What You're Worth

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1229353.

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What You're Worth

by lavender_love00

Summary

A moving on.

In which Kurt and Blaine learn new ways to love, and that life is always unexpected.

Notes

To those of you who've waited for this, thank you. For your patience, for your excitement, for your encouragement. It's been an insanely busy year, and I am so grateful for how understanding all of you have been about the long wait.

To my betas, Wowbright and Judearaya, thank you for your hours and your pep talks and your edits and suggestions. You've poured yourselves into this 'verse, and I don't know that either of you know how much I appreciate it. This sequel wouldn't have happened without you.

As before, I'll be posting a chapter a day every day until it's done. I'm so excited that this is finally coming to fruition, and I hope you all enjoy it!

(Also, for whom this may concern, Finn has a prominent part in this fic. I started writing it a long time before Cory's passing, and struggled with what to do afterward, but in the end, I love that his memory can live on even after he's gone through things like this. If this bothers you or triggers you in any way, please don't read.)
Tuesday, April 9th, 2024

Kurt sat at his desk in the green-walled office, once upon a time a nursery, and stared down at a brass button and a sample swatch of striped nautical fabric.

Too Ralph Lauren. Come on, Kurt, get it together.

The samples were swiped into the "no" bucket at his feet, full of rejected buttons and zippers and colors. The yes bucket sat beside it, lonely and empty. Kurt sighed and put his chin on his hands, sullenly staring out the window at the clouds overhead.

It was the kind of afternoon where a calming morning shower had long passed, and angry, dark clouds had rolled over the city in its place, casting a gray, dim haze through his window and threatening lightning and storms.

On cue, a white-blue bolt flashed across the gray sky. In spite of himself, Kurt jumped, cursing loudly as a clap of thunder boomed seconds later. He planted his forehead on the cool surface of the desk, breathing. He'd never get anything done in weather like this.

He needed to get some shit done in weather like this. Because he had a meeting scheduled with Marc Jacobs himself in five days' time to discuss his ideas for next year's spring/summer line, and he was absolutely drawing a blank. What had started as a rip-roaring success, so rip-roaring that some of the other designers in the Little Marc Jacobs line had honestly begun to hate him, was turning sour fast, and Kurt felt like he was on a runaway train to Joblessville.

He rubbed his hands over his eyes and took a deep breath. He needed a distraction.

As if Blaine could hear him thinking from blocks away, a text message sang through his phone, chasing away all his storm cloud thoughts.

From: The Husband
Done with my run. Will be home soon. <3

Kurt smiled.

To: The Husband
Bet you look like a drowned rat.

From: The Husband
I certainly feel like one.

To: The Husband
We'll see if we can't remedy that.
Love you. <3

Kurt scooted his chair back, the legs screeching across the wood floor, and started toward the bathroom. Finding a distraction no longer appeared to be an issue.

* * *

Twenty minutes later, Kurt was leaning against the kitchen counter sipping on a glass of Pinot Gris when Blaine, dripping wet and red-faced from his run, came through the door. Kurt held out a cold bottle of water, fresh from the fridge, as Blaine toed off his rain-soaked shoes and peeled his transparent white t-shirt over his head.

"Mmmm, you should run in the rain more often," Kurt said, eyeing his husband's toned chest and stomach. "How far'd you go today?"

"Only three miles," Blaine said, taking the bottle and chugging down half of it in several big gulps. He came up for air and wiped his forehead off with the back of his hand. "I did – or tried to do the East River run, which is normally great, but – god, I don't know if it's the rain, or what, but man, it got to me today." He leaned against the fridge and slid to the floor in a sweaty heap. "I couldn't even finish it."
"Awww," Kurt cooed, pouting his lower lip out. The way Blaine's legs were splayed, he could see all the way up his shorts, the dark coarse hairs curling on his tanned thighs. *Damn*, he loved that man. "Poor little Blainey-days."

"Don't call me Blainey-days," Blaine grunted.

Kurt slunk to the floor like a Siamese cat and purred in his ear. "I think I can call you whatever I like, considering there's a big soaking tub filling up with warm, fizzy, bath-bomb water just for you …"

"Welllll," Blaine drawled, "in that case, Blainey-days is just fine. But I can't get in yet – I still have to water the plants, and once I get in that bathtub, I'm never coming out."

"Why don't you let me take care of your herb garden for once," Kurt said, tipping Blaine's chin up so that they were eye-to-eye. "You just go in there and get that beautiful, wet body of yours undressed the rest of the way and into the tub. I'll take care of everything else."

Blaine's face softened, his eyes growing wider and filling with the look of adoration that seemed to overcome him at times when they were together. It made Kurt's heart and legs and brain all turn to Jell-O. "You're too good to me."

"It's true," Kurt smiled. "Now go before I change my mind and let your lavender wither."

"I feel like there's an euphemism there."

Kurt's grin turned wicked. "*Ohhhh*, you shouldn't have said that."

"No." Blaine slapped a hand over his face, still on the floor. "No, no, no, you are not going to refer to my dick as my lavender …"

"You never know." Kurt's voice was impish. "I just might."
Blaine closed his eyes and sighed, relaxing under the firm pressure of Kurt's fingers and thumbs on his shoulders, muscles tight under his skin.

"You're not usually this tense after a run," Kurt commented casually as he worked his fist into a particularly stubborn knot.

"It was cold. The rain – uggghh, that hurts." Not a bad hurt, though, Blaine decided, bending lower, giving Kurt's hands broader access, but Kurt's hands stilled.

"Do I need to stop?"

"No, no, it's the good kind of hurt," Blaine said, wiggling his shoulders a little to remind Kurt's hands of where they were supposed to be.

"Well in that case …" Kurt's voice came out lower and Blaine sucked in a breath as a pair of thumbs ran down the sides of his spine in two firm strokes. He was barely, barely beginning to get hard when Kurt mouthed at Blaine's ear, making him squirm away – how could earlobes be so ticklish?

"Ahh, no!" Blaine exclaimed, unable to keep the grin from his face. "No fellating my earlobes!"

Kurt grinned back and kissed Blaine's cheek, his lips dragging across Blaine's still-wet skin. He let Kurt pull him back so that his shoulders rested against the cool porcelain. He slid down, his head resting against the lip of the tub, looked up at Kurt and saw beautiful. A lock of hair was dangling onto Kurt's forehead and Blaine reached up to replace it, wet hands and all.

"Well, then, you just let me know what works for you …" Kurt slid his hands off of Blaine's shoulders and down his chest, his fingertips catching on Blaine's nipples as they dipped into the bathwater, and ohhhhh, god yes, that worked for him. Blaine sucked in a gasp of air, his cock twitching with interest. "…And what doesn't." Kurt's hands plunged deeper then, grazing over both sides of Blaine's stomach.
Water sloshed out of the tub as Blaine grappled for the edge, trying not to giggle like a child. Tickling was supposed to be against the rules. "You know exactly what works for me. You're not playing fair."

"I drew you a bath and watered your plants. That's totally playing fair."

"You know my tickle spots are off-limits. And here you've messed with two of them."

"Off-limits to everyone but me," Kurt sang, teasing. Blaine frowned, trying to look menacing as he narrowed his eyes, but Kurt only grinned. "Oh, come on Mr. Grumpy-Pants, lie back. I won't tickle you anymore."

Blaine knew he looked about as menacing as a golden retriever. He sighed and did as Kurt asked, lying back against the tub.

"So what are your plans for tomorrow?" Kurt asked, his voice growing softer as he began rubbing Blaine's shoulders again.

"More edits," Blaine said, sinking into the feel of strong fingers kneading him pliant. "And I've got to run to CVS – I'm due for a refill of my meds. You need me to grab anything while I'm out?"

"We're almost out of toothpaste. I'll let you know if there's anything else before tomorrow," Kurt said. "How many refills do you have left?"

"Just one, and then I've got to go see Dr. Seang again." Blaine sighed, rolling his head on his neck. Kurt's fingers were heaven, had always been; how could fingers feel so good? "I don't think there will be any issues, though. I've felt really good on this dose."

He felt the warmth of Kurt's smile before he could see it. "I can tell. You seem happier lately than you have been in a long time."

"Well, I still have my moments," Blaine said, craning his neck back, cringing at the crackly noise his muscles and tendons made against the hard tub. "Remember last week? When I accidentally shrunk your shirt and you got mad and I went off the deep end and was ready to throw myself off a
building for being such a terrible husband?"

"Yes, dear," Kurt said wryly. "How could I possibly forget?"

"Yeah, not my finest moment, I know. But for the most part, I am happier. I just wish I'd gone on meds a long time ago."

"Well, you're on them now, and that's what matters," Kurt said, kissing the top of his head. He came away with water droplets on his nose and upper lip, and god, Blaine just wanted to kiss them away. It was hard to think about what went on eight months before, when he'd splintered apart and moved to Nick's couch. When he'd gone a month without sleeping next to Kurt. How had he managed to bear it?

"Yeah. You're right, I guess …"

"Of course I am. Now," Kurt said, taking one of Blaine's wet hands and kissing it, "why don't you finish soaking until you turn all pruney, and then when you can't stand it any longer, you can come help me make dinner."

"What're you making?"

"Oh, I thought I'd just do something easy tonight – pasta with crushed tomatoes and garlic and some basil from your garden. That sound okay?"

Blaine sank deeper into the water again, content to soak in the tub just a little longer while he pictured Kurt snipping basil leaves from their stems, gliding around the small kitchen, chopping and stirring and making culinary magic. God, he loved being married to this man. Even after seven years, after everything they'd been through, the feeling still overwhelmed him sometimes. "That sounds perfect."

* * *

Thursday, April 11th, 2024

Blaine was editing at the kitchen table, fervid and intense, his notecards stacked carefully and precisely beside his laptop. He was making good progress; he almost felt giddy with it, the
amazing click that he felt somewhere in his brain, and after that all the pieces began to fall into place and his words started to make sense. He was typing with abandon, fingers flying over the keys, when Kurt burst through the door to tell him that he'd finally figured out the theme for the spring line at Little Marc Jacobs.

This would have been excellent news, except he wasn't expecting Kurt home for another hour at least, and the intrusion startled him enough that he knocked every notecard in the stack fluttering down to carpet the hardwood floor in white.

"Oh my god I'm so sorry," Kurt wheezed out in one breath, horror-stricken with his portfolio still raised high in the air.

"It's okay," Blaine said, squeezing the bridge of his nose hard. If there was a god in heaven, Blaine would be thanking him that those were the words that came out of his mouth, and not the ones that were playing in his head. He looked down, the floor littered with cards, once in numerical order by page number. "It was an accident."

Some sort of marriage-saving angel had to have entered his body, tied his tongue and spoken through him, because fuck, Kurt, really?

"I – yes. One that I will help clean up, right now," Kurt said, and Blaine could tell he felt awful about it. "How's it coming? Or – how was it, before I came in and scared the shit out of you?"

"I had an epiphany of sorts," Blaine said, smiling bashfully despite the fact that two days' work lay in shambles at his feet. "It's coming along really, really nicely. Or, well, it was." 

Kurt cringed. "They're ordered by page number?" he asked, stooping low to the ground, gingerly collecting the capsized cards.

"They are," Blaine said, stooping next to him. "Will you start from the end and work your way backwards? I think the last one is page 318 or something like that …"

"I will," Kurt said, and started his search for the bigger page numbers, carefully combing through the cardstock carpet.

Any anger that Blaine initially felt melted completely away. "Thank you. I love you, Kurt," he
blurted out, because he had to, because there was no way those words were going to stay buried in his chest when Kurt was handling a bunch of plain 4x6 white index cards as if they were made of glass.

Kurt looked up, his clear eyes piercing Blaine's soul all the way through. "You're my most favorite thing. Do you know that?"

"Kurt, you have a lot of favorite things."

"But you're the most. You're on top."

Blaine grinned wickedly. "Sometimes."

Kurt laughed, his real laugh, the one that didn't come out very often and, when it did, only in front of people he loved. To Blaine, it sounded like bells and made him feel like he did every time Freddie Mercury came on his iPod – alive and joyful and maybe just the slightest bit nostalgic, because _god_, the memories that were associated with that laugh.

"Blaine! You're taking my nice words and making them all dirty!"

"Dirty _is_ nice, sometimes," Blaine said. "And if you try to argue with that, I'm just going to point you to last week …"

"Mmm, no arguments here." Kurt leaned back against Blaine's chest, still idly cleaning up Blaine's mess. It was these little moments, picking index cards up off the floor, washing dishes, falling asleep next to someone, that felt _so domestic_ to Blaine, that made him wonder how the hell he'd gotten so lucky to have _him._

He told Kurt so, which prompted a wide grin. "Does that mean you're over –" he gestured to the pile of cards " – all of _this_?Which was, I readily admit, completely my fault."

"Yeah," Blaine said, kissing Kurt's head. "I'm over it."

"Oh, yay," Kurt said, clapping his hands a little. "Do you want to see my portfolio now?"
Blaine laughed, but pulled himself up with the assistance of a chair, then stretched his arms down to Kurt, who held on tight, using Blaine as leverage to hop up, bouncing in the air a little, his toes pointed. Kurt grabbed the portfolio and danced over to the couch and perched on the arm of it, tucking his knees under his chin. In another life, he could've been an acrobat. Blaine sometimes pictured him perched even higher above on a trapeze, beautiful and alone, mysterious and mesmerizing.

"Now," Kurt said once Blaine had gotten situated, "I want you look and tell me what you think, but first I want you to guess which one my favorite look is …"

* * *

Saturday, April 13th, 2024

Kurt woke to the sound of crying. He glanced out the window – it was nowhere near daylight yet.

"Blaine?" he whispered in the dark, feeling for him, hand reaching and searching and – there.

A sniffle. "I woke you up. I didn't mean to – I was trying to be quiet –"

"Shhh," Kurt soothed, following his hand with the rest of his body so he could cup himself around Blaine. "It was a nightmare?"

"I'm having less of them, you know," Blaine said, sniffling again. Kurt felt his arm move to wipe his face.

"Just because they're happening less doesn't mean they aren't important. I'm still here. I'm not going anywhere," Kurt murmured into his shoulder, hugging him tighter. "You're allowed to wake me."

"But I don't –"

"Hush."
A long pause, and Kurt felt the rise of Blaine's chest steady and slow. He almost let go, very nearly released Blaine from his arms when Blaine spoke up again.

"I still miss her." He paused. "Not her, really. Just the idea of her."

"I know, honey," Kurt said softly.

"They took her away again. In the dream," Blaine said, his voice quiet but even. "The ending never changes. It's not even a nightmare, really, just a fucked-up memory."

There wasn't really anything Kurt could say to that – he knew this dream; Blaine had been having it for months, the same thing over and over, and the only thing that was different between the dream and what had really happened was that it wasn't Karen taking Violet away, but a group of men in business suits identical to the ones his father used to wear, and that Kurt held him back as he kicked and screamed and tried to rescue to her.

A fucked-up memory.

"I'm here," Kurt repeated to him in a quiet whisper, "and I'm not going anywhere." Blaine turned in his arms, buried his face in Kurt's chest. "Sleep, honey."

Finally, once Blaine was puffing warm air against his collarbone in heavy breaths, Kurt felt like he could relax again. He closed his eyes and hoped desperately that his own nightmare didn't come, the one that Blaine didn't know about because Kurt refused to talk about it. It was also, in a way, a fucked-up memory – in the dream, Blaine broke again, yelled at him, walked out. But in Kurt’s twisted nightmare-world, Blaine was broken beyond repair; Blaine never came home to him.

"Stay," he breathed into the darkness, quiet enough that he wouldn't wake his husband. "Please, just don’t leave me in the dream tonight."

* * *

Sunday, April 14th, 2024
Kurt picked up Blaine's phone, buzzing on the counter where he'd left it after coming in from his run. He'd woken before the sun rose, said he needed to clear his head of the scene that wouldn't stop playing behind his eyes. Kurt understood the sentiment. It was why he did yoga at five in the morning sometimes.

"Hello?"

"So I know it's short notice – oh, Kurt, hi!" Nick paused, sounding confused. "Did I call your phone? Not that it matters, but –"

"No, no, Blaine's in the shower – he just got back from a run. What's short notice?"

"Hopefully brunch? Jeff's here, and we miss seeing you guys …"

Kurt grinned. Perfect distraction after a long night of nightmares. "Name the place, and we'll meet you in an hour."

They finalized the details, and Kurt cracked open the bathroom door just enough for Blaine to hear him, trying not to let all the steam out, but then heard Blaine humming over the noise of the shower. "Blaine, honey," he called, "how do you feel about Poco for brunch this morning?"

He let himself into the bathroom, closed the door behind him and stared through the slightly-fogged glass shower door at Blaine, whose head was tilted back, shampoo suds flowing down his back and pooling at his feet. Kurt's cock twitched, interested, and that really was not the reason he came into the bathroom, but it might end up being the reason he'd stay…

"If they still have that truffled mushroom omelette thing from last time? I feel yes," Blaine said. "What's the occasion?"

"Nick called."

Blaine broke into a grin, clearing the condensation from the door with his forearm so that his face came into focus. "Definitely yes, then. It's been too long since we've gotten to see him."
"Jeff's here, too," Kurt said, swallowing hard as Blaine soaped up a washcloth and ran it over his arms, his chest. He was all lean muscles, trim from all the running he'd been doing, and god, his legs – Kurt had to hold back a whimper when Blaine twisted to wash his back, his calves flexing, both muscles there visible under his skin. Yeah, he was definitely staying.

"Even better, then! What time –" Blaine cut himself off. "Kurt?"

Kurt was determinedly stripping his clothes off, shirt pulled up and over and tossed aside, pants in a puddle at his ankles. His dick was still mostly soft between his legs, but he could feel blood pooling and he knew it wouldn't be that way for long. "I can't just sit here and watch you do that –"

Blaine grinned darkly. "Do what? Shower?" He dragged the washcloth down his chest and over his stomach in a slow tease, squeezing it so that sudsy water dripped down, catching in the coarse, curly hair around his cock.

"Shit, Blaine …" Kurt opened the stand-up shower door and slipped inside into Blaine's space, clicking the door shut and crowding him against the stone tiles. "You really are unfairly attractive."

"What's so unfair about it? It's not like I'm off-limits or something – far from it, actually," Blaine grinned.

Kurt chuckled, but stopped when Blaine took his hand and pressed it in between his legs. Blaine's cock was filling, and Kurt's hand automatically wrapped around it, tugging a little – he loved the way it felt, Blaine literally growing in his hand.

"We have to be there in an hour," he said before pulling Blaine into a messy kiss.

"Mmm, plenty of time, then," Blaine mumbled against Kurt's mouth.

Grasping Blaine's wet curls with his other hand – they felt so different wet, free of product and frizz, just soft and dripping and looping around his fingers – he let go of Blaine and blindly reached behind him toward the shelves that held all their shampoo and soap and the bottle of silicone lube that they kept in the shower for situations such as this. They'd done this enough that his fingers found the bottle without trouble. He grinned, a little proud.

"What're you preening about?" Blaine gasped as Kurt moved down his neck, sucking at the skin
right over his Adam's apple.

"I know where the lube is without having to look."

"That." Blaine stopped, and Kurt could tell that he was trying to figure out if it would be okay to laugh or not. "That is quite impressive. But maybe not the best party trick?"

"Oh, I don't know," Kurt crooned into Blaine's ear. "I think that depends on what kind of party we're talking about." He popped the lid open, squeezed some into his hand, took Blaine's cock again and began jerking him off, slow and teasing. "Mainly I think it means that everyone should be jealous of our sex life."

Blaine groaned, his hips rolling with the motion of Kurt's hand, his head surging forward, joining their lips in a heated kiss. Kurt let himself get lost in the moment, Blaine's labored breathing against his mouth, Blaine's cock fucking in and out of his fist, Blaine's fingers skirting up and down the shaft of his dick. He barely registered the cooling water spraying at his and Blaine's sides.

"Babyyyy," Blaine whined into his shoulder, "Wanna suck you off."

"After you come," Kurt told him, tightening his grip. "Can't do both at once."

"God, I'm so close …" Blaine moaned, and Kurt pushed him harder against the wall and took both their cocks together in one hand. He thrust his hips up, his cock sliding against Blaine's with the slippery lube.

Blaine looked down, eyes widening as he watched their cocks moving together like something out of a porno. A really good porno, if Kurt had anything to say about it.

"I love it when you do this," Blaine said, his voice rough and hushed.

"I know," Kurt murmured, brushing his lips against Blaine's jawline, and oh, he loved to make Blaine fall apart.

"Fuck, Kurt –" Blaine choked out, and Kurt thrust once, twice more, and then Blaine's body jerked
and his cock spilled all over both of them.

Immediately, Blaine dropped to his knees, a little shaky, his back to the spray of the shower. He blindly grabbed a bottle of body wash and went to work on Kurt's cock, washing off the lube and making Kurt gasp.

"Fuck my mouth," he said once Kurt was clean, his voice low and his eyes dark. How he managed to look both sweetly innocent and delectably naughty from that position, looking up through a fan of dark lashes, Kurt never knew, but it made his mouth water every single time.

And then Kurt was sinking into the wet-warm cavern of Blaine's mouth, and — god, into his throat already, fuck — moaning loudly. Blaine was sucking in earnest, swallowing Kurt down deep in his throat, and as if that wasn't enough to make his brain completely short-circuit, Kurt's hands being placed on either side of Blaine's head definitely was. Blaine gave him a look — come on, already — and Kurt grinned and did as he was told, hanging onto Blaine's hair and sliding halfway out of his mouth, then back in.

It didn't take much to really get him going, his groans growing louder with each slip-slide inward, his hips rocking gently back and forth. But then Blaine squeezed his hip hard and exhaled through his nose, giving him an imploring look.

"What?" Kurt managed to ask. He couldn't string a coherent sentence together if he tried.

Blaine made a noise around his cock, then reached around and found the lube that Kurt had replaced and slipped a slicked finger back between Kurt's cheeks.

