Kurt laughs. "Can you just accept the compliment?"

Blaine bites his lip. "You really think I did okay in there?"

Kurt's smile falters, just a little, but Blaine hardly notices it because Kurt leans in close to kiss him. It catches Blaine by surprise, so much that it takes his breath away, and he finds himself leaning into Kurt's touch as Kurt rests his hand on Blaine's cheek. "Yes," Kurt breathes, moving a hand to Blaine's knee to steady himself. He lets his other hand fall to Blaine's chin, forcing Blaine to meet his eyes. "In the courtroom today? Blaine, I was so *proud* to be with you."

It's so different to hear someone say that. Blaine's had a year and a half of *are you sure* and *you can do this* and *you don't belong here*. He's been told he's capable of doing what he's just done. People have told him they have faith in him. People have told him they were glad he was their friend. But rarely -- if ever, actually -- has anyone ever told him that they were proud of *him*. And coming from Kurt, it means that much more. Blaine is doing what Sebastian wanted -- being 'serious' by becoming a lawyer -- but he's never actually compromised who he is, at his core, to get there. And Kurt is proud of that. Kurt is proud of *him*. Kurt loves him. Blaine draws in a breath, trying not to cry, and leans in for another kiss --

"*Ahem.*"

Blaine's lips stop just short of Kurt's, the ghost of a breath between them. Kurt lets go of his chin and they both turn reluctantly at the sound of the voice.

Sebastian.

Blaine bites his lip and looks away, but Kurt's much slower to look away. He reaches for Blaine's hand and clears his throat, trying to compose himself. "I heard something about Sugar throwing an 'after-party'," he says casually, biting back a smile at the phrase. "So we could celebrate."

Blaine lifts his gaze slowly, deliberately teasing Kurt by looking up at him through his eyelashes. "I thought we were."

A color rises to Kurt's cheeks but he remains otherwise composed and ignores the blatant flirting. "Would you accompany me?" Blaine nods his assent and Kurt squeezes his hand before pushing himself up off of the bench, briefcase in hand. It's silent except for the sound of Kurt's shoes against the floor, and Blaine watches him with a fond smile as he disappears around the corner.

Sebastian takes the empty spot on the bench recently vacated by Kurt and leans forward, elbows on his knees. Neither of them look at each other, and it takes Blaine a moment to realize that he has to be the first to speak if this conversation's going anywhere. Sebastian obviously doesn't have the courage to say whatever's on his mind. "I don't think you look very good with facial hair. Or much, anyway."

Sebastian snorts. "I take it Santana told you about our little arrangement?"

Blaine nods. "I just... have one question." Sebastian waves a hand at him as if to say *get on with it*. "Why?"

Blaine glances over and sees Sebastian bite his lip, clearly not wanting to answer. But he does, much to Blaine's surprise. "I didn't come out to my parents until after graduation," he says. His voice is quiet and Blaine can tell just how hard this is for him to say. "I was eighteen, you know? I was a little idealistic. And they didn't -- they didn't really care. But they knew what I wanted for myself, and their support came with conditions. Expectations. I wasn't -- I wasn't supposed to do anything that would make achieving my goals more difficult than they already were."

Blaine works his jaw a little, fighting to keep his temper. "And being out made it more difficult?"

"To them, yes," Sebastian answers shortly. "Out in California, I could do what I wanted. They figured it'd be easy to explain away anything... less pleasant than I did while I was an undergrad. But when I came back to Boston, to Harvard, they expected me to get my act together."

"To marry a woman. Santana."

Sebastian looks over at him briefly, a small smile playing at his lips. "She's really not as bad as you think she is. We were best friends for all of prep school. We're two of a kind, she and I."

Blaine looks away then, trying not to show his frustration. "Why'd you even bother with men in the first place, if you knew this is what you were coming back to?"

Sebastian's knee knocks against his own companionably, and Blaine turns to him, eyebrows raised. "You happened," Sebastian laughs, unable to keep from smiling. "I wasn't really counting on you."

Blaine shakes his head. "I still don't understand *why*. I don't -- you seem miserable, putting on this act. And that's not -- that's not you. You were always comfortable in your own skin in California, when we were -- when I knew you then. Why would you agree to come back to something like this?"

Sebastian looks away again, his face betraying his anger, and he speaks the words Santana had said to Blaine months ago. "I didn't really have a choice." He pauses for a moment, and then the words rush out of him like he's been holding them back for a long time. "I envy you. You -- I saw how hard you tried to fit in out here, B. And in the end, you didn't really need to. You did your own thing. You -- you stayed true to who you were and still managed to get people in your corner. You found a way to be happy that wasn't part of your original plan."

It's Blaine's turn to laugh. "I didn't really have much of a plan to begin with, other than to get you back."

"Maybe it was better that way." Sebastian toys with his wristwatch as he talks, eyes still trained on the empty space in front of them. "You know, there was this one photographer who worked with Marilyn a few times in the last few years of her life. He said she told him that she always had a full-length mirror with her whenever she did publicity stills. That way she'd know how she looked." Blaine turns to look at him then, and sees Sebastian's Adam's apple bob up and down as he swallows. "The photographer asked her if she posed for the photographers or the mirror. '*The mirror*,' she said. '*I can always find Marilyn in the mirror.*'"

Blaine feels his stomach sink a little. "You've always known what it was like to have to keep up appearances, haven't you? California didn't teach you that."

Sebastian hears him, Blaine *knows* Sebastian hears him, but Sebastian continues to talk, choosing to ignore Blaine's words. "I envy her too. At least -- at least she could find *someone* when she looked in the mirror. I look into one and I see a person I don't recognize lost in a fog. I don't -- I don't see me, B. I don't even know who I'm supposed to see anymore. I --" He stops talking, tries to breathe in and out and ends up gasping a little, rubbing his palms hard against his eyes.

Blaine's heart breaks for him, a little.

He reaches out and tugs Sebastian's hands away from his eyes, pulling him to his feet. "Hey," he says gently. "Come with me." Sebastian doesn't argue and lets Blaine usher him into a nearby empty bathroom. Blaine situates Sebastian so that he's standing in front of a mirror. Blaine can see it in his eyes again, see the dark circles underneath them and the exhaustion. Blaine places a hand on each of Sebastian's arms and meets his eyes in the mirror. "Somewhere in there," Blaine sighs, "is Sebastian Smythe. Boston native -

"Winchester, if we're being specific," Sebastian cuts in with a slight grin.

Blaine rolls his eyes and tries to get Sebastian to stand a little straighter. "Somewhere in there is... a guy who values the support of his parents, a guy who got *Santana Lopez* to care about him --" Sebastian colors a little and chuckles, looking down at the sink for a moment. "There's a guy who loves the color blue and hyacinths and Marilyn Monroe. There's a guy who doesn't like onions because of the way they make his breath smell, and a guy who doesn't like to wear glasses because kids made fun of him for it when he was nine." Sebastian meets his eyes in the mirror again, glazed over; Blaine can feel his muscles relax under Blaine's touch.

Blaine feels like if he lets go, Sebastian won't stay standing. So he curls his fingers around Sebastian's elbow and presses his cheek against Sebastian's arm, exhaling heavily. It's the most together they've looked since before the break-up, even at the party during Halloween, and it doesn't look right anymore. Blaine looks in the mirror and still sees Sebastian, and while the version of himself he sees isn't completely different from the one he'd seen earlier in the year, it's a version that isn't compatible with its reflective counterpart.

"Somewhere in there," Blaine murmurs, closing his eyes for a moment and inhaling, trying not to focus on the way Sebastian smells, "is a guy who has always wanted to be a lawyer. There's a guy who wants it for the power and the opportunity, the guy who wants it for the difference he can make for people." Blaine opens his eyes. "I get that. I really do."

The corner of Sebastian's mouth turns up. "Making art and helping people, that's all you've ever wanted to do."

Blaine smiles, real and big and genuine. He stands a little straighter and tries to focus on the task at hand. It's been a long time since Sebastian's said something that made him feel good about himself, and Blaine doesn't want to dwell on it. "You might look in the mirror and see a fog, Sebastian, but that guy's in there."

It just... might take you a little while to find him." He pauses, and then adds, "She could always find Marilyn in the mirror. I don't think that was who she wanted to see." Sebastian makes a questioning noise, and Blaine simply says, "She was Norma Jean."

Sebastian exhales, the sound coming out like a gasp again, and he shrugs himself out of Blaine's touch. He turns and faces away from the mirror, hands gripping the edge of the sink counter. "Yes." He glances up at Blaine for a moment, but Blaine merely raises his eyebrows in silent question. "Back in October, you -- you asked if I ever loved you." He swallows again, hard and audible, but he doesn't look away. "B... I never stopped."

Sebastian closes his eyes and *god*, Blaine can see it now, can see how much pain he's in, how much he's been holding back. And Blaine remembers --

*-- Blaine knows that look, can see it in Sebastian's eyes, remembers the first time he saw it -- you remembered my coffee order -- Sebastian still doesn't look up from his book, but his lips curve into a smile -- remembers the way Sebastian's eyes had lingered and his fingers had reached out to touch -- Sebastian kisses back -- we're not getting back together -- there's pity in his eyes, pity clouded with lust and something else Blaine can't identify -- Sebastian doesn't call after him, doesn't follow him or try to stop him -- he looks like he took it personally -- something about it that doesn't sit quite right with Blaine -- stay -- you can sing, just not that -- Sebastian won't let go of his hand --*

Blaine knows better now, knows how to interpret it, what Sebastian must've been going through. Blaine showing up in Boston, at Harvard, can't have been easy for him. It wasn't -- it wasn't part of the plan, and if Sebastian had still been in love with him, the mixed signals make so much more sense now.

Sebastian's still in love with him.

The admission should mean something to Blaine, should make him flustered or upset or *something*, but it just raises more questions. "Why'd you lie to me?"

"B," Sebastian laughs, shaking his head. "Have you *met* you? Can you imagine what you would've done if I'd told you the truth?"

Blaine thinks about it for a moment and shrugs. "I don't know. I guess I would've --"



"You would've tried to talk me out of it," Sebastian says, and Blaine clamps his mouth shut because he knows Sebastian's right. "You would've tried to find a way around it, tried to find a way to *help me*, god --" He looks up at Blaine, eyes swimming with tears. "You're impossible to say no to."

And there it is again, the almost admission that's almost as good as the real thing: Sebastian's still in love with him, has been in love with him all this time. Blaine braces his hands against the edge of the counter and hangs his head, exhaling shakily. He feels Sebastian shift next to him, feels the faint press of Sebastian's skin against his own as their pinkies brush against each other on the counter. Blaine pulls his hand away instinctively. "You said -- earlier, you said that you -- that you never --" And Blaine can't even bring himself to say it aloud because it's unbelievable to him, that Sebastian would put him through all of this because Sebastian still loved Blaine and didn't want to hurt him any more than he had to.

"Yeah," Sebastian says faintly.

"You know that means nothing to me now, right?" Blaine says quickly, looking up at Sebastian. Sebastian's fingers curl in and away from Blaine's, recoiling in reflex and reaction to Blaine's stinging words. "I've moved on."

Sebastian nods and swallows, hanging his head to avoid eye contact. "I thought -- there's supposed to be one decision that's the hardest anyone's supposed to make. Just one. But for me -- I feel like my whole life's been full of them. The decision to come out, the decision to break up with you. And I thought -- I thought that I'd be able to get over you once I'd left California, but then summer came around and I didn't have anything to keep myself occupied. So then I thought, '*Fall. I'll be able to get over him in the fall, when I go to Harvard.*' And then you were here, B, and I just -- I didn't know what to do." He stops to take another breath, and Blaine wonders just how close he is to tears. "I'm sorry," he murmurs. "I know it's not much, but it's all I've got."

"I'd say too little, too late, but --"

-- but that's not who you are, B. I know you. Despite how much you've changed, I still know you." Sebastian looks up at him, finally, and his eyes are brimming with tears. He's close. "I think watching you move on is the hardest thing I've ever had to do." He worries his lip between his teeth, hesitates, and then asks, "Do you love him?"

And Blaine feels several things at once, in that moment. He feels his heart break some more and hates that Sebastian's the cause again, but it comes with the fact that it's breaking for Sebastian and not himself. He feels his heart swell at the reference to Kurt, because Kurt has the most amazing eyes and is selfless and loves Blaine, *loves* him, is so proud to be with him. "Yeah," Blaine breathes. "I do."

The tears fall, three from Sebastian's left eye and five from his right, and then they stop, just as quickly as they started. "And --" He coughs a little, clearing his throat, and wipes at his face roughly with the back of his hand. "And he makes you happy?"

"Yeah," is Blaine's immediate answer. "He does."

Sebastian nods and sniffs a little, looking away from him. "Okay, good, that's -- good." They're both quiet for a few moments, awkwardly leaning against the counter. "I think -- I think I need some time," he says quietly. "I need to put some distance between me and Boston." Blaine hears the words Sebastian doesn't say: *distance between me and you*.

"No summer internship?"

Sebastian shakes his head. "No, I -- I think I just need to get away for a little while, you know? Clear my head a little." More unspoken words: *really get over you*. He stands a little and turns to look at himself in the mirror again. He splashes a little water on his face, trying to mask the fact that he's been crying. Their eyes meet in the mirror one last time, and Sebastian smiles faintly at him. "He's not going to be George Wilson, is he?"

Blaine returns the smile and shakes his head. "No," he agrees. "He's my Noah."

Sebastian nods, just once, and turns to leave. Blaine reaches out a hand as he passes by and grabs Sebastian by the elbow, holding him in place. "Are we -- do you think we'll ever really be friends, you and me?"

Sebastian looks up and meets Blaine's eyes for a moment. "I don't know," he says finally. "I can try. I --" He pauses and turns around again, looking at himself in the mirror. He turns Blaine towards the mirror with him, hands settled firmly on Blaine's shoulders, and lets out a loud and exaggerated sigh. "You look in the mirror, Blaine, and you see the man you want to be, the man you are. Me? I'm not quite there yet."

Blaine tries and fails to bite back a smile. "Not a real boy yet?"

Sebastian shakes his head, but he's smiling, too. "I haven't learned to do what you have."

"Which is?" Blaine prompts.

"How to take it like a man."

## ***Chapter Twelve***

*Two years later.*

Once upon a time, Blaine started his day with a medium drip.

Coffee's a lot of things to Blaine. It's beginnings and middles and friendships and love lost and love gained. It's bitter and sweet and coursing through his veins like blood. It's obligation, and generosity, and a million other complicated things, and it used to be the beginning of every day for Blaine.

Not anymore.

Now, it's waking in an apartment one storey up, pressing his icy toes against Kurt's calf just to hear Kurt grumble at him in his sleep, snuggling into Kurt's side until the last possible moment before braving the early morning chill. It's drawing Kurt out of his cocoon with the smell of cooking pancakes and fresh orange juice -- Blaine's still not very good at cooking most things, but he can make a mean pancake after two years of practice. It's greeting Kurt with kisses and maple syrup sticky fingers. It's trading forkfuls of pancake as they discuss their Saturday plans, teasing each other with the prospect of a romantic breakfast tomorrow morning before the hubbub of the rest of the day; Kurt's off to the farmers' market for supplies before spending the day with his dad and stepmom.

And Blaine?

Blaine has a late coffee to get to.

There's a medium drip with cinnamon and cream and sugar waiting for Blaine when he gets to the cafe, sitting in front of the lone empty chair at Tina and Josh's table. Tina's only willing to let Blaine buy the coffee some of the time; every so often she'll just make sure to be there first and buy it herself before Blaine gets a chance. Mike is straddling the chair nearest the counter, apron temporarily discarded while he spends a moment with Tina and Josh, whose chairs are pushed almost impossibly close. They may very well be playing footsie under the table, but, well. Blaine decided long ago not to ask -- it's better for his sanity.

Blaine pauses near the door, just watching. Three years ago he never would have imagined this as his life - living in Boston, about to get his law degree, friends with people like Tina and Josh and Mike. Tina and

Josh are graduating with him, Mike's starting his residency, and it feels like their lives are really beginning now, now that they're moving out into the real world, outside the confines of college and law school and medical school.

Josh throws a napkin at Mike as he stands up to get back to work (only two months until Mike gets to leave working as a barista, and Blaine knows Mike can't wait), and Mike catches it and holds it to his heart before leaning to peck Tina on the lips. Blaine smiles, watching them, watching the way they all bounce off each other and connect in new ways every time he sees them.

Tina turns in her seat and catches Blaine's eye, grinning. "What are you waiting for, Anderson? I promise we won't bite today!" she calls with a laugh. Blaine grins back and goes to join his friends. He's always liked doing more than watching, anyways.

The coffee shop will always be there. It's where Blaine will go after he starts his day, or in the middle of it if he needs a pick me up, or when he's burning the midnight oil. It's a constant, like so much of his life is now even as it's changing.

And at the end of the day, when he curls up into bed next to Kurt and kisses him goodnight, the kiss will always taste faintly of coffee even behind the toothpaste and mouthwash. It will always remind Blaine that this is how it all started. After Sebastian had given Blaine his phone number, they met for coffee first.

And really, that's how it always starts -- with a name, and a cup of coffee.

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"Will you stop fidgeting?" Blaine sighs. "I can't do this if you don't stay still."

"Sorry, sorry," Sebastian says distractedly, squaring his shoulders and wiggling his fingers. Blaine sets to work trying to do up Sebastian's tie, tongue poking out as he focuses.

"Hey, Pinkie and the Beard, get a move on," Santana snaps, crossing her legs as she settles comfortably into the large armchair next to the mirror the men are standing in front of. "We're not leaving here any later than four-thirty. My abuela expects us at five."

"She really didn't have to do this," Blaine protests, peeking over Sebastian's shoulder at Santana.

"Well it's not exactly for you," Santana says dryly. "It's really my graduation dinner. The only reason you two are invited is because she's acting under the misguided notion that you're my friends. The Beard, I get. Pinkie, I can't explain."

Blaine rolls his eyes and smiles a little, turning his attention back to Sebastian. "I love you too, Santana." He hesitates as he finishes up the knot of Sebastian's tie, and then ventures, "How's she taking it?"

"Okay," Santana says, trying for indifference. Blaine sees her look at Sebastian as they turn to look at Sebastian's reflection in the mirror. "I was right, though. Her practically raising me did make a difference. Except she keeps asking if I'm seeing anyone. That's starting to get annoying."

"The whole strong, independent woman thing?" Blaine guesses.

"I just want to pass the bar," Santana groans. "Then I'll start thinking about a relationship."

"You did just get out of a long-term engagement," Sebastian says, corner of his mouth twitching up in an effort not to smile.

"Shut up," Santana says, rolling her eyes. "Why *do* you need a new tie for graduation tomorrow?"

"I just want to look my best," Sebastian says, rolling his shoulders back. "It'll probably be the last family function. I want to leave a good impression."

"Last family function?" Blaine pries.

Sebastian doesn't meet either of their eyes in the mirror, straightening his sleeves and adjusting the tie uncomfortably. "I just want to make sure I have full access to my trust fund," he says carefully. "Before I do anything else."

"And why would you need access to your trust fund?" Santana asks. "Law school's paid for. The only thing you'd need it for before you get licensed and hired is -- *no fucking way.*"

Blaine looks over at her, confused, until it dawns on him. He turns his gaze back to the mirror, eyes fixed on Sebastian's face. "Are you planning on disowning your parents?"

“Not *disowning*,” Sebastian protests, sounding annoyed. “I’m just... giving them a choice. If I can support myself, I don’t need their support. If they want to come along for the ride and watch me become a senator, great. If not, then they can watch it happen from their televisions and newspapers.” He finally stops shifting and tugging at his clothes uncomfortably, eyes lifting slowly to meet Blaine’s in the mirror. “They’re not the only ones who can issue ultimatums.”

“That’s kind of... huge,” Blaine points out gently.

“Yeah, well.” Sebastian straightens a little, eyes fixed on his reflection in the mirror, jaw set. “I’m never going to be Jackie Kennedy. Time to start facing the Marilyn.” Blaine smiles a little at that and nudges Sebastian’s elbow with his own companionably.

Santana stays quiet, watching them both for a moment before pushing herself up out of the chair. She turns Sebastian to face her and starts to tug the tie off, nodding at the table behind them. “Hand me that one, will you?” she asks Blaine. Blaine does as she asks, swapping out the ties, and he watches with a fond smile as Santana does the knot for Sebastian. For all that they’re not together anymore (not that they ever were, really), they still move and dance around each other as if they were a real couple, familiar and easy. Santana smooths the tie down and adjusts the knot one last time before turning Sebastian to face the mirror again. “I think you look better in blue.”

Sebastian looks over to Blaine for approval. Blaine nods, smiling. “You do,” he agrees. “Much better than the red.”

Sebastian works off the tie, shoulders relaxing, and when he places the tie on the counter at the register, he exhales, long and slow. “I’ll take this one.”

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Late Sunday morning, a bang comes on the bathroom door and shocks Blaine out of his unseeing contemplation of the mirror.

“Blaine Anderson, if you do not come out of that bathroom and get dressed in the next minute, I will not be held responsible for my actions. Lives may be lost out here,” Sugar yells through the door.

“I’d listen to her, Blaine, she’s got a scary look in her eyes,” Wes calls. “I don’t want to be in the line of fire if you don’t come out of there.”

Blaine sighs and nods to himself. He can do this. It's not that big a deal, right? He's not going to screw it up. He opens the door to find Sugar tapping her foot while Wes looks on in amusement. Smug bastard who already graduated and isn't planning to -- well. "Sorry, I got distracted," Blaine says, before wincing at the word choice.

Sugar smirks. "Really?" she says, tilting her head to the side. "By what?"

Blaine just shakes his head and starts to pull on his clothes for graduation -- polo, slacks, bow tie with the gavels. He'd thought about wearing a suit, but June in Boston is warm enough even without the graduation robe. There's no need to wear more layers than necessary. He steps in front of the mirror hanging on the closet door to adjust the bowtie and Sugar sighs loudly. "Okay, spill. You are way too nervous for this to just be about the speech, especially since we've watched you rehearse it at least a hundred times," she says with exasperation. "Something else is up."

Blaine glances between her and Wes and slumps. Busted. "Can you keep a secret?"

Wes glances sideways at Sugar. "Well, I can. I don't know about her."

Sugar narrows her eyes at him and flops onto the bed, inspecting her nail beds. "You have no idea what I'm capable of, Warbler man."

Blaine arches an eyebrow. "And what is that supposed to mean?" Sugar shrugs, going for indifference, but Blaine can see right through her. "Sugar? What secret are you keeping?"

"If I told you, it wouldn't be a secret anymore, now, would it?" she says in a sing-song voice.

Blaine plops onto the foot of the bed and nudges her knee. "Hey, come on, that's not fair. I'll trade you my secret for yours."

She glances up, surveying him. "I was waiting for a better time."

"Oh my god, just tell him," Wes groans, sitting on the other side of the bed.

"Do *you* know?" Blaine asks, aghast.



"No," Wes says. "But all of this secrecy and nervousness isn't what you need today. So come on, Sugar. Out with it."

Sugar bites her lip, debating, before fishing around in her purse on the nightstand. She unearths her prize and holds it up in front of her, poised between her index finger and thumb -- "You're *pregnant*?" Sugar nods and Blaine practically tackles her against the pillows, arms squeezing her tight. "Oh my god, seriously?!"

"Yes, well," Sugar says with a slight laugh, patting him on the back clumsily. "It's sooner than we were planning on, but the deed is done."

Blaine pulls back and cradles her head in his hands. "How long have you been keeping this from me?"

"Two days," Sugar says defensively. "You're graduating! I was going to wait until at least tomorrow. I'm not that selfish, thank you," she sniffs, glaring at Wes.

"How far along are you?" Blaine asks, ignoring the dig at Wes.

"Six weeks." Sugar blushes a little and drops the pregnancy test back in her purse, getting comfortable on the bed. "But enough about me, your turn. A secret for a secret, remember?"

Blaine nods decisively and strides the short distance to the dresser. His hiding place wouldn't have worked in the long-term. Eventually, Kurt would go looking for something at the back of the bowtie drawer and all would be discovered, but for the week or so between acquiring his prize and today, it's been fine. He tugs the red velvet box from the back of the drawer and carefully opens it, turning to show Wes and Sugar.

"Oh!" Sugar gasps, holding a hand to her chest. "Blaine, it's beautiful. Are you --"

Blaine ducks his head, smiling bashfully. "I just think it's time. I want to spend the rest of my life with Kurt. This is just an expression of that -- *hey!*" he cries indignantly, dodging the second pillow Wes throws at his face. "What was that for?"

"How long have *you* been keeping *this* from us?" Wes asks, outraged. "This is huge! Your two best friends should have known about it way before now."

"Yeah, well, excuse me for not wanting to spoil the surprise," Blaine snaps, rolling his eyes. "I know you're both capable of keeping a secret, but I'm not so sure I have faith in your ability to contain your excitement or to refrain from meddling in my love life."

"Ouch," Sugar says, hand going back over her heart.

"Yeah, what Pixie said," Wes echos, earning him his own pillow beating from Sugar. "We've *matured*."

"Yeah, well." Blaine looks down at the box in his hand and runs his thumb along the edge. "We all have."

"How are you going to ask him?" Wes asks, head tilted. "A romantic dinner out? Fireworks display? *Will you marry me?* spelled out in coffee mugs?" He grins at Blaine. "Personally, I'd go for the fireworks."

"You could always serenade him," Sugar offers, grinning impishly. "It has a proven track record of success."

"I think," Blaine says carefully, "that I don't need to do it like that. I think I'm going to wait until the time is right, and then I'm going to say what I feel."

"Wow," Wes says, voice a little thick. "You really are ready for this."

"I really am."

"So the whole distracted thing," Wes says. "I guess that means you're nervous about it."

"Well, yeah," Blaine says, rubbing at the back of his neck awkwardly. "Am I not allowed to be? I mean, weren't you?" he asks, looking over at Sugar. "Weren't you nervous when you proposed to Rory?"

"Not really," Sugar says, shrugging. Blaine glances down at the box in his hand and sighs. "Oh my god, come here," Sugar huffs, pushing herself off of the bed and guiding Blaine in front of the mirror. She tugs at Blaine's shirt where it's ridden up in places and forces him to look at his reflection in the mirror. "Do you remember why I asked Rory to marry me?"

"Because he was going to be deported?"

"No," Sugar says, rolling her eyes. "Because he had the entire package, remember?"

Wes snorts in derision from the bed. "Seriously?" Sugar throws him a scathing look over her shoulder. "Oh my god, that's such a mom look. It's --" Wes pauses, opens his mouth and then shuts it. He frowns a little before speaking again. "I have to be nice to you, don't I?" he asks slowly. "Because you're pregnant?"

"Yes," Blaine says firmly, answering for her. "You do."

"Ugh," Wes groans, rolling over and face planting into a pillow, lying spread-eagle on the mattress. "Fine," he mumbles into the pillow.

"Anyway," Sugar says, turning to face the mirror again. "Back to what I was saying --"

"Wait," Wes interjects from the bed. "Motivational best friend speech, I know where you're going with this," he says, sitting up again. "Why do you want to ask Kurt?"

"We know why he wants to ask Kurt," Sugar snaps, picking up a spare pillow and throwing it at him. "That is so not where I was going with this."

"Okay, okay, fine, jeez," Wes says, surrendering. He rolls over and faceplants into the pillow again. "I'll just be over here. Completely useless."

"Ignore him," Sugar says with another roll of her eyes. "He's just being childish."

"It's good practice for you," Wes throws back, and in the reflection of the mirror, Blaine thinks he actually sees Sugar smile a little.

"What I was going to ask you," Sugar continues, standing a little straighter, "was if you knew why Rory said yes? And if you say it was because he didn't want to be deported --"

"No," Wes says suddenly, lifting his head from the pillow. "It was because you made him an offer he couldn't refuse."

"I'm never going to escape *The Godfather*, am I?" Blaine mutters.

"Embrace it," Sugar says soothingly, patting his arm. "Wes isn't wrong, though. Rory didn't say yes because he thought it was the only way he wouldn't get deported. He said yes because it was the only way we could be together."

"I'm not following," Blaine admits.

Sugar sighs and turns Blaine to face her. "When you meet someone who changes your life, romantic or not, they leave a mark. Rory and I left enough of a mark on each other that we didn't want to be apart. And that didn't happen in three weeks, Blaine. You know that."

"Yeah," Blaine says fondly, remembering the spilled drinks and blushes and post-it notes. "I do."

"What you're planning on doing?" she continues, plucking the box from his hand and holding it up between them. "It's telling Kurt -- and the rest of the world -- that he's made a mark on you. And by asking him, you're hoping you've made one too."

"You actually *are* the Godfather, you know that?" Wes quips from the bed, rolling into a sitting position. "Or Godmother. Whatever."

Sugar surveys him for a moment before beaming at him. "I'm going to take that as a compliment."

Wes grins at her. "I meant it as one."

"I think you guys getting along is a sign of the end times," Blaine says dryly.

"Yeah, well." Wes reclines against the pillows and shrugs. "You told me I had to be nice to her. This is your fault."

Blaine chuckles, taking the box back from Sugar's hand and tucking it in the pocket of his slacks. "You are going to be a great mom, you know that?" he says quietly, drawing her into his arms.

"Don't," she murmurs, tucking her face against his shoulders. "My hormones are all crazy and I'm going to start crying and I am not redoing my make-up, Blaine Anderson." They pull apart a little, Sugar blinking furiously in an effort not to cry, and then both look over at the flash of white next to them. There's a handkerchief in Wes' hand, dutifully held out for Sugar, and they both stare down at it in amazement. "Being pregnant is like having a superpower," Sugar says in wonderment. "I wonder what else I can do."

"Just accept it and say thank you," Blaine instructs, turning to give himself a once-over in the mirror one last time. "We have a graduation to get to, and I have a speech to give and a proposal to make."

“And what’s the way to a man’s heart, Blaine?” Sugar says teasingly as Wes pushes himself off of the bed.

“Through his ears.”

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*Commencement Address, Harvard Law Class of 2020 -- Blaine Devon Anderson*

“On my very first day at Harvard, I went to a small coffee shop just off campus and committed an act of kindness. I paid for the person behind me in line. The person I bought coffee for -- a man I know well now - - gave me some advice on how to survive. *Just don’t panic.*

“It was easy advice to follow. I came to Harvard with a degree in show choir from UCLA. I was familiar with putting on a show face. I could give you a smile that’s so optimistic it could cure cancer. And that’s what we’re told in preparation for court: keep calm, stay collected, don’t panic.

“Screw that.

“So much of what we’re told about practicing law, so much of what we see, is red tape and games and manipulation. It’s about finding the weakness in your opponent and playing it close to the vest and not letting anyone peek at your cards. It’s about tearing someone else down. There’s no trust, no truth.

“How different would the world be if we didn’t have a game face? What if we stopped playing games? What if we stopped trying to tear people down? If we wore our hearts on our sleeves? If we laid out all of our cards on the table?

“People -- our *clients*, they’ll come to us for any number of reasons. Maybe they’ll be accused of committing a crime, or they’ll ask for a divorce, or fight over their kids, or want a prenuptial agreement. They come to us for help. And those clients -- those *people* will be trusting us to help them. And we’ll be trusting them to give us the truth, so that we can uphold it, fight for it, defend it, honor it. Do we as a society even remember what honor is?

“I’ve had people tell me that wearing my heart on my sleeve is dangerous, that it makes me vulnerable and weak. I’ve had people tell me that I shouldn’t care so much, that the people we’ll meet pay us for a commodity, not compassion.

"But if I don't care enough to do my job, if I don't care enough to believe what my clients tell me, if I don't care enough to give them the help they ask for, if I don't care enough to treat them like the *people* they are... what's the point?

"Aristotle once said that the law is reason free from passion. Well, no offense to Aristotle, or to the man who gave me the advice on my first day, but without passion? We're not human. And isn't that what it all comes down to? Every crime, every grievance, every precaution -- they're all products of the human condition. They are all motivated by passion. We owe it to the people -- to ourselves -- to match that passion.

"Being nervous is okay. Being upset is okay. Being happy is okay. Wearing our heart on our sleeves, caring about other people -- none of that makes us weak. It makes us human. And somewhere along the way, people lose their humanity in this profession. I don't know where or how or why, but they do. And when they stop caring, the system fails. It fails us, it fails our clients, it fails us all.

"The world is full of ugly things. People are going to be hateful. They're going to commit crimes. They're going to fall out of love. They're going to be selfish and put their needs before someone else's.

"Don't panic. Have a little faith in people. Believe in the good in people. When we all stop resorting to the same games and lies and tricks, we start to trust each other a little more. And from that comes truth. And that, fellow graduates, is what we're after.

"Start your day with an act of kindness. End your day with an act of kindness. Remember that at the end of the day, this isn't just about you. When you help someone else, you help us all."

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As she watches Blaine lean against a tree, laughing at something his sweetheart has said (and for this alone she would love Kurt, that he gives her baby joy and laughter), Marisol is glad she was wrong. Law school has been one of the best things to ever happen to her Blaine, and she almost can't believe she ever doubted he would succeed. It's true that her son has never been ugly or boring, but if there's one thing these last three years have shown, it's that Blaine is serious about the things that matter.

Blaine glances up and grins at seeing her. "Mom," he calls, trotting over, "there you are. Where's Dad?"

"Oh, I think he got caught talking to Wesley and Sugar," Marisol replies. "He said he'd be along in a minute." She spots a bench along the path and draws Blaine towards it. "Sweetie, can we sit down for a minute? I just wanted to say something." Blaine's brow crinkles, and Marisol sighs. She didn't mean to make him concerned. "It's nothing bad, dear," she says, sitting and patting the bench beside her. "I wanted to tell you that you were amazing earlier, giving your speech. And not just then, Blaine. These past three years, the effort you've put in and the way you've given your heart to this whole endeavor --" She shakes her head, overwhelmed for a moment. "Your father and I, we're just so, so proud of you, and of what you've accomplished here. We couldn't have wished for a better son."

Blaine's biting his lip, something Marisol hasn't seen him do since he was nine. He sniffs and takes a visible breath. "Mom, I don't -- all I've ever wanted was for you to be proud of me and what I've done."

Marisol blinks away tears and pulls Blaine into a hug, squeezing tight. "We are, sweetie. We are. I -- I know I haven't been quite as supportive as your father, when it comes to trusting your instincts, but --"

"No, Mom," Blaine interjects, tightening his hold on her. "Don't. It's okay. It's not -- I just needed --" He pulls away and sighs heavily, eyes trained on his lap. He's quiet for a moment, clearly upset, so Marisol reaches over to take his hand. "Can I tell you a secret?" Blaine asks quietly. "One I haven't even told Dad yet?"

Marisol offers him an encouraging smile, a warmth blooming in her chest. "Of course you can, sweetheart."

Blaine glances over his shoulder down the path to where Kurt has joined Theo and Wes and Sugar. He watches them for a moment before turning back around to face her. He brushes part of his unzipped graduation gown away and digs in the pocket of his slacks before unearthing a small red, velvet box. He lifts his eyes to meet Marisol's and places it in her hand gently.

Inside is a ring.

Marisol's not so sure why she's surprised. Maybe she isn't. She feels like the wind's been knocked out of her, though, when she meets Blaine's eyes again. "When?" she asks.