It only took seconds for Blaine's forefinger to find its destination, rubbing directly over Kurt's prostate, and oh damn, it felt good. He thrust forward, a real thrust this time, and Blaine made a pleased little noise — so that was what he wanted. It always worried Kurt — his gag reflex was so much more sensitive than Blaine's, and while he loved giving head, Blaine was just better at it. It was hard to separate himself and his own reactions from the situation, but if Blaine really wanted it — well, it was a hardship that Kurt would just have to endure. He closed his eyes and went for it, never quite knowing which part of Blaine to gravitate further toward, throat or finger.

"Blaine," he whispered, "ohhhhh, Blaine —"

A wider stretch and a firmer pressure on his prostate. Kurt watched the water hit the small of
Blaine's back and roll in rivulets down his perfect ass and he was coming, buried deep in Blaine's throat, his entire body pulsing with it.

"Oh, fuck," he said after Blaine had released him, and leaned against the cold tiles of the shower wall.

"Mmmmmm," Blaine agreed, his voice all hoarse and growly and yes, it had been an excellent idea, coming into the bathroom instead of just cracking the door. "Now – what about this brunch?"

* * *

"So, we have news with a capital-N," Jeff said, smiling easily after ordering the table another round of mimosas.

"Oooooh," Blaine said, his eyes lighting up playfully. "This sounds serious, especially if it requires three cocktails before noon."

"Yes, what are we toasting to?" Kurt asked, blushing a little as Blaine took his hand and kissed each knuckle in succession, just because he could. Kurt after two mimosas was much, much more open to public affection than Kurt stone-cold sober.

"Well, Nick and I have been talking lately." Jeff started off shyly, grinning wide as Nick threaded their fingers together. "About where we're going from here. About … the future."

"Dun- dun-duuuuuun," Nick added dramatically, making them all laugh.

"So fate decided to smile on us, and an opening came up in one of the architecture firms here. I have an in because my boss went to school with one of the guys that works there, and I landed an interview last week and was offered the job on Friday."

"So say hello to your new neighbor, boys," Nick said, his face lighting up. "We're finally shacking up."

"Oh my god, congratulations!" Blaine exclaimed as Kurt squealed next to him, clapping his hands.
"So, a toast?" Kurt asked, holding up his mimosa.

"Here's to new beginnings, I guess," Jeff said.

"And to friends-turned-lovers," Nick added softly, a warm smile on his face.

Blaine grinned at them, still so new in love. He felt so privileged, getting to watch them discover all life had to bring them, joys and sorrows and everything in between. He held up his own drink. "To new beginnings."

"And friends-turned-lovers," Kurt said as the four flutes clinked together.

"So when are you moving?" Blaine asked after they'd toasted, threading his fingers through Kurt's on top of the table.

"In May," Nick answered for him, beaming. "I can't wait."

"Well let us know the date, and we'll help move you in," Blaine offered. "Hopefully it'll be less … eventful … than last time."

"Oh god, can we please not repeat last year?" Kurt moaned.

"I second that," Nick said with a chuckle.

"I wasn't even here and I don't want to repeat it," said Jeff. "That was such a shit time for everybody …"

"And yet, look at us now," Nick said, pecking him on the cheek. "All grown up and cohabitating."

Blaine smiled. "Mmm, and look at us now, rehabilitated, functional members of society."
"Oh, you do have a way with words," Kurt said, teasingly rolling his eyes.

"Always has," Jeff said. "Or do we need a retelling of the time Blaine shared that love poem he'd written about you with the Warb--?"

"Entirely unnecessary," Blaine said, cutting him off quickly.

"Oh, no, no, no, honey," Kurt said, "that's where you're mistaken. That story is always necessary. Who wants to split a pastry with me while Jeff tells it again?"

* * *

Monday, April 15th 2024

Blaine was running late.

It was, of course, raining, as it always was when he was in a hurry and trying to juggle twenty things in his hands plus a cup of coffee. The coffee was there because he'd slept late, and he'd slept late because of the rain. He hated rain. Rain made things feel gray and dull and hopeless and made him want to stay in bed all day.

It was the rain's fault that he was running late. Everything was the rain's fault.

Kurt had told him that morning when he finally dragged himself out of bed that he needed a sun lamp.

He may or may not have bitten Kurt's head off, saying that there was no need for a sun lamp when the sun so obviously shined out of Kurt's ass, and why didn't he just turn around?

And then he may or may not have sent twenty apology text messages after Kurt stormed out of the condo without speaking to him.
It wasn't a good way to begin his meeting with his literary agent, to say the least, which was why Alex's bear hug caught him so off-guard outside the café where they were meeting for lunch.

"Jesus, can't we get inside first?" he snapped, trying to shield his hair from the rain. Not that it mattered – no amount of hair product could protect him from the humidity that would inevitably make his hair puff up like a head of broccoli.

"Well damn, what crawled up your ass and died?" Alex asked, pulling his arms away and stepping back. "Try to be friendly, and this is the thanks I get …"

Blaine sighed. "Sorry, I just hate rain …"

"Yeah, no shit. Let's get you inside before you melt, Elphie."

Blaine grinned in spite of himself. "Remind me to tell Kurt you made a Wicked reference."

"Will it make him hate me less?" Alex asked as they followed a hostess to their table.

Blaine sighed. "He doesn't hate you, he just –"

"I know, I know, I'm just not his favorite person in the world. I've come to terms. Now, are you ready to hear good news and maybe be a little excited about it?"

"Sure thing, boss," Blaine said, plastering on a plastic smile.

"Oh, come on," Alex said, "You call that excited?"

Blaine tried to make it reach his eyes, but the rain had dampened all the light in him.

"Okay, fine then, I guess you'll just have to get excited after I tell you. The publishing house loved the concept of the short story collection I pitched to them. They want your draft so they can send it to their editor, but they're already drawing up an offer."
Blaine looked up, his mouth ajar as he processed Alex's words. "Wait – an offer? Really?" he asked slowly. "After just hearing your pitch?"

"Clearly I deserve a raise. Now, make me happy, Blaine – how close are you to having the manuscript finished?"

"God, it's so far from perfect," Blaine sighed after he paused to order a glass of water from the waitress. "But I guess it's getting there."

"So far from perfect for you is like other writers completing a pilgrimage to literary Mecca. I'll give you four days, then I want that copy."

Blaine's eyes widened. "Four days? I've still got like seventy notecards to get through!"

"Then I guess you'll be drinking a lot of coffee," Alex grinned, clapping him on the arm. "Congratulations, man. I'm proud of you."

* * *

To: Kurt <3

For my twenty-fifth apology for being such a complete ASS this morning, I'd like to share some good news with you…

From: Kurt <3

I'm listening…

To: Kurt <3

Alex pitched the book to the publishing house. They haven't even read it, and they're
already working out an offer!

From: Kurt <3
That's great, Blaine!

From: Kurt <3
But are you still of the opinion that the sun
shines out my ass?

To: Kurt <3
If it does, it's only because you're so luminescent.

From: Kurt <3
Stop wooing me with big author words.

To: Kurt <3
Is it working?

From: Kurt <3
I'm actually embarrassed to admit how much.

* * *

"Oh, Kurt …" Blaine put his hand over his mouth, a circle of delighted surprise, when his husband came through the door that evening with a bright bouquet of red and yellow roses. "I should be the one getting you flowers after the way I acted earlier …"

"No, no. These are to celebrate you," Kurt said, grinning wide. He'd used the same line every time Blaine had ever done something noteworthy – and sometimes even when he did things that weren't – and every time, it had moved Blaine more than he could ever hope to explain. "I'm so proud of
"Thank you," Blaine said. God he felt so lucky.

"Those stories," Kurt said, pulling Blaine into a warm hug as he pressed a kiss to Blaine's temple, "they're her, aren't they?"

Blaine hadn't ever let Kurt read them. Every now and then he'd call out a sentence, ask whether the wording made sense, and Kurt would bend over Blaine's laptop and tell him, sometimes gently, sometimes not, precisely where the problem lay. But as far as the reading? He knew less than Alex did.

"They –" Blaine started carefully. "Some of them are. Her, I mean. Some of them are you. Some of them are my parents –"

"I don't know if I want to read those stories."

"You can read whatever stories you want once I've got the proof," Blaine said.

Kurt nodded, and Blaine was all at once so grateful that Kurt understood. It wasn't a locking out; it wasn't even embarrassment. It was just – like letting Kurt read his journal. Which, he eventually had, the journal he kept in middle school, and then high school, but they'd been married for two years before Blaine ever had the courage to pull it out and hand it to him.

It was just so personal. His deepest thoughts and fears and god, the suicidal ideations, his teenaged soul poured out onto tear-stained pages.

And his stories – especially these stories – were just as private, felt just as delicate.

Blaine would let Kurt read the baring of his soul before the rest of the world got to read it, of course, but he wasn't ready for Kurt to read it yet.

"…also got this," Kurt was saying, and Blaine's head snapped up when he realized he hadn't been paying attention. Kurt held a bottle of champagne in the opposite hand from the flowers,
condensation budding up in supple droplets on the dark green bottle.

"Oh, Kurt – the book's not even close to being published yet –"

"I don't care," Kurt said, defiant and proud. He went to the little cabinet where they kept their tiny bar, got out the corkscrew. "You got good news today. We should celebrate."

Blaine started to argue, but then stopped himself before he ever got started. Why shouldn't they celebrate?

"You're right," he said, following Kurt to the kitchen to grab two champagne flutes. "For life is short –"

"But sweet for certain," Kurt finished for him, pouring two glasses. "Even sweeter because – well, you."

Blaine shook his head. "Because us," he corrected.

"And also because book advances," Kurt said. "Cheers?"

"Cheers," Blaine laughed, clinking his flute against Kurt's. "I'm sorry I was in such an awful mood this morning, seriously," he said after he'd taken a sip.

"You fixed it when you called me luminescent."

"It's good to know my vocabulary is good for something …"

"More than one thing," Kurt grinned, sipping on his bubbly. "Like I said, book advances."

Oh, oh, oh Blaine loved him.
"Finn? It's so good to hear your voice!" Kurt exclaimed, picking up his cell. "Did you get my text about Blaine's short story collection?"

"I – yeah, that's great, little bro," Finn said, and Kurt frowned. Something wasn't right. Finn's voice was off.

"Finn, what's wrong? Is it Dad?" Kurt sat up straight as a pin as he waited for the answer, and the music from the piano dwindled as Blaine turned around to look at him.

"No, no, it's not Burt – shit, you're like psychic even over the phone. I didn’t even say anything." He sighed heavily.

Kurt waited, and still no answer. "Finn?" he finally said. "What's going on?"

"Do you remember Emily?"

Kurt's eyes narrowed. "Emily as in your girlfriend that we met at Christmas? What about her? Do I need to stop liking her?"

"Um. Kurt …"

"Oh, Finn, did she break up with you?" he asked, his tone softening.

"No. No, she surprisingly didn't." He laughed, sounding rueful. "I – I don't know how to tell you this."

"Just tell me already! How bad could it be?" Kurt stopped. It could be bad. It could be cancer or something; what was wrong with him? "Finn? Is Emily sick?"
Silence on the other end of the line. And then, "No. Actually. She's pregnant."

Kurt felt his heart stop. "What?" he whispered.

"Six weeks along." There was fear in Finn's voice, the same fear that Kurt had heard all those years ago before they were brothers, when Finn thought Quinn was having his child. "I don't know what to do, man. We didn't – it wasn't a planned thing. This was supposed to be your deal, the baby thing. I don't even know what to do with a baby."

"Are you keeping it?" Kurt asked quietly, bracing himself for the answer.

"Well, yeah," Finn said, like it should have been obvious. "I mean, we're both pretty freaked out, but I think Emily's already kind of in love with it, even though I think it looks like a blob. She keeps getting these looks on her face and putting her hand on her stomach and I – oh, god, I'm being insensitive, aren't I?"

The pain wasn't raw; it never felt like knives were stabbing Kurt in the heart anymore, but suddenly the dull ache wasn't quite so dull anymore, and all his insides stung. "No, Finn. You're not being insensitive. This is … a thing that is happening to you. Don't feel like you need to censor yourself for me, okay?"

"I feel like I'm taking something away from you, or something. I –"

"Finn, it's okay," Kurt said.

"What's going on?" Blaine mouthed from across the room. It must've been Kurt's face giving him away, because his voice was holding strong. He could be comforted later, though – if Blaine touched him now, he'd break down, and he couldn't break down on the phone with Finn. Not over this.

He shook his head as Blaine moved to get up from the piano bench.

"You're not taking anything away from us." Kurt took a deep breath and let it out, then looked up at Blaine, still perched in the air with his ass halfway off the bench. "In fact, you're giving us something – we're going to be uncles."
Blaine's eyes grew as big as saucers. "What!?” he silently demanded.

"Yeah," Finn said slowly, and Kurt could hear the smile creeping over his face. "Yeah, I guess you are. That's cool, man. You'll be a good uncle."

"Blaine will be a better one," Kurt said softly, looking at his husband, now balanced on the edge of the piano bench with an almost cartoon-ish look of shock still covering his face.

"What the fuck!?" Blaine mouthed at him again, holding his hands in the air, palms open to the sky.

"I'll tell you in a second." Kurt mouthed back and Finn continued talking.

"You guys are gonna have to give me dad lessons," he said, sounding worried. "I don't think you understand exactly how much I have no idea what I'm doing."

"Finn, you're a teacher."

"Yeah, but that's high schoolers. And I'm not, like, raising them. I don't know the first thing about toddlers."

"Well, it's not like we ever got to that stage, either," Kurt said, unable to keep the bitterness from his voice.

"...Oh. Yeah."

Kurt sighed. "Look, ask Dad. He was fantastic. I'm sure he'll be more than happy to give you some advice, okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, that's a good idea. Didn't he used to play along with your tea parties and stuff?"
"He was very good at humoring me, yes. Which is why you should ask him and not me." Kurt paused. "Not to change the subject, but … what are you going to do? About Emily, I mean?"

"Well I'm not breaking up with her, if that's what you're suggesting …"

"No, I mean, are you going to marry her? Have you proposed?"

"I – no. Not exactly. We – I want to be with her, but she's already said like five times that she doesn't want to be pregnant in a wedding dress, and then she gives me these eyes that say, like, 'hint, hint, you idiot.' So I think we're going to wait a while. The baby can be the flower girl or the ring bearer or something, maybe."

"Okay," Kurt said. "I just don't want to see this turn into another Rachel thing –" He knew he shouldn't have said it as soon as the words left his mouth.

"Wow. Okay." Finn paused. "Just, wow, Kurt. Two totally different situations, there. I can't believe –"

"I'm sorry," Kurt blurted, finally beckoning Blaine over to him. He let Blaine sit beside him and pet his hair while he tried to make amends for letting his mouth get the better of him. "I didn't mean that like it sounded –"

"Well, I'm not sure how many ways there are to mean what you said." Finn sighed. "In no universe would Rachel and I have ever worked out. We were young and stupid and naïve. You're close enough to both of us that you should know that. And – there's a baby this time. Don't you think that might change some things?"

Kurt cringed. He didn't mean for their conversation to go so far south, so fast. "I know. I just –"

"I know you don't know Emily very well, okay? But maybe you should try getting there before you make comments like that. She's not Rachel, god, not even close. Just – wow, Kurt."

"I'm sorry."
"Yeah, you've said that. Look, I'm just gonna go, okay? Discussion tabled, we'll talk sometime when you haven't just royally pissed me off."

"Okay," Kurt said, his voice small. "Bye, Finn. And … congratulations."

Finn huffed. "Yeah. Thanks."

Blaine raised his eyebrows as Kurt hung up the phone. "Wow."

Kurt groaned and dropped his head in Blaine's lap. "The universe hates us," he said, his voice muffled by Blaine's thigh.

"So Finn actually knocked his girlfriend up this time, huh?" He could hear the smile in Blaine's voice, but there was a brittle bitterness behind it that Kurt felt deep in his heart as well.

Kurt snorted. "That's not funny."

"And we're sure it wasn't another 'hot tub' incident?"


"Anytime, cupcake."

Kurt turned his head enough to grin up at Blaine. "I love those little pet names, you know that?"

"I know." Blaine's voice was gentle as he petted Kurt's hair. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Kurt shifted to his back, and Blaine bent to kiss his forehead. He lay there for a moment looking up at the ceiling. "Let's not right now," Kurt said, a little whine in his voice. "Can we have wine and chocolate cake for dinner and pretend we're celebrating instead?"
Blaine gave him a sad smile. "Go fire up the KitchenAid. I'll see if we still have that bottle of Cabernet in the wine rack."
Chapter 2

Thursday, April 18th, 2024

"On a scale of one to ten, how miserable are you right now?" Kurt mumbled into the crook of Blaine's elbow. They were spooning in bed, a bottle of wine downed and half of the un-iced chocolate sheet cake that Kurt had thrown together eaten.

"I don't know, but I'm guessing you're about an eleven," he answered.

"Damn straight. Why aren't you as miserable as me?" There was a sad whine to Kurt's voice amidst the prickliness that Blaine was honestly a little scared would reach out and barb him like a porcupine at any moment.

"Well … at least partly because I'm holding you in our bed right now and I'm full of your fabulous chocolate cake."

Kurt turned over to face Blaine and trailed his fingers down Blaine's cheek. "Tell me more about my fabulous chocolate cake."

This was good. This was progress. If Blaine could just keep things going in this direction … "Well," he said, his voice growing low, "it wasn't quite as good as sex, but …"

"But?"

"It might've been if I'd gotten to eat it off of you," Blaine grinned. "Do you want some more?"

"Not another bite," Kurt said. "I'm already miserable – I don't want to be fat, too."

"Baby, you aren't going to get fat from a piece of cake. You're beautiful –"

"Blaine." Kurt's voice came out harsh, and yep. He knew those barbs would come out sometime.
"Hmm?" Blaine stroked a finger down Kurt's cheek, trying to calm him. Kurt recoiled from his touch, and it was like he'd been slapped across the face.

"This? Is not what I need from you right now," Kurt said.

Blaine blinked at him. "Sorry," he said a little sullenly, retreating to the opposite side of the bed. He could grow a little prickly himself, if Kurt wanted to play that game. "I was just trying to make you feel better."

Kurt sighed. "That's what the wine was for. That's what the quarter of a sheet cake I ate was for. I just need you to be here, okay?"

"I thought that's what I was doing."

"Oh, don't act so surly. You know you were coddling me," Kurt said. "I don't need --" He sighed, dragging a hand through his hair. "Look, can we just start over?"

Blaine took a deep breath and tried to remember all the things that Dr. Jacobson had taught them about communication and conflict, and the right ways to fight. "Sure," he finally answered with a tight smile. "So, obviously you're upset. Do you want to talk about it?"

Kurt smiled. "Better. Thank you," he said sincerely. "It's just this whole Finn thing. I know it wasn't intentional. I feel bad for them, because unwanted baby? Not fun. And with Emily living in Columbus …"

"Yeah, logistical nightmare," Blaine agreed.

Kurt flopped to his back, tugging Blaine's arm around his middle. "But Blaine – as sorry as I feel for them – I just can't help feeling like I felt when Dad and Carole first started dating."

"And how was that?"

"I guess I never talked to you about it much, because I was so, so over it by the time I met you, but … I felt like Finn was stealing my dad. He'd go to games that Dad would never have even thought
"They spent time together. Like, guy time, not like it is now, with you guys watching football and me reading Vogue."

"Kurt. Just – pause and listen to what you're saying," Blaine said, trying to be reasonable, trying to make Kurt see reason. "You hate that kind of guy time."

Kurt sighed. "I know, but that wasn't the point. I felt like he was taking our time together on purpose. And just because Finn didn't mean to sow his seed," – Blaine accidentally interrupted him with a snort – "doesn't mean that I'm not going to be a little bitter about it. Just because he didn't do it on purpose doesn't mean it doesn't hurt just as much."

"I know." Blaine paused, scared to ask the question that came next, because it was Finn that Kurt was upset by and not the baby. "Do you wish it was us?" he finally asked quietly, his stomach churning. "Having a baby, I mean?"

Kurt grew quiet. "I don't know," he eventually said, hesitant. "We're doing so well; I don't want to rock the boat …"

Blaine nodded. "Right," he said slowly. "But you – do you want kids at all anymore? Do you ever want to try again?"

"I have no idea how to answer that question tonight, honey," Kurt said, looking as exhausted as Blaine suddenly felt.

"Right," Blaine repeated flatly.

"Blaine? As much as you might think so – it's not that I'm trying to avoid the subject. I just need to be mad at Finn for a while, get it out of my system before I think about a decision that big. I don't want the deciding factor for something like that to be jealousy, you know?"

"I – yes," Blaine said. "Yeah, of course, that makes sense." The worst thing was that it did make sense, and yet it still made his heart break a little bit that Kurt's immediate answer wasn't an automatic yes.

"We will talk about it, I promise," Kurt told him, and kissed him sweetly on the nose before curling up to go to sleep. Blaine put an arm around him and kissed his hair, fully prepared for his recurring
nightmare to come back full-force while he slumbered, helpless and vulnerable.

He was almost there, drifting toward sleep, when his eyes shot open. "Shit, Finn has the worst timing on earth."

"Mmmm?"

"My manuscript. Is due. Tomorrow."

"Ohhhhh, fuck," Kurt said, sounding sympathetic and entirely unprickly for the moment.

"Yes, Kurt. Fuck," Blaine sighed, swinging his legs off the side of the bed.

"Wait, where are you going?" Kurt yelped, grabbing at Blaine's hands and arms and t-shirt and whatever he could reach, it appeared.

"Kurt. The manuscript. Is due. Tomorrow. As in, not tomorrow at midnight. Tomorrow morning. And thanks to Finn's little bundle of joy? I still have about thirty or forty notecards to get through."

"Motherfucker," Kurt muttered.

"Yes, well." Blaine sighed, scrubbing a hand over his face. "Silver lining?"

"What silver lining?"

"At least I won't have nightmares tonight."

"Yeah, but I might," Blaine barely heard Kurt mumble as he dragged himself out of bed.

* * *
Friday, April 19th, 2024

Kurt wasn't sure if he'd ever woken up in a worse mood. He was just the slightest bit hungover, whether more from the beer or the chocolate cake, he wasn't sure. His head was pounding and while he wasn't really nauseated, his stomach was rumbling around like a storm was brewing inside it.