"Tonight," Blaine says, taking the box from her and tucking it back into his pocket, glancing over his shoulder anxiously. "After dinner sometime. When -- when we're alone. I want it to be just the two of us."

Marisol nods, not speaking, but she can tell that Blaine can still see the glee all over her face by his expression. "You promised," Blaine reminds her imploringly.

"You're going to make me sit through that entire dinner without saying anything?"

"Yes," Blaine says firmly. "Let me *ask him* first," he adds with a laugh. "And then you can say anything you want and print announcements and whatever else you want. But let me handle things first."

"Fair enough," Marisol sighs, nudging Blaine's knee with her own. "So which one of us is he?"

"What?"

"Kurt," Marisol clarifies. "There's that saying that you marry one of your parents. Which one of us is he?"

Blaine glances over his shoulder again, face relaxing into a warm smile without even realizing it. "Dad," he says. "Kurt is definitely Dad."

"So I guess that means you're more like me," Marisol says with a smile, recapturing his attention.

"I think I'm like both of you," Blaine counters, giving her a knowing smile of his own. He pauses for a moment, eyes trained on her face, and for once, Marisol doesn't try to guess what he's thinking. Her gut says Blaine will tell her, and the warmth grows in appreciation of how open he's being with her. "There's this chapter in *The Great Gatsby* where Gatsby tells Nick about what it was like to fall in love with Daisy," Blaine says. "*What was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling her what I was going to do?*" Blaine closes his eyes, shakes his head and smiles and *there's* Marisol's sweet boy, bashful and thoughtful and so, so in love. "It's never been like that with Kurt. I -- I didn't even have any great things to talk about, much less to do. Kurt gave me that, or -- well, he pointed me in a direction and encouraged me to take it, but he let me make the choice on my own." Blaine opens his eyes to look at her. "We don't talk about doing great things, Mom. We just do them. We do them on our own and together and it's --" He stops, suddenly breathless, and his hand reaches out for hers to cling tight. "Isn't that what marriage is?"

Marisol smiles at him. "It's what I think everyone wants it to be."

Blaine's brow knits in confusion. "Is that not what it was for you?"



Marisol laughs and shifts to get a little more comfortable on the bench, eyes drifting past Blaine to watch Theo talk to Kurt for a moment. "When I said yes to your father, it was because I found someone I trusted to take care of me. Daisy and I weren't so different, back then," she says, a note of teasing in her voice. "I got a lot more out of the marriage than I expected. Your father -- he's the strong, silent type. You know that. But he made himself very emotionally available to me, and when the time came, I returned the favor."

"What do you mean?"

Marisol sighs, shifts again, slightly uncomfortable. "I know you weren't part of all of the conversations we had about moving to California. Your father and I had a lot of them on our own, especially while you were in the hospital. But in the end, I was the one who made the decision to move."

Blaine blinks, surprised. "You never told me that."

"It wasn't important back then," Marisol says with a shrug. "But your father was... a *mess* when you were in the hospital. He didn't know what to do. He didn't even want to talk about the possibility of moving. He thought it was too selfish of him if he did. A decision had to be made, so I made it. I thought -- I thought it'd be better for all of us, you know? A clean slate. We could reinvent ourselves, or at the very least just be able to be ourselves without worrying what other people thought."

They're both quiet for a few moments until Blaine shifts and leans forward, pressing his lips to Marisol's cheek. "You made the right decision, Mom," he says softly. "But why are you telling me all of this now?"

Marisol lets out a slight laugh and pats his cheek. "Oh, sweetheart. You and I are more alike than you realize. What you're doing right now? Getting into law and getting ready to get married? Those are big endeavors. You're trusting your instincts. I trusted mine." She reaches out for his hand again, feels the weight of it warm and solid and heavy in her own. "And now I'm trusting yours."

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"So," Kurt sighs heavily, glancing over at Blaine, cheek smushing into the pillow. "How does it feel, graduate?"

Blaine's chest rises and falls rapidly as he struggles to catch his breath. "Awesome," he answers, panting a little. "It feels *awesome*."

Kurt laughs. "I think that's the endorphins talking."

Blaine waves a hand dismissively in the air. "Exercise gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy." He lolls his head to the side now, cheek equally smushed on his own pillow, and grins at Kurt. "I'm pretty sure sex of that magnitude qualifies as exercise. I am one happy graduate."

"Well I have to keep you on your toes somehow," Kurt reasons innocently. "You still have to take and pass the bar --" He stops talking when Blaine rolls back on top of him, eyes glittering.

"Kurt."

"Blaine."

"We're celebrating," Blaine reminds him. "And that means I'm not going to worry or stress out about things like that until at least tomorrow. Right now, I'm exactly where I need and want to be. I'm happy." He darts in to kiss Kurt, right at the corner of his mouth, down to the junction between his neck and jaw and then up to his eyebrow. It never fails to make Kurt's heart skip a beat. "*You make me happy*," Blaine sings quietly into Kurt's neck, and Kurt breaks out into a grin. "*So, so happy*."

"Well I'd certainly hope so," he teases.

Blaine lifts his head from Kurt's neck and meets Kurt's eyes for a moment. "You do." He bows his head and hides his face against Kurt's chest, draws in a breath. "When I told my parents I wanted to go to Harvard -- *why* I wanted to go to Harvard -- they didn't really have any objections. But my dad..." Blaine stops to gather himself and Kurt buries a hand in his curls to comfort him, unsure what's prompted the story but encouraging Blaine to tell it nonetheless. It's here, in the bedroom, that Blaine seems to be able to express himself best, words and hands and lips and voice. "My dad encouraged me to really give law school a chance. He thought I might like it. And --" Blaine stops and lifts his head, eyes still closed. "God, no matter how awkward our relationship might be sometimes, I forget that he still knows me, you know? I'm still his son and he still *knows* me. He knew I was searching for something even if I didn't say it out loud. My life wasn't miserable by any means, but there was definitely something... lacking.

"Then I met you," he says quietly, opening his eyes. "I met you and you... opened my eyes to what I could be, who I could be." Kurt smiles at him and feels warm all over. He knows Blaine feels awkward sometimes, uncomfortable with words and romance and gestures, but when he does something right, *god*

does he do it right. "By making me stay, you reminded me of the kind of person I am. You made me keep my promises. And you --" Blaine stops and swallows, then, words lost in his throat. "You make me want to promise you more."

Kurt hums in an effort to distract from the flush in his face and distractedly plays with Blaine's curls, loose now after the long day and *exercise*. "And what exactly would you promise?"

There's a moment, there, silent and heavy between them, before Blaine answers. He shifts on Kurt's chest a little and presses his lips to Kurt's chest, directly over his heart. "To always love you." Blaine untangles Kurt's hand from his hair and brings it down to kiss the pads of Kurt's fingers. "To always try to do the right thing." An almost kiss to the knuckles, a teasing kiss to the inside of Kurt's wrist. "To keep you on your toes." A kiss to the clavicle. "To always make time for you, no matter how busy we are." Kurt's breath catches at that and he has to grip hard at Blaine's shoulder to force himself to breathe again. Blaine's lips move up, resilient, and land soft on the corner of his mouth again. "To bring you a box of apricot cookies from the bakery you love at least twice a year." And just like that, the tension dissipates a little, and Kurt can feel his laugh all the way down in his belly. Blaine kisses Kurt's jaw, the path predictable now. "To kiss you wherever and whenever you want." Kurt leans into the last one, desperately wanting more than the brief pressure to his eyebrow. "But mostly," Blaine finishes with a happy sigh, pulling back a little, "to make sure you remember how perfectly imperfect you are."

Kurt fights against the desire to tug Blaine down into a kiss and runs a hand over Blaine's bare arms, trying to distract himself from the way his stomach flips at Blaine's words. "You make a very persuasive argument," he allows, "but you've already won me over, you know."

Blaine laughs a little at that, soft and quiet, his smile reaching all the way up to his eyes. "You don't even know what I'm making an argument for."

"Well it's very convincing," Kurt admits, "whatever it is."

Blaine bites his lip and surveys Kurt's face for a minute, clearly thinking. "Do you trust me?" he asks. "Do you trust that I know what I want?"

Kurt smiles faintly and nods. "I think I trust you with that more than anything." Blaine exhales, breath ghosting over Kurt's chest in a huff, and leans over the side of his bed, hands searching for something. "Blaine," Kurt laughs, shifting awkwardly underneath Blaine's twisted figure. "Blaine, what are you --" He's

cut off by Blaine pushing himself back onto the bed all the way, and the pinpricks of something new on Kurt's chest force him to look down at the red box Blaine's perched there, between them, and --

*Oh.*

Kurt can't breathe and he knows his heart's gone beyond just skipping to full on stopping now, synapses failing to fire in his brain. That's -- that's --

"Kurt?"

He breathes out at the sound of his name and looks up from the box to Blaine's face, to the bottom lip drawn between teeth in concern.

"Sorry," he breathes. "I just -- I was expecting a musical number or something."

Blaine's eyes narrow for a minute, confused, before his whole face lights up and he buries his face in Kurt's chest, laughing. "You're teasing me."

"Inappropriate humor," Kurt babbles. "Defense mechanism for when I get nervous, and I just --"

Blaine's fingers press gently over his lips to silence him, and everything on Kurt's insides does that flip-skip-stop again. "I thought about it," he admits quietly. "I thought about taking a page from your dad's book and doing it at the coffee shop. And I -- I thought about us, and about you, and I remembered what you said, the first Christmas we spent together."

"Refresh my memory?" Kurt pleads breathlessly. "My brain is kind of totally not working right now."

Blaine smiles and ducks his head a little and *god*, Kurt could just fall in love with him all over again. "About *Amélie*, and how the reason you loved that kiss was because it was simple, intimate. And I just -- I thought you might appreciate it more."

Kurt offers him a weak smile. "You know, you draw a lot from that film. You'd think it was your favorite instead of mine."

Blaine chuckles, the sound low and pleasant. "Well *The Notebook* doesn't exactly have a proposal, or at least not one to draw inspiration from."

"Oh, I don't know," Kurt muses. "*I want all of you forever* sounds pretty good to me." Blaine's face turns suddenly serious at that and Kurt can see his heart in his *eyes*. Kurt props himself up on his elbows a little, rocking the box out of place and into Blaine's outstretched hand, and his voice is quiet when he speaks. "I can't accept an offer if you don't make one."

Blaine pulls back a little to put some space between them, his fingers working deftly to pry open the box. "Somewhere in there is a *Godfather* reference," he mutters.

"I'll be sure not to mention it to Sugar."

Blaine finally stills his fingers enough to get the box open, and he lifts his eyes to meet Kurt's. The moment is quiet and still between them, the band gleaming unassumingly in its pocket, and Blaine finally speaks, breathless. "Marry me."

There's that flip-skip-stop again, and Kurt bites his lip to fight back a grin. "You have to phrase it in the form of a question --"

"Oh my *god*," Blaine groans, burying his face in Kurt's chest again. "Do you want me to get out of bed and get down on one knee and propose in the nude?"

"Technically, you *are* proposing in the nude --"

Blaine just gives him a look and props himself up again. He removes the ring from the box and tosses the box on the nightstand, crowding in close. "I appreciate that you're trying to defuse the tension and put my nerves at ease, but --"

"I'm sorry," Kurt laughs. "It's just -- you *planned* this."

Blaine arches an eyebrow at him. "It's not unusual to plan a proposal."

"No, but --" Kurt sighs and reaches out a hand to rub at Blaine's arm. "You plan to be spontaneous. Are you telling you planned to do this post-orgasm and in the nude?"

"Well, no," Blaine admits. "I just knew I wanted to do it today. And that speech -- I had that whole speech planned."

"And it was a very moving speech," Kurt assures him. "But you're psyching yourself out. This doesn't have to be hard."

There's a pause, and then Blaine rolls off of him, studying the ring perched between his fingers. "This is important to me."

"Hey," Kurt says gently, shifting onto his side. "I didn't mean --"

"Just... let me get this out," Blaine cuts in. He inhales, long and deep, and fixes his eyes on the ceiling. "It's been three and a half years since Sebastian broke up with me. It was right after homecoming, and in the days leading up to it, there -- I kept reading into things, noticing little details. And I thought -- I thought he was going to propose to me."

Kurt reaches a hand out tentatively, fingertips brushing against Blaine's arm again. "How come you've never told me this before?"

Blaine doesn't shrug out of the touch, but he seems more agitated now, and fuck, this is not how Kurt wanted this to go. He was just trying to get Blaine to relax. "I don't know. I haven't been hiding it from you or anything. It's just -- it's one of the ugly parts. It was humiliating and heartbreaking and I... I made it all up in my head." He sighs and shifts onto his side, not meeting Kurt's eyes, but at least they're facing each other again. "When I was little, marriage was just this... thing that was supposed to happen when I got older. It was a fantasy, or a dream. And then I realized I was gay, and suddenly it wasn't even an option anymore, at least not in Ohio at the time."

"That changed," Kurt points out.

"Everything changes," Blaine says softly. "Suddenly, I *could* and I met Sebastian and all I wanted outside of making art and helping people was to be married. And I don't -- I don't think I ever really thought about being married to him, specifically. I was in love with the idea of it. And then he dumped me and I chased after him and he broke my heart again. After that, it meant something different to me. It *had to*. It wasn't just this fantasy anymore. It wasn't -- it wasn't anything."

"Oh," Kurt breathes, and Blaine finally blinks up at him, eyes silently questioning. "That's why -- that first Christmas, you were upset when my dad and Carole got engaged. After Sebastian and Santana, and Sugar and Rory... Blaine, I didn't realize. I didn't know --"

"Of course you didn't," Blaine dismisses. "There was no way you could've. But that Christmas changed everything for me."

"It changed a lot of things," Kurt reminds him, and he can't help the smile that creeps onto his face.

Blaine finally relaxes at that, corners of his mouth twitching upward. "Being with you, Kurt, was just... different. It's never been perfect, no matter how close it gets. It's the good and the bad and everything in between. It's -- I'm an idealist, and a romantic, and you love those things about me." Kurt smiles a little wider and reaches forward to brush a curl off of Blaine's forehead. It's less frightening, now, to know Blaine as well as he does. It's comfortable and familiar and almost reassuring, in a way. He knows they know each other well enough to always get down to the root of a problem, to tell when the other is upset or turned on or just plain tired. "But..." Blaine casts his eyes down, fingers toying with the ring again, and oh, Kurt had almost forgotten about that. "There's always a point when dreams just aren't enough. You have to find a way to make them a reality." He lifts his eyes back to Kurt's face, slow and deliberate and those stupid eyelashes, god. "You gave me my reality, Kurt. And you did it without killing my dream." He reaches for one of Kurt's hands with his free one and tangles their fingers together. "That's why this is so important to me. It's about choice and being able to have one. It *means* something to me now. *You* mean something to me. You mean --"

-- everything," Kurt supplies breathlessly.

Blaine closes his eyes at that and leans in close, nose nuzzling against Kurt's. Kurt follows suit almost blindly, lets Blaine take the lead because god, Blaine planning to be spontaneous is the best thing. "And I -- I don't --" Blaine pulls away a little, flustered and shaking his head. "I don't mean that in a clingy or co-dependent way. I don't *need* you, Kurt. But I want you."

Kurt exhales slowly, trying to collect himself and failing. "Okay," he says, fighting to keep his voice even. "Ask me. Properly this time. I promise, no more jokes or distractions or anything else."

Blaine finally smiles at that, in that warm way that makes Kurt melt into a puddle of goo (and he's still not over it, not even at the age of thirty). Blaine shifts a little on the bed, making himself more comfortable and bringing up his free hand between them again, ring poised between his index finger and his thumb. "Kurt Hummel, will you marry me?"

Kurt smiles, toothy and wide, before biting his lip and nodding. It's not married by thirty legally, but it's close enough and so much more. "Yes." And Blaine's hands are there, warm and firm and steady against his own as he slides the band onto Kurt's right hand. It's so much more than just a word of agreement. It's yes to the bravest, most resilient man he's ever known. It's yes to a cup of coffee and a pair of cold toes against his calf in the morning. It's yes to the person who brought Kurt out of his shell and made him dare enough to hope. It's yes to the person who made him believe in love again. It's a yes that doesn't come out of some twisted sense of obligation. It's a yes that's a choice. It's a yes to the person who made Kurt get up and start *living* his life instead of just planning it.

It's a yes to Blaine.

Blaine's mouth is on his almost instantaneously, warm and eager and relieved and happy. Kurt kisses back, hand clutching at Blaine's shoulder. This is supposed to be Blaine's day, and he's turned it into theirs. Blaine's hand is heavy and warm against Kurt's cheek, resting solid and sure. Kurt feels so much *his*, so lost to Blaine, and Kurt has to break their kisses in order to remember how to breathe. He tucks his face against Blaine's neck and lets Blaine tug him closer. They end up hip to hip, one of Kurt's legs tossed over Blaine's, and Kurt feels safe enough to let go. Blaine will always be there to catch him and bring him back.

"So," Kurt says breathlessly, grinning against Blaine's chest. "How do you feel now?" Blaine's chest moves against his cheek, up and down as he breathes and contemplates. Kurt can feel Blaine's smile against his forehead, and it's with a happy, content sigh that Blaine gives his answer.

"Like I could fly."



## **DRAW THE LINE**

**Summary:** Companion piece to *Take It Like a Man*. *He doesn't feel wrong, he never has. He's not looking for this, not asking for it, and that makes it so much harder. They aren't good at this. They don't do feelings. They don't -- she's going to miss him, she is, but she's not in love with him and she never will be. She's never going to want him like she's supposed to. That doesn't make losing him hurt any less.* This is the story of Sebastian and Santana, from beginning to 'end.'

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### ***Part One***

Santana's parents die in a car crash when she's seven. Her abuela takes her in and raises her. For a long time, Santana wants to be a doctor, like her father.