He also hadn't slept much without Blaine at his side. It felt disturbingly like the fall prior, when Blaine's side of the bed stayed cold. Around three A.M. he'd called Romeo into the bedroom from where the dog was curled at Blaine's feet, just so he'd have another warm body to snuggle under the covers.

So he was surly that morning, angry with Finn for all the wrong reasons and with himself for all the right ones, and with Blaine for – well, for being surly himself.

It wasn't his fault, Kurt tried to reason – Blaine had literally gotten not one wink of sleep (thanks, Finn). But Kurt wanted to be left alone, wanted to be able to process and just be mad for a while, and absolutely did not want to be coddled, which was what happened the night before, or snapped at, which was what happened while he was trying to make a pot of coffee before he left for work.

Thankfully Kurt was just rested enough and had just enough reserve to let Blaine's snide comment slide off his back, not blow it out of proportion, and he sent Blaine to bed with a kiss and permission to finish off the chocolate cake later.

Unfortunately for everyone else around him, on the subway and at work that day, being kind to Blaine that morning meant using up every ounce of patience Kurt's heart could hold – so much less than Blaine's capacity for it; Blaine was so much more tolerant than Kurt was, at least when he'd had some sleep …

But Blaine hadn't had any sleep and Kurt had only had a little and Finn was having a fucking baby – why couldn't it be them? How was it remotely fair? It wasn't Kurt's fault that he and the man he loved didn't have the right parts.

He walked into the studio with a scowl on his face as an intern ran smack into him, sending a box of fabric samples flying, and it was bound to be a really, really terrible day.

* * *
Blaine was having a really, really terrible day. Mostly because he was just so fucking tired, and god, he hoped the last few pages of that draft were in some semblance of readable order, because he was a zombie by the time he got to them around four in the morning.

But there was also a part of him that ached in the way that he hadn't ached in a really long time. He knew Kurt was mad at Finn, but he was mad at Finn too, dammit. It wasn't his fault that he loved men – well, one man, really, that he loved Kurt, and that together they had two very useless identical halves of a functional reproductive coupling. And the fact that Finn could just go and accidentally knock up his girlfriend – and then tell them about it the day before his draft was due – well, it just felt like a smack in the face.

The therapy or the meds or a combination of the two were doing their thing, though, because after a nap, instead of drinking down a bottle of wine like he would've done last September, Blaine went for a very, very long run and came home and called Nick.

Nick, who he was so very, very glad he was friends with, who made all the right sympathetic noises in all the right places and assured Blaine that no, his book would not be total crap, and no, it would probably not be a good idea to credit all mistakes and/or typos to Finn Hudson in the acknowledgement section, and that yes, he really, really would be alright.

And it was thanks to Nick – and that run, god, he loved running – that he was calm and unruffled again by the time Kurt got home that evening. It appeared that they were just taking turns with the prickly that day, passing the testiness back and forth between them like a hot ping-pong ball, because Kurt was churlish from the moment he set foot in the condo. Blaine felt a pang of sympathy for everyone at the studio, and even a little for himself, even though his mood was just as bad (well, maybe not just as bad) that morning.

"I want to maim him for doing this to us," Kurt announced to their home with no preamble, right after throwing open the door.

"…Your brother?" Blaine asked, trying to stay caught up. It was very important never to be too many steps behind Kurt, but in that moment it seemed especially vital.

"No, Rush Limbaugh," Kurt snipped. "Yes, Blaine, my brother." He sighed, dropping his bag on the table. "I'm sorry, I just used up all my nice this morning, and then lucky for you I used up all my bitchy at work and now I just have, like, nothing left."
Blaine eyed Kurt carefully, trying to gauge his dinner preferences based on his mood. "Do you want frozen pizza and ice cream for dinner?" he asked carefully.

"God, yes," and Blaine finally felt like he'd done something right.

* * *

Friday, April 26\textsuperscript{th}, 2024

In spite of all his protests the Thursday before, it sure seemed like Kurt was trying to avoid the subject of a baby – now, or in the future, or whenever – to Blaine, because it had been a week, more than a week, and they never had talked about it. Kurt was always having to rush off to a meeting, or was too tired (but suspiciously not too tired for sex), or was in the middle of making dinner. Or was still very, profoundly angry with Finn.

As for Blaine's side of things, any mention of Finn or Emily or the baby made the Violet-shaped hole in his heart open just a little wider. It hadn't ever closed, not really, and he was always vaguely aware of it, a mild, steady ache inside of him. His meds helped with the depression, and Dr. Jacobson had helped him find tools to deal with the pain, but he'd long accepted that it wasn't something that was going to disappear anytime soon.

He'd made peace with it before, but now that there was another baby being born into their family, one that wasn't his to raise, he wasn't feeling so peaceful about it anymore.

And then there was the tiny problem that he felt a little like he was going crazy all over again. He'd been trying so hard to be a support system for Kurt – he'd failed miserably at that before, too focused on his own issues, and he wasn't going to let it happen again. But nothing he was doing was making Kurt happy, and he couldn't figure out what it was that Kurt wanted.

Honestly, he didn't know if Kurt knew what Kurt wanted.

Which is why, that Friday, he had to get the hell out of the condo. Romeo had been sadly neglected lately, both of them preoccupied with work and using up all their energy being angry with everyone else and the rest of their energy went to not being angry with each other, so Blaine got the leash and took him for a walk. He was letting Romeo sniff around a tree in Tomkins Square Park, waiting for him to do his business, when a bouncy rubber ball rolled right into Blaine's ankle.
He stooped to pick it up, and found himself eye-to-eye with a curly-haired, blue-eyed little boy who couldn't have been older than four.

"It wobbled away." The boy pointed to the ball at Blaine's feet, his eyes wide.

Oh. Oh, oh, oh.

"Well, we can't have that, can we?" Blaine asked, picking up the ball and placing it into the boy's hand. "What's your name?"

"Patwick. What's youw name?"

"I'm Blaine," he smiled. He couldn't help but smile; the boy looked like Blaine with Kurt's eyes; he could've been a perfect melding of the two of them. If only biology supported something like that…

God, he wanted to take little Patrick and just squeeze him, but – yeah, no, impulse control, Blaine. Somehow he doubted that the boy's mother would appreciate her son being hugged by a total stranger. And speaking of his mother… "Hey Patrick, where are your parents?"

"My mommy's ovev thewe," the boy said, pointing to a playgroup full of toddlers in the middle of the grass a few yards away. Sure enough, Blaine saw a pretty woman standing with her hands on her hips, looking at them warily. He put up his hand in a wave, plastering what he hoped was his best I-swear-I'm-not-a-pedophile grin on his face. She started walking toward them and Blaine smiled even brighter. He felt a tug at his chinos.

"Can I pet youw doggy, Mistew Blaine?"

"Sure you can," Blaine said, praying the kid didn't have some horrible allergy to pet dander. "He's a nice doggy. His name's Romeo." He whistled softly, and Romeo turned around. Blaine tapped the ground with his foot, and Romeo lay down in front of the little boy.

"Hi, Womeo," said Patrick as he carefully reached his hand out. He looked up at Blaine in awe as he stroked the dog's soft fur. "I want a doggy just like him at my house!"
Blaine laughed, and refrained from saying *I want a kid just like you at my house.* "I think you'll have to ask your mommy about that, buddy."

"He'll have to ask his mommy about what?" Blaine looked up again to see Patrick's mom standing next to him.

"Mama!" the boy squealed happily. "The nice man saved my ball for me! Can we have a doggy?"

She laughed, and oh, how Blaine *wanted* as he watched Patrick pummel into his mother's legs, wrapping his arms around them. Blaine's heart throbbed, his whole body really, as she unwrapped the boy's arms from around her, bent, and gave him a real hug, kissing his cheek. "We'll see, baby. Now, what have I told you about talking to strangers?"

"Oops," the little boy said guiltily. "I'm not s'posed to, huh?"

"Nope."

"Am I in trouble?"

She sighed, picking him up off the ground and holding him on her hip. "Just promise me – promise me and cross your heart, baby – that you won't do it again. Okay? You promise?"

"I promise."

Patrick's finger traced an X over his chest, and Blaine melted into a puddle of goo watching them. The desire for a child was thrumming in his very soul so hard he could have cried.

"But Mister Blaine was a nice stranger, Mama," Patrick said after a long pause.

"And thank god for that," his mom murmured under her breath. "Not everybody's so nice as Mr. Blaine, honey."

"Oh. 'Kay," the boy said.
"Now, let's go back and play. What do we say?" she asked.

"Oh! Thanks for saving my ball!" Patrick exclaimed.

"No problem, buddy. Thanks for petting my dog. He loves attention."

Patrick beamed, and his mother smiled at Blaine. "Thanks," she said, "he's just a little too gregarious for his own good …"

"Don't apologize," Blaine said. "He wasn't bothering me, I promise."

And with that, they went their separate ways, Patrick and his mother back to the playgroup and Blaine and Romeo to the dog run. Blaine sighed heavily as he quickened his pace, an excited Romeo trying to lurch forward toward where the other dogs were playing. Was this what it would be like all the time at family get-togethers? Would his and Kurt's pain grow along with Emily's belly? Would his heart bleed every time Finn got a hug or a kiss or an "I love you, Daddy?"

He stooped to unhook Romeo's leash and smiled as the dog licked his cheek. "Yeah, I love you too, buddy," he said, petting his furry white head. "Go play, okay?"

As Romeo skittered happily around the park, yipping with the other dogs, Blaine glanced back toward the playgroup, the children squealing and toddling through the grass. The hole where Violet had once been stung sharper than it had in a long time, and he knew as sure as the sun would rise that he wouldn't be truly happy until a child rested comfortably in his arms again. He turned back to Romeo, who was in a glorious game of chase with a King Charles spaniel, and wondered a little guiltily if this was the only kind of play date he'd ever really be privy to, if this was the only kind of parent club he'd ever get to join.

* * *

Monday, April 29th, 2024

"I love it."
Kurt looked warily at his boss. "Really?" he asked as Marc clasped his hands together under his chin, a wide smile on his face.

"Really, Kurt, I love it – it's edgy, but still kid-appropriate. It's fresh and fun and god I love that dress –" He stopped in mid-sentence. "Kurt. What's wrong? I'm giving you praise that half the designers in this place would literally kill for, and you're looking at me – well, actually, you're not looking at me, you're looking through me. What's up?"

"I'm sorry, it's just personal stuff," Kurt said, his breath coming out like lead. He shook his head like a puppy, as if that would somehow toss all the thoughts flying around inside his skull back into some semblance of order, and turned back to his portfolio. "I'm glad you like that dress – it's my favorite, too."

"Uh-uh-uh, you're not getting off that easy," Marc chided, shaking his finger back and forth. "What kind of personal stuff? Something happen with Blaine?"

No. Something happened with his heart. Kurt closed his eyes. "My brother's girlfriend is pregnant."

Marc was quiet for a moment. "Oh," he finally said softly, then reached out to put a hand on Kurt's shoulder. "Should I offer condolences or congratulations?"

"Maybe a little of both."

"You'll be okay, you know," Marc told him.

"Will I?" Kurt laughed drily. "Because it doesn't really feel that way." He swallowed hard.

"Kurt, you –"

"Can we just get back to how much you love the dress?" Kurt asked, the muscles in his temples working in a steady rhythm. "I think I'm ready to revel in that praise you were talking about that half the designers would kill for …"

Marc squeezed his shoulder once, hard, before dropping his hand. His eyes flitted between Kurt's
face and Kurt's portfolio for several beats before he said, "...So what are these, paint spatters?"

Kurt nodded, grateful and relieved.

* * *

Wednesday, May 1st, 2024

"Oh my god, you have no idea how glad I am that I'm seeing you today," Blaine groaned as soon as he'd entered Dr. Jacobson's office. "I don't know if this twice a month thing is going to work out ..." She handed him a bottle of water and motioned for the couch.

"What's going on? Talk to me."

Blaine leaned back, his body sinking into the cushion. "Kurt's brother called, not this Thursday, but the last. Apparently he's accidentally gone and gotten his girlfriend pregnant."

Dr. Jacobson stopped with her own bottle halfway to her lips. "Ahhhh," she said.

"Ahhhh is right," Blaine grumbled.

"So how's that been for you?" she asked. "Are you holding up okay?"

Blaine tipped his head back, closed his eyes. "I don't know how to answer that. I have a raging case of baby fever. Raging. And Kurt ...

Dr. Jacobson waited. "And Kurt?" she finally prodded.

"He's angry."

"Angry with what? ...Or whom?"
"Mainly Finn," Blaine said. "He – Kurt knows he didn't do it on purpose, he knows it was an accident, and even if it wasn't, Finn would never have a kid out of spite, but …"

Dr. Jacobson raised her eyebrows, her signal for him to continue.

"But I think – I don't know, there's some baggage there for Kurt that isn't an issue for me. Some step-sibling rivalry between Finn and him that goes back to before Burt and Carole were married. I think – well, I should probably let him talk to you about this, but I think he's afraid that his dad's going to gravitate toward Finn's baby like the moon to the earth or something, and he'll get left behind. You know how Kurt gets when Burt's concerned …"

"You probably would do well to let Kurt talk to me about that, yes, but I can see where you're coming from. But – Blaine, what about this raging case of baby fever? What does Kurt say about that?"

"I – he doesn't know about it?"

"Mmmm," Dr. Jacobson murmured noncommittally.

"He won't talk to me about it," Blaine said quietly. "I asked him once whether or not he wants kids in the future at all." He stopped, not wanting to say his next several words aloud.

"And?" Dr. Jacobson prompted.

"And he's been avoiding the topic like the plague. He's kind of been avoiding me like the plague, actually. And I'm beginning to think that he doesn't. Want them, I mean. At all," Blaine said, his voice very, very small.

"I'm afraid I can't help you there, Blaine," Dr. Jacobson told him. "That's something that will have to come from Kurt himself. My only suggestion for you right now is try to be patient. Everybody grieves at their own pace – we've talked about this. Kurt could be taking a little longer. Kurt could be thinking about it, wanting another baby, and just not be ready to talk about it yet. Any guess you make right now is only an assumption and–"

"And assumptions get us nowhere," Blaine parroted. "I know that, I do."
"I know you do."

"But that doesn't make it any easier right now."

Dr. Jacobson smiled sadly. "Of course it doesn't. Unfortunately, there's nothing easy about any of this. But if it helps at all, I'm really impressed with the way you're handling this."

Blaine frowned. "Thank you?"

"I'm serious. You haven't slid back into any of your old coping or defense mechanisms, at least none that I know of. That takes a lot of work, Blaine, and I'm proud of you."

Blaine squirmed in his chair, trying to fight the urge to look down at his shoes. "You aren't going to tell me how to fix this, are you?"

"Is it really something that needs fixing?"

Blaine couldn't fight it any longer; his head dipped and he focused on the intricate stitching on the toes of his shoes.

"I think," Dr. Jacobson continued, "that this might be an excellent lesson in patience. Can you be patient with Kurt, Blaine? Can you try, as hard as it is, to live in the uncertainty of just not knowing right now, and be alright with that?"

"I –" he started, hugging his arms to his chest. He took a breath, picturing Kurt's face. "I can try."

"That's all I've ever asked of you," Dr. Jacobson said gently, reaching out to pat Blaine on the knee.

* * *

Forty-five minutes later, Blaine's thoughts were still eating at him as he walked home in a fitful
state of unrest, hands fidgeting in and out of pockets, breaths coming and going like his lungs were made of iron.

Patience.

It wasn't like it was a new thing, this desire for a baby. He'd been enamored with the idea of being a dad ever since he found out about Violet's existence, and not even a year of depression had quelled his hunger for a newborn to hold, a child to raise.

Funny, how he was pining after a baby when it was Kurt's idea to have a one in the first place.

Patience, Blaine.

Right. If Kurt wanted to wait, that was fine. He could wait. He might have to up his dose of fluoxetine, meet with Dr. Jacobson twice a week, but he could wait.

But … for how long? What if Kurt decided he never wanted kids?

Blaine didn't really let on how strongly he felt about it, but if he was being honest, he didn't know if he wanted to go through a life without children. Without even trying for them again. And if he was being completely honest, if it were up to him, he'd try and try and get his heart stomped on over and over just for the chance for one.

Never in his life, not since he'd known Kurt had he worried that Kurt couldn't make him happy. And yet …

How could his brain justify the paradox of always and forever following Kurt to the ends of the earth, but still desperately wanting something that Kurt couldn't give him?

It wasn't really helping, the way Kurt had been pulling away from him lately. In the last week and a half, Blaine felt off-kilter, more unstable in their relationship than he'd felt in months. He wanted to feel the intimacy of them again, needed to feel engaged with his husband, to feel like he wasn't being pushed to the back burner. But he also knew that Kurt needed space, and absolutely didn't need Blaine badgering him about a baby when he was already clearly dealing with a difficult situation.
So what was he supposed to do? It felt like a no-win situation.

He took a detour to the park, to their park, the park where they walked Romeo and had picnics and strolled the paths holding hands. He plopped down on a park bench, put his head in his hands – he needed to think.

Blaine breathed slow and deep, trying to be pragmatic for once, trying to distance himself from the churning emotions that tended to have their way with him.

Pragmatic. Right.

…Did he know how to be pragmatic?

Okay, Blaine, you can do this. Pretend you're Kurt. Think like Kurt.

Pragmatic. Pragmatic meant that he was probably getting ahead of himself. He hadn't talked to Kurt about anything yet, was just making assumptions about how Kurt felt. They'd talked about assumptions, Dr. Jacobson and himself. He needed to stop looking down the road, and start looking at what was right in front of him.

And what was right in front of him was Kurt. There wasn't a baby in question, there wasn't a baby anywhere on the radar, not really – Kurt was his reality, Kurt was his everything, Kurt was his constant. And that's what this needed to be about – Kurt was what mattered. Regaining the intimacy that he'd been sorely missing for a week should have been his priority, not pining after a baby to fill some hole in his life.

It hurt, he ached with it, but he knew that to make Kurt the priority he had to push all thoughts of future children to the side. He had to accept the fact that he was just going to have to wait, that maybe Dr. Jacobson was right, maybe it wasn't even that Kurt didn't want kids, it was just that he wasn't ready to talk about it yet.

Blaine could be patient for Kurt. Blaine could be anything for Kurt. Blaine walked out on Kurt last year; Blaine could be anything for Kurt.
Blaine was going to be what Kurt needed if it killed him, dammit, Blaine was his husband; that's what husbands did.

He rose from the park bench, determined and aching and sure, and shit, life was so hard sometimes, but he was going to go buy some damn flowers for his husband and hopefully make things a little easier for the both of them.

* * *

A knock on the door, and that's all it took for Kurt to lose it.

"Gavin, I swear to god, if I hear one more word about your brother's stepsister's goddaughter today, I will end you."

Silence. Then the slow creak of a door cracking open, and the sweetest face he'd ever seen peeking into his office.

"Package for Kurt Anderson-Hummel?"

"Blaine." It was a sigh of relief, like all the day's and week's burdens had slid off his shoulders at the sight of his husband.

Blaine stepped inside, grinning like an idiot, flowers in one hand and a drink-holder with two iced coffees in the other, looking delicious enough to lick in a pair of jeans and a pink button-down rolled up to just below his elbows.

"Rough day?"

"God, you have no idea," Kurt groaned out, getting up to meet Blaine halfway to his desk. Blaine's arms, full of the lovely gifts, came around Kurt's shoulders and squeezed.

"Tell me."
Kurt melted into him, let Blaine bear his weight for a moment as he explained how completely annoying Gavin had been, prattling on about how some kid he'd only met once was perfect as a model for the line when it was months away from even considering children. He complained about the fabric samples that were running late, and his too-late realization that the paint he'd ordered for Marc Jacobs' favorite dress would absolutely not work with the fabric he'd picked out.

Blaine sympathized in all the appropriate places until Kurt felt better, and he pulled back and took one of the coffees from the holder still in Blaine's hand.

"Thanks for letting me vent," Kurt said. "But to what do I owe the pleasure?"

Blaine smiled a little self-deprecating smile. "I've missed you lately," he said quietly, his eyes darting to the floor. "It's been a rough week for both of us, and you seem … distant. I just wanted to reconnect a little, you know? And I thought you might need a pick-me-up –" he held out the flowers, " – and a coffee break."

Kurt sighed. "I love you. That sounds perfect."

"Do you have time for a walk?"

"For you? I've got all the time in the world," he smiled, then smiled bigger when the worried furrows in Blaine's forehead relaxed and then disappeared.

He took a sip of coffee, then strode out of his office into the main studio. Every head whipped toward him and yeah, maybe he had been in kind of a mood all morning. He'd been in kind of a mood all week. He made a mental note to bring bagels for everyone the next day.

"Okay people," he said, clapping his hands together once. "I'm going out to take a twenty-minute coffee break with my husband. When I get back, I expect progress on that clusterfuck with the paint, I expect to see everybody working and," he softened his voice, a sheepish grin crossing his face, "I also expect that I'll be a little nicer to be around. Apologies to those who've had their heads bitten off."

Several of his employees grinned back at him, and he tugged on Blaine's arm and pulled him toward the elevator. They took their coffees outside and walked the path that Rachel so often took with Kurt during her force-feeding initiative last fall.
"How are you?" Blaine asked, sounding very sweet and sincere as he took Kurt's hand, causing Kurt to feel very guilty.

"Stressed. Pissed off. Snarky and prickly and – Blaine, honey, you know I'm not mad at you, right? I've honestly been trying to keep away from you lately so you don't get caught in my crossfire." Blaine stopped abruptly in the middle of the sidewalk, and Kurt's hand jerked out of his. Kurt turned and saw that Blaine's eyes were cloudy. Pained, he rattled off a hurried, "I didn't tell you that to make you upset!"

"No, I know," Blaine said, looking at the ground. Kurt watched him take a deep breath, then look up and smile softly. "It does explain some things, though."

"I –"

"Kurt," Blaine said, interrupting his thought. "I don't want you to isolate. I'd rather you not take your frustrations out on me, but Jesus, what have we been in couple's therapy for six months for? Come to me. Talk to me. I want to be there for you – I want us to be there for each other."