She changes her mind when she realizes that not even a doctor could've saved them.

She decides to be a lawyer, instead. There's power and influence there, and it's an acceptable career choice for her abuela.

Santana doesn't do well with disappointment.

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When he's in the seventh grade, Sebastian tells his father that he wants to be a lawyer, too. More importantly, he wants to be a Senator.

(He might have a thing for the Kennedy family.)

He neglects to mention that he's also currently harboring a crush on David Huntington.

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They meet at freshman orientation.

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“What are you doing Friday?” Sebastian asks, stretching in his desk chair.

Santana hums but doesn’t look up from her book. “I don’t know,” she answers absently. “Lauren was talking about seeing the new *Twilight* movie, but I don’t think I’m gonna go.”

Sebastian looks over at her in surprise. “Not into the whole vampires and werewolves trope?”

“Please,” she snorts. “Anyone worth paying attention to can back their shit up without supernatural abilities.”

He smiles. “Do you want to go to dinner? We could do Chez Rouge -- I know you like Italian -- and then we could go see something else. *Inception* more to your taste?”

She shrugs. “Sure, Leo’s always good.” She pauses and then looks up at him, raising her eyebrows. “Wait, like a date?”

Sebastian drums his fingers on his desk, shifting uncomfortably. “Well, yeah?” he ventures. “We’ve been hanging out for almost a year, I just thought...”

Santana considers him for a moment. “I’d rather it were you than someone else,” she decides after a moment. “Particularly Jeremy Bradshaw. God, that guy’s as slimy as they come.”

“Thanks,” he says dryly. “Nice to know I’m tolerable.”

She rolls her eyes at him. “Oh, like the reasoning you just provided was any better.”

“I didn’t compare you to Jeremy Bradshaw!” Sebastian snaps defensively.

“Yeah, thanks for that.” She tosses one of the pillows from the bed at him in an attempt to soften the blow. “I can’t.”

Sebastian furrows his eyebrows. “Did you just accept my dinner invitation and then reject it?”

"It's not -- it's my abuela," Santana explains. "She doesn't really want me dating until after my quinceañera." She colors and shifts uncomfortably on the bed.

Sebastian softens a little. "Hey, parents -- grandparents, whatever, I get that. You've met my parents. You know what they're like."

"Yeah," she laughs. "Constantly buzzed or high-strung -- real power players. I'm glad you're not that uptight. I don't think I could stand it. I'd have to find someone to remove the stick from your ass."

Sebastian swallows thickly. "You need an escort, don't you? For your quinceañera?"

She gives him an odd smile. "Yes," she says slowly. "Are you offering?"

He grins at her. "We'd get to hang out more and your grandmother could get to know me -- it's win-win as far as I see it."

"True. Plus, this way I wouldn't have to use my cousin Renaldo." She scoots down on the bed and reaches out a hand to him. "Okay, deal."

He takes her hand and smiles wider. "I'm cashing in on the dinner and a movie date."

She grins wider. "You're buying."

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They enter their hotel room and leave their cat-calling friends behind, the door clicking shut and barring them in. "Senior prom," Sebastian sighs, shrugging out of his jacket. "I guess it wasn't a completely painful experience."

Santana slips out of her red stilettos and twirls on the spot, smiling impishly at him. "It was a dream," she sighs breathlessly, her tone mocking. "Seriously, how was that any different than homecoming, or Sadie Hawkins, or any other dance?" She flops down on the bed and closes her eyes. "I am *starving*. Dinner was hours ago." She looks up at Sebastian hopefully. "Can we order room service?"

He grins at her. "Menu's probably in the drawer. Wanna watch a trainwreck on MTV or Bravo?"

She digs in the drawer for the menu and gives it a once-over. "You're the lamest seventeen-year-old boy I know," she drawls, skillfully deflecting the pillow he tosses at her. "It's your senior prom, you're in a hotel room with your girlfriend, and you want to watch trashy reality television? They probably have Skinemax."

"Yeah, that we'd have to pay for," he points out. "Why do that when there's perfectly good free porn online?"

"Oh my god, I'm getting a burger," she groans, handing him the menu and crossing the room to her overnight bag. She snaps her fingers impatiently. "I'm starving, make it quick."

He rolls his eyes but does as he's asked, placing orders for both of them before taking off his shoes and socks and tie. "We're a couple of thirteen-year-old girls, aren't we?" he sighs. "This is turning into a really expensive sleepover."

She grins wickedly at him. "Do you want me to paint your nails?" He throws another pillow at her and misses by about three feet. "Oh, a pillow fight. Okay, I think you just deaged us, what are we, five?" He snorts with laughter but doesn't perpetuate the joke. She crosses the room again and presents her back to him. "Unzip me? I can't reach it on my own."

He does as he's instructed and immediately feels at least ten years older than he actually is, chained to Santana and comfortable with her in the way an old married couple is supposed to be. Her dress falls to the floor, pooling at her feet; she steps out of it and picks it up to take it back to her overnight bag. It's not awkward, seeing Santana in her underwear (although she's wearing a thong which gives Sebastian a pretty good view of her ass); they've spent enough summers around each other in swimsuits at his parents' pool and out on the Cape for it not to be.

But this -- this is different, because she's this close to naked and they're in a hotel room on the night of their senior prom; they've been together for almost two years and... There's a script they're supposed to follow, here. They've never talked about it. Neither of them has ever pushed for it. They kiss because they're good at it, because they're comfortable with each other. To everyone else, they're the perfect fit. They get along because they're so similar, they can predict each other's thoughts and words and movements. It's easy, too easy, and it's because there hasn't been *this* to complicate it.

Sebastian swallows thickly. Time to bite the bullet.

“Hey,” he says quietly, reaching out a hand. “Come here.”

She raises an eyebrow at him but comes back to the bed, nightgown in hand. He runs his fingers over her palm, the silk of her gown, and breathes out. He takes the gown from her and sets it aside before looking up at her. He tries to speak but the words die in his throat, and he ends up sitting there at the edge of the bed, holding her hand and looking up at her like a deer caught in the headlights. Wordlessly, she reaches for the buttons of his dress shirt and starts to undo them.

Santana saves him. She always does.

She slides the shirt off of his shoulders and kneels in front of him, working his belt off and tugging at his pants. He stands to let them pool on the floor and it’s still not awkward, being with each other like this. His hands anchor at the small of her back as hers wrap around his neck, fingers toying with the hair at the nape. They’re kissing before they even really know it or plan for it and it’s just as good as it always is, hot and wet, mouths together.

They kiss for too long, standing next to the bed, neither of them moving towards it, and Sebastian wonders vaguely which one of them is going to make the first move.

It’s Santana, in the end. It always is.

She breaks the kiss and settles onto the bed, propped up by pillows, and offers her hand without another word. He takes it and pulls the covers down, crawling in with her and settling on top of her, careful not to nudge between her legs. He’s barely hard from kissing her, something he hopes she doesn’t notice because it’s not her, it’s him, and Sebastian knows that sounds like the lamest excuse in the history of the universe, but --

“Hey,” she murmurs, running her hand up and down his back. “Relax. It’s just sex.”

It’s the first time either of them have said it out loud and the room suddenly feels thirty degrees colder. But he swallows again and nods before leaning down to kiss her again, his hand tucking under to rest on her shoulder blades. Her skin is too smooth and too warm and he keeps running his thumb over the band of her bra by accident. She laughs into his mouth and tugs his hand out from behind her. “It unhooks in the front, Einstein.” The joke does nothing to defuse the tension for him because now he’s staring at her breasts, tucked perfectly behind red satin, just shy of spilling over. The hook’s there, right in the valley and

all he has to do is let her keep guiding him and then it'll be off, followed by her underwear and then his and there's a condom in his wallet --

He pulls away from her with a gasp and rolls onto his back. "Yeah, I can't do this."

"It's really not that hard," she says dryly. "I can do it for you, if you want --"

"That's not -- this isn't about the bra," he huffs.

She sits up and tucks her knees against her chest; she looks small, curled away from him and *fuck* he's actually hurt her feelings, he's never done that before. "Hey, no," he says, sitting up a little and using his hand to gently turn her face to his. "It's not what you think." Her eyes are glazed over and she looks like she's in as much pain as he is, lip worried between her teeth and holding back words she doesn't want to say.

"You're gay, aren't you?"

He blinks at her in surprise, mouth hanging open a little. It takes him a minute to realize that her tone implies that this isn't a conclusion she's recently reached. "How long have you known?" he breathes.

The smile she gives him is watery at best and she looks down at her knees. "A while," she admits. "I've always thought *maybe*, but I think I knew for sure at homecoming. If you don't want people to know, you should probably keep your leering in check." She turns to face him again, smirking a little. "David Huntington? Really? How long have you been into that tool?"

He barks out a laugh, he can't help it, and settles back onto the pillows, suddenly much more at ease. "Seventh grade," he admits. "Long before I met you."

"You could do better," she says, ruffling his hair a little. He smiles at her and she looks back down at her knees. "Me too," she adds quietly.

"You could do better than me? A few years ago, you said you'd rather it were me than fucking Jeremy what's-his-face --"

She turns and looks at him sharply, her eyes wet again. "Stop being willfully obtuse," she snaps. He wrinkles his brow, confused for a moment until --

He sits up fully, now, and reaches over for her hand. "You're gay?"

A breath escapes her, harsh and loud, and she squeezes her eyes shut. "It's weird hearing it said out loud."

"Santana," he says softly, "I had no idea."

She turns to look at him again and actually smiles. "Yeah, well." She nudges his shoulder with his own. "That's because I'm better at hiding things than you are." They fall back against the pillows together, Santana curling up into Sebastian's shoulder. "Are you going to tell anyone?" she asks after a few moments.

He plays with her hair (too long) and sighs. "I don't know," he admits. "You're the first person I've talked to about this." He smiles down at her. "Are you?"

"No," she answers immediately, her lips thinning into a line. "So please, just... don't say anything, okay?" She looks away from him and reaches down to twine their fingers together. "I couldn't stand it if she knew. She'd be so disappointed."

Sebastian turns her face to his again and kisses her, soft and warm. The difference is striking, now that they're out to each other, but somehow he's more comfortable doing this now than he was before. "Your secrets are always safe with me."

Santana grins at him, wide and bright. "I know," she quips. "Future politician and all that. You'll probably do a better job of keeping my secrets than your own." She glances over at the television and then back at Sebastian. "Tell you what," she says. "Let's order some porn while we wait for room service. I bet you we'd make better critics than most of the judges on those crap reality shows."

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She doesn't burn from the sun.

If anything, it's the scalding water in the shower that will turn her skin bright red.

Santana exhales through her nose and runs her nails across her scalp, feeling the sand and salt give way as she works the shampoo through her hair. She can make it on her own, she knows she can. She doesn't *need* a companion, doesn't need the feelings or the clinginess or anything that comes with it. It's just -- being

out at the Cape this weekend has sort of thrown her relationship with Sebastian into an entirely new light. They're not even together anymore, not since he came out to his parents at the beginning of the summer, and yet...

He's been her best friend for the last four years, something she's reluctant to admit even to herself, and she's actually going to miss the loser. She'll miss having someone who can keep up with her barbs. She'll miss the way he respects her intelligence and work ethic. She'll miss having someone to unload her secrets and frustrations on. She'll miss his stupid meerkat smile and his obnoxious CW hair and the way he acts like has to try so hard when in reality, he's actually fed with a silver spoon.

"Hey."

She glances up at the sound of his voice and finds him leaning against the edge of the sink counter. She wonders exactly how much he can see through the steam and fogged up shower door. "I hate to break it to you, peeping Tom, but one, this isn't a free show, and two, I don't exactly have the parts you're looking for."

"Can I join you?"

She raises an eyebrow at him but shrugs and grabs the bottle of conditioner. She watches him step out of his swim trunks and slide the door open before stepping inside. It's a level of intimacy they never breached in the two years they were together (they came close, once, back in May), a little too domestic for her liking. She turns in the spray to get her hair wet and watches as his eyes take in her figure, trailing from her breasts down her torso to her pelvis and back up. "It's pointless to ask if you like what you see, isn't it?"

He looks back up at her face and smiles a little. "Objectively, you're very attractive."

She snorts and cards her fingers through her hair, working the tangles out. "Such a fucking politician." She leans back and rinses her hair out, glancing down. "You're not so bad yourself. You know, for a dick."

He rolls his eyes at the double entendre and reaches behind her for the loofa and shower gel. "Thanks, Snix," he says dryly. "That's really going to give my self-esteem a boost for when I'm out trying to seduce guys in California."



“Objectively,” she says, and he laughs. “Objectively, you’re hot, okay? You’re in decent shape from all of the sports you did and your dick’s nothing to sneeze at. The hippies will think you’re hot, okay, twink?” She leans against the wall. “What’s your type, anyway? Besides giant tools?”

He shrugs. “I don’t know. Guess I’ll find out.”

She places her hand over her chest and bats her eyelashes. “Undergrad, a time for self-discovery. You’re a regular cliché, you know that?”

“Whatever.” He nudges her with his elbow. “Switch with me, I need to rinse.” She obliges albeit begrudgingly, turning her back to him. She tenses a little when his hands wrap around her, the loofa dragging across her stomach. He pulls her against him, her back against his chest, and buries his face in her neck, water falling onto his back and dripping around to her, running in streams down their legs. “I’m gonna miss you,” he murmurs into her skin.

She closes her eyes and lets herself get lost in the way his lips feel on her neck. That, at the very least, doesn’t feel wrong. He doesn’t feel wrong, he never has, and he’s not even hard against her. He’s not looking for this, not asking for it, and that makes it so much harder. They aren’t good at this. They don’t do feelings. They don’t -- she’s going to miss him, she is, but she’s not in love with him and she never will be. She’s never going to want him like she’s supposed to.

That doesn’t make losing him hurt any less.

She spins in his arms and kisses him hard on the mouth, her hand grabbing at the knob to shut the water off. He drops the loofa on the shower floor and pulls her against him, his hands wet and too-broad against her back. But at the same time, it’s familiar and comfortable and she’s going to *lose* that in a matter of hours --

“Fuck you,” she gasps against his lips. “Why do you have to do that?” She kisses him again, tugs at his hair at the nape of his neck and pushes him against the wall. “Why?” He doesn’t answer her and she doesn’t need him to because she already knows the answer.

If they can’t do this with each other, they can’t do it with anyone.

He slides the shower door open and offers her his hand. She gives it to him, just like she’s given him everything else.

He can have this, too.

Their skin's still damp when they fall into the sheets, too slippery and awkward. He leans in to kiss her, still not hard against her hip, and she has to fight back a laugh at the thought of the last time they were tangled together like this. "I've done all the hard work for you," she chuckles into his mouth.

He pulls back and looks down at her chest for a brief moment before looking back up at her face. She rolls her eyes and grabs his hand, moving it to her breast. "They don't bite."

A smile flashes across his face, brief and unexpected. "No," he admits, cupping her breast in his hand, brow knit in concentration, "but you do."

She barks out a laugh. "Guess we're about to find out."

His face falls a little. "Is that why we're doing this?" he asks. "To be sure?" His thumb brushes over her nipple as he pulls his hand away --

She arches against him with a gasp; her mouth collides with his, open-mouthed and clumsy and it's so, so wrong. "To say goodbye," she mumbles against his lips.

"Santana --"

"Stop," she admonishes, pressing a finger to his lips. "Don't ruin this with talking, okay?" She kisses him again, mostly to prevent him from talking. "You do that, sometimes. You talk too much and that inevitably leads to talking about feelings and that's not what we're doing here, okay? We're doing this so we don't have to talk."

He smirks at her a little. "Funny," he laughs. "Normally I can't get you to *stop*."

"See what you did?" she sighs, falling back onto the pillows. "You kept talking and reminded me how much of an asshole you are."

He grins wider and leans in closer, lips grazing hers. "You know you lo --"

"Stop," she groans, pushing his head down her body. "Just *do* something, okay? Before this gets any more awkward." He presses a kiss to the right of her belly button before trailing further down; he studies her

with way too much concentration for a gay man, fingers ghosting over her folds. “Hey, Andrew McCarthy,” she snaps. “You’re not studying for the SATs or an AP exam. It’s a fucking vagina.”

Sebastian *hmm*s at her but doesn’t lift his gaze. “I’ve heard they’re rather... complicated. Difficult to please.”

“Not if you know what you’re doing.”

He looks up at her and grins mischievously. “Challenge accepted --”

“No,” she groans, hiding her face in her hands. “Oh god, I’m about to have sex with Barney Stinson.”

He bends down and situates himself between her legs, nudging her thighs a little further apart. “Does that make you Robin Sparkles?”

“Do I look like a teenage popstar to you?” Santana snaps. “Can it, Swarley, and do something already.” He rolls his eyes, clearly annoyed, but presses in closer, his nose brushing against her skin. She waits, waits for the unfamiliar sensation of having someone else’s fingers or tongue pressed there, but all she gets is the faintest hint of skin on skin contact, the pressure barely-there -- “What the hell are you doing down there?” she huffs out.

He looks up at her darkly. “What does it look like I’m doing?”

“You aren’t doing anything. Oh my god, here, I’ll show you.” She grabs a fistful of his hair and positions his head a little further down, fighting the bloom of arousal in her abdomen at the whine he gives when she pulls on his hair.

“You watch a lot of porn, don’t you?” he murmurs, relaxing under her grip and letting her guide him.

“No, it’s my body,” she throws back dryly. “I know what feels good when I use my fingers, okay?”

He smiles against her thigh. “I love that you own up to the fact that you masturbate.”

“Would you expect any less from me?” She feels his lips right where she wants them, just above her opening, and releases her grip on his hair. “There,” she says. “Just -- start there,” she instructs, “and lick your way up towards me. And don’t be afraid to apply a little bit of pressure.” He hesitates for a moment before diving in, pressing the tip of his tongue to the spot she’s indicated before flattening his tongue and

dragging upward slowly. It's wet and strange and familiar all at the same time, and her thighs tremble a little as she fights not to wrap her legs around his head. He does it once, twice (this actually feels kind of good, no wonder people love oral sex so much) before pulling back and studying her again. Something unpleasant twists in her gut and she knows her face is probably bright red and betraying her discomfort. "You don't have to finish," she mumbles. "God, if you just want to stop, we can get dressed and pack up and drive back to Boston --"

"No," he says firmly, pressing a palm flat against her stomach and pressing her back into the bed. "It's just... different. It's not what I'd ever envisioned myself doing, you know?"

"Are you like, totally repulsed by lady parts now?"

He laughs and presses a kiss to the inside of her knee, and somehow *that* is what makes her feel better. "Not repulsed," he argues. "Just... not interested."

"Yeah, mastering the art of going down on a woman isn't going to be a useful skill when you're planning on spending the rest of your life with a dick in your mouth," she teases, grinning. "And yet you want to keep going."

He looks up at her, his eyes dark, calculating. "I want to get you off," he says, lowering his voice. He pries her folds apart and presses a kiss to her clit, keeping his eyes trained on her face.

"Oh, *fuck you*," she gasps. "This is a power thing for you, isn't it?" She can tell he's grinning even though she can't see his mouth, and he licks up again as per her instructions. He licks again, and again, but she refuses to react and give him the satisfaction. She should've expected nothing less from him, turning their last night together into a fucking *game*, and she doesn't want to admit that playing with power turns her on too. She figures he's probably figured that out, though, with how wet she is.

Santana starts when he shifts a hand between her legs and starts to press two fingers inside of her; she reacts instinctively and reaches out for his wrist, stilling him. "What are you doing?" she asks breathlessly.

He pulls away from her, hands and fingers and mouth, but doesn't yank his hand from her grasp. "I don't have to if you don't want me to," he says quietly. "I just thought you might want... I don't know, something more."

She laughs, the sound bubbling up and out of her chest, she can't help it. "Are you going to take care of all of the boys you sleep with like this?" she chides. "Because that doesn't really seem to be your style."

"You're not exactly my type," Sebastian throws back. "Nothing about this is exactly normal." He kisses the inside of her wrist, her palm, the tips of her fingers, and closes his eyes. "If this is goodbye, I want to do it right."

She releases his hand and closes her eyes, trying to relax. This isn't anything she wouldn't do with another girl, and she has to keep reminding herself of that as he slips his fingers back inside of her, pumping in and out slowly. He starts to lick up her labia again, a little more firmly this time, and suddenly she doesn't care so much about holding out. She just wants to *let go*. "Focus on my clit," she chokes out. He licks up one more time before shifting his attention, crooking his fingers inside of her a little. He licks over her clit, tongue broad and wet and firm, and her hips buck up a little at the attention. "Faster," she breathes.

He flicks his tongue as commanded, faster than before, moving his fingers again. She feels pressure *everywhere*, inside of her and on her clit and on her thighs, in her gut and the tips of her nipples and even her fucking eyelids. She hopes to god that he's actually really, really bad at this, because she's never going to forgive him if he ruins her for the women she plans to fuck at school (and that takes some of the edge off because she has to fucking sneak around behind her abuela's back and that's *not* something she wants to be thinking about right now). "Suck on my clit," she says, her voice raspy and slightly desperate but she is so beyond the point of caring right now.

He pulls away from her, just slightly, and coughs a little. "You watch too much porn," he complains, his voice just as gone as hers.

"I know what I want," she argues, grabbing his hair and trying to force him back down. "And right now, you sucking on my clit sounds like a really, really good idea."

And he does, just once; her hips buck up violently and he pulls away again, panting. "Are you actually going to come?"

"Don't be a smug bastard about this," she whines, pulling his face back down. "Please, just --"

He darts back down with the force of her hand and sucks on her clit hard, pumping his fingers a little faster. She can feel it building, swelling with her clit and the pressure inside of her pussy and the way her stomach twists, over and over until it's too tight, she's gone too high and he's sucking the soul out of her --

She comes with a loud cry, shoving her pussy into his face and she pulls his head closer, her legs wrapping around his head and shoulders. His fingers still as she clenches around them but he keeps sucking, tongue flicking out to apply a little more pressure to her clit. She pushes him away with a whine as she comes down, her legs falling to the side, her arms hitting the mattress with a quiet *thump*. He peppers kisses up the inside of her thigh before crawling up to lie next to her, his knuckles brushing lightly against her arm.

"Wet," she rasps, batting his hand away half-heartedly. "Your fingers are wet." The bed creaks as he crawls off of it, the tap whistling as he washes his hands in the bathroom. When he returns, she feels the mattress dip with his weight. "It was the *please*, wasn't it?" she asks breathlessly, pulling her legs together a little. "I swear to god, you're going to be the biggest power-tripping lawyer on the face of the planet --"

"Hey," he chastises, laughing a little. "I don't get a *thank you* or anything?"

She rolls onto her side, trying to ignore the dead weight her legs have become. "What do you expect, for me to be eternally in love with you or some shit?"

Sebastian shakes his head at her. "No. A *thank you* would be nice, though."

Santana rallies and rolls over a little, hooking a leg over his and resting her chin on his chest. "What do you want?"

His smile fades. "I don't know."

She rolls her eyes at him. "Yes you do," she argues. "You've never been afraid to go after what you want." He shifts uncomfortably under her weight, not meeting her eyes, and she sighs in frustration. "Okay, you? You're totally killing my buzz right now, so I'm gonna steer this away from all of the feelings crap and refuse to let you make this awkward again. Just tell me what you want. What, my fingers in your ass?"

He does look over at her at that, flushing a little, and it's then Santana notices that the water on his brow isn't from the shower. "No," he says, shaking his head. He reaches for her hand and taps at the tip of her fingers. "Nails."

Santana rolls her eyes. "Okay, fine, so what? You want me to let you do it yourself?"

Sebastian swallows, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down in his throat, and his voice is back to being low again when he speaks. "I want you to *let me*."

It takes her a minute to get the implication but when she does, she grins slowly, all teeth. "So I get to call the shots." He nods, just barely, and she can't fight back the laugh that escapes her. "I never would've pegged you as someone who likes to be teased."

"Can you please not talk about pegging?" he asks, voice strangled. "There's -- in my suitcase, there's lube. Can you --"

She nods and untangles herself from him to retrieve it. "Don't start without me," she orders, and his fingers twitch in an effort to obey. When she returns, he reaches out a hand expectantly for the bottle, but she shakes her head. "Just tell me how much. I'll make sure you're not too dry."

He laughs at that, fingers trailing down to where she's still a little wet. She smacks his hand away and nudges his legs apart before uncapping the bottle. She reaches for his right hand but he curls his fingers away from her, trying to offer her his left instead. "You're right-handed, dumbass."

"No, it's just --" The color on his cheeks grows darker as he uncurls his fingers slowly and deliberately, one by one. "I usually save my right hand for --"

"For jerking yourself off, yeah, I figured."

"So you're not gonna let me?"

She coats his fingers with lube, ignores the hiss that escapes him and watches as a little bit of it drips down his palm. "Remember how I said you were going to ruin this with talking?" He bites his lip but shuts up, finally, and she settles back on her heels to watch him. "Start," she instructs. "I'll tell you when you can do something different."

He closes his eyes, then, and reaches a hand between his legs, hoisting them up a little. The tip of his middle finger circles his entrance, slides up and down between his cheeks -- the areas he can reach, anyway -- until he's slick and damp and wiggling his fingers at her, eyes open again. She obliges without making him work for it, some of the earlier nerves and awkwardness back. It's fucked up -- god, this is so

fucked up and twisted and he's probably never going to be like this with anyone again, submissive and vulnerable.

She shakes her head and tries to focus on letting this be good for him -- she owes him that much. His eyes are closed again as he pushes the tip of his middle finger inside, just to the first knuckle.

Sebastian's holding his breath.

It hits her then, how startlingly intimate and personal this is, watching him try to get himself off. She can see how tight he is, right around the tip of his finger, can see the hesitation as he fights not to push in more. She leans forward and wraps her hand around his, pushing herself up onto her knees until her face is level with his. His eyes snap open in surprise, and she smiles to get him to relax. "Hey, it's just me." She can feel him relax at her words, feel the way his limbs sag and his hand gives way to her touch.

She pushes his finger in the rest of the way, and he arches towards her with a gasp. His dick twitches a little against her thigh and she glances down, amused. "Fucking finally."

She pulls away again, lets him move his middle finger in and out of his own accord, his dick growing a little harder. When his finger starts to slide with ease, he pulls out all the way, holding out his hand again. "More lube."

She obliges again, this time with a request as he sinks his index finger along with his middle finger, groaning once they're in up to the second knuckle. "What do you think about?"

"What?" he huffs impatiently, trying to stretch himself enough to get both fingers in all of the way.

"What do you think about?" Santana asks again, hand hovering dangerously close to Sebastian's. "When you do this? Do you think about anyone? Do you think about someone's dick inside of you?"

"Fuck you," he laughs, fingers not quite in all the way. "I'm not going to --"

"You want this second finger to stay in, you tell me," she coaxes, tips of her fingers dancing across the back of his hand. "And if you say David Huntington, I swear to god I'm going to pull your fingers out of there and --"

"Hands," he says quickly, hand struggling to move under hers. "I think about hands, and stubble and --"



“And?” she prompts, pushing against his hand until his fingers sink in all the way.

Sebastian groans, completely hard now, and fucks down onto his fingers, foot pushing at Santana’s shoulder. “And the weight of a cock in my mouth and a perfect ass and --”

“And you want it so bad, don’t you?” she breathes, maneuvering around his foot to hover over him again. “The boys are going to *love* you in California.” He whines and reaches his free hand between them, making a grab for his dick. “No,” Santana orders, shifting her weight again. “Not yet.”

He rocks up a little, burying his head against her shoulder, and the breath he lets out feels cool against her breast. The tip of his dick brushes against her stomach, and she can feel pre-come smearing against her skin. “Santana, *please*.”

Arousal swells in her gut at that but it’s not enough and she’s already gotten off anyway. He didn’t want this to be easy, the fucking masochist, and she’ll be damned if she lets him get off this easily. “No,” she says again, pushing him back down. “This is what you wanted.” And that hurts more than it should, because he always gets what he wants, especially from her. He gets to share his secrets and keep hers, gets to be snide and judgmental, gets to be out and away from here. He gets everything.

She gets *nothing*. She should hate him for it.

She can’t.

She moves her hand to the base of his throat and presses down a little. He gasps a little and twists under her, trying to escape her hold. She doesn’t miss the way his fingers pump in and out a little faster. She adjusts her hand again and presses down harder, watches the way his Adam’s apple tries and fails to move in his throat. “Now you know what it feels like,” she murmurs. “Now you know what you’re leaving me with.”

“Sadist,” he gasps, writhing underneath her. “Why do you... get joy... out of my pain?”

“Life is pain. Anyone who says differently is selling something.” She snakes a hand between them and wraps a tight fist around his dick, ignoring the bottle of lube next to them. “You’re the closest thing I’ve got that isn’t.” She starts to stroke up and down, hard and fast. His eyes grow unfocused as he struggles to breathe, and it’s not until his eyes start to roll back that she removes her hand from his throat. His back

arches off of the bed as he gasps for air, and his dick pulses in her hand as he comes all over his stomach, fingers still buried inside of himself.

It takes him a few minutes to breathe right again, to pull his fingers from himself and clean himself off. He's still panting a little when he sits upright on the bed, and it takes one look for him to cross the mattress and kiss her hard on the mouth. Santana inhales sharply and ignores the tears that burn at her eyes. Sebastian's not worth crying over, he's not.

His lips trail across her cheek, down to her neck and shoulder, and it's the first time in a long time she's felt this alone.

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He drops her off at her abuela's at four-thirty in the morning. She barely has time to set her duffle bag on the porch swing before he's grabbing her arm and spinning her around with force; he presses her against the screen door, her back hitting it with a too-loud *slam*. He fists a hand in the material of her wife-beater near her waist and slides his other hand to the back of her neck, his thumb cradling her jaw. He kisses her without asking, hard and soft, fast and slow, moist and dry. He kisses her because he didn't talk the entire drive home, and she won't let him talk now, at the end. She didn't want him to ruin this.

He did anyway.

"I hate you," she gasps against him, anchoring a hand on his wrist. "I hate you so much. You're a fucking asshole and you're *leaving* and --"

-- and you hate me," Sebastian finishes for her, laughing as he kisses her again. "I hate you too."

One last kiss and then he's gone, down the steps and into his car and out of the driveway, leaving her breathless and slumped against the front door. He doesn't look back, not once, and for the first time, she's really glad he's leaving.

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Blaine says *I love you* long before Sebastian does. They're six months into the relationship -- probably less, if Sebastian remembers correctly -- when he does. It doesn't come as a total surprise (Blaine is fairly

obvious when he makes heart eyes) but it never really occurs to Sebastian to say it *back*. Blaine seems okay with this, surprisingly, something's Sebastian's glad for.

It's not until they've been together a year and a half that anything really changes: he's a week late flying home to see his parents after they've finished their sophomore year, sick and bedridden and absolutely miserable. And Blaine -- Blaine stays with him the entire week, gets the Warblers to postpone a trip to the water park and basically waits on Sebastian hand and foot. Sebastian is an absolute asshole when he's sick, it's a fact he'll acknowledge freely, but Blaine's patience doesn't seem tested the entire week, not once. It's not until Thursday when Sebastian's half-sitting up in bed and being spoon-fed chicken soup that he softens or is coherent enough to really appreciate what Blaine's done for him, and he mumbles it sleepily when Blaine shifts to set the bowl on the nightstand. Blaine doesn't say anything, just smiles and pushes Sebastian's hair off of his forehead and kisses the skin there before pushing him back under the covers to sleep.

Sex is just sex up until then. Sex is something he does, sex is something he enjoys, sex is something that's purely physical. Sex is just sex, and then it's sex with Blaine, and then it's not sex anymore after he says it. The first time it happens is two days later when he's mostly recovered. They fall together into the sheets, the room dark, Blaine on his back and Sebastian between his legs; it's stupidly desperate, the way Blaine's legs wrap around him and his hands grab and scratch and claw against Sebastian's arms and shoulders and back. He's inside of Blaine and for the first time, Blaine really *owns* him.

It's terrifying and it's unplanned and Sebastian knows this can't go on, but it does. It does for a whole year more and then some, and he sort of hates himself for it.

## ***Part Two***

“Here’s your tea, Abuela,” Santana says, setting the cup down on the table next to her. “Did you want anything else? I don’t think Roger and Cindy were planning on doing cake for a while --”

Her abuela waves a hand at her dismissively. “No, no, you go on, mija,” she encourages. “Go say hello to Sebastian.”

Santana blinks at her in surprise. “He’s here?”

Her abuela smiles at her, and Santana forces herself to smile back. “He’s living with his parents for the summer,” she informs Santana. “Came up to me right away and wished me a happy birthday.” She grabs Santana’s arm and leans in close. “He told me I didn’t look a day over forty-seven.”

Santana rolls her eyes. “Sounds like him.” She straightens a little. “I’ll be back for cake, okay?”

She weaves her way between guests and pokes her head in a few rooms as she passes by -- the kitchen, the library, the study -- and ends up on the back patio amidst a bunch of middle-aged adults drinking wine coolers. Sebastian’s still nowhere to be seen, but Santana grabs a pair of wine coolers out of the ice chest and wanders around a little more.

She finds him in the poolhouse, pants rolled up to his knees, bare feet dangling in the water. He’s lying on his back, a fedora covering his face. He looks taller, older, even just like this, but seeing him again makes Santana feel like she’s seventeen.

But she’s not.

“Hey, loser.”

He starts on the ground, feet splashing in the water as he turns a little, fedora falling off of his face. She can see his shoulders relax once he realizes who it is, though, sees the smile spread across his face and god *damn*, has she missed having him around. “Snix.”

She kicks off her heels and pads across the concrete to join him, dipping her own feet in the water. It’s a welcome relief in the summer heat and humidity. She hands him one of the wine coolers wordlessly and

takes a sip of her own, watching her feet move beneath the water. "I didn't think you'd be back until the fall."

He's quiet, too quiet, and that makes her nervous. Normally, she couldn't get him to shut up.

She smiles.

"No reason to stay," he says after a while, sipping his own cooler. "What about you? Your abuela said you spent most of your time down at school the last four years."

She shrugs. "Harvard starts in the fall. I wanted a little time to get used to what I'm supposed to be like."

She can feel his eyes on her. "Still haven't --"

"No," she hisses immediately. "Not -- not to her. Not gonna happen. I'm not you."

He taps her foot with his own in the water companionably. "I'm not me, either." She looks over at him and grips the edge of the pool tightly, the concrete rough against her palms. He draws in a breath, long and slow and loud, before he speaks. "The day I left for California, after we -- after I dropped you off at your abuela's," he amends, and she fights back a blush, shifting uncomfortably. "My dad was waiting for me on the front steps that morning. I think -- I think he knew, about us, you know?"

Santana tries to swallow the lump in her throat. "Did he --"

Sebastian shakes his head. "He didn't say anything to your abuela, don't worry." His hand inches towards hers, his pinkie finger brushing against hers. "He made it clear to me that I could do what I wanted out in California, while I was in undergrad, but when I came home..." He tapers off and kicks his feet a little, water sloshing around them. "There was a plan," he says, his tone flat. "There's always been a plan. I wanted Harvard. I wanted law. I wanted the Senate seat. They supported that."

She smiles dryly at him. "There's always a but."