Kurt blinked at him for a moment, realization slowly dawning. In his effort to spare Blaine from his increasingly foul moods, in his determined choice to never repeat what happened last year ever, ever again, he'd removed himself from Blaine's company to the point of completely disregarding what Blaine himself might feel about this whole Finn-having-a-baby idea.

"Oh my god," he breathed, "I am such an ass."

"Kurt, no –"

"No, I'm serious, I am obtuse," he said, shaking his head."I've been ignoring you and your feelings this entire time, haven't I? I haven't been there for you at all. Be honest, Blaine – how thoughtless toward you have I been?"

"I – I mean –" Blaine sighed, ruffling his curls a little. "The distance is preferable to what happened last year for sure, and I appreciate you recognizing that, and sparing me from it. And it's not like you're walking around pretending that I don't exist. But – there have been a couple of times that I've really wanted to talk, and …"
Kurt closed his eyes for a moment, letting himself feel every ounce of guilt. "I know," he said. "I know, honey, I'm sorry –"

"So let's talk now," Blaine said lightly, taking his hand again. "I'm not mad, Kurt. I just – I wanted to nip it in the bud before it got out of control again and we stopped talking altogether, you know?"

"Yes. Yes, thank god one of us is being sensible right now –" Kurt followed him to a park bench, then set his coffee down to take both of Blaine's hands firmly in his grasp. "I am such a loser, and I am so sorry. But I'm ready to be not-a-loser; I'm ready to listen, so – how are you handling all of –" he made a vague hand gesture in the air, "–this?"

Blaine's eyes widened for just a moment, so quickly that Kurt wondered if he wasn't just seeing things, then returned to normal, his face calm. "Maybe a little better than you?"

"Well thanks," Kurt said, his eyebrows shooting to his hairline.

"No, no, that's not what I meant," Blaine said, holding his hands up in submission. "I just meant – of course it's harder for you, you have that whole backlog of crazy history with Finn, and –"

"Blaine, she was your baby, too."

All the sound in Blaine's body seemed to be trapped in his throat, his mouth open to speak, his eyes wide like he couldn't quite breathe properly. Kurt watched as tears brimmed, forming droplets on his eyelashes like morning dew. "I know she was," he whispered. "I – Kurt, can we – not here, please. We – I don't mind talking about her, but I'll cry, and –"

"I have a handkerchief," Kurt offered. "Normally it's not for use, but I'd make an exception for you – we'll just have to get it dry-cleaned immediately –"

To Kurt's surprise, Blaine laughed, a single tear slipping down his cheek, the rest of them disappearing from sight. "Oh. There you are," he said softly, his fingers gently brushing over Kurt's cheek, his voice strangely mirthful.

Kurt smiled at him, though perplexed. "Yes, well, here I am. So – if not Violet, what do you want to talk about?"
"Have you talked Finn lately?" Blaine asked.

"Ahhhh," Kurt stalled, picking his coffee cup back up. The condensation on the cup looked like the saline tears that clung to Blaine's lashes only moments ago, and he wiped a drop away as carefully as he would have had it been on Blaine's face. "No? I should probably call and apologize, shouldn't I? Although he hasn't been subjected to even half of the awful things I've said." He paused. "I should at least check on Emily."

Blaine smiled softly. "I don't think you should do anything. Bad word, remember?" He nudged Kurt with his shoulder.

"Bad word. Right."

"Do you want to call and apologize? Do you want to check on Emily?"

"Well, I tried to apologize that day, and Finn was still understandably mad and he actively did not accept my apology – but I feel like I have more things to apologize for now." He took a sip of coffee, letting the cold bittersweet liquid rest on his tongue for a moment. "And it's not that I don't want to check on her," he continued. "Of course I want her to be okay. I just don't want to deal with all that excitement, all those nerves – and I don't want to end up being the one telling Finn everything's going to be okay, you know?"

"Maybe you should give it a little longer, then," Blaine suggested. "You don't want to come off sounding bitter – I don't think that'll make the situation any better."

"No, you're right," Kurt said. "I'm obviously bitter. I'm sure that would come across. It's come across to everyone who isn't Finn just fine, at least. Every person in the studio could tell you I'm bitter right now."

"Then let yourself be bitter for a while longer," Blaine said gently. "But this time, try to remember that you don't have to feel that way all by yourself, okay?"

Kurt leaned into the kiss that Blaine was offering, short and sweet and simple, but Kurt felt giddy just being close to him again. Definitely a stupid idea, trying to keep himself away from Blaine.
"Okay," Kurt said, glancing at his watch. "I think my twenty minutes are up. But – Blaine, thank you. This was exactly what I needed today."

"My pleasure," Blaine said, sticking his cheek out for Kurt to kiss. "Let me know if Gavin gives you the run-around again – I'll come beat his ass."

"Like hell you will. He may be obnoxious as shit, but Blaine, I need his sewing skills. He's too vital to dismember."

Blaine shrugged. "Well, okay, but if you change your mind …" He held up his fists in a boxing stance. "I do a mean bob and weave."

* * *

Sunday, May 5th, 2024

A lazy weekend home with Blaine, and the bitter pill Kurt had swallowed was finally dissolving into something that felt like acceptance.

"He really didn't do it on purpose, did he?" Kurt asked, perched on the couch folding a basket of towels.

Blaine was sprawled in the sun, reading, and looked up from his book. "Who, Finn?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"No. I don't think he did. But that doesn't mean that you aren't allowed to be mad."

Kurt sighed, smoothing the wrinkles out of the top of a towel. "I know that. But I'm tired of being mad, and I'm worried about Emily – and Finn, too, actually. It's not – I'm not over it completely. That's going to take a while. But I also don't want to burn bridges with my brother over this, not when we've come so far from where we started."

"Do you think you're ready to call him, then?" Blaine put down his book.
A pause, and Kurt thought of how that conversation could go, wondered if he was ready to apologize, to potentially be apologized to. Was he ready to offer forgiveness for an offence that Finn never meant to commit in the first place? The burn was deep, yes, but he could also picture the familiar, bewildered look he was sure had come over Finn's face when he'd found out about the pregnancy; he knew how scared Finn was.

"I think so."

"Would you like me to sit with you while you talk to him?"

Kurt shook his head. "No, but I'll come get you if I need you, okay?"

"Okay. I'll be in the bedroom," Blaine said, kissing Kurt's temple. "I love you. And no matter what happens, I'm proud of you."

Kurt nodded, then stared at his phone for five minutes before ever initiating the call.

"Hey, man," Finn answered on the first ring once he finally did, sounding happy as ever. "What's up?"

"Just calling to check on things. You. Emily. The baby. And also to apologize for what I said the last time we talked –"

"Dude, no worries about that. I honestly am so glad you called – god, it's nice to talk to somebody who isn't Mom or Burt or the other teachers. I never thought I'd still hate teachers after I actually became one, but …"

"That's because you're a decent teacher, Finn. Not all of them are. Is everybody dishing out advice or something?"

"By the bucketful," Finn said. "Mostly unsolicited."

"I know this is going to sound meaner than I mean it, but it always impresses me how much your vocabulary has grown over the years," Kurt said, idly picking at a fingernail.
"Nah, not mean. Just true. I didn't work hard enough in high school. I wish I could figure out what could've made me study harder, because then maybe I could get my kids to do it now …"

"End of semester blues?"

"I'm just trying to get them out of here, and get the seniors graduated. I've got finals this week," Finn said, "and the reviews have been killer. As in, it is killing me how much they do not know."

"Remember yourself during finals, Finn. Remember Puckerman. You guys managed to make it out. They will, too."

"Right. Yeah, thanks. I – I'm really glad you called."

Me too, Kurt thought. "So how's Emily?"

"She – are you sure you want to talk about this?" Finn's voice softened. "I know it's hard for you guys."

How Kurt could have ever thought Finn was hurting them on purpose – Finn had hurt him plenty in the past, but rarely on purpose. "It's okay, Finn. It's not like you're becoming a father out of spite."

"Hah," Finn coughed out. "Father. Yeah, still weird." Kurt smiled. "So, Em. She's – okay. She's puking a lot, lost some weight; I think the doctor's gonna give her some medicine or something to help with that. I –"

Kurt thought he heard Finn's voice break. "Finn?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Just – allergies. Springtime, you know?"

"Allergies. Right."

"It's just – I feel like the worst boyfriend ever. I feel like I should be more than her boyfriend, it sounds so childish, I was Quinn's boyfriend, I was Rachel's boyfriend; I want to be Emily's …"
something. Something else. But how do I deserve to be something else when I can't even be there to take care of her?"

Kurt blinked, in some weird form of shock. He'd never heard Finn talk like this before.

"It's just – it's hard, you know? Being far away from somebody you love so much, who really needs you."

"Finn, is she giving you a hard time about being in Wapakoneta?"

"No, god, no," Finn said quickly. "Not at all – in fact, most of the time she's blowing it all off, saying she's fine, that I don't need to come. She's so stubborn – she reminds me of you a little in that way, and she's strong like you, too. But – Kurt, I love her. I don't need for her to be strong; I want to be strong for her, and knowing that she's so sick by herself … I just want to be there to make her Jell-O and feed her crackers and stuff."

Kurt smiled fondly. "Have you ever actually made Jell-O?"

"Well – no – but it can't be that hard, can it? I mean, aren't the directions on the box? I wanted to take her some this weekend, those little jiggly shapes in that blue flavor that's so good. I even went to that craft store that Mom likes so much – Matthews or Marcos or whatever –"

"Michael's," Kurt supplied drily.

"Yeah, that one, and there was this cookie cutter shaped like a baby sleeper thing –"

"A onesie?"

"Yes. That. Oh my god, Kurt, you have to teach me all the names to this stuff before the baby comes. I am going to suck at this."

"I'll send you a subscription to Parenting magazine. Think of it as an early baby shower present," Kurt offered.
"Dude, you're the best brother ever." Kurt could hear Finn's grin all the way from Ohio. He could also hear it fade a second later. "So anyway, none of that panned out because she had to work all weekend and I had these stupid final reviews to look over and –" His sigh sounded burdened. "I miss her. She's growing my baby and it's making her so sick and I can't even see her –"

"You're pining, Finn, oh my god, I actually cannot believe this," Kurt said, a little delighted."You're in love with her."

"I am. More than I've ever been in love with anybody before, I didn't know what love was … Like, Kurt, I want to marry her. And I know I said I wanted to marry Rachel, and I know it took me forever to get over her, but – dude, I want to marry her."

Kurt laughed, the kind that showed his teeth and made his face stretch all funny and made Blaine lie and say that he was the most beautiful thing Blaine had ever seen. But he felt it, that kind of laughter, and he was just so happy for Finn –

"Do you know how frustrating it is to not be able to marry somebody because you knocked them up?"

Well, maybe not entirely happy.

"I know how frustrating it is to not be able to marry somebody because your country and your government won't allow it," Kurt said softly.

That shut Finn up for a moment. "I just stuck my foot in my mouth, didn't I?"

"Maybe a little bit."


"I know," Kurt said quietly. "But we would've gotten married in 2014 if we could have."
"But – but you were still in college! You were sophomores! How did I not know that?" Finn sputtered.

"Well it wasn’t like we told anybody – it wouldn't have mattered, even if we did. We wanted to wait until it counted in all fifty states. But Finn? How could you not have known? Was there ever a time when Blaine and I weren't getting married?"

"I – no," Finn said, and Kurt could see his little sheepish smile. "No, I guess not. Except for your junior year –"

"We don't talk about junior year, remember?" Kurt tersely reminded him.

"Right. Right, sorry. My mouth is shutting. I will never speak of it again."

Kurt chuckled, then softened his voice. "So, Emily, huh?"

"Yeah, man. Crazy, right?"

"I want to get to know her."

"I want you to know her. She's worth knowing."

They sat in silence for a moment after that, resting quiet with the heaviness of it all. They'd had deep conversations before, but never one quite like this, as Kurt never felt that Finn was the best confidant about his gay best friend/boyfriend/husband, and Finn hadn't ever felt like this before now.

It was Finn who spoke up first. "Hey, actually – your birthday's coming up soon!" Kurt was a little bit impressed that he remembered, and maybe this Emily girl was even better for Finn than he thought, in spite of the baby. Maybe she was making him more grown up, more responsible. "Maybe we can all come see you guys," Finn continued. "She keeps talking about how she's always wanted to go to New York, and maybe by the end of the month that medicine stuff will have kicked in and she won't be puking her guts up all the time. Do you guys have any big out of town plans or anything?"
"No," Kurt smiled. "I can't think of a more perfect way to spend my 31st birthday than getting to know my – what would she be, my future step-sister-in-law?"

"Something like that," Finn laughed. "I'll talk to her and see what she thinks."

"Good. Send her our love, Finn. And tell her I hope she feels better soon. I remember what it was like to feel sick all the time – I can't imagine trying to grow a person in the midst of it."

"Yeah, well, that's because she's more awesome than you."

"Watch yourself, Finn Hudson," Kurt said, trying not to cackle out of sheer amusement, because Finn must have been in love to wake that sleeping dragon. "You're heading into dangerous territory there."
Chapter 3

Sunday, May 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2024

"Finn's going to marry her," Kurt said, sleepy in bed that night, drawing patterns on the palm of Blaine's hand. Sometimes he wished that his fingers could put out glow-in-the-dark ink, just so the hearts he always traced onto Blaine's skin would show up and glimmer in the darkness.

"Who? Emily?"

"But not yet," Kurt continued. "She's sick. She's losing weight. I don't think people are supposed to lose weight when they're pregnant, are they?"

"Wait," Blaine said, tugging his hand back and propping up against the headboard. "He's not marrying her because she's sick? What kind of sick? Why's she losing weight? I'm confused."

Kurt snuggled down, too tired to sit up, and pressed his cheek against Blaine's hip. "Morning sickness all the time. I don't know why they call it morning sickness. She's sick all day, apparently."

"So – why's he not marrying her?"

"He's not marrying her \textit{yet}. She doesn't want to be pregnant at her wedding," Kurt said.

"Oh," Blaine nodded. "Understandable."

"I've never seen him like this. Blaine, he was going to make her onesie-shaped Jell-O Jigglers to make her feel better. He's \textit{pining}."

"Finn Hudson, \textit{pining} – never thought I'd see the day …" Kurt could hear the smile in Blaine's voice fade. "How much does Rachel know?"

"She knows about the baby. I'm not sure she knows that a love-sick puppy has come and replaced my brother, though."
"Think she'll be okay?"

Kurt snuggled closer. He really, really loved Blaine's hips. "She got over him a long time ago. She'll be more upset that she hasn't beat him to it, actually."

"Well, that sounds like something brunch and mimosas can probably fix, right?"

His hair threaded between Blaine's fingers, and he was getting closer to sleep by the minute. "Throw in a spa day and she'll be good as new."

Blaine lay back down, running a finger down Kurt's chest. "And how are you? Are you good as new?"

"Not quite," he said, suppressing a yawn. "But I'm getting closer."

* * *

**Saturday, May 11th, 2024**

"We're never moving ever again," Kurt said, spread-eagled on his back on the floor.

Blaine, sprawled on the couch, blinked a few times before answering. They'd just helped Jeff move into Nick's apartment, and in spite of more manpower than last time and a much healthier Kurt, his back ached and Kurt's knees ached and yes, Blaine definitely understood the sentiment. But never moving again meant there was no room for more than one child, and –

*Stop it.*

He'd be lucky to get *one* child out of the deal, he was lucky *now*, even without kids, with just Kurt.

"We *can't* move, Kurt," he said instead of saying all the things he wanted to say. "We don't even have a quarter of this condo paid off yet --" He could be happy with no kids running around. He
could be happy with their quiet life in their quiet condo in the middle of the loud, loud city. He could be happy with traveling abroad and breakfast in bed and an easier, louder sex life than their friends with children and – he could be happy, dammit.

"Even when it's paid off," Kurt said, unaware of the turmoil in Blaine's head, "we're never moving. I don't want to move anything ever again. Think of the piano, Blaine – we have so much more stuff than Jeff does, I don't even want to imagine it –"

"We could hire movers."

"And let perfect strangers touch my clothes? Or my kitchen accessories? Or the piano?"

"We're getting too old to move the piano," Blaine said, his back creaking.

"Speak for yourself. We are not old. Nick and Jeff didn't even have a dolly, who moves into an apartment in this city without a dolly? You know what? It doesn't even matter. Because we are not moving, so that won't ever be an issue. I plan to die here."

Blaine craned his neck – ouch – and raised his eyebrows upside down at Kurt. "I hope you don't plan to do it soon."

Kurt grabbed the nearest object – a plush hedgehog chew toy of Romeo's they'd named Ernie – and chucked it at Blaine's head. Ernie bounced off and hit the floor with a loud squeak!

"Of course not, dummy, we've talked about this. We're going to Notebook it out of here, die peacefully together in our bed the night after your 100th birthday party. You know the plan – don't screw it up."

"We'll have celebrated our 75th wedding anniversary the year before." A quiet smile crossed Blaine's face. He could be happy with no babies.

"You don't think I already had that in mind when I made the plan? I've already started putting the party plans in writing – for both the anniversary and the birthday – just in case I'm too senile to make my wishes known."
Blaine flopped to the floor in a pile of aching limbs – how could their floors be getting harder? – and crawled over to where Kurt lay. "You'll never be senile."

Kurt snorted. "You're senile already."

"Hey!" Blaine sat up too fast, a shot of owowowow zipping down his back into his leg. He grabbed his back, whining a little.

"Old man," Kurt teased, but rubbed at his back anyway. "I'm serious, though. This is why we're never moving again. Remind me of this conversation in five years after I've gone crazy and have somehow gotten tired of our beautiful home. Tell me to redecorate instead. Tell me I have to move the piano by myself."

"Okay," Blaine said, slumping on the floor next to Kurt. "As long as I'm not too senile to remember."

"Maybe we should start doing crossword puzzles in the morning to give you some mental stimulation," Kurt teased.

"Being married to you isn't mental stimulation enough?"

"Oh, ho-ho, Blaine, good one," Kurt grinned. "Hey." He caught Blaine's arm, and Blaine turned back toward him. "Senile or not, I love you, every day, up until we die together in that bed. You're the best thing in my life, honey."

Blaine leaned into kiss him on the cheek. "And you're the best thing in mine." Yeah, he could definitely be happy with just Kurt.

* * *

Monday, May 13th, 2024

"Yessss!" Blaine whooped loudly to the empty condo, spinning around on his heel. "Yes, yes, yes, thank you –"
With hands shaking from adrenaline, he shot a quick text to Kurt.

To: Kurt <3

Editor read my manuscript, loved it, meeting
w/ publishing house to talk offers later this
afternoon. Kurt! OMG!

Seconds later, his phone was buzzing with Kurt's reply.

From: Kurt <3

Didn't I tell you I only keep you around for the
book advances? Glad to see you've earned your
keep this year!

From: Kurt <3

j/k, I <3 you. So proud.

Blaine beamed.

To: Kurt <3

Thanks. Couldn't have ever finished it without you.

From: Kurt <3

Drinks tonight with everybody to celebrate? I can
plan to come in late tomorrow.

To: Kurt <3

Karaoke? Please please pleeesease Kurt? I'll love
you forever and ever and ever and ever. Please
please pleeeeeease?

Blaine squirmed like a six-year-old who had to go pee ten minutes ago while he waited for Kurt's reply.

From: Kurt <3

…Okay. But only because book advances.

Blaine decidedly did not do a crazy happy dance in the middle of their living room, and he definitely didn't trip over the coffee table and whack his arm on the edge of the end table in the process.

To: Kurt <3

Thank you! Thank you thank you!

"Come on, Romeo," he said, dangling the leash in front of the dog after he'd recovered enough to type out a hurried message to Kurt before he could do any more damage to himself. "I think Daddy needs to run off some steam before he kills himself and can't make his meeting."

* * *

"So, it's been a long time since we've been out," Blaine said casually as he lifted the lid of his box of bowties.

"I know, honey, but everything's just been so busy with work and –"

Blaine glanced into the bathroom where Kurt was fixing his hair and saw clouded eyes in the mirror. "That's not what I was implying." He quickly picked a gray, blue and orange striped bowtie from the box and walked into the bathroom. "I just – I wanted to touch base. Make sure we're on the same page."

Kurt frowned at his reflection, turned around. "On the same page about what?"
"This. Going out tonight. I – I wanted to make sure you were okay. With me having fun, maybe drinking some …"

"Blaine, honey, you know I'm fine with you drinking. We drink wine here all the time. We had mimosas with Jeff and Nick last week. Why wouldn't I be okay with it?"

Blaine looked down at his feet, bare toes curling nervously on the wood beneath them. "Because – it's karaoke, Kurt. What I did when I'd go out with Alex last year …"

"Oh." Kurt's voice was soft, gentle. He took Blaine's hand, led him to their bed. Blaine had a hard time meeting his eyes as they sat down. "Have I forgiven you for all of that, sweetheart?" he asked.

"I – yes," Blaine answered simply, taking a deep breath. "I think you have."

"You think right," Kurt said. "As long as you aren't planning on getting so wasted that you require a bucket again, I want this to be a time for you to celebrate. You're being published again." Blaine's heart gave a little leap at the pride evident in Kurt's face. "I trust everyone going with us, and I trust you. The only thing I ask is that if I, or someone else, says they think you've had enough, that you stop drinking. Okay?"

Blaine smiled, relieved. "Okay."

"Now," Kurt said, taking the bowtie from Blaine's hand and slipping it under his shirt collar, "let's get you all gussied up." His deft fingers flipped the ties over and around, knuckles brushing the skin at Blaine's throat. "You're the man of the hour and I want you looking the part."

Blaine closed his eyes, shivering as his skin tingled under Kurt's touch.

* * *

"I love karaoke nights!" Rachel exclaimed, holding her third cocktail high in the air.
"You love any opportunity the universe gives you to show off," Kurt said, but his voice was full of love. "And besides, this night isn't about you. It's about my smart, sexy, adorable, published author with a book advance of a husband!" He paused. "Where is he, anyway?"

"With us," Nick said, a lilt to his voice as he and Jeff dragged a happy, slightly stumble-y Blaine back to where Kurt, Rachel and Liam, her current squeeze (and British, to boot!), were standing. "I found somebody at the bar getting a little too happy. More singing, less drinking, Blaine."