"Naturally," he says bitterly. "It's -- they didn't have a problem with me being gay, I don't think. But they're a little... old-fashioned."

She grins and finishes off her own wine cooler, setting it on the pavement and plucking Sebastian's from his hand. "That's putting it nicely," she chuckles. "Normally you're the one with something up your ass, aren't you?"

He grins back at her and steals the drink back, downing the rest of it in one go before setting it down behind them. His smile fades after a moment, though, and he trains his gaze back on the pool. "They didn't want me to make it difficult to get what I wanted."

"You being out makes it difficult," she supplies. Her fingers curl around the edge of the pool again, betraying her anger. "It's never that difficult for you to get what you want. You know that, right?"

He reaches over and pries one of her hands away from the edge, lacing their fingers together. "I know," he sighs. "I -- look, I know I can be a bit of an asshole sometimes."

"Sometimes?" she says, her tone dry and sarcastic.

He gives her a look but smirks anyway. "Okay, most of the time," he allows. "And I don't -- look, I'm not trying to make you feel better about anything, but I know how hard you've worked to get where you are. I'm really glad you're gonna be at Harvard with me. You deserve it."

She arches an eyebrow at him. "That's trying to make me feel better, Mr. Rogers."

He winces at the reference to his father's name and lets go of her hand. They're both quiet for a long time, feet narrowly missing each other beneath the water, before he ventures, "We could --"

"How did I know you were going to suggest that?" Santana sighs.

"You didn't even let me finish."

"I didn't have to."

Silence again and his feet dare to touch hers beneath the water. "It's not like it's new," he argues. "We did it for over two years."

"That was before," she throws back. "You want me to be your trophy wife, this is totally different --"

"I don't have a choice!"

She recoils a little at the sudden volume and biting tone to his voice. "You don't get to do this," she says, her voice dangerously low and uneven. "You don't get to call all the shots here. You don't get to be mad at me. You *left*."

"I came back."

"We said goodbye!" she yells, her voice echoing and reverberating in the empty space around them. "You went to California, you got to be out, you didn't have to watch your fucking back the whole time --"

"That doesn't mean I had it easy," he argues. "It -- god, do you know how much harder that made it to come back here, to all *this*?" he says, gesturing around.

"Why didn't you just stay in California?" she asks.

Sebastian's jaw sets and he exhales through his nose, still clearly upset but fighting to control it. "Not part of the plan," he says through gritted teeth. "I -- look, you could fuck whoever you wanted, Santana. I wouldn't ask you to do what we did again, not after what we've been through."

"Which brings us back to the trophy wife," she points out. "You're an idiot if you think I'm going to spend the rest of my life being your obedient arm candy."

"I'd never do that," he assures her. "You'd probably have me killed and make it look like an accident if I even thought about it. And I -- I respect you too much for that." He swallows and reaches for her hand again. "I missed you," he admits, softening a little. "I told you I would, and if I have to do this, I'd rather do it with someone I trust. And there's no one I trust more than you. I'd rather it were you than anyone else." He looks up at her, his eyes earnest and stupidly desperate and --

"I hate you," she sighs. "Have I ever told you that? I really, really hate you."

He smiles. "It's win-win," he points out. "Look, I know you like to keep up appearances for your abuela. We're helping each other out here."

She hums at him and looks back at the water, thinking. "We'd have to spend the entire summer together," she says after a moment. "To get to know each other again, find out how much we've changed. We have to be convincing."

"Do I have to be romantic about this?" he laughs. "Should I officially ask you to be my beard again?"

Her lips twist a little, unable to decide if they want to smirk or pout, and she nods steely. "Yep, I think I've about had my dose of Sebastian Smythe for the day," she announces, and promptly reaches over to shove him into the pool.

That turns out to be a mistake, though, because even though he's caught off guard, he has enough presence of mind to try and grab onto something to hold onto on his way in, and that something happens to be her leg. She falls into the pool after him with a shriek, her dress clinging to her body even more tightly than it was before, and she breaks the surface of the water sputtering. "You son of a bitch!"

"You pushed me in!" he howls.

"You just asked me to be your beard for the rest of our lives, I think I'm entitled to it! You push, I push back, remember?"

"And that," he drawls, grinning and swimming towards her, "is what I love about you. I love that you fight back, and I love that you fight dirty." She rolls her eyes but lets him box her in against the wall of the pool, his eyes glittering with mischief. Her life will never be boring, that's for sure.

She spies his father crossing the back patio, headed in their direction. Santana turns her attention back to Sebastian. "You trust me, don't you?"

His brow furrows a little. "Well, yeah, why --"

"Just go with it," she whispers, hooking her arms around his neck and pulling him closer. She hesitates for the space of a second, eyes trailing down to Sebastian's lips; Roger's hand reaches for the handle of the door to the poolhouse, and Santana tugs Sebastian in for a kiss.

She's forgotten how it feels, the way his lips mold over hers and the stubble on his chin and the hard, firm line of his jaw. He inhales sharply at the contact, clearly caught off guard and as unused to it as she is, but he doesn't pull away; instead, he anchors his hands at her waist, sliding a hand around to press against the



small of her back and pull her closer. Her fingers tangle in the hair at the nape of his neck out of habit and she's seventeen again, back in a dark closet.

At least she's not alone.

*"Ahem."*

Sebastian breaks the kiss and turns slightly in Santana's arms to look at his father over his shoulder. "We were going to do cake," Roger announces, sounding slightly amused. He looks so fucking *smug* that Santana has to look away so she doesn't betray her rage. "We can wait an extra fifteen minutes if you two wanted to change into dry clothes. Cindy might have something that will fit you, Santana."

"Um, yeah, just... give us a bit, we'll be right there," Sebastian answers, clearly flustered. He waits until his father's out the door and it clicks shut behind him before he turns to face Santana, smirking. "Voyeurism, huh?"

A grin spreads slowly across her face. "Oh, you have *no* idea."

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"Why am I not surprised they elected you their homecoming king?" Santana sighs, leaning back as the waiter sets a salad down in front of each of them.

"Thank you," Sebastian says absently to the waiter before picking up his fork and knife. "Maybe because it's not the first time it's happened?" he says dryly, reaching across the table and transferring the beets from Santana's plate to his own.

"Nice to know you still keep your ego in check," she snorts, maneuvering around his hands and arms to pick the onions from his plate. "Was your homecoming queen as spectacular as I was?"

"Yours too," he throws back. "Worse, actually. I spent most of the night wanting to strangle her."

"Law school first, dear," she says, her voice sugar-sweet. "You'll need a good lawyer to keep you out of jail."

"That's what I have you for, isn't it?" he says, grinning.

She grins back and reaches across the table again to collect the radishes off of his plate with her fork, but he nudges her hand away with his knife and starts to eat. "What, you eat radishes now?" He nods, focused on his plate, glancing up only when she nudges his leg with her stiletto. "You have to tell me these things," she chastises, "for this to work."

"They're radishes," he says flatly. "They're a neglected vegetable. It's really not that big of a deal --"

"Oh my god," she laughs, turning her attention to her own salad. "Did they turn you into a hippie or something out in California?"

He shrugs and takes another bite of his salad. "No, just something Blaine got me saying --"

"Okay," she says loudly, dropping her fork and knife to her plate with a noisy clatter. "Who the *hell* is Blaine? You've mentioned him like twenty times this week."

Sebastian blinks up at her. "Um, my ex?"

She just stares at him. "You dated someone?"

"Well, yeah --"

"Like, seriously? Because it sounds like you know him pretty well."

Sebastian shifts uncomfortably in his chair. "I guess so? I mean, we were together almost three years, so --"

"*Three years?*" Santana's mouth is agape. "What the *fuck*, Sebastian? This isn't like you. Why, *why* would you date someone that seriously when you knew what your parents expected of you, what you were coming back to?"

"I didn't plan it, okay?" Sebastian snaps back defensively. "It just happened. And like I said, he's my ex, so this isn't a problem."

Santana's jaw twitches but she sighs, reaching for her water glass. "When did you break it off?"

"After homecoming," Sebastian mumbles, poking at the leaves in his salad with his fork.

There's a brief moment of silence before she ventures, "Did you love him?" Sebastian doesn't answer. "You still do."

Sebastian throws his fork down with a little more force than is strictly necessary, huffing out impatiently. "Can we just not?"

"No," Santana argues, imitating him. "We're doing this. You broke things off with him and you've spent the last six or seven months pining after him? Sebastian, you can't go back there. Screw whoever you want, but at the end of the day this is about you and me. He can't be part of the picture. It's time for you to move on."

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Sebastian stands up, wine glass in hand, and clears his throat; Santana resists the urge to roll her eyes and crosses one leg over the other, sipping from her own glass. "First of all, let me just say how good it is to see us all together like this. Reminds me of the old days." She sees his parents smile out of the corner of her eye and sips from her drink to avoid commenting because *man*, is he laying it on thick. He pauses for a moment, looking down at the glass in his hand before looking back up at the rest of them. "Actually, it's -- it's sort of nice. Everything's... the way it's supposed to be. Except --" He stops again, glances over at his parents before setting his glass down on the table. "There's just... one thing missing."

And then the fucking bastard is down on one knee and pulling a small black box out of his pocket and Santana can't do anything other than sit there with her jaw hanging open. "Marry me, Poohbear?"

Santana makes the mistake of flicking her gaze over to her abuela, and there's an eagerness on her face, *hope* in her eyes, and Santana stammers out a *yes*.

Sebastian pries the glass from her hand and slips the ring on her finger (he has taste, she'll give him that -- six carats, *damn*), tugging her to her feet and into his arms. She hides her face against his shoulder, hides from his parents, her abuela, all of them and tries to just *breathe* because there's no turning back now.

He pulls away from her a little, looks down at her and she *knows* what he's thinking, hates that she knows him that well. He doesn't really give her much time to consider it, though. Sebastian leans down and in, cups her jaw in his hand and presses a firm kiss to her lips. Santana inhales sharply at the contact and

squeezes her eyes shut. When he breaks the kiss, he looks slightly apologetic but doesn't linger; his mother tugs at his arm and stands up on tiptoe to hug her son.

"Mija."

Santana spins around and meets her abuela's eyes with her own wide ones. "Abuela," she breathes. "I --"

"Mija, I'm so proud of you."

Her abuela is smiling at her, big and bright, and Santana can't bring herself to be negative about this; she's never coming out, she isn't, and she can't screw this up. This is what's *supposed* to happen, just like Sebastian said. This is why they're back to their little arrangement. This is -- god, she hates that she's had to work twice as hard to make something of herself, to prove herself, to prove... whatever the fuck it is she has to prove to everyone, to her abuela.

"Abuela," she says again, resting a hand on her abuela's arm to steady herself, "I --" She glances over her shoulder at Sebastian and then back at her abuela, flashing a smile. "I'm gonna go talk to him, okay?" Her abuela nods, leans up and presses a kiss to Santana's forehead before patting her cheek.

Santana has to fight not to shake with rage as she wraps an arm around Sebastian's elbow and smiles sweetly at his parents. "Do you mind if I borrow my fiance?"

"He's all yours," his father laughs, raising his wine glass.

Santana tugs him from the patio into the house and practically throws him into the library; she shuts the door behind them, turns around, plants her palms flat against his chest and shoves. "What," she seethes, shoving him again, "the *fuck* --" another shove "-- was that?"

She reaches out to shove him a fourth time but he grabs her by the wrists and stops her, equally as pissed. "This is what we agreed upon, remember?"

"Yeah, I know," she snorts, folding her arms over her chest and keeping her distance. "But we never agreed you could just spring shit like that on me. We should've talked about this!"

"What's there to talk about?" Sebastian says, and his voice is too loud, their families will overhear.

Santana glances over at the door before shooting Sebastian a glare. "Keep your voice down," she hisses. "We've only been back together for four months --"

"You're keeping track," Sebastian mutters. "Dear god, you're *counting*."

"Every detail counts!" Santana insists, fighting to keep her voice low. "This is way, way too soon."

"Did you see them out there?" Sebastian says, gesturing towards the door. "They were elated."

"Well of course they were," Santana snaps. "It's --"

"-- part of the plan," Sebastian finishes for her. "So what is your problem?"

"Where is this coming from?" Santana presses. "Why now?"

Sebastian stares at her for a moment, jaw set, before sinking down into a leather armchair. "I almost had sex with him."

Santana blinks at him disbelievingly. "I'm sorry, I just hallucinated. You *what*?"

"Blaine," Sebastian mumbles into his hand, gazing at the floor. "At the party Friday night, I -- I almost slept with him."

Santana crosses the room and smacks him across the back of the head. "Have you lost your fucking mind?!" She reaches out to smack him again but he bats her hand away, clearly irritated.

"Stop it," he mutters, and there isn't even any fight in him. It's pathetic, sad and pathetic and Santana does not get why Sebastian is so hung up on this guy. He's a brown noser and wears too much product in his hair and god, those hideous bowties.

"He doesn't belong here," she reminds him. "He followed you here like a lap dog and he's going to screw this up. He's going. To screw this. Up," she repeats. "And I refuse to let that happen."

"It doesn't matter," Sebastian says, rubbing at his eyes. "Nothing happened and I'm pretty sure I finally did a good job of pushing him away, Santana, so you have nothing to worry about."

Santana sighs and rests her hands on her hips. She hates Sebastian. She hates that they know each other so well and she hates that she's going to marry him and she hates that she has a soft spot for him. She hates that he makes her care. "What happened?" she asks. "Was it the bunny outfit? Is that like a *thing* for you? Because kinks aren't on my list of details I need to know --"

"It wasn't the costume," Sebastian sighs. "I mean, it did something for me, I'm not going to lie, his ass looked fantastic in those shorts --"

"Gross. I didn't need to hear that."

"The point is that it was supposed to be just sex," Sebastian explains. "I wasn't-- I wasn't going to get back together with him, okay?"

And that surprises her, the fact that Sebastian is trying to be smart enough to stick to the plan. Still, sleeping with Anderson has to be the *dumbest* solution Santana has ever heard. She sighs and sinks down onto the arm of the chair. "That's a lie and you know it. He probably looked at you with those big puppy eyes and begged you to take him back and you would've --"

"I told him no," Sebastian says flatly. "I told him it was just supposed to be one last fling and that we weren't going to get back together."

"Bet he didn't take that well," Santana snorts.

"No," Sebastian says shortly. "He didn't. He --"

"What?" Santana demands, hooking her fingers under his chins and forcing him to meet her gaze. "What did he say? What did he do that's got you angsty like a fourteen-year-old? What did he do to make you give me this?" she asks, wiggling her fingers and flashing her engagement ring at him.

"He thinks he's never going to be good enough for me," Sebastian says softly. He swallows and breathes out through his nose, and something in Santana's stomach twists. "He thinks that's why I broke up with him. I mean, fuck, of course he does, that's what I told him last year."

Santana's mouth twists unpleasantly. "Was he pissed? I can't imagine him taking his usual polite, diplomatic route."

"I hurt him, Santana." His eyes glaze over and fuck, he's going to *cry*; she's never seen him cry before. "I just -- I had to keep my distance but I didn't want to hurt him and I did anyway. He thinks --" Sebastian squeezes his eyes shut and there they are, the stupid fucking tears she can tell he's been holding back and Santana doesn't feel like she knows him at all any more. She doesn't know who the fuck this guy is, this guy who has more blue in his wardrobe than she can remember and wears the occasional hat; this guy who keeps a pair of reading glasses in his pocket and eats radishes and wants to spend more time outside while it's still warm.

Santana sinks down on her knees in front of him and runs a thumb over his cheek to brush his tears away. "Hey," she says, her voice quiet but firm. "Look at me." He does as she commands, sluggish and half-hearted, and she *hates* how much he makes her care. "Are we doing this or not?" she asks, showing off the diamond again. He nods. "Then you have got to get over him." He opens his mouth, probably to protest, but Santana presses a finger to his lips to silence him. "Don't. I'm not saying it's going to be easy, but this isn't something you can revisit. This isn't something you can have. You can't have him. And from the way it sounds, I don't think he wants you any more." Sebastian flinches at that a little but Santana overlooks it because she has to. "He doesn't need you. But I do. And this," she says quietly, linking their hands together and glancing down at her ring, "this tells me you need me too."

Sebastian brings her hand up to his mouth, presses a kiss to the back of her hand and exhales, his breath heavy against her skin. "Snix, I --"

"Don't tell me you love me," she says shortly. "And don't kiss my hand like you're some fucking prince, okay? You're not fucking royalty, sorry to deflate that huge ego of yours."

That gets him to smile, even if he does look sort of annoyed, and he shoves at her shoulder lightly. "Bitch."

She grins at him. "Takes one to know one."

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During the year and a half long 'Sebastian is a pathetic loser and pines over Blaine even though he was the one who initiated the break-up' fest, Sebastian falls into a few patterns. He creates a playlist that's simply entitled *B* and the most played song is Cher's "If I Could Turn Back Time" (and yes, it does make him feel like a gay stereotype). The weekend after he proposes to Santana (and that's how he has to think of it because if he associates it with Blaine it becomes much too painful to think about), he curls up in bed,

resolutely ignores every single one of his law books, and pops *Return to Me* in his DVD player. Santana finds him halfway through his second viewing and curls up with him on the other half of the mattress (which shouldn't be that comfortable but it is); she forces him to start it over so she can follow along with the story and doesn't buy his excuse that it's his comfort film because he likes looking at David Duchovny. By the fourth time they watch it together that weekend, Santana's providing her own in-depth character analysis and commentary ("This is *exactly* like stabbing the heart of Davy Jones, what crack are you smoking?").

For the first time in a week, it makes Sebastian smile.

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Sebastian shifts uncomfortably in his bed and groans, blinking his eyes open blearily. It takes him a minute to adjust to the light in his room (and he's never been more grateful for the fact that he prefers yellow light over white light because god, he feels like shit), but once he does, he lolls his head to the side and notices that his chair has been pulled up next to the side of his bed. He follows the stilettos to the long, silky smooth legs up to the bored face of his fiancée, who's sporting one of his fedoras. "Hey," he croaks.

She glances up at him from the textbook she's reading and sighs, plucking the glass of water from his nightstand table and handing it to him. "Hey, loser."

"Don't be such a bitch," he groans. "I feel like I'm on my deathbed, here."

"You're *fine*," she scoffs, snapping her book shut.

He hands her the cup. "Do I have you to thank for that?"

"Aww, sweet," she purrs. "But no, your miracle worker is your family physician. Guess all those years in med school actually taught him something. Who knew?"

Sebastian smiles a little and bends his leg to nudge her knee with his own through the blankets. His eyes fall to his nightstand where there's something out of place; it takes him a minute to realize there's a vase there now that wasn't before, a small vase filled with a small bouquet of blue hyacinths, his favorite. He reaches out for them and brings them to his nose, smiling even though he can't really smell them. "Poohbear, I didn't think you cared," he drawls, his voice sore and sounding froggy. God, if he looks half as awful as he feels...



"Please," she snorts. "Do I look the type of person to bring you flowers *and* sit vigil at your bedside?"

"The perfect little doting wife," he says mockingly, reaching out to tap her nose; she mimes biting his finger off. "They're probably from my mom," he adds, pulling the card from its holder. "Although I wouldn't have figured she'd know that these were my --" He tapers off when he flips open the card and reads the one letter inscribed inside: -- *B*. "-- favorite," he finishes breathlessly.

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Sebastian inhales, long and deep, and surveys the courtyard in front of him with a small smile on his face. It's the start of his second year at Harvard, and for the first time in five years, Boston feels like home again. Sebastian credits that to his summer in Paris, to the sun along the southern coastline that one blissful week in late June. The last two years have been especially hard on him, particularly in regard to the break-up and the engagement and --

Sebastian exhales and shakes his head determinedly, turning his back on the courtyard to make his way over to the coffee shop. Things are different now. That was the whole point of getting away this summer, to drop his defenses and enjoy himself and not get so stressed out. In a lot of ways, France reminded Sebastian of California. But that's a thing of the past, and Boston is his past and present and future all rolled into one. He hasn't always been unhappy here, and it's with another inhale that autumn settles into Sebastian's bones. He'll always be partial to the summer, he thinks (and that, at least, was always true before California, even if he never let it show). This summer only served to further prove that, and it's with another smile that Sebastian remembers Santana's sun-kissed skin on the beach and hazy eyes in the nightclubs, just as happy. France afforded them the opportunity to take advantage of the secret perks of their little arrangement. Sebastian laughs quietly to himself at the memory of him and Santana acting as the other's wingman, Sebastian spending his nights on the couch when Santana had found someone to let loose with, Santana teasing him when he'd walk in their suite sore and completely disheveled. It'd been oddly freeing, after the pining and torture he'd put himself through after the break-up. And yeah, being back in Boston means they both have to start keeping up appearances again, but it's the first time in a long time that Sebastian's felt like himself underneath all of that.

He pushes open the door to the coffee shop and glances around at the tables until he spots the person he's looking for. Sebastian approaches the table with a confidence and ease he hasn't felt in ages, and it's as he slides into the chair waiting for him that Blaine looks up from his textbook in acknowledgement. In the

time it takes Blaine to blink, Sebastian sees apprehension melt out of Blaine's face and Blaine smiles, eyes lighting up --

*Fuck.*

"Hi," Blaine greets warmly, nudging a coffee cup across the table. "I ordered for you, I hope that's okay. You still take a shot of courvoisier in your coffee, right?"

"Yeah," Sebastian responds dumbly, picking up the cup just for something to do. Blaine even remembered his coffee order and this is *stupid*, why is Sebastian getting so worked up over this? He got over Blaine this summer, that was the whole point.

Blaine shifts a little in his seat, discomfort showing, but his smile is still warm and genuine as he meets Sebastian's eyes. "How was your summer?"

"Good," Sebastian answers automatically, because it was, and he's not going to let one measly cup of coffee ruin that. "Santana and I spent it in Paris."

Blaine arches an eyebrow, mouth twisting into an amused smile. "Sounds romantic," he quips dryly.

Sebastian takes a sip of his coffee (just the way he likes it, fuck fuck fuck) and swallows. "It was nice," he admits, ignoring the jab. "We both got to clear our heads a little. It was a much needed vacation." And god, that hits Sebastian like a slap in the face, because that's all it was, a *vacation* from what his life is going to be like, tied to Santana and pining after Bla --

*No.*

Sebastian returns the question with mildly curious interest, trying to push the attention off of his arrangement with Santana. Blaine supplies him with answers easily, happy and unaffected. Blaine spent most of his summer in Boston interning (not a surprise) with the exception of two weeks early on in the summer that he spent in California, attending some of the Warblers' graduation and introducing Kurt to his parents (and maybe that's not a total surprise, but it does catch Sebastian off guard and he tries to save face as best as he can). Blaine seems *happy* -- no, *is* happy, settling into life in Boston much more easily than he did last year. And Sebastian's happy because Blaine's happy, and he doesn't want to ruin that with his stupid, stupid inability to keep his feelings in check.

But then Blaine rises from his chair to leave, stands up on tiptoe to hug Sebastian goodbye, whispers the words “It’s so good to see you again” and “I’m really glad we can do this -- be friends,” and fuck, Sebastian is screwed. He’s never going to get over Blaine, not like this, not spending so much time around him, studying, working, trying to be just friends with him. Sebastian was stupid to think that one summer out of the country would change all of that, that fucking a long line of pretty Parisian boys would get Blaine out of his system.

Blaine is always going to be infectious, and Sebastian will never be immune to him.

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Santana flips over onto her stomach, nestling her cheek on her arm as the sun’s rays beat down on her. There’s something comforting and familiar about being out here on the Cape with Sebastian during the summer, even if it’s Labor Day weekend and they’re here under the watchful eyes of their families. It’s a part of her that remains the same, a part of her she’s allowed to show, and she smiles a little at the sight of Sebastian stretched out on his back next to her. He’s grown so much in the last ten years, height and muscle and sacrifice. She tosses her sunglasses onto her towel and closes her eyes.

“We should set a date.”

Santana blinks her eyes open in surprise. “What?”

“We should set a date,” Sebastian repeats, not looking over at her. “For the wedding.”

Santana sighs and closes her eyes again, shifting on the towel to try and avoid the awkward lumps of sand underneath. “What brought that on?”

“Don’t be like that,” Sebastian says. “This time next year, we’ll have graduated and taken the bar.”

“Ah, and getting married is the next part of the plan, right?” Santana muses.

“You know it is,” Sebastian answers quietly. “We should set a date and start looking at venues and color schemes and --”

“Whoa, okay, hold on,” Santana interjects, propping herself up on her elbows to look at Sebastian properly. “It’s one thing to set a date. It’s another to sit here and talk about things like *color schemes*. Next thing you

know, you're going to be asking me about cake tastings and flower arrangements, and I know neither of us really gives a shit, so what's this really about?"

She can see Sebastian's face fall a little even just from looking at his profile, and it's his turn to prop himself up on his elbows in order to answer her, eyes trained on the water. "Blaine's moving in with Kurt."

Santana considers it a great personal accomplishment that she doesn't roll her eyes. "And that got you all gung-ho about planning your own happily ever after."

"Can you just... *not* mock me, for once?" Sebastian asks.

Santana's lips thin into a line. "I'm never going to be him," she says resolutely.

"I would never expect you to be," Sebastian sighs, rubbing a hand over his eyes.

Santana softens a little but looks back down at her towel. "You're never going to get over him, are you?"

"It's not easy."

"I don't think you've really been trying," Santana argues, flipping over onto her back again.

"Yeah, well, it's kind of hard to bring myself to even *try* when I'm around him all the time," Sebastian throws back, and it's that that makes Santana look over at him again. His eyes are still trained on the water in front of them but she can see it in his eyes, the ache that's been there since they reunited two summers ago. He looks over at her after a moment, eyes dull against the sun. "We're not really trying at this either, are we?"

Santana sighs and looks away, taking her turn to look out at the expanse in front of them. "I'm tired," she says. "Aren't you tired?"

"Exhausted," he admits with a slight laugh. "Wh -- what would you tell your abuela?"

She sticks her toes into the sand and kicks at it a little, debating. "I don't know," she answers quietly. "The truth, I guess."

"Would you really?"

Santana shrugs, more out of habit than to disguise how she really feels. He probably sees right through her anyway. "She basically raised me on her own," Santana reminds him. She glances over at him and tries to smile. "That's has to count for something, right?"

"It's a big jump from giving me my grandmother's ring back to coming out to yours, though," Sebastian points out.

Santana glances down at her hand and starts to twist the ring on her finger just for something to do. "Do you want it back now?"

Sebastian shakes his head. "No, later, when there's less of a chance of losing it. Not that it matters much, anyway." Santana looks up again and raises an eyebrow at him. "Do you really think I'm going to be able to do this with anyone else, Santana?"

She looks away, suddenly guilty and definitely not wanting him to see that. "I'm sorry," she murmurs. "I know I pushed this our first year at Harvard, but --"

"Don't be," Sebastian cuts in, reaching over to settle his hand on hers. "I was the one who asked in the first place." He shifts again so that he's hovering over her a little, and he uses his fingers to tilt her face back to his. "And if you do decide to tell her the truth and she doesn't take it well, I'm still here."

Santana snorts a little in derision, she can't help it. "Yeah, under what conditions?"

"Any," is Sebastian's reply, and the tenderness in his voice finally, finally doesn't make her uncomfortable. She relaxes a little underneath him, grateful. "Just because we're ending things doesn't mean you're getting rid of me, Snix."

"Unfortunately," she sighs dramatically. "I actually like you enough to want to keep you around."

He smirks a little, smile faltering after a moment. "Fitting, isn't it?" he says dryly. "This is where we said goodbye once, and now here we are, six years later, doing it again."

"It's not goodbye," Santana says, using her elbows to push herself up a little so she can press a kiss to Sebastian's lips. "Not this time."

## SUNRISE ON THE EAST SIDE

**Summary:** Companion piece to *Take It Like a Man*. Kurt and Blaine move in together just as Blaine starts his final year at Harvard.

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Kurt grips the edges of the box labeled *kitchen supplies*, taking care with each step so that he doesn't drop it and break the dishes inside. He knows Blaine's collection of novelty mugs is in this box, and Kurt wants them all to survive the move so they can join Kurt's in the kitchen cabinets. Of course, being this careful on the journey to his -- *their* second floor apartment means that Kurt ends up lagging behind on their last trip up the stairs. Blaine's carrying a box labeled *miscellaneous*; it's not quite as big as the one Kurt's carrying, which means Blaine doesn't have to be quite as careful going up the stairs. He's taking them almost at a light jog, spry and eager to get the climbing over with. It affords Kurt an excellent view of Blaine's ass, and he knows he's not subtle at all because when he finally reaches the top of the stairs, Blaine's already at the door to their apartment rolling his eyes.

By the time Kurt catches up to him, Blaine's bending over and depositing his box onto the living room floor. Kurt grins unabashedly and kicks the door shut with his heel, depositing his own box on the kitchen island before rushing across the apartment and looping his arms around Blaine's torso as he stands up. "Kurt," Blaine laughs, straightening all the way. "I'm all sweaty and gross."

"Mmm, don't care," Kurt hums, tugging him closer and burying his face in Blaine's neck. "Let's just order take-out and then we can take a bath. Tomorrow's Monday. We should just relax and unwind tonight. Leave the unpacking for later."

Blaine turns his head enough so he can press a warm kiss to Kurt's lips before wriggling out of Kurt's embrace. "I have to unpack *some* stuff tonight," he reasons. "I'll do that while you order dinner, how's that?"

"Fair enough, I suppose," Kurt sighs dramatically, giving Blaine's ass a light smack before darting back into the kitchen.

By the time Kurt rejoins Blaine in the living room, Blaine's kneeling on the floor, digging through the box labeled *miscellaneous*. He unearths a couple of plastic cases and shakes them at Kurt, grinning. "Blu-ray," he teases. "Much more advanced than your DVDs."

"My DVDs are just *fine*, thank you," Kurt sniffs, but he kneels down on the opposite side of the box to help Blaine unpack his things. It's nice and quiet for a few moments, both of them organizing Blaine's films in alphabetical order on the floor. Kurt feels twenty-two all over again, for all that he's twenty-nine now, grown-up in a way that's supposed to mean something. His boyfriend's moving in with him, and a shiver goes up Kurt's spine at the thought that Blaine will wake up with him in the morning and go to sleep with him at night. He's never going to have to hear "I should really get back to my dorm" again.

Blaine starts to stack the cases for easier transport to the shelves next to the television when Kurt finally notices it, and he frowns a little, confused. "What's wrong?" Blaine asks.

Kurt takes one of the cases in his hand, glances at the front and the back, opens it to look inside. "You don't have any of your stuff labeled."

"Labeled?"

"You know, with your name," Kurt clarifies.

"Why would I do that?" Blaine asks slowly.

Kurt blinks up at him in surprise. "I -- they're your things," he says, laughing a little. "Are you telling me none of your stuff has your name on it? Your books, your mugs, nothing?"

"No," Blaine answers, shaking his head. "I didn't really see the need for it." He's frowning now too, clearly confused.

Kurt sets the case down and rests on his heels, palms flat against his thighs. "Don't you want to be able to tell our stuff apart?"

Blaine laughs now, like Kurt's being ironic or something. "Doesn't that defeat the purpose of moving in together? I mean, I spent at least half of my nights here last year and left stuff over here all the time. What's the difference?"

"It's just -- it's *your* stuff," Kurt tries to explain.

Blaine shrugs and makes a grab for one of the stacks before pushing himself to his feet and crossing the room to the shelves. "I really don't mind, Kurt. I figured we'd be sharing everything anyway."

Kurt's lips thin into a line as he tries to figure out how to make his case. "I'm not disagreeing with that, but -- it's like when people get married. They sign a prenup beforehand."

Blaine's back is facing him as he surveys the films already slotted on the shelves, trying to figure out where his belong alphabetically. "Yeah, well, people do that because they don't trust each other."

"No," Kurt argues, pushing himself to his feet. "They do it to protect themselves and their assets, and for good reason. Half of marriages end in divorce, you know that."

Blaine freezes a little, and he turns around so slowly that it makes Kurt nervous and uncomfortable. "So what?" he asks, eyes narrowed. "My writing my name on the front of film cases and the bottom of mugs is some sort of precaution?"

"It's just the smart thing to do," Kurt says reasonably.

"In case we ever break up," Blaine supplies, and Kurt's stomach bottoms out. "In case we ever break up and one or both of us has to move out."

Kurt runs a hand over his face, frustrated. "Blaine," he sighs, stepping over stacks and boxes to cross the room. "Your name is on the lease, we live together now. I'm not saying that --"

But Blaine, apparently, is done listening. He tosses the stack of films in his hand back into the box they came from without care. They make too loud of a clattering noise once they hit the bottom, everything else quiet and still. "Do you really have that little faith in us?" Blaine asks, raising his voice a little.

"That's not what this is about," Kurt says, trying to placate him. "Blaine, I'm a *lawyer*, it's not unreasonable for me to think about things like this."

"Yeah, and in case you'd forgotten, I'm studying to be one too, remember?" Blaine throws back, voice even louder now and oh god, they're having their first fight as roommates and Blaine hasn't even unpacked yet. "I've been one, more or less, supervised by you, remember? Don't play that card with me, Kurt, because it



doesn't work. We're in the same boat here -- the same apartment, the same career. I know what sort of mentality I'm supposed to have, and I refuse to buy into that. I believe in the good in people, remember? And I -- I believe in us." And just like that, the tension seems to dissipate, and Blaine runs a hand through his messy curls, suddenly looking exhausted. "I thought you understood that. I thought you liked that about me."

"I do," Kurt insists, making a grab for Blaine's hand.

"Then why are you being like this? Why are you insisting that I do this?"

"Because," Kurt sighs, exasperated now. "Don't you want something to call your own? Don't you want something only you can have, that you don't have to share with someone else?"

"Of course I do," Blaine snaps, aggravated. "But I want it to be something that *means* something to me. This stuff?" he says, gesturing around at the array of boxes strewn about the apartment. "They're just things, Kurt. They don't matter that much to me."

Kurt drops Blaine's hand and wiggles his fingers a little bit to try and keep his frustration at bay. He ends up retreating back into the kitchen for a minute, digging around in the box on the island before unearthing his prize and returning to the living room. "So you're telling me that this doesn't mean anything to you?" he asks, holding the object up.

Blaine softens almost imperceptibly, mouth twitching as he tries to fight back a smile. "Of course it means something to me," he says softly. "It's [the mug](#) you got me for Valentine's Day."

"So you'd care," Kurt says thinly, dangling the mug precariously by the hand on one finger, "if we broke up and you moved out and I kept this? Or if, I don't know, I accidentally dropped it and it broke?"

Something shifts behind Blaine's eyes and the look on his whole face changes. He looks confused, betrayed, hurt. "Kurt, I don't care about it because it's my mug. It means something to me because *you* gave it to me."

The mug falls from Kurt's finger and shatters on the hardwood floor.

Blaine closes his eyes and looks away for a minute as silence fills the room again, almost like he's trying to keep himself from crying. When he opens his eyes, though, they're not wet at all. "I'll leave you to pick up

the broken pieces,” he says thinly. He’s down the hall and in the shower without another word, and Kurt has to sink down onto the couch just so he can breathe again.