Nick handed him over to Kurt, and Kurt clucked as Blaine kissed him sloppy on the neck, licking over a tendon. "No exchanging of body fluids in public, darling, remember?" he said cheerfully, reeling Blaine around and planting a hard, chaste kiss on his lips.

Rachel cackled beside them, tipping over into Liam's chest.

"Oh my god, Rach, come sing with me," Blaine implored her. "You don't mind, right Liam? Please don't mind. I won't fall in love with her. I love Kurt."

"He does," Rachel said, slapping Liam's arm lightly for emphasis. "They are so married, Liam, but like, good married, I found this box in their closet once —"

"O-kay, Rachel, back to the topic at hand, please," Kurt said as Blaine guffawed into his shoulder.

"Right. Duets. Liam, we have a history of duets. And he hasn't fallen in love with me yet."

"Not sure if I'm really worried about that," Liam said, his eyebrows raised in amusement. "I'm more worried about you falling off the stage, darling."

"Oh, they'll be fine," Kurt reassured him. "I've seen them a lot worse off than this, and their performances are always … amusing, at worst. No stage accidents thus far," he said.

"We are not amusing, Kurt, we are artists. Karaoke is serious." Rachel was fierce in her insistence, slingling half her drink onto Kurt's shoes after she'd gulped down a few swallows, then pushed it into his hand. "Here, hold this. Come on, Blaine."
Kurt looked on as Rachel, tiny and determined, pulled Blaine through the crowd.

"She's really something, isn't she?" Liam said, a lilt of awe in his voice, and Kurt dared to hope that maybe, just maybe, she'd found a guy with just the right personality, who wouldn't be scared to stick around in spite of all her … her.

"She's something alright," Kurt said with a smile. "A force to be reckoned with."

"But don't get on her bad side," Nick warned, pulling Jeff a little closer to his side. "I said the wrong thing at a hangover brunch one time – I thought she was going to take my head off."

"Mmm, she learned from the best," Kurt grinned.

The four of them, Kurt, Liam, Nick and Jeff, waved when Rachel and Blaine finally took the stage, and Rachel waved back as she grabbed a microphone. "Hello, boys," she said, low and seductive, and a good three-quarters of the room turned to face her. "My name's Rachel Berry, and on most nights I grace the Great White Way with my presence as Fanny Brice in Funny Girl. But tonight, you get a special treat, because I'm here celebrating with my friend Blaine, who just got a book deal –" she gestured to him, and he gave a little bow, "– and we'd like to sing you a song."

Liam looked Kurt as the music started and chuckled. "Think she's trying to impress me with music from my side of the pond?"

"No idea," Kurt said with a smile. "But I wouldn't put it past her. Karaoke is serious, after all."

"Well he was just seventeen, do you know what I mean, and the way he looked was way beyond compare …" Blaine sang, bebopping around the stage like he hadn't had a drink all night. "So how could I dance with another – ooh! – when I saw him standing there?"

Rachel came in on harmony as Blaine shot a lusty grin into the crowd and pointed straight at Kurt, who turned bright red.

"Looks like somebody's getting some tonight," Nick chuckled as Kurt downed the remainder of Rachel's drink in one big swallow. He grinned through the song, and then promptly wanted to die when they finished singing, because then Rachel was pointing at him.
"That man over there that Blaine was singing to the whole time? That," she said, "is the one and only Kurt. And he happens to be this one's better half." She jabbed her thumb at Blaine and winked. "Lucky boys, aren't they? And it just so happens that my man – who is British and therefore better than all of you and does not play for your team, so hands off, please – is down there waiting for me, so I've got to go."

Laughter rang out in the bar, and Kurt heard a few catcalls.

"So that leaves Blaine up here all by himself, and while he can totally hold his own, I think he'd much rather have some company. Kurt? Care to join him? What do you boys say?"

The whole bar erupted in whoops and hollers, and Kurt felt Jeff's and Nick's hands nudging him forward toward the stage. He could hear his heartbeat in his ears – he had not had enough to drink for this. He stopped by the bar, let the bartender pour him a shot and threw it back. There. That was better.

"Helloooo, all you patrons of this fine establishment," he sang once he finally got a microphone in hand, his cheeks burning bright from both the alcohol and the embarrassment. "It's been a while since these pipes have seen a stage, so go easy on me, okay?"

He was answered by catcalls and whistles, and he gave a little curtsy, then turned to Blaine. "What are we singing, darling?"

"Well, since you haven't done this in a while, let's do something familiar," Blaine said. He leaned down to the karaoke guy and whispered the song to him, then stood back up. "We sang this song at our friend Sugar's Valentine's Day party back in the stone ages when we were in high school."

Kurt tipped his head back and laughed – of course Blaine would want to sing that song. He grinned at the memory of Blaine in that ridiculous heart-shaped eye patch, the jeans that made his ass look seriously delicious, the sex they'd had afterward in Blaine's empty house.

…Maybe that song was a good idea after all.

"Feel free to sing with us! I know you know it," Blaine said, looking at the crowd, then at Kurt with excited puppy eyes, and Kurt grabbed Blaine's hand as he began to sing.
"If you see a faded sign at the side of the road ..."

* * *

"So, did you enjoy your celebratory karaoke?" Kurt asked, hooking a finger into Blaine's belt loop, pulling him back and squeezing his ass, getting handsy on their walk home from the bar. He was normally more careful about his displays of affection, but it was late, the streets weren't crowded, and their neighborhood in the East Village was decently safe. Also, he was maybe a little drunk.

Blaine arched his back a little so his ass was pressed further into Kurt's hands, and Kurt instinctively pressed forward, his cock doing an excited little bounce inside his jeans.

Okay, he was maybe a lot drunk.

"Mmm, I did," Blaine said enthusiastically. "But you know what I'm going to enjoy more?"

"What's that?" Kurt purred in his ear.

"The celebratory blow job you're going to give me when we get inside."

Kurt wanted it so badly that he couldn't even bring himself to be scandalized. "I raise you to celebratory sixty-nining."

Blaine stopped so abruptly on the sidewalk that Kurt smacked right into the back of him. Blaine craned his neck and smiled darkly at his husband. "Call."

* * *

The moment they stepped into the condo, Blaine's hands were seeking out Kurt's belt buckle and Kurt was fumbling with the hem of Blaine's t-shirt.

"Oh, god, I want you," Kurt murmured as he looked into Blaine's eyes, more green than honey that
day, darkened to the color of olives.


"But the coffee table …"

Blaine looked up as if he only just remembered they had a coffee table, then strode over, pulling his t-shirt off over his head in one smooth motion. He effortlessly pushed the piece of furniture off the rug and onto the floor, muscles rippling under tan skin, and Kurt tingled with want. He didn't even care if the feet of the table scratched their hardwoods.

"Now lie down on the rug," Blaine said, turning around with hands crossed over his chest. He reminded Kurt a little of a caveman. A very sexy caveman, but a caveman all the same. And yet …

Kurt walked forward as if entranced. He'd lie down on a bed of nails if Blaine asked him to, caveman or no.

The rug was scratchy under his skin, and he thought to himself, surprised, that in the five years that they'd owned it, they'd never had sex on it before. Well. First time for everything.

He took his time opening Blaine's pants, and was delighted to find nothing underneath them but Blaine's naked cock, hard and ready for him. He buried his nose at the base, where Blaine kept himself neatly groomed, and inhaled, dizzy and heady with his husband's musky scent.

And then he nearly choked on his tongue, because down below, Blaine was already swallowing his dick.

"Oh god," he whimpered, licking up Blaine's shaft, sinking his lips over the head, because he wanted this to be good for Blaine, too.

But after a few minutes of eye-watering, Kurt pulled off, frustrated. "Okay. New plan," he said. "This isn't working." Sixty-nining sober and sixty-nining drunk were different animals entirely. Neither of them could find the right balance of breathing and sucking, neither of them were managing to keep their hips still. The rug, at first a delightful and new texture that Kurt thought might be a thing, was now just rubbing his right shoulder raw. He sat up.
Blaine sighed, slipping Kurt's cock out of his mouth, and Kurt stared down as Blaine rested his head on Kurt's hip, a tiny line of saliva strung between Blaine's lips and Kurt's cock.

"I think we're still too drunk to be that coordinated," Blaine said.

"Also never having sex on the rug again," Kurt said, rubbing his reddened shoulder.

"Oh, baby, your skin," Blaine fussed, sitting up. He pressed kisses over every square inch of it. "New plan?"

"New plan," Kurt agreed. They stumbled to their feet, and Blaine groaned.

"Oh god, the floor is harder when you're thirty than when you're twenty …"

"That it is." Kurt rubbed his hip, frowning.

Blaine shook his head as if to clear it, then put his hands on his hips, a sort of comical pose with his jeans open, his hardened cock poking out of them. "Okay. Try again? Take turns this time?"

"As long as I get to fuck your mouth sometime tonight."

Apparently the magic words, Blaine groaned loudly and grabbed Kurt's hand, dragging him back to their bedroom.

* * *

"Oh, Kurt – that's – ohhhh," Blaine was moaning, pressed up against the wall, his legs trembling.

Kurt looked up at him through fanned lashes and rolled Blaine's balls in one hand. Another moan, and Kurt had to brace against Blaine's hips with his forearm, keeping him plastered to the wall as his mouth sank over Blaine's cock time and again.
He hummed and sank deeper, even as his eyes began to water.

"Kurt – oh, fuck, baby, can I move? Just a little? Please?" Blaine was looking into his eyes, his pelvis shaking and twitching, desperate for more.

Kurt took a deep breath through his nose and gave his head a tiny nod, not wanting to pull off. He wasn't quite as good at this as Blaine was – Blaine, who could swallow Kurt's cock all the way down his throat and still talk normally in the morning. It made him harder just thinking about it. But though he couldn't take as much, the effort and the desire were always there, and he tried to relax as much as he could as Blaine's hips inched forward.

Kurt could tell it was taking every ounce of willpower Blaine had not to grab hold of the back of Kurt's head and fuck his mouth for all he was worth. Instead, he gave tiny thrusts, gripping Kurt's shoulders in his hands like a vice, moaning out curses and long vowels.

Kurt closed his eyes and breathed, trying to relish in the slide of velvet skin across his tongue, trying not to dwell on the fact that the tip of Blaine's dick was hitting the back of his throat.

"You okay?" Blaine gasped, and Kurt opened his eyes. His husband was wrecked and sweaty, pupils blown, hair frizzy from rubbing his head against the wall.

Kurt nodded.

"Okay, I'm close, I –" He broke off in a long moan as Kurt swallowed, trying to stave off the gag reflex that followed. "Fuck."

Kurt swallowed again, his cheeks now hollowed, every part of his mouth suctioned around the breadth of Blaine's cock.

"Oh god," Blaine cried, and Kurt wished he could better see what his face looked like. "Kurt, I – Jesus, don't stop –"

Kurt didn't, swallowing once more, and his mouth couldn't be tighter around Blaine if he tried. He hummed again, barely any sound coming out with Blaine pressing down on him, and –
"Ohhhh," Blaine gasped, his hips stuttering forward as he spilled down Kurt's throat, "oh god oh fuck, Kurt –"

Kurt pulled off, swallowing what he could, the rest dripping out of his mouth and down his cheek as he sucked in air like a drowning man. He coughed once, twice, and was surprised at how okay he actually was; he could breathe, and though his heart was pounding in his chest, he wasn't even close to gagging.

"Oh my fuck you're getting good that that," Blaine said, now slumped in a little pile of limbs on the floor.

"'Bout time, don't you think?" Kurt asked, his voice hoarse.

"No," Blaine said. "No, you're perfect and you always have been but – shit."

Kurt grinned, feeling triumphant. "My turn soon?" he asked, his attention turning to his own painfully hard cock.


Kurt planted kisses all over him until he got his footing back, then helped him up. "On the bed, I'm assuming?"

Blaine nodded, flopping back on their soft bedcovers, looked sated and happy, and Kurt settled himself atop Blaine's chest. "God, I love this," Blaine said. "I can already almost taste you." He raised his head a little and ran his tongue around the circumference of Kurt's cock. "Mmmmm. Want you in my mouth."

"Okay," Kurt whispered, grabbing onto their headboard and shifting his hips forward a little. He nudged Blaine's lips apart with the head of his dick and Blaine opened for him. That first slide in was almost always his favorite part – Blaine could take it so well, so quickly, and he closed his eyes and let his hips take over. He felt it in every nerve ending as he glided over Blaine's tongue as if it were a slide, not stopping until his pubic bone was flush with Blaine's nose and the tip of his cock was somewhere down Blaine's throat.
Blaine hummed softly and Kurt swore he could feel the vibrations in his toes.

"Okay?" Kurt choked out, gripping the headboard a little tighter. There was mirth in Blaine's eyes as he gave a slight nod of his head, and Kurt smiled – Blaine really, really did love this. "Okay, then. You ready?"

Blaine swallowed in reply, and Kurt's eyes rolled back and his cock twitched in Blaine's mouth in response. "Shit."

Blaine hummed again, this time an encouraging sound, and Kurt drew his hips back, shuddering at the wet, warm drag, and thrust back in. He couldn't help the whine that escaped his lips, loud and wanton and high-pitched – it just felt so good. He thrust in again, the ridges on the roof of Blaine's mouth giving him spine-tingling friction, drew back once more before he was clutching at the headboard, gasping as the control left him and animal instinct took over.

Blaine had grabbed his hips, his fingertips pressing in so hard Kurt knew there would be light bruises in the morning, and was sucking at Kurt's cock for all he was worth.

When Kurt managed to open his eyes and look down, it looked like nothing less than porn, his cock sinking into Blaine's mouth, Blaine's throat opening up for him, taking him in. The sight of it spurred him on even more, and he clutched their headboard and rode Blaine's mouth, grunting hard with every thrust.

He got lost for a moment, soaking in the devastating pleasure of Blaine's wet mouth on him, and the rest of the world disappeared. He felt like he was drowning in the best way possible, falling down, down as he sank his cock into Blaine's mouth harder and harder. He was making some sort of noise – he had to be, he knew, and he could feel Blaine humming, but couldn't quite hear him over the buzzing in his own head. All he could hear was his own nerves singing out their craving for relief.

Then he cried out, and he did hear that, because Blaine's finger was circling his hole, applying dry pressure and oh god he was going to combust from the inside out because it wasn't possible for a body to hold this much desire and –

He gasped, feeling something warm and wet splash on his back. It slippery-slid down in a wet trail, then Blaine grunted underneath him and he felt another splash, and he realized that neither one of Blaine's hands were holding his hips anymore and – oh, fuck, that was Blaine coming on him, with one finger pressed against Kurt's asshole and the other hand around his own cock.
And then he lost it, because Blaine, panting hard beneath his hips, ran his finger in the come on Kurt's back and –

"Ohgodohgodohgodohgod –"

He fell off the ledge, pushed over with the mere slip of a forefinger inside of him, coated in Blaine's own come. Kurt orgasmed harder than he'd done in a long time into Blaine's mouth, down Blaine's throat, on Blaine's face.

"Oh my god," he said, pulling away, falling onto the bed, pupils blown, hips still twitching. "Oh my god. Blaine. Fuck."

And Blaine was on top of him, around him, face sticky, clinging to him tightly. "That was. So hot," he panted, taking his fingers and swiping them over the come on his face, sucking it off.

"You're going to kill me," Kurt moaned, pulling him in for a dirty kiss. He could taste himself on Blaine's lips, in his mouth, and if he'd had the stamina of a sixteen-year-old, it would definitely be time for round two.

Sadly he didn't, so instead he wrapped his arms around his husband and they panted in rhythm together, both their heads resting on one pillow.

"I love you," Blaine whispered, tangling his legs around Kurt's. "I love you I love you –"

Kurt cut him off with a sweet kiss. "I love you too, honey, but we are filthy."

"You are filthy."

"Your fault," Kurt grinned. "Come wash me off?"
Blaine giggled. "Rearrange that sentence."

Kurt's forehead furrowed. "What?" Then … "Oh, Blaine. You are five."

"I'd say more like sixteen, actually. I never aged. I stopped aging when I met you. Do I still look sixteen, baby?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. He loved this man, loved having him back whole and complete and even better than ever … "You could if you tried, I think. Now, more pressing issue here – get me a washcloth. It's drying."

* * *

**Tuesday, May 14th, 2024**

When the alarm rang the next morning, Blaine opened his eyes to see Kurt already awake, gazing down at him.

His mouth felt like cotton and there had to have been a jackhammer inside his head and exactly how much had Kurt let him drink last night at karaoke? "Hi," he tried to say. It came out "Hhgggh," instead.

"Hi. So I didn't ask you yesterday evening, because we were preoccupied with getting ready and I didn't ask you last night because that was obviously not on my mind, but – Blaine this contract you signed for the book deal? Did this one include a tour?"

Blaine blinked at Kurt – there were words coming out of Kurt's mouth and he thought he was supposed to be understanding and maybe answering them, but the alarm was still ringing and it was early and the words were coming out really fast and –

"Blaine? Wake up."

He blinked his eyes several times.
"Whmmmt?"

"Are you going off on a book tour anytime soon? Or at all?"

Blaine shook his head.

"Because I – wait, was that a no?"

Blaine nodded and attempted to swallow. His cotton-dry tongue felt huge in his mouth, and he was so tired …

Kurt, Blaine's hero, trotted to the bathroom and came back with a cup of water. Blaine drank as thirstily as if he'd been stranded in the desert for forty days like Jesus.

"No," he finally said once his tongue could move comfortably again. He rubbed his eyes. "No book tour."

"Why did you say no?"

He shrugged. "Didn't want it in the contract. Fought with Alex a little, but I won."

"But –" Kurt sputtered beside him.

Unfortunately the water hadn't helped Blaine's headache any, and every noise made the jackhammer drill a little deeper into his skull. "Don't want to go," he said, trying to keep things short and simple. "Don't want to leave you. Want another baby, don't want to miss out –" Shit. What did he just say?

Kurt looked all funny, like he was trying not to cry and trying not to smile all at once. "Yeah," he said softly after a while, long enough to make Blaine scared that he'd said even more than he thought he did. "Well, good. I'm glad you'll be home. Touring's always the worst part of my year."

Blaine didn't quite know what to say to that, so instead he wormed his way through the covers to
where Kurt was, noodled his sleep-heavy arms around Kurt's waist. "Won't be gone this year. You won't have a worst part of year."

"Good," said Kurt.

Blaine's eyes drifted shut.

"Go back to sleep," said Kurt.

Blaine did, with Kurt's fingers playing with his curls, his nails gently brushing over Blaine's scalp.

* * *

"Did I say anything weird this morning?" Blaine asked over dinner after Kurt had gotten home from work. "I barely remember waking up the first time, except for a pounding headache."

"I told you to take something before you went to sleep," Kurt said, not looking at him. "Will you pass the pepper?"

Blaine breathed steadily as he handed over the pepper mill. Was Kurt mad at him? Oh god, he had said what he thought he said, and Kurt didn't even want to talk about it –

"What do you mean by weird?" Kurt asked after he'd taken a bite of his salad. "You say weird things all the time."

"I – I don't know, I was having strange dreams," Blaine lied. "I just wondered if they bled over into reality."

Kurt finally looked up and smiled at him. "Well, you didn't say anything about flying monkeys or hijacked motorcycles or being stranded on an island with Captain Jack Sparrow, if that's what you're worried about."

"Hey, that dream about Captain Jack Sparrow was not a weird dream. It was a good dream. And if
I recall, you were there too …"

Kurt grinned and nudged his foot under the table. He let out a silent sigh of relief. Maybe he hadn't said anything after all. Or maybe it was so garbled that Kurt couldn't understand.

Mostly, Blaine hoped he hadn't said anything at all. He could be happy with just Kurt. He was happy with just Kurt. And he didn't want Kurt to have any reason to think otherwise.

* * *

Monday, May 20th, 2024

"I think Blaine wants another baby." It was Kurt's bi-monthly appointment with Dr. Jacobson, and god, did he ever have some good ammunition for it today.

She, in her infuriatingly calm way, just raised her eyebrows and said, "Oh? What makes you think that?"

"Stupid patient confidentiality," Kurt muttered under his breath, then looked back up at her. "He accidentally said something about a baby the other morning. And he accidentally left all his internet tabs open a few days ago, and I found the adoption agency's website pulled up. And he accidentally let me catch him in the baby clothes when we were shopping yesterday." He looked at her and she sat, silent and still. Infuriating. Annoyed, he continued, "Do you see the accidentally thread here? He's not talking to me about it. He hasn't said a word about what he wants."

"Well, do you have any idea why he might not want to talk with you about it?"

Kurt blinked. Oh. "I think –” he started, a flush coloring his cheeks, how could he have forgotten this? – "He tried to ask me about it the night we found out Emily was pregnant. I think I blew him off; I couldn't – I was sick over it that night, I wasn't –” He trailed off, guilt darkening his eyes and his heart.

"And he hasn’t approached you about it since?"

"No." Or had he? Kurt wadded the sleeve of his sweater in his hand as he tried to remember, tried to remove himself from his emotions and think. Had he been blowing Blaine off this whole time?
Were those things not accidental after all, but Blaine just giving subtle hints? *Shit.* "I – I don't know. Maybe he's tried? Oh god, he's probably *avoiding* it now because he thinks *I'm* avoiding it …"

"Are you? Maybe subconsciously?" Dr. Jacobson asked.

"Maybe?"

"Mmm," she said. "I'll let that percolate, and we'll switch gears a little. Do you want another baby?"

There was no easy answer.

"I want," Kurt said wearily, "to get through this year, and the next, and the one after that without having some sort of disaster strike our household. I want Blaine and I to continue to function like rational, married human beings. I want to love him, and keep loving him, and do boring things like wash dishes together and read in bed."

"Kurt, you didn't answer my question."

He sighed heavily. "It's not – whether I want a baby or not has nothing to do with it. It doesn't *matter* what I want, because I don't feel like I can afford to take the *risk* of adopting again," he said. "And besides that, I don't want to have a baby because I'm jealous of my brother. That's a stupid reason to have a child."

"Why don't we try taking Finn out of the equation for a few minutes. There's no pregnant girlfriend, there's no risk of whatever you're scared of. Just tell me this. Do you want to raise children with Blaine?"

"Yes," he said quietly, aching with it. "I – *yes*, every piece I design is for our kids, every time I see a baby it makes me want one, I don't know how I'm going to *survive* having a niece or nephew – but none of that matters, because Blaine is more important than any of it. None of it would be worth anything without him and I can't –" He stopped. Breathed. "I don't know if I could survive it all over again."

"What couldn't you survive, exactly?" Dr. Jacobson asked. "Another adoption falling through?"
"I keep having this dream," Kurt said softly, closing his eyes, picturing it. "He – it's that day, all over again. But in the dream, when he breaks, he breaks for good. Loses his mind. Never comes home to me."

He opened his eyes and saw that Dr. Jacobson's were full of concern. "And that's what you're afraid of?"

"I – well, I'm afraid of all of it, but that would be the worst."

She nodded. "Okay. So we know how you're feeling about it. And we know what you think Blaine wants. So if that's true, how do you reconcile? What do you do if Blaine wants a baby and you don't? What if he wants one right now? Is this fear something you think you can work through?"

Kurt felt like crying. "I –" He broke off. If it was non-negotiable to Blaine, this baby thing … nothing was worth anything without him. But he was so scared – what if Blaine left him? He couldn't handle it, couldn't deal with another night in an empty bed, couldn't handle the paralyzing fear of living life alone after living for so long with his other half. "I have no idea," he said, honest and wrecked. "I just feel … stuck."

She gave him a little, knowing smile. "And do you think maybe talking to Blaine will help you feel unstuck?"

Tears sprang to his eyes. "Maybe, but – oh god, what if I'm right? What if he gives me an ultimatum, him and me plus baby makes three or he moves out? I – Dr. Jacobson, things are good, I don't want to fight, I don't want to rock the boat –"

"Kurt, Kurt," she said, her voice soothing and gentle, "calm down. Try to breathe. Do you really think Blaine would just leave you like that? Where's all this coming from?"

"I don't know," he sniffled, "that stupid dream and you didn't see his face when he was looking at those little dresses the other day, you didn't see how he wilted when I found him and gave him a look …"

"Do you think you might be building it up in your head because you're more scared of him leaving
than anything else?"

"I – maybe?" God, his sweater was close to ruined, he'd have to change clothes before anyone saw him, sleeves wadded and wrinkled and damp with sweat and tears. He could drop it by the cleaner's on his way home …

"Talk to Blaine." Dr. Jacobson's voice was firm. "What have we been talking about the whole time we've met, hmm? You have to communicate, you can't assume. Okay?"

Kurt nodded, knowing she was right. But the dream felt so real, the terror and the loneliness always speared through his heart, and … maybe babies weren't the only thing he needed to talk with Blaine about.
"Hi, honey."

Blaine looked up from where he was toeing his sneakers off by the door. "Hi," he said, smiling, unable to help it when Kurt was perched on a chair, dressed prim and proper and not a hair out of place while he was disgusting, a bead of sweat dripping from his forehead to the floor, dark stains under his arms and on his chest and on his back. What a pair they made.

"Will you come here a minute? I'd like to talk with you," Kurt asked, beckoning, and oh no, what had he done? Blaine racked his brain, trying to think of what it could be, and – shit.

"I – this is about the sheet, isn't it? I swapped the laundry out because this was my last pair of running shorts, and I know how meticulous you are about fitted sheets, and I just can't fold them like you can, Kurt. I'll put the sheet back in to fluff. You really don't want me coming over there, I smell like garbage or wet dog or something equally horrible …"

Kurt was smiling a little. "It's not about the sheet, Blaine."

Oh. Well, extra shit, then, because he couldn’t think of anything else …

"Can I maybe shower first?" he asked, his voice full of trepidation. It wasn't that he was scared of Kurt; Kurt wouldn't hurt him, but he preferred to stay on Kurt's good side because, well, being on Kurt's bad side was an experience unlike any other. And Blaine would know, having been married to the man for seven years.

"If you have to – god knows I understand not wanting to be filthy for any longer than necessary – but I also feel kind of like I'm going to crawl out of my skin, so try to make it a short one?"

Blaine slowly set his keys on the table and made his way toward Kurt, distracted by a sudden buzzing in his ears. "Why do you feel like you're going to crawl out of your skin? What – what aren't you telling me?" He settled on the edge of the piano bench, not wanting to taint the fabric couch with his perspiration, and tried to slow down his brain – it was whizzing through a multitude of scenarios, each even worse than the next, a lost job, a sordid affair, a brain tumor, an untreatable brain tumor …
"It might be more of what you aren't telling me, actually. Do you want another baby, Blaine?" he asked, and Blaine stopped in his tracks.

"Wh- … what?"

"Today, at my appointment with Dr. J, I was trying to figure out if all the baby stuff you've been looking at lately was your way of dropping subtle hints, or if you honestly didn't mean for me to stumble upon the adoption agency website on your laptop. I kind of drove myself a little crazy."

Blaine blinked at him, his mouth ajar. "Y – you. You saw that."

"I did. And I'm wondering why you were trying to hide it."

"Because." Because. "Because you don't want one." It stung his heart to say the words out loud. "Because – I didn't want to rub it in your face – I didn't want to rock the boat –"

Kurt's laugh was sharp, piercing through the air. "Those are the exact words I said to Dr. Jacobson today. 'I don't want to rock the boat.'" He paused, looked down at his hands clasped in his lap. "Blaine, who told you I don't want a baby?"

"I – nobody, it's just so obvious, Kurt. You drag me away from anything baby-related as soon as you realize I'm looking at it. As far as I can tell, you're still pretty angry with Finn. You wouldn't even talk about it when I asked, not a word, so I just assumed –"

Kurt's eyes were wet when he looked up, and it startled Blaine. "Did you ever think," he said, his voice shaking, "that I was just scared?"

Blaine's brow furrowed. "Of what?"

"I guess I should've let you shower," Kurt muttered to himself, his arms folding over as tears pooled on his lovely eyelashes, and it was always amazing to Blaine how he could make himself shrink.
"Hey, hey," Blaine said, coming off the piano bench and perching on the coffee table, right in front of Kurt. "No, hey, don't disappear on me. What are you scared of?"

"You know your dream?"

Blaine cocked his head to the side. "The nightmare? About Violet?"

"Well, I have one too."

* * *

Kurt lay cocooned in Blaine's sweat-sticky arms, tear tracks dried into his face. He felt – well, not completely at ease, as they were still in limbo, would be for the time being. Blaine wanted a baby and Kurt wanted a baby, too, but Kurt was still scared – Kurt would probably be scared for a long time.

But he also felt stupid, so, so idiotic for thinking that Blaine would just walk out when, in fact, he was holding Kurt so tight he could barely breathe, whispering promises of never letting go.

"We'll figure it out," Blaine murmured as Kurt's temple was peppered with salty kisses, and he didn't smell like garbage or wet dog, but boy, all sweaty, sticky, delightful boy, Kurt's delightful boy. Man, he corrected himself, feeling Blaine's muscles ripple under his skin as he shifted. "I can wait. I – it was awful, at first, but I got my priorities in order and – Kurt, you have to know. I can be happy with just you, you make me so happy –"

Kurt sighed. "But it's not what you want."

"What I want," Blaine said, accompanying his statement with more staccatoed kisses and another tight squeeze, "is for you to be happy and not stressed and not scared. If that means waiting, we'll wait. If that means never, well – I can deal with that. We'll get another puppy."

Kurt grinned at the thought – Blaine was adorable with Romeo when he was a puppy; hell, Blaine was adorable with Romeo now …
"We'll figure it out," Kurt agreed quietly, awkwardly turning over in Blaine's arms to face him. "I love you. I'm sorry I was scared –"

Blaine cut him off with a kiss, the sweat tangy in Kurt's mouth. "Don't ever apologize for feeling, Kurt."

"But – it was like I didn't trust you all over again –"

"If you didn't trust me, we would never have had this conversation," Blaine told him softly. "Don't apologize for feeling."

"I'm sorry."

"Now you sound like me," Blaine teased gently. "Seriously, Kurt, it's okay. We'll figure it out."

"I guess we always do …"

Another kiss. "We do."

* * *

Saturday, May 25th, 2024

The restaurant was crowded but quiet, dim lighting and candlelight casting a glow over white tablecloths. In the middle of the floor, their party was gathered – Kurt and Blaine, Burt and Carole, Finn and Emily.

Finn and Emily had flown in that afternoon for Kurt's birthday party, and Finn was hovering over her like an anxious bird, constantly petting her hair, pecking light kisses on her cheek asking every ten minutes if she was feeling alright.

Kurt stared at him in awe over a plate of braised rabbit, wondering how Finn had felt, watching Kurt fall head over heels for Blaine so many years ago. He wondered if it was anything like this, his eyes now opened to the man that Finn might one day be.
The man that Finn was becoming now was sharing about how he was trying to revive the Glee club at the high school he taught at while absentmindedly stroking over his girlfriend's knuckles at the same time. It was hard for Kurt to be angry with him at all anymore.

"So how are you, honey?" Carole asked in her ever-motherly way, rubbing a gentle hand down Emily's arm. "Is the Zofran helping at all?"

"It seems to be," Emily said, swallowing down a bite of risotto. "And I've finally figured out that eating every two hours sort of keeps the sickness at bay. I can't wait to start showing more. I'm looking forward to having an excuse to eat as much as I am."

"I had the strangest cravings with Finn," Carole said, patting her hand. "I lived on pork rinds and cantaloupe for the first several months – anything else would make me sick."

Emily laughed as Finn pulled a face. "Mom, that's gross."

Kurt glanced at Blaine, trying to appraise how he was holding up, and saw a mask of a smile plastered over his face. He squeezed Blaine's hand under the table.

"It was delicious at the time," Carole smiled. "But I'll be honest – I haven't touched a pork rind since I was pregnant with you."

"Ugh, I bet. I'm glad you haven't wanted anything weird yet," Finn said, squeezing Emily's hand.

"Mmm, what you don't know, Finn …" she grinned. "I have sort of developed an affinity for fried pickles, usually at about eleven at night." Finn gave her an aghast look as the rest of the table burst into laughter. "But I have to say, all the cravings and all the sickness will be worth it when we finally get to meet this precious angel," Emily cooed, her hand on her belly. "I can't wait to find out if it's a girl or a boy."

"Are you finding out at your 18-week appointment?" Carole asked, turning in her chair. Emily had her full attention.
Burt rolled his eyes fondly from across the table. "There she goes – anything nurse-y, and she's off like a speeding bullet. Don't count on getting either of them back for a while," he told the boys.

Kurt forced a chuckle and picked at his rabbit.

"Excuse me for a second," Blaine said after a few minutes of silence, the women at the table in their own world, chattering about fetal development. He scooted his chair back and tossed his napkin on the table.

"You okay?" Kurt asked softly.

"Fine. Just have to use the restroom."

Emily stopped in mid-word. "Oh my god. I'm so sorry."

"What for?" Burt asked.

"I'm being insensitive. All this baby stuff, and at your birthday dinner, too, Kurt – I feel so awful."

How Blaine's forced smiles appeared to look so genuine, Kurt had never been able to figure out. "Emily, I'm fine," Blaine assured her, reaching across the table to squeeze her hand. "I really do just have to use the restroom."

"Okay, but – I don't know, this can't be easy on you. I should've been more careful about talking about it –"

"Hey," Finn interrupted, gently grasping her chin and turning her face toward his. "They said it's fine? It's fine. Okay?"

"But Finn –"

Kurt managed a half-smile. "He's right, you know," he told her, inching his hand forward and barely grazing the back of hers with his fingertips before quickly pulling away. "It's your baby –"
you're supposed to be excited, to talk about it. Blaine and I definitely did before Violet was born."

"I know, and I am excited about it, but I also don't want to rub it in your faces. Finn told me what a hard time you guys had last year – I can't imagine. And besides, it is your birthday today. We should be talking about you."

He smiled at her again, and this time it reached his eyes. "My real birthday isn't actually until Monday."

"It's your party, though. That counts, right?"

Kurt grinned. "Well, I don't normally turn down the chance to pull focus…"

"Good. Tell me about your work, then. Finn can't ever make heads or tails of exactly what you do."

Finn shrugged his shoulders. "I just always figured you could explain it better than I could."

"That's probably true," Kurt chuckled. "I'm the Creative Director for Little Marc Jacobs …" And by the time Blaine returned to the table and took his hand, Kurt let himself dare to think that he might end up liking Emily in spite of himself.

* * *

"That wasn't as bad as it could've been."

Hands interwoven, they walked down the teeming Saturday night street toward home. Blaine's feet were lighter on the concrete than he'd expected, and he wasn't itching to get home to type out a rushed and dismayed email to Dr. Jacobson like he'd been afraid of.

"No. No, it went well." Kurt paused. "Blaine, I like her."

Relief whooshed from Blaine's lungs like a wind machine. "I was afraid it was just me."
"No." The smile Kurt only saved for secret things crossed his face. "I like her."

"Surprised?" Blaine asked, slowing his pace.

"I thought I'd hate her."

"And instead you're designing her nursery."

"I am. How'd that happen, again?"

"I don't know," Blaine said, a pesky grin gleaming across his face in spite of all his efforts not to smile. "If I recall, she asked if you enjoyed interior design as much as textiles, and you vomited up fabric swatches and paint chips and even a crib or two all over her."

"Shut up, it was not that bad," Kurt laughed, playfully smacking Blaine's arm.

"I don't know about that. You were pretty excited."

A lull fell over their conversation. Blaine held tight to Kurt's hand as they descended into the subway tunnel, artificial yellow light blinking and buzzing like something out of a horror flick.

"Blaine?"

"Mmm?"

Their voices echoed off the dingy walls. They were alone save a woman dressed in tattered clothes, pushing a grocery cart as she mumbled to herself. Blaine wondered where all the other people were.

Kurt's voice came out timid, quiet. "Do you think you can be patient for just a little bit longer?"
Blaine untangled his fingers from Kurt's, slid his arm around Kurt's waist to pull him closer. "I can be patient for as long as you need me to be."

"Because I think – I'm not ready yet, but I'm getting there."

The wind from the train roaring to a stop in front of them ruffled Blaine's shirt, his hair. "Good," he said, reaffixing his hand to Kurt's as they stepped into the car. "Take your time. But good."

* * *

Monday, May 27th, 2024

"Happy birthday to you ... happy birthday to you ..."

Someone was singing.

Kurt's brain was registering a voice – a low, sultry, muffled voice that reminded him of a male Marilyn Monroe – apparently pulling him from the depths of sleep, and oh.

It was not just a voice that pulled him from the depths of sleep.

His eyes flew open as blood flooded his cock, a tongue licking up the length of him …

"Happy birthday my Kurt ... happy birthday to you."

The voice was coming from beneath the covers – it was Blaine's voice, and Blaine's tongue, and it was also ridiculous that it had taken Kurt this long to process such a simple bit of information, except, oh shit, it was really hard to think with a boner of that magnitude at this time of morning.

He groaned loud as the lump under the covers moved and his cock was encased in Blaine's hollowed cheeks.
"Blaine –" he managed before his eyes slammed shut. His back arched and his hips thrust up and it was too early for Blaine to expect him to have any control over his body, Jesus –

"Blaine, honey," he gasped, his hands twisting in the bed sheets, "I don't – this isn't going to last very long –"

Blaine just hummed around his cock, sounding perfectly content. How was he not smothering under all those blankets?

Two seconds later and it occurred to Kurt that he could keep his husband from smothering, that that would probably be a good plan, since he did rather want Blaine to stick around a while, so he unfisted his hand from the fitted sheet and threw the comforter off to Blaine's side of the bed.

Good plan, indeed.

Blaine's eyes were closed as he worked over Kurt's cock, Blaine's pouty pink lips stretched wide over the girth of him. Blaine's hair was sticking out, sleep-messy and beautiful, and when he slid up and down, his torso rose just enough for Kurt to catch a glimpse of Blaine's own cock, engorged and pressed against his belly.

A noise that Kurt didn't intend to come out of his throat came out anyway, and his hand gravitated toward the curls he never could get enough of. A rush of boldness pulsed through him and his fingers threaded through and held Blaine's head still as he canted his hips up.

Blaine moaned loud around his cock, looking up at Kurt through flirty, fanned lashes, and he rutted his hips a few times against the sheets. Kurt took it as a sign to keep going, and he held Blaine's head in a firmer grip, and rocked into a steady rhythm, hips pumping and muscles straining.

Blaine's mouth was heaven, the ridges on his hard palate rubbing perfect friction, his soft palate giving way just enough for Kurt's cock to slip down his throat, and when he swallowed –

"Fuck," Kurt whispered, rolling his pelvis. "Look at you take it … oh my god …"

Blaine swallowed around him again, his throat constricting and squeezing at Kurt's cock, milking the pre-come from him, and Kurt closed his eyes and breathed, wanting to bask in it, in this amazing love that had him splayed out naked on a bed – their bed – in the early morning sunlight,
with birds singing outside and a garbage truck roaring down the street and somewhere a dog braying …

"Oh fuck, happy birthday to me," he stuttered out just before he came, pulsing his orgasm down Blaine's throat.

When he finally opened his eyes again, after that perfect floaty sensation had passed, he found Blaine grinning at him like a loon, stretched out on his stomach, chin propped on folded arms.

"Happy birthday to you," Blaine repeated in the lovesick voice that always made Kurt's insides melt into warm molasses.

"C'mere." Kurt summoned him, his voice sleepy with sex, and Blaine happily followed. "Take care of you."

"Kurt, this is your day –"

"S right. My day. Gotta do what I want. And I want to make you come."

Blaine grinned. "Well, if you insist …"

"I do."

His hand wrapped around Blaine's warm, heavy cock and he started stroking, just skin on blissful skin. Kurt knew it wouldn't take long enough to bother with anything but his hand alone, because sucking him off always did things to Blaine, and within three strokes, Blaine was moaning his name.

Within six, Blaine was writhing on the bed, a bead of sweat popping up on his forehead, his brow knit tight and his biceps straining against the sheets.

"Oh, Kurt –"
Within ten, Blaine was coming, his mouth open in a silent shout, thick white ropes that Kurt had purposefully aimed at his own chest streaking over his skin.

Blaine slumped back against the bed when he'd finally stopped spasming all over, shaky and floppy like a puppy just learning to walk, and murmured, "Jesus."

Kurt dragged a finger through the come on his chest, sucked it in his mouth. "Happy birthday to me indeed."

"I can't believe you have to go to work," Blaine whined. "It should be illegal to have to work on your birthday."

"Shhh," Kurt shushed him. "Work? What's work?" It was then that Kurt's alarm chose to ring loudly in his ear. "Ugh," he groaned, smacking his phone repeatedly, trying to get it to be quiet. "What is it they say? All good things must come to an end?"

"Even birthday sex," Blaine said sadly, nodding his head. "I'll come by the studio later on, okay?"

"For more birthday sex?" Kurt asked, bouncing his eyebrows up and down.

"Only if you're very, very good," Blaine grinned, and Kurt trotted off happily to take his shower.

* * *

"Kurt! Happy Birthday!" Rachel exclaimed.

Kurt startled so hard that he dropped his pencil, his hand flung to his chest as his heart pounded beneath his sternum.

"Oh my god, Rach, have you forgotten how to knock?"

"I'm sorry! I'm just excited! I can't believe you're thirty-one!"
"Shhhhhhh!" Kurt hissed. "Don't say it out loud. You'll make me feel old. I am forever twenty-nine as far as we're concerned, okay?"

She gave a silly little salute. "Scout's honor," she said, then brandished a box from behind her back. "But perk up, Birthday Boy, I brought you a treat!"

"Ooooh, show me!" Kurt squealed, clapping his hands.

She flipped open the lid, and Kurt's eyes widened. "Oh my god, they look delicious. What kind?"

"Meyer lemon-filled cupcakes topped with whipped cream."

"Oh, yummy. I don't even care if these go to my hips!" he exclaimed, plucking one of the miniature cupcakes from the box in Rachel's hands, then another to shove at her. "Here, at least share them with me!"

They were licking whipped cream and lemon curd from their fingers when Blaine walked in with a box of his own.

"Uh oh," he said, "looks like I'm late for the party."

"If those are more cupcakes in that box, you are perfectly on time, honey," Kurt said, smiling up at him from the floor where he and Rachel had spread out.

Blaine's grin turned wicked. "What if it's not exactly cupcakes in the box?"

Kurt turned bright red as Rachel let out a scandalized cackle. "Blaine!" he cried, darting over to shut the door behind his husband.

"No, I'm just kidding," Blaine said, chuckling. He opened the box for Kurt. "They really are cupcakes."
"You," Kurt accused, smiling through it as he dropped to the ground next to Rachel again. "You are terrible."

"Terribly perfect, you mean?" Blaine asked, plopping down beside them. "I did bring you cupcakes, after all."

"I suppose I can forgive you this time." Kurt took a swig from the water bottle sitting on his desk, then helped himself to one of the large cupcakes in Blaine's box. "God, this reminds me of college," he said. "Remember finals week freshman year?"

"When the three of us sat around stuffing our faces and stressing until I had a massive acne attack right before my vocal performance?" Rachel asked. "That finals week?"

"Ah, the good old days," Blaine sighed, leaning his head back and closing his eyes, then gasping as Rachel dragged a finger full of chocolate frosting down the side of his cheek.

"Good old days my ass," Rachel said. "See how you like an acne attack – I hope that frosting gives you pimples the size of Mt. Rushmore!"

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that …" Blaine said, grabbing a lemon cupcake from her box and rearing his arm back.

"No! Blaine, stop it – Rachel Berry I swear to god – no food fights in my office!" Kurt scolded harshly, holding Blaine's arm and narrowly avoiding a messy disaster.

Blaine and Rachel both sat back, giggling.

"I swear, sometimes I think the two of you never matured past age ten."

"Where on earth would you get that idea?" Rachel asked, grabbing another lemon cupcake. Her expression turned serious as she took a bite. "So," she said after swallowing, "um … how was Finn this weekend?"

"Rachel," Blaine warned, but Kurt shook his head.
"No, I think it's fine. He's good. He and Emily are … really good, actually. He's moved on, Rach."

"I know. He moved on a long time ago. I just – there's a part of me that still cares about him, you know?" she said. "Do you think he's excited about being a dad?"

Blaine smiled at her, a tender expression in his eyes. "I think he really is."

She laughed softly. "We could never have raised kids together. We would've killed each other."

"You could never have lived together, sweetie," Kurt said, wrapping his arm around her shoulders. "The two of you just didn't fit."

"Yeah," she said, a little sullen. "I guess."

"Speaking of fitting …" Blaine piped up. "How's Liam?"

A smile crossed her face, replacing the pouty frown that had just started to blossom. "He's good."

"I don't think I understand," Blaine teased. "Is he good, or is he good?" he asked, miming an overzealous hip thrust, making her laugh.

"Can I say both?" she asked, blushing brightly. "I don't know – I don't want to get too serious and scare him away. And yes, Kurt, I am aware of my intensity in spite of what you might think. But – I don't know, he's really fun and he's so sweet to me, and …"

Kurt smiled over Rachel's head as she talked on about Liam. Thank you, he mouthed to Blaine, who was smiling encouragingly at Rachel, so engaged in what she was saying, his hand resting lightly over her hand. His eyes darted up to Kurt's for a split second, acknowledging, and then they were trained on Rachel again. It was one of the things Kurt loved so much about Blaine – when you had his attention, you had all of it.

He sat back and listened, happy for her, idly rubbing her back, and thought with warm fondness
about friendship and ties that bind, and how lucky he was to be with people that he called family on his birthday.

* * *

Saturday, June 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2024

"So, how are things in the household of Happily-Shacked-Up-Bliss?" Blaine asked Nick. He tightened his shoelaces before straightening up and stretching his arms high into the sky like he was trying to graze the clouds with his fingertips.

"Blissful," Nick grinned. "You ready?"

"Let's do it."

They took off down the trail at a loping pace. Blaine smiled brightly as the sun kissed his face and arms, making him feel so \textit{alive} as his calves and hamstrings got to work.

"Thanks for coming out with me today."

"Hey, no problem!" Nick said. "I left Jeff dozing in bed, which – well, I'm sure you have some sort of inkling of how hard that is –"

An image, Kurt sprawled bare-chested in bed with morning light spilled like milk across his perfect skin, popped into Blaine's head.

"Yes."

"Well. It's a good thing I like running."

Blaine coughed out a laugh, his shoes jogging up dust in a gravelly spot on the trail. "Yeah, me too."
"I wanted to see you, anyway – we have a proposition for you and Kurt," Nick said.

"Proposition?"

"We're going to my aunt's beach house in Nantucket in a couple weeks. It's way too big for just the two of us. We were wondering if you wanted to tag along."

Blaine slowed, looking at him. "Nick, I'm not going to barge in on your –"

"It falls over the week that you guys … um … the week you lost Violet," Nick interrupted, slowing his pace as well. "We just thought – I don't know, the beach might be a nice distraction?"

"Oh. I – oh."
Blaine had been trying not to think about Violet – that morning dawned the month of her birth; nearly a year ago they'd been celebrating, falling in love with the sweetest baby they'd ever seen and now …

Now they were happy. They were.

But a trip to the beach might be nice all the same.

"You don't have to give me an answer right now," Nick said, "but let me know soon so I can tell my aunt that it's not just the two of us."

"Thank you," Blaine told him, trying to pour sincerity into his words. "I'll need to talk with Kurt about it, but –"

"No problem," Nick said kindly, effectively liberating all of Blaine's concerns. "We're going the 23rd and we'll be coming back on the 29th. Now, we gonna run this thing or not?"

Without a word, Blaine pushed off into a sprint, leaving Nick fumbling to catch up. "If you can catch me, we are!" he called over his shoulder. He flew ahead, legs pumping, letting the wind ruffle his hair.
"We can't barge in on somebody else's vacation, Blaine!"

The pitch wasn't going quite as well as Blaine had originally planned.

"But if you'd just listen to me –"

"I don't care what Nick said! They're stuck in that tiny shoebox apartment together; they deserve some space and having us there is not going to give them any!"

"Kurt, you haven't even let me tell you why –"

"Tell me why? They're being polite, just like you, just like all you nicety-nice people in this world who ask people to do things they don't actually want them to do!"

Blaine sighed heavily. The kitchen chair was hard on his tailbone as he plopped down, ready to admit defeat. "Okay," he said, "I give up. What else is this about? Because I haven't ever heard you turn down a vacation before …"

Kurt let out a frustrated little yelp and stuck his fingers in his hair, thoroughly mussing it up. "I don't know!"

Blaine sat quietly, replaying Kurt's words over in his head. "Do you – feel pressured by me? With the baby thing? Because if you are, I need to know – you know that's not my intent –"

"No!" Kurt groaned, his hands now covering his face. "No, you're perfect and I'm a mess and …" he trailed off.

Blaine smiled wanly. "It's June."

Kurt's hands dropped to his sides. "It's June." He sounded so defeated.
"Is that the only thing? Or is there something else?"

"I don't know," Kurt said miserably. "I just keep trying not to think about Vi, which makes me think about her, and then I think about last year in general and …" He trailed off, making a little explode-y noise and miming a bomb going off.

"Okay, hey, I know," Blaine said, getting up from the kitchen table to pull Kurt into a hug. "But that's what I was trying to explain. Nick and Jeff want us to come with them to give us a break, or a distraction, rather – the trip falls right on the week that she – that we lost her. So we won't have to be here."

"...Oh."

Blaine kissed the top of Kurt's head. "Yes, oh. Now, do you want to go?"

"I – okay. That – yes, I want to go. I'm sorry I freaked out," Kurt said meekly into Blaine's chest.

"On the Richter scale of Kurt freak-outs, I think that one wasn't so bad. Maybe a 3.7."

Kurt's eyes, orbs the color of the ocean that day, came in and out of focus, narrowed to slits right in front of Blaine's face. "I don't even know how to respond to that," he said warily.

"You should kiss me." Confidence was key – Kurt didn't ever respond the way Blaine wanted him to if there was wavering.

"Really. And why's that?" Kurt asked, turning coy.

"Because even though that one was just a 3.7, I still stick around in spite of the 9.5's," Blaine answered with his most charming smile.

Blessedly, Kurt laughed. "Well, that's true," he said, and Blaine was rewarded with the slow press of a perfectly pouty kiss.
Hey Blaine, it’s Alex. Listen, just wanted to let you know – I talked to the publishing house, and we’ve got a publication date set in stone. Mark July 29th on your calendar, and get that friend of yours to send me the final copy of the book cover. Congrats, buddy. I think we’re gonna do really well with this one.

Blaine held the phone to his ear long after the message ended, a smile stretched over his face.

"Thank you," he whispered to the quiet of the living room, then sent out a quick text.

To: Kurt <3

Hope you're free the last weekend in July.

The reply was almost instant.

From: Kurt <3

Why's that?

To: Kurt <3

I'll need to borrow you for a party…

From: Kurt <3

Is that when your book is being released??

To: Kurt <3

:)
From: Kurt <3

If you start buying champagne now, we might have

enough by July ;) I love you and congratulations!

To: Kurt <3

Thank you, and I love you too!
Tuesday, June 18th, 2024

Tuesday dawned warm and bright and gorgeous, perfect for a little girl's first birthday party in Central Park.

Several miles south, Kurt was struggling to get out of bed.

"We can do this," he said, his voice muffled by Blaine's armpit. He'd tucked himself away from the world under Blaine's arm in a futile attempt to shield himself from the memories of this day a year prior.

"Right," Blaine said, not sounding very confident. "Just – one day at a time, right?"

"Yep," Kurt replied. "And next week we'll be at the beach. We can totally do this."

Five more minutes passed.

"Kurt, baby, you're gonna be late."

He looked at the clock and said, "Shit." He still didn't move.

Blaine's big brown eyes turned to stare into his own. "Are you sure you want to go into work today?"

Kurt closed his eyes and nodded. "If we don't get out of bed right now, we never will. Come on, I'm going to work, and you need to go for a run."

"I – yes. I do."

They still didn't move.
Blaine finally took a heaving sigh and launched himself into a sitting position. "Okay, up. You hop in the shower and I'll make us some breakfast."

"Breakfast. Right. Good plan," Kurt said. He managed to roll himself out of bed, but stopped and caught Blaine's wrist before either of them got very far. "Blaine, honey?"

"Mmm?"

"Do you think you might be able to bring me lunch today?"

Blaine's face softened. "Sure I can." Kurt melted into his side, his arms wrapping around Blaine's trim torso, and Blaine's hand came to rest on the back of Kurt's neck. "Hey," he murmured. "we're gonna be okay."

"I know we are," Kurt said, his voice thick. "It's just – god, Blaine, I don't think I'll ever be able to forget what she looks like. How she looked in my arms that first time I held her."

"I know," Blaine whispered, and let Kurt cling to him for a moment.

"Okay. Sorry." Kurt rubbed his face, trying to rub the sadness out of it. "I'm good now."

Blaine smiled gently at him. "I would've come by anyway, you know. I don't think I could make it through today without at least a few minutes with you."

"Stop, stop, stop, I said I was good and now you're making me cry!" Kurt said, fanning at his face with his hand. "Go – I don't know, make French toast or something, god, if there was ever a time for emotional eating …"

"French toast it is, love." Blaine kissed his forehead and turned to go, and Kurt's heart sped up a little.

"How are you not frantic? I feel – frantic. Or something."
Blaine shrugged, turning back around. "I doubled up on my meds last night. Doctor said that was okay in really stressful situations, so …"

Kurt let a frustrated little squeak escape his throat. "That's not playing fair! I want meds to be able to double up on!

Blaine laughed. "I'll give you extra maple syrup. I know it's not Prozac, but I do what I can with what I've got."

"And extra powdered sugar!" Kurt let his feet smack the bare floor a little louder than normal as he marched to the bathroom for his shower.

_EXTRA Prozac, my ass. That's totally not playing fair. He could at least have the decency to crush one up and put it in my food …_

* * *

"Burt." There was affection in Blaine's voice as he answered the phone, lying flat on his back, sweating all over the yoga mat that he bought for stretching after his runs – _"Blaine, you're sweating on the floor, these are hardwoods, what are you thinking?!?!?"_ –

"Hey, kid. How you holding up today?"

"I'm good. I just got back from running seven miles, though. I'm pretty sure the negative energy didn’t have a fighting chance." Blaine extended his leg toward the ceiling, holding it steady with his free hand.

"Sounds about right. Plus that extra little hit of meds, yeah?" Burt said, the smile evident in his voice.

"Ah. You've talked to Kurt," Blaine said. "How's he?"
"Still grumbling that you have an unfair advantage today," Burt chuckled. "But he's fine. Sounds like himself, only a little sadder, so I'm not too worried. Said you were bringing him lunch?"

"That's the plan," Blaine said, switching legs. "We just need to be together today, you know?"

"I'd kick both your asses if you weren't." Burt paused. "So, uh, a little birdie told me you guys were thinking of having another kid sometime? Trying again?"

Blaine froze in mid-stretch.

"And I just want you to know – you have my support. No matter which way this thing goes."

Blaine blinked, silent on the ground. If Kurt was talking to his father about another baby, that meant –

It didn't necessarily mean anything. Blaine would know when Kurt was ready – Kurt was still processing, that's what he did when he talked with his dad, but still …

"Blaine? You still there?"

"Yeah." Blaine let his leg flop to the floor and closed his eyes, willing the swell of hope and joy to die down in his chest. This meant nothing. (This meant everything.)

"You sound upset. Was I not supposed to know about it? Did I just get Kurt in trouble?"

"I'm not upset, I swear. It's just –" Blaine stopped, contemplating how deep into this he wanted to go with Kurt's dad. But Kurt's dad was also basically his dad too, and he hadn't been able to talk about it with anyone save Dr. Jacobson, and ... "It was my idea. The baby thing. I – honestly, I'm aching for one, it's like a hole in my heart. But Kurt was really hesitant, so this is just me waiting for him to be ready. And – I don't know, the fact that he told you …"

Burt sighed. "Blaine. I –" He broke off, his voice thick, waited a moment. "When he told me, I –"
"Burt?"

"I never thought I'd have this – a grandkid. I made my peace with it a long time ago. And here I am, gonna have two of them. At least."

Blaine placed his sticky palm over his sweaty face and tried to stave off the tears that threatened to spill over.

Burt’s voice was warm in his ear. "He'll come around, kiddo – you shoulda heard the hope in his voice when he said it."

"Good," Blaine said. His own voice sounded steadier than he felt. "I just – he just needs time. I'm doing my dead-level best to give it to him."

"You're a good husband to him, Blaine. I hope you know that. I hope you know how much I appreciate it."

"Well, you're a good dad to him, and I hope you know how much I appreciate that – and now we have to stop talking about this or I'm going to cry," Blaine said, slowly sitting up on the yoga mat.

Burt laughed. "Okay. I gotta go anyway – the shop's filling up. Just try to remember to keep me up to date with this baby business. And chin up today. Try to remember the good."

"Will do. Love you, Burt."

"Love you too, Blaine."

The words reverberated in his chest for a long while after the phone call ended. He figured they always would, having grown up as a boy who heard the words from his own father on such rare occasion. It wasn't the proper thing to do once a certain age was reached, he'd been told time and again, to tell another man you loved him, even if that man was your father.

Even when the only thing you ever strove to do was make him happy.
Blaine was grateful every day to have a father-in-law who was happy regardless of what his son strove to do, regardless of the package his son came in.

Blaine was grateful every day that Burt loved the package his son came in.

He hoped desperately that he would be able to show that same kind of love some day. He rolled up his yoga mat and, still un-showered, opened the door to the closet in their office, found the stained wooden box tied with a lavender ribbon, and opened it in hopes of remembering how it felt to give that same unconditional love.

* * *

"Is this weird?" Kurt asked.

They'd just finished dinner and were staring at a small, 6-inch cake on the kitchen counter, frosted with large lavender rosettes and boasting a single lit candle in its center.

"If it is, I don't care," Blaine said.

Kurt took a breath and nodded, and caught Blaine's hand as they began to sing.

Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday sweet Violet, happy birthday to you.

* * *

Sunday, June 23rd, 2024

Kurt, giddy and restless like a child after a five-hour car ride then a three-hour ferry ride, burst from the backseat the minute they stopped Nick's aunt's house. He ran down the driveway, around the house, down the deck stairs – all forty of them – and straight to the beach.

Flip-flops kicked off, he stood with his arms outstretched to the sides, toes curling in the sand, eyes
closed as he let the sunshine wash over him.

Moments later, he felt two solid arms wrap around his middle. "Glad we came now?" Blaine murmured in his ear.

"I feel like I can breathe here," said Kurt to Blaine and the sea.

* * * *

In the wee hours of the next morning, Blaine found Kurt sitting at the kitchen table in the beach house in a pair of boxer briefs and a white t-shirt, sipping on a cup of tea and staring out the window at the moon. He let himself look for a while, admiring Kurt's gorgeous profile, tracing with his eyes the line of Kurt's leg, knee pulled up to his chin.

"Hey," Blaine said eventually, barely over a whisper, treading softly over the hardwood floors so as not to wake Jeff and Nick, who were sleeping in the bedroom above them.

Kurt smiled softly. "Hi. What're you doing up?"

"I woke up and you weren't there."

"I'm sorry, honey. I can't sleep."

Blaine frowned. "But you always sleep well after sex."

"Not this week, apparently," Kurt said, his smile fading. He looked down into his tea and gave it a little swirl, making the tea bag's label flutter against the side of the mug. "Just a lot on my mind, I guess."

Blaine wondered what 'a lot' meant, wondered if a new baby was included in that, or if Kurt's sole focus was what had happened a year prior.

"Yeah, me too," Blaine said, tip-toeing to the stove where Kurt's teapot still sat. He poured himself
"Mind if I join you?"

"Not at all," Kurt said, motioning for the chair across from him. "The moon's beautiful tonight."

Blaine silently slipped into the chair, stared at the sky and its stars.

"Last year, when Violet was still with us and my family was all still there, I was telling Dad all the things I hoped for Violet. I was holding her, looking down at her and her eyes were so wide open, she was just staring at me … I couldn't help but see all these plans for the future," Kurt said quietly. "Her being with Abby was never part of the plan, but I still hope she gets everything I wanted for her."

Kurt's skin was smooth and cool under Blaine's fingers as he slipped his hand over his husband's.

"Do you think she's happy, Blaine?"

"I hope so," Blaine said, pressing a kiss to Kurt's knuckles. Kurt took a sip of tea.

"I can't believe it was a year ago that we had her at home. It feels like light-years ago – like another life, almost."

Blaine sighed. It could've been another life. They could've had a completely different life from the one they were living now, one with baby swings and pack-n-plays and zoo trips and spit up and sleepless nights and sweet giggles, and yet …

"I'm happy with my life now. Whatever life I have, as long as it's with you …" Blaine shrugged. "That's the life I want to live."

He could just see tears spring to Kurt's eyes in the dim kitchen. "Thank you for saying that. I know that, I do, I just – there are some things you just need to hear out loud."

"I know." Blaine leaned over the table, ignoring the uncomfortable press of wood into his stomach as his lips dragged over Kurt's in a slow, sweet, sensuous kiss. "You're my everything. And I'll remind you whenever you need to hear it." He looked down at Kurt's mug. "Your tea's gone. Think
you might be able to sleep now?"

"If you promise me cuddles," Kurt said softly. "I'm just warning you now – I might be needy this week."

"Well, that makes two of us," Blaine said, kissing Kurt's temple before hopping out of the chair and holding out a hand for him. "Come on. Back to bed."

* * *

Tuesday, June 25th, 2024

"I could get used to this."

Kurt opened his eyes a crack and looked over at Blaine, sprawled lazy and half-naked on a beach chair, an empty wine glass tucked into the sand next to him.

"Mmm," Kurt agreed, too blissed out to use actual words. They'd been lying under umbrellas since they'd finished breakfast that morning, slipping in and out of sleep, listening to the water lap gently at the shore.

Jeff and Nick were at the water's edge playing like children, kicking up saltwater on each other's legs, chasing each other up and down the beach. Kurt was content to open his eyes and watch them every now and again, reminding himself how grateful he was that they'd invited Blaine and him along on their vacation. It warmed his heart to see how their love for each other had grown over the last several months, how the ties of romance had only served to strengthen the bonds of their lifelong friendship.

"Let's not go home, Kurt." Blaine's voice drew him from his thoughts and he turned his head back to find Blaine now propped on an elbow. Kurt wished Blaine wasn't wearing sunglasses – he wanted to see Blaine's eyes. "Can we move here? I can write here, and you could open a shop – the kids in Nantucket wouldn't know what hit them. …Neither would their parents, actually."

"That would be nice." Kurt picked up his wine glass, took a slow sip. "But it would get old after a while, all the sand, don't you think?" he pointed out. "And we'd miss the city."
"I know. It's just – the beach, you know? It's nice. Quiet."

Kurt knew what Blaine meant. One mention of home, and his heart flew backwards – it was exactly a year since Rachel had thrown Violet's baby shower.

The memories had been hitting him hard all week, making him nostalgic and moody and melancholy. He'd woken up in a cold sweat the night before after having the nightmare again, and as much as he and Blaine were trying not to be, both of them had shorter fuses than normal.

But the memories also made him want. The shower, the baby clothes, Rachel's excitement over having a goddaughter, the quiet moments when it was just Kurt and Blaine and Violet – he remembered how big his heart felt during all of it, remembered the complete joy he'd felt during that first ultrasound they attended. He'd been in an internal tumult for a solid month, wanting but not wanting, wishing, but feeling scared to wish at all.

But the wanting was beginning to outweigh the fear. He was starting to wonder if this beach trip wouldn't be so much a distraction from the trauma of the year prior as it would be a quiet space to think, to process. To spend time with Blaine, make sure they were still on the same page.

"I'm really glad we're here, honey," Kurt finally said, reaching out blindly with his hand and finding Blaine's.

"Me too." A gentle squeeze of fingers shot warmth through Kurt's veins. "Jeff and Nick sure look like they're having fun out there. Feel like joining them, maybe?"

"Blaine, the water must be freezing."

"I'll make you warm again when we get back to the house …" Kurt saw the points of Blaine's eyebrows popping in and out of his sunglasses, and that was it, Blaine had won. (Blaine had won from the moment Kurt laid eyes on him, who was he kidding?)

"Alright, fine," Kurt huffed, but smiled anyway as Blaine tugged him toward the surf.

***
The four of them munched on veggies and fruit all day, too sun-drunk to eat anything heavier, jogging back and forth between the water and their chosen spot in the sand where four beach chairs were lined up.

Kurt convinced Blaine at one point, when the sun was at its peak in the sky and the cold water had gotten to be too much, to part ways with the ocean and build a sandcastle. It didn't take much persuading – Blaine was happy to be pulled along as Kurt searched for the perfect place in the sand to set up shop. All afternoon they worked, crafting detailed towers, turrets, even a footbridge, all surrounded of course by a grand moat filled with ocean water.

It took hours, and all the while, Blaine couldn't help but think of Violet and the beach bag they'd already put together for her, chock full of shovels and buckets, a pair of flower-shaped sunglasses, a child-sized beach towel. He'd dreamed of taking family vacations, renting a cottage right on the water like his parents had done when he was small, letting Violet dig holes in the sand all day just like he'd done. Maybe even convincing Kurt to bury him in the sand, making their little girl laugh and squeal when Blaine could only move his head and his fingers.

But that was another life, one not lived.

Oh, how he wished they could've lived it. Could \textit{still} live it, even…

Finally, a good while after the sun began its descent back down into the edge of the ocean, Kurt sat back on his haunches. They were finished.

"I'd say that's a pretty impressive sand castle," Blaine said, admiring their work.

"Mmm," Kurt agreed. "I'd say we make a pretty good team."

Blaine took Kurt's sandy hand in his own, and together, they looked back toward their beach chairs. Jeff and Nick had squeezed themselves into a single chair, two towels thrown over top of them like blankets. Jeff's head was nuzzled into Nick's shoulder, and they were sleeping.

Blaine looked back at Kurt. "I'd say it might be a good time to take that teamwork back to the house …"

A flare of interest flashed bright in Kurt's eyes, and silently they rose and began to jog through the
"You know what I really want to do?" Blaine murmured after they'd gotten past Nick and Jeff.

"What's that?" Kurt asked, turning around, a demure expression on his face.

"I want," Blaine said, pausing to kiss Kurt's neck before they hauled ass up the forty stairs, "to blow you in the kitchen, rim you in the shower, and then fuck you in the bedroom."

Kurt gasped as Blaine licked over his Adam's apple, a few grains of sand scratching against his tongue.

"That is – oh god," he whispered. "I didn't realize I'd be leaving this beach thoroughly oversexed, but from the way things are going …"

"Do you have objections?"

"Not a single one."

* * *

"Oh, god," Kurt moaned as Blaine knelt on the hard tiles of the kitchen floor, bones already aching, looking up at his husband. He had Kurt pushed back against the stove, hands clutching the handle of the oven, swim trunks pulled down low and tucked under his balls, cock deep in Blaine's mouth. "Nick and Jeff better be taking a long fucking nap out there …"

Blaine just hummed, and Kurt groaned louder, craning his neck backwards in a graceful arc. Blaine stared up appreciatively at Kurt's exposed throat, his bare chest, nipples hard. Kurt was sex to Blaine, the only thing he'd ever really wanted, especially after he realized precisely what he was getting.

"Do you feel bad," Kurt gasped above him, rolling his hips, "defiling someone else's kitchen?"
Blaine breathed deeply in through his nose. "Mm-mmm," he mumbled, shaking his head slightly, his eyes bright. Nope. In fact, he was enjoying the defiling quite a bit.

He sucked, making a vacuum seal with his lips and cheeks, and watched Kurt lose himself, his face alternating between taut and slack, his knuckles turning white on the oven handle.

"Jesus Christ …"

The familiar snap of Kurt's hips came moments later, and Blaine pulled off with a grin.

Kurt yelped, his pelvis still jerking forward, trying to reach something. "Blaine, what the hell –"

Blaine tsk'ed at him. "Don't you remember parts two and three of our little arrangement? I'm not done with you yet."

* * *

The tiles in the shower were cool under Kurt's hands as he leaned against them, legs spread as wide as they'd go with Blaine on his knees again between them. "Oh, Blaine. Oh, Blaine," he babbled over the noise of the shower.

They'd wasted no time with soap, Kurt wasn't clean, just halfway doused with water and now bent over, braced against the shower wall.

But soap was the last thing on his mind, because Blaine's mouth was everywhere, licking over his perineum, mouthing at his balls from underneath, tongue pressing into his hole, making him shake and shiver. It was pleasure, it was perfect, but it was also torture, because Blaine's tongue couldn't quite give him the prostate stimulation he wanted, and his entirely neglected dick hung suspended in the air, engorged and throbbing.

Part of him wanted to go all night like this, suspended just at the edge, at the point where the desire was almost painful but so good that he didn't care if it hurt.

And then his eyes rolled back in his head.
"Blaaaaine." It came out whinier than he meant, but Blaine's thumbs had spread him open wider and Blaine's tongue was licking deeper and yes, yes, right there, fuck –

Blaine's tongue slipped out of his hole, Blaine's hands let go of his ass, and Kurt let out a frustrated sob.

"You suck, you suck, you suck!" he yelped, whipping around to face Blaine, his cock bobbing painfully in front of him.

"Mmm, I do. Pretty sure you like it, too," Blaine said with a wink. "Can I wash the sand out of your hair, baby?"

Kurt sighed heavily, wanted to tell him no, that he'd rather shove his cock down Blaine's pretty throat again, but the scalp massages Blaine gave while washing his hair weren't anything he wanted to turn down …

"Okay. But part three had better be worth it."

* * *

"Oh-oh-oh-ohhhhhhh."

Kurt, who was only catching glimpses of the smug grin on Blaine's face because Jesus, how could anyone keep their eyes open during something like this, was in the middle of having his very words fucked out of him.

He was on his back, his bent knees gripping Blaine's sides, and Blaine was fucking into him with fervor, so hard that Kurt's head kept tapping against the headboard of the bed.

He couldn't bring himself to care.

Blaine had found the perfect angle, dragging the head of his cock against Kurt's prostate with each
motion, and it didn't matter that his own cock hadn't been touched once since the blowjob from earlier. It was hard and heavy, curved up so the tip just rested on his lower abdomen, dripping a little pool of precome on his skin.

If he touched it – if Blaine even so much as breathed on it – he was going to come, and in spite of being strung out for so long, he wasn't quite ready. And really, he wanted to come from Blaine's cock inside him alone, and given just a little more time, that was definitely happening.

"Kurt, god …"

Kurt had never really understood the Big Bang Theory up until sex with Blaine, had never been able to process the fact that all the energy in the universe had been contained in one tiny space and then exploded into a perfect galaxy. But after Blaine? After world-rocking, sock-knocking orgasms? It all made sense.

Because he felt it, the energy of a thousand heavens all concentrated into that one point inside his ass, and when it finally all exploded, once he came – well, he was pretty sure that orgasms from Blaine were good enough to create a universe all their own.

"You close?" Blaine panted, a drop of sweat from a loose curl hitting Kurt in the chest, making his cock twitch on his belly.

All Kurt could do was nod in reply.

"Good, me – ahhhhhh – me too."

Kurt pried his eyes open, stared at the tendons standing up in Blaine's neck, watched as his abs worked, tensing every time he thrust forward.

You're so hot, Kurt wanted to say, but all he got out was a strangled cry.

"Yeah, baby, come on," Blaine said, his voice deep and gravelly, balls smacking against Kurt's ass. "Come on, I want you to come first –"
"Just – just a little more," Kurt managed, sounding a lot more fraught for it than he meant to. "Try – oh, fuck – try pulling out a li- – hah – a little slower?"

Blaine did as he asked, shaking over him, grabbing Kurt's hips hard, and the head of his dick dragged over Kurt's prostate with delicious precision.

"Oh, oh, oh, like that –"

"Kurt, shit, not gonna last much longer – want me to stop, or –"

"No. No, nnnnnnnghh –" He was almost there, so close, Blaine was suspending him over the precipice – "Oh fuck, keep going, keep – fuck fuck, don't stop –"

Blaine was burying himself in Kurt's ass, his cock stretching him wide, but he managed to keep up the slow drag out that Kurt had asked for. The ridge of his glans caught just right just as Blaine desperately reached forward to pinch a nipple, and Kurt was done for.

He cried out, unable to stop himself, vibrating with it all over as his orgasm rocked through him, cock pulsing, streams of milky come spurting all over his chest. He couldn't help it then – he grabbed his cock in hand, milking it as Blaine picked up speed again. Blaine growled into Kurt's chest as he bent over, lapping up the come as he fucked into him harder.

Kurt could only moan, letting him take and take, until finally Blaine's body shuddered and he came with a loud shout.

"Oh my fucking god," Blaine gasped, pulling out with a little squelchy noise, and Kurt felt Blaine's warm come drip from his hole, sliding over his ass and onto the sheets.

"Blaine –" Kurt started, but didn't even have to finish, because Blaine came right to him, latching onto his chest in a tight embrace. Kurt needed to hold him, needed every part of his body to be touching every part of Blaine's after sex like that.

"I like my body when it is with your body," Blaine recited breathlessly, then giggled. "Like, a lot."
"I like your body when it is with my body, too," Kurt grinned into his hair. "It was a good day."

"And it ended very well," Blaine said, eyes lazy, looking a little debauched. Kurt loved him that way, loved that he was the only person who could do that to Blaine.

"Yes." He paused. "The whole room smells like sex."

"Our bedroom should always smell like sex."

"Yes, well …" It wasn't like Kurt could argue with that. "We need to do the sheets. And I need to make sure I didn't leave an ass-print on the oven before Nick and Jeff get back."

Blaine burst into laughter at that, hugged him harder. "I love you," he said. "So much. As crappy as this week is – god, you just make it so much better."

"Mmm," Kurt said, settling into Blaine's arms, kissing him gently. They could afford a little time to cuddle. "You do too honey."

* * *

Thursday, June 27th, 2024

Five AM and Kurt was giving up on sleep. He grabbed the throw draped on the trunk at the end of the bed, tossed it around his shoulders, and made his way up the spiral staircase to the small widow's walk on the roof.

The sun was barely peeking at the horizon, its orange rim casting a light glow over the water. The morning was a chilly one, the wind from the sea whipping through Kurt's hair, making the blanket billow behind him.

He'd sworn to himself that he wouldn't replay the trauma from the year before over and over in his head, the horror of finding Blaine sobbing in the bathroom, sick with grief and shock, the terrible words coming out of Blaine's mouth as they told his dad, Carole and Finn. He'd promised that he wouldn't hear Blaine's voice reading that story, that he wouldn't picture the disheveled pile of baby paraphernalia they'd made as they tried to pack her things.
But that – all of that, every scene, every noise – was exactly what he was doing. He'd been driving himself crazy, tossing and turning through a sleepless night, and refused to spend a wakeless morning doing the same. At least up on the widow's walk he could think and pace without waking Blaine.

Kurt wasn't sure if he'd ever felt so torn. He was ripped from the last stretch of light dozing with the memory of a dream – not the nightmare he'd become so accustomed to, but a new dream, one where he and Blaine were laughing in the middle of Central Park, a toddler who wasn't Violet swinging between their arms as they walked down the sidewalk. The ache in his heart after he realized that it wasn't real hadn't been that strong in ages.

He closed his eyes and stretched out his arms, the blanket catching the wind like a sail. He wished it was one – it would be nice to sail away, even to just stay here on the beach where the waves lapped at the sand in a beautiful soothing rhythm, where the world seemed idyllic. Surely there were no problems in Nantucket. Surely people didn't lose their babies here.

He knew it was a lie sure as the sun, but there was something about this place …

A sense of peace washed over him as his hair flew around his face, rebelling against the pomade he'd set it with the morning before. And just like that, a snap of fingers, in a split second, he understood.

Kurt needed to let go. He was the only person who was standing in the way of his happiness. Blaine was ready, his father was so, so supportive and excited at the thought of another grandchild, everyone he worked with was rooting for him. The fear was coming from him, and him alone.

I wish you were here. He sent the whisper out to sea, to the waves, to his mother, wherever her soul rested. I wish you could help me not be so scared.

Because what he wanted – what he really, really wanted, he was sure of it now – was a family with Blaine, a house full of life and love, one more full than just two people could make it. He thought back, two years ago back, back to when he'd first gotten the baby bug – he'd been obsessed, cooing over everything baby-related, squealing over babies in stores.

This was not that kind of baby bug.
This was a desire deep in his heart to love a person more than they could possibly love him. This was a desire to give love unconditionally, a desire for self-sacrifice. He'd gotten a ten-day taste of being a parent, barely a drop in the bucket compared to what most people experienced, but those ten days were enough to hook him and reel him in. He could deny and put off and procrastinate all he wanted – nothing would change the fact that he longed to be a father.

And there on the widow's walk, blanket ballooning behind him like a big cotton cape, Kurt decided it was time to stop being so scared and start living his life the way his dad always taught him, head held high, fear still present but never stopping him.

He'd tell Blaine that day, he decided. Maybe it would make the blow of the first anniversary of the worst day in their lives just a little bit easier to deal with.

* * *

Blaine? Blaine, honey, wake up...

Kurt's voice sounded far away, then closer, then loud, and when Blaine finally opened his eyes, he was staring at Kurt's face, no more than three inches away from his own.

"Not getting up today," Blaine grunted, turning over on his belly. "Go 'way."

"What if I made you pancakes?"

Blaine paused, considering this. Kurt's pancakes were the things of fantasies, but … "Nope."

"What if I made you crepes?"

Blaine rolled back over, slitting his eyes. "Not playing fair."

Kurt smiled. "Is that a yes, then?"

"Come get me when they're done," he said, feeling a little bit like a caveman.
"You guys sure you don't want to get some sun today?" Nick asked, gobbling down a forkful of Kurt's strawberry crepes as he hooked his ankle over Jeff's under the table.

Kurt sighed sadly, looking at them from the stove as Blaine grunted again – he was sitting at the table, wrapped in the blanket he'd dragged off his and Kurt's bed, looking surly, his hair a mop of unruly curls. Kurt hadn't gotten a chance to talk to him yet.

"You guys go on," Kurt told them. "I think we'll be staying put for the day."

"If you're sure," Jeff shrugged. "Want us to tell you if your castle's still there today?"

Kurt was honestly a little worried that Blaine would be the one to kick it in, were they to go outside. "Sure," he said. "Thanks."

"Honey? Can I talk with you for a minute?"

Blaine looked up from the bed, where he was cocooned in blankets, and saw Kurt's face peering around the corner at him. A double dose of Prozac might have been a good idea that day after all. He hated being so gruff with Kurt, who he knew was also having a bad day.

But how could either of them not be churlish? How else were they supposed to act on the anniversary of the day that their child was forcibly ripped from their home?

He didn't feel much like talking at all, but patted the spot on the bed next to him anyway.

"I went up to the widow's walk this morning before you woke up," Kurt said, rubbing his arm gently. "Blaine – I've been thinking."
Blaine rolled over. "About?"

"Family."

"And?" Tha-thud, tha-thud, tha-thud went Blaine's heart. He kept his face neutral, no expression, this could be nothing, this was probably about Burt or Finn or Emily or someone, no way was this about a baby …

"And how I want one. With you." Kurt scooted himself under the covers, spooning Blaine against him. "How I'm tired of being scared of the what-ifs, and how I'm ready to jump in with both feet again."

Blaine regarded him warily. "Is this just because it's today?" he asked. "Because if it is – Kurt, this can't be some emotional reaction to the fact that you miss our baby –"

"It isn't," Kurt assured him. "I've already talked with my dad about it. I – I'd never have mentioned it to him if I wasn't serious; you know that. I just – I'm tired. It's been a year, and I'm happy with you, I'd be happy for the rest of our lives, but you want this too, and –"

So it was true, what Blaine thought about Kurt talking to his dad. Burt was right about him coming around. But there was still a thread of doubt hanging around Blaine's head. "Are you sure? This isn't something that you can tell me and take back tomorrow."

Blaine sighed, suddenly content as Kurt took his face in his hands. "I'm sure. I'd never lead you on about something like this. I – it'll be hard, I'm not denying that, and I'm still scared shitless, but – Blaine, I want this. And I want the real thing, not some happy-go-lucky fairy tale. We've been through the trenches together before. You up for going at it one more time?"

"I – seriously?"

"Seriously."

Blaine crumpled, unable to say anything else. If it had been any other day, he would've felt elated, seeing the dream he'd carried for months come to fruition. If it had been any other day …
But it wasn't. And all he could feel was bittersweet.

"Shhh," Kurt soothed, cradling him. "I know, honey, I know."

"It's just not fair," Blaine cried into his shoulder. "It shouldn't be this hard, all we want is a baby to love …"

"I know. You're right. I know."

"I'm just so mad …"

Kurt held him in their borrowed bed, his heart alternating between bursts of searing pain where sobs escaped him in shaking gasps, and surges of joyful disbelief where laughter mixed with his tears. "I know, I know," Kurt kept repeating, and as simple as the words were, they were comforting, because they were true. Kurt was the only one in this world besides Blaine himself who did know. And he was the only person in the whole world who Blaine would be crazy enough to try it all again with.

Finally the tears stopped, and they just held each other, living in their grief, clinging to the hope of the future.

"Hey," Kurt said, his smile a little teary.

"Hey," Blaine said, wiping a drop of moisture off Kurt's cheek.

"I love you."

Almost crumbling again, Blaine managed a watery smile of his own. "God, I love you too."

* * *

"We're home!" Jeff shouted loudly from the front door of the house. "That means dicks away, clothes on, and enough space for the Holy Spirit between you two!"
Kurt grinned down at Blaine, whose head was pillowed in his lap, but the smile didn't quite reach his eyes. It had been a long day of tears and movies meant to distract themselves, which ended up causing even more tears. They were both so exhausted that sex hadn't even come up as a possibility.

"We're in the living room," Blaine called, a feeble attempt at shouting. Kurt doubted that either Nick or Jeff could hear him.

Both men appeared in the doorway a few minutes later, both a little sunburned, Jeff's hair bleached almost white by the sun, ruddy-cheeked and happy.

"Your castle still stands," Jeff said proudly. "You guys would make excellent architects."

"Thanks," Kurt said softly from the couch.

"You okay? I know it was – well …" Nick trailed off, clearly not wanting to bring it up.

"Bittersweet," Blaine said, his head still in Kurt's lap. "Break out the champagne, guys – we're trying again." He sounded completely spent; the tiny amount of excitement in his voice was clearly feigned. Kurt slipped his fingers down through Blaine's curls, rubbing softly at his scalp.

Jeff's eyes widened as he processed what Blaine had said. "Trying again for … a baby?"

Kurt and Blaine both nodded.

"Seriously?"

"Seriously," Kurt said.

"Oh my god, we should celebrate!" Nick said, breaking into a grin. "Unless – do you want to celebrate? There's this really nice restaurant that my aunt recommended – do you guys feel like going out tonight?"
Kurt couldn't possibly imagine leaving the couch for anything other than maybe ice cream and a spoon. "I think we'll pass for tonight," he said, rubbing careful patterns on Blaine's head. "But don't stay home just because of us – you guys go, have fun." Please, he added silently. He wanted a few more hours with just Blaine.

Their friends got the hint. "No problem – totally understand," Jeff said. "We'll just shower really fast, and we'll be out of your hair."

"Thank you," Blaine said, somehow making himself even smaller in Kurt's lap. "I promise we'll celebrate tomorrow, it's just today –" His voice broke. "A year ago, we were reading to her. Right now."

Kurt slipped his arm over Blaine's chest, and Blaine held it there like a teddy bear.

"I'm sorry," Jeff said, looking helpless. "We're just … we're really sorry …"

"It's – well, it's not fine, but it is what it is," Kurt said. "We'll move on tomorrow, start fresh, but today …"

"We just need today," Blaine finished for him.

"Totally," Nick said. "We'll just …" He motioned with his thumb toward the stairs.

"Thank you," Kurt said softly as they linked hands and headed up the stairs toward the bedrooms.

He looked down at Blaine. "You hungry, honey?"

"Not really, but we should eat – we haven't eaten anything since the crepes this morning." Blaine spoke with his eyes shut, like it was hurting him.

"Pizza night," Kurt decided. "Because I don't feel like going anywhere, and hell if either one of us is cooking …"
Blaine laughed drily. "We did this after she was gone. Got pizza because we couldn't stand to leave home. That was when you stopped eating …"

"Oh, Blaine," Kurt said gently. "This is not last year. It's not going to turn into last year. I'm going to keep eating and you're going to keep taking your meds and we're going to get through this."

"You're right." It was the first time Kurt had heard strength in Blaine's voice all day. "It's just a bad day. We're just having a bad day."

"We're allowed to have bad days," Kurt agreed.

"Tomorrow will be better." Blaine paused. "But for tonight … pizza actually sounds like a good idea. Can we get it and then cuddle in bed? I just want to be close to you."

"Of course we can."

* * *

Friday, June 28th, 2024

When Blaine woke the next morning, he found himself nestled in Kurt's warm arms, the sun streaming through their bedroom window. The ache of the day before had dulled some, but he was stiff from inactivity. He carefully removed himself from Kurt and arched his back, pointing his toes and flexing his calves.

Kurt stirred beside him, dragged a hand down his arm and pulled him back, clearly not ready to stop cuddling, and Blaine went willingly.

He turned over, facing Kurt, and wrapped them both in an octopus cuddle, limbs everywhere, clutching each other. "Morning," he mumbled into Kurt's neck.

"Mmm," said a very sleepy Kurt.
"Hey," Blaine said softly, cupping the back of Kurt's head with his hand, "you're not gonna take it back today, are you? Trying again?"

Kurt stretched in Blaine's arms like a cat, then opened his eyes. "No," he said, "of course not."

"You're sure?"

"Blaine, honey, when have I ever said I'd do something that I wasn't sure about?"

"Well, there was that time when you drank the Hunch Punch out of Annie's bathtub in college …"

"Yeah, well, I was right to not be sure about that, and I should have listened to my gut before it decided to talk with the inside of a toilet for three hours. Thanks for bringing that up, by the way, now I'm queasy," Kurt said, but he was smiling.

"Sorry," Blaine said, smiling back.

"But hunch punch aside – I'm talking about something important. Of course I'm sure about it – I'd never just string you along, you know that."

Blaine nodded, his chin bumping against Kurt's shoulder. "I know."

"Good. So let's enjoy the rest of our vacation, because it sounds like we'll be a little busy when we get home," Kurt said. "Wanna do yoga on the beach with me?"

"If you'll run with me a while after," Blaine said, the heaviness of the day before dissipating with the promise of what was to come.

* * *

"Burt?" Blaine said quietly into the phone while Kurt was showering, the first moment he'd had away from him all day.
"Hey kiddo! You sound good – I was worried about the two of you yesterday."

"I am good. Listen, I've only got a second, and I'll let Kurt tell you all the details later himself, but – you were right. He came around."

"He – what?"

"We're calling the adoption agency again on Monday. I promised I'd let you know first thing, and … this is first thing." Burt was silent on the other end of the line. "Burt? You there?"

"… I never thought …"

"I know." Blaine's voice matched Burt's, thick and emotional. "I'm sorry, I'm just kind of a ball of emotions right now …"

Burt chuckled gruffly. "I can imagine."

"Just – thank you," Blaine managed. "For everything. You'll be in the loop, okay?"

"Sure thing. Have Kurt call me later, okay?"

"Will do. Love you, Burt."

"Love you too, son."
Monday, July 1st, 2024

Blaine paced nervously around the living room, Romeo sticking to him like glue, still a little anxiety-ridden from being left with Rachel for a week. Blaine had told Kurt that morning that he'd handle it, that he didn't need Kurt to stay home for something as simple as a phone call.

He was eating his words.

It was silly, wishing that Kurt was there just to lay a heavy hand on Blaine's knee to keep it from bouncing or to tell him to sit still or, better yet