This was not how he envisioned tonight going. He was so looking forward to this, to the idea that Blaine living here meant Kurt would finally be able to relax a little. It’s been a really tough year and a half, leaving Callahan’s firm and trying to find work and make ends meet on a much more meager salary. Blaine moving in was supposed to be the start of so many good things. It meant someone to share the rent and utility bills with, someone to curl up with on the couch at the end of the day and vent to about his work down at Legal Aid. It meant being able to do what he’d been hoping to do tonight, soaking in a bath together and having someone to share dinner with and fall asleep next to at night. And it’s not like any of these things are new for him, aside from the legality of it all, the lease and bills and a promise that Blaine would be there day in and day out.

Kurt sighs and sets to work cleaning up the pieces of the mug, taking care not to cut himself. He leaves Blaine’s boxes untouched, and they spend the rest of the evening in shifts steadfastly avoiding each other through showers and dinner and moisturizing routines. Blaine pulls out just enough clothes to sleep in tonight and dress in tomorrow, and he falls asleep without another word, curled up under Kurt’s duvet with his back facing Kurt.

Neither of them sleeps well.

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Kurt spends the entirety of the next day swamped with paperwork and completely distracted. The former isn’t all that surprising, especially since Lucy left on maternity leave last month, but the latter is disconcerting at best. He can’t quite figure out where last night went wrong. Blaine had been on his way out the door this morning by the time Kurt got up, and Kurt hates leaving things unresolved. Going to bed angry isn’t something he likes to do, something he’s pretty sure he picked up from Blaine. He thinks the thing that bothers him the most about their fight is that it showed how little they actually know about each other. Having Blaine in his life for the last two years has been a breath of fresh air, and before last night, Kurt was sure that they’d reached the ultimate level of comfort and familiarity. No one knows him better than Blaine does, except maybe Kurt’s dad, and even then, Kurt’s not sure about that. Last night shook him up badly. He’s not sure of a lot of things now.

By the time he drags himself through the front door of his (their?) apartment, he's dead on his feet and wants nothing more than to throw himself into the bath and then the mattress and not move for a good twelve hours. The front door clicks shut behind him as he drops his briefcase to the floor, and it takes one look around the front of the apartment for Kurt to know that Blaine still hasn't unpacked a thing. He's clearly waiting for Kurt's permission, or something ridiculous and twisted like that, and Kurt doesn't know how to give it to him, how to fix this. He sighs and starts to work off his tie on his way down the hall to the bedroom, ready to strip and shower and just *think*.

He's surprised to see Blaine in the bedroom when he gets there, legs tucked underneath the duvet and earbuds in his ears. He looks as tired as Kurt feels and has already changed into his Stanford hoodie and what looks like his pink teddy bear and candy cane pajama pants, judging from his waistband. There's a sliver of skin exposed between the bottom of the hoodie and the top of the pants, and Kurt has to force himself to look beyond it to the book perched on Blaine's lap. There's so much more than that, though, strewn across the bed, books and index cards and Blaine's laptop, a manila folder and a pouch full of pens and hi-liters. Blaine's got a pen in one hand and an index card in another, and Kurt feels a smile tug at his lips as he watches Blaine tap the pen in time with the music he's listening to. He looks tired but focused and decidedly less tense than last night.

Kurt takes a risk and toes his shoes off before gently sinking a knee onto the foot of the bed. Blaine blinks up at the shift and tugs his earbuds out, dropping the index cards and pen onto his book. "Hi," Blaine offers quietly.

"Hi," Kurt returns, crawling up the mattress, careful to maneuver around Blaine's work. "I don't want to bother you if you're busy."

Blaine groans a little but shakes his head, hoisting up an arm and shifting some of his work around so that Kurt can curl into his side. "It's okay," he sighs. "I think I need a little break."

"Long day?"

"The longest," Blaine affirms, shifting the book off his lap so Kurt can cuddle closer. "I really thought I'd be used to the workload by the time I started my third year, but nope. It's still just as plentiful and tortuous as ever. That combined with the work I'm doing for HLAB just has me kind of swamped right now. And it's only *Monday*."

“Been there,” Kurt groans sympathetically. “Still there, in some ways.”

Blaine *hmm*s and shifts a little so he can look down at Kurt properly. “Look, I know we need to talk about last night, and my stuff still isn’t unpacked and the boxes are just in the way of everything, but can we just... pause this argument until the weekend? Tonight, I need to focus on my work and I can’t really afford distractions. I’m already brewing a pot of coffee in the kitchen to help get me through it.”

Kurt purses his lips a little but nods and extracts himself from Blaine’s side. “I’ll pour you a mug. Do you want some grilled cheese?”

“Sound perfect,” Blaine says with a happy little sigh, and he even deigns to lean in and press a quick kiss to Kurt’s lips before the earbuds go back in and he buries himself in his work again.

It’s after Kurt’s fixed Blaine’s coffee the way he likes it, while he’s waiting for the first grilled cheese to cook, that his brain starts to work again. And just like that, the fantasy is back, coming home to Blaine at the end of a long day, curling up and talking about his day, sharing a life together in this apartment. It occurs to Kurt, then, that he’s gotten what he’s wanted, but he’s also gotten so much more. Because this isn’t just about him. This is Blaine’s space now too, Blaine’s home. It’s their couch because they’ll curl up on it and watch *Amelie* on Kurt’s birthday every year. It’s their coffee maker because they’ll both need a cup to get going in the morning. It’s their hamper because their dirty clothes will get mixed in all together until they can’t distinguish one person’s scent from the other. It’s their bed because they sleep in it and make love in it together, every night and on Sunday mornings. For all the benefits Kurt’s been excited about in regards to the move, Blaine gets them too. He gets Kurt’s words of reassurance when Blaine feels like he’s never going to make it out of Harvard. He gets someone who doesn’t mind washing dishes as long as Blaine’s the one to dry and put them away. He gets Kurt’s warmth at night and a cup of coffee in the morning and god, Kurt is out here making him grilled cheese for dinner, for crying out loud.

Living together means having someone to share things with. It means never having to be alone, and Kurt finally understands that in a way that isn’t necessarily negative.

He burns the first sandwich and almost sets off the smoke detector in the process, but the next four are a perfect golden brown, and Kurt breaks his rule about no food in the bedroom just this once. They’ll have time to make their own rules together, later. For now, it’s worth it just to see the smile light up Blaine’s face a little bit. Tonight, Kurt gives him space, because he asked for it.

Tomorrow, things will be different.

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Blaine walks into the apartment Tuesday night more tired than the day before, something he didn't think was even possible. He leans against the front door with a heavy sigh as it clicks shut behind him, closing his eyes and taking a moment just to breathe. His entire body is stiff and sore, the product of moving and not sleeping well and too many hours sitting in chairs and shouldering his messenger bag. He's not entirely convinced he's going to make it out of his final year at Harvard alive. He wonders if anyone's ever sleepwalked their way to graduation. That'd be nice. Gathering himself, he pushes himself off of the door and opens his eyes.

The apartment is spotless.

Not just in a 'things are picked up off of the floor and in their proper place and the stove is clean for once' kind of way. The apartment is clean in a lived in way. There's not a cardboard box in sight. Slowly, Blaine makes his way into the living room first and then the kitchen. His search yields him unexpected results, his films mixed in with Kurt's on the shelves, none of them labeled, his mugs in the far right cabinet with Kurt's, no markings on the bottoms. Blaine shuffles down the hallway, bewildered and a little touched. He intends to make his way into the bedroom next, but the sight in the bathroom distracts him first.

The lights are off but there are candles lit and two glasses of wine on the sink counter. The tub is full of bubbles and it looks *so* inviting that Blaine almost drops his messenger bag and briefcase right there in the hall to go submerge himself in it.

He starts a little at the pressure of a hand on his waist, lips on his ear, but he relaxes almost immediately as Kurt's hands snake around him again, an almost identical picture to the other night. "Mind if I join you?"

Blaine shakes his head and swallows thickly, ignoring the way his dick twitches in his jeans. "Not at all," he breathes, turning around in Kurt's arms to face him. "Let me just put these in the bedroom." Kurt nods and drops a kiss to Blaine's nose before releasing him, and Blaine barely notices that the bedroom is clean as well. All of his clothes have been put away. There's nothing out of place at all, and for the first time, Blaine actually feels like he lives here.

Kurt's already stripped down and in the tub when Blaine makes his way into the bathroom. He's moved the wine glasses to the floor next to the tub, and Blaine wants nothing more than to drain his glass and climb in. He chooses the latter first, though, and takes care in situating himself between Kurt's legs so the water doesn't spill over the edge. Blaine settles down with a happy sigh, back against Kurt's chest, and Kurt's fingers start to card through his hair. It's relaxing and comforting and intimate in a way that only Kurt can provide for him, and Blaine closes his eyes and wills himself not to fall asleep. "So," Blaine mumbles sleepily. "Is this you apologizing and admitting you were wrong? Because I could totally get used to this."

Kurt's lips press a kiss to Blaine's wet shoulder. "No," Kurt says calmly. "I wasn't wrong."

Blaine opens his eyes and shifts a little, quirking an eyebrow at Kurt. "So is this your way of trying to get me to apologize, then?" he says dryly. "Because that's kind of manipulative and so not you, Kurt --"

"Hush," Kurt laughs, kissing him full on the mouth before tapping his cheek. Blaine sighs and turns back around, trying to relax again. "I think we both had valid points, but that's not what this is about."

"Okay," Blaine sighs. "Then what is it about?"

"I... might have tried to project some of my fears onto you without realizing it," Kurt admits, and Blaine twists around again, curious. Some of the suds end up on his chin as he turns, and Kurt bites back a smile before batting them away. "You're not the first boyfriend I've lived with."

"Jeremy," Blaine supplies.

"Jeremy," Kurt affirms, and Blaine turns around again, letting Kurt's fingers resume their work on Blaine's hair. It's a distraction for Kurt, Blaine realizes, something to do and focus on while he talks, and he's obviously taking as much comfort in it as Blaine is, if not more. "We were together for three and a half years, and then when I was just about to start at Harvard, we moved in together."

"And what, you assumed that our relationship would suffer the same demise that one did?" Blaine guesses.

"I was afraid of it, a little," Kurt admits in a small voice, and Blaine reaches down through the suds to tangle their fingers together under the warm water. "I told you why we broke up, Blaine, but our relationship didn't start to fall apart until we moved in together. Do you know why so many couples move in together before there's any sort of legal commitment?" Blaine shakes his head, uncomfortable, and Kurt

presses a kiss to his shoulder in response. "It's the equivalent of having a baby to save a marriage. People think moving in together will solve their problems. It doesn't. It just makes you face them. And that didn't happen with me and Jeremy. The opposite happened. I think we both figured that since we were living together, we didn't have to put in as much effort. It was like he was hardly in my life at all."

"I don't -- Kurt, I don't understand," Blaine sighs. "I didn't think I'd ever given you the impression that I would be like him, that we would end up like that. You told me all of that a long time ago. I don't understand why you're still worried about it now."

Kurt's quiet for a minute before he reaches out a hand and plucks his wine glass from a floor to take a long sip. He sets it back down when he's done, smacking his lips to bide some time. "You're nothing like him," Kurt assures him. "And I think that's part of what terrifies me. You've kind of turned my whole world upside down, Blaine Anderson. I don't know if you've noticed."

"A little bit," Blaine hums, grinning cheekily.

"It's sort of almost the last step, us moving in together," Kurt explains. "You being here all the time, your things mixed in with mine -- it's all so permanent. It's like you've completely invaded my life."

Blaine turns around again at that, face falling. "You say that like it's a bad thing."

"It's not," Kurt rushes to explain. "It's -- I don't think I was wrong in expressing a desire to want a little independence and space. It's just -- this is all so much more, now. You mean a lot to me, which makes this a bigger deal. And it means there's a lot more to lose."

"Hey," Blaine says, twisting a little more so he can press a wet kiss to the underside of Kurt's jaw. "You're not going to lose me. I don't know how many times I have to tell you that."

"Yeah, well. Projecting," Kurt says with a smile.

Blaine laughs at that, finally relaxed, and kisses Kurt's jaw again before turning back around, reaching for his own glass. "You know, I'm kind of surprised you weren't a psychology major at Tufts," he teases. "You're very self-aware sometimes. I'm simultaneously frightened and jealous."

That gets Kurt to chuckle against him, and he sets Blaine's glass down on the floor for him before turning Blaine all the way around so that their chests are pressed together amidst the water and suds. He leans

down and presses a kiss that tastes like wine to Blaine's mouth, warm and buzzing and comforting in a way that feels like home. "How about," he starts, dropping a kiss to the corner of Blaine's mouth, voice suddenly low, "you and I take this into the bedroom?" His lips fall to Blaine's jaw, trail up to Blaine's eyebrow, and Blaine can feel Kurt against him, just as hard.

"I think that sounds perfect, roomie," Blaine breathes, pressing in close. "You know, the only bad thing about living together is that it'll be really hard for me to focus with you around all the time. You're such a distraction."

"Me?" Kurt yelps, splashing some bubbles at him. "Look who's talking, Mr. I-Bend-Over-In-The-Middle-Of-The-Living-Room. I know this is a sore spot, but your ass *is* fantastic, you know."

Blaine wrinkles his nose and tries to blow the suds off of his face. But he's not upset, not at all, and he tries to convey that by taking Kurt's hand in his under the water and moving it down to cover his ass. He grins a little as he leans up and in to kiss Kurt. Kurt's hand tightens on Blaine's ass as Blaine deepens the kiss. "Mmm," Kurt moans, trying to pull away a little. "Bed, let's move this to the bedroom. We're not having sex in the bath."

"Are you sure?" Blaine asks, shifting so their cocks align. "Just because you're turning thirty next year doesn't mean you can't have a little adventurous sex once in awhile."

"You *brat*," Kurt chastises, gasping as Blaine grips the edge of the tub behind his head. "I could make you sleep on the couch for that."

"You wouldn't dare," Blaine counters with a grin, rocking his hips a little. The water sloshes around them but doesn't spill over, and Kurt's hand squeezes his ass a little harder. Blaine leans in and nudges Kurt's nose with his own. "No more going to bed angry?" Kurt answers him with a kiss, free hand curling around to the back of Blaine's neck. Blaine inhales sharply, shifting to try and get more purchase --

Blaine's hand slips from the edge of the tub, too wet to hold him up properly, and he falls on top of Kurt, submerging them both under the water. They come spluttering to the surface together, Blaine laughing so hard he can't even keep his eyes open. "This is why we don't have sex in the bathtub!" Kurt gasps, trying to sit up a little.



"No, no," Blaine insists, still laughing as he places awkward, off center kisses to Kurt's mouth and cheek. "I just need to get some traction. We can do this right here." Kurt laughs, ducking his head and avoiding Blaine's kisses, bangs falling across his forehead. "What?"

"Sorry," Kurt laughs. "It's just -- that's what you said to me, the morning after we were first together."

Blaine wrinkles his nose as he tries to remember. "Morning after Valentine's Day last year," he says. "After Sugar's wedding."

Kurt grins and then bites his lip, clearly trying to hold back a laugh. "You wanted to blow me in the kitchen."

Blaine perks up a little, crowding in close again. "I can do that."

Kurt smiles again, soft and warm, and kisses Blaine's forehead before resting a hand on Blaine's shoulder. "Okay, make up sex first, then we'll curl up in bed and I'll help you organize your work, okay?"

Blaine returns the smile and presses a kiss to Kurt's clavicle. "You're the best."

They drain the bath and climb out without bruises, miraculously. They towel dry each other off, tugging each other close and trading wine-flavored kisses. And even if it's not new for Kurt, it's new for Blaine, to see his things mixed in with Kurt's. He's left bottles of shampoo and conditioner here before (good hair care is especially important for people with curly hair), kept a spare toothbrush in the holder on the sink. He's left a couple of spare sets of clothes in one of Kurt's dresser drawers, but Blaine actually lives here now. Kurt's unpacked his boxes, put away all of his things. Blaine's a permanent fixture here now, beyond the bathroom and a single drawer. He's willing to bet there's even a whole drawer devoted to the collection of bowties he's acquired over the last two years.

Blaine takes his bathrobe off of the hook from the back of the door and tugs it on, angling his neck when Kurt comes up behind him to pepper more kisses against his skin. "Kitchen?" Kurt mumbles into his neck.

"Kitchen," Blaine affirms.

In the kitchen, though, Blaine gets distracted on his mission to get Kurt onto one of the kitchen stools. There's something on the kitchen island that wasn't there when Blaine walked in, and Blaine can feel Kurt's smile against the back of his neck. It's a replacement of the novelty mug Kurt broke on Sunday night

with a shiny pink bow stuck to the handle. Blaine's fingers trace over the letters printed on the mug as Kurt's hands snake around to the front of Blaine's robe, toying with the belt. "Save a horse, ride a lawyer," he reads aloud, unable to fight back a smile.

"Mmhm," Kurt hums, nipping at Blaine's earlobe. "Now that's something *I* can do."

Blaine shuffles out of Kurt's embrace reluctantly, picking the mug up from the island and carrying it to the cabinet. He opens the door and pauses for a moment, smiling at the sight of the rest of their mugs all mixed in together. He removes the bow from the mug in his hand and places the mug inside, right next to the mug Kurt had first let him use. "Lawyers get you off."

"Still true."

Blaine turns around as he shuts the cabinet door, wiggling the bow between his fingers. "Which one of us wears the bow?" he asks, closing the distance between them.

Kurt plucks the bow from Blaine's hand and presses it to the hollow of his throat, beaming. "You. I like to think of you as the gift I come home to every day."

Blaine sucks a kiss to Kurt's neck as he tugs the belt of Kurt's bathrobe undone, hands skirting beyond the fabric to touch Kurt's skin. He wedges a leg between Kurt's to nudge them apart a little before dropping to his knees. He lifts his eyes up as he pushes the robe away, grinning. "Welcome home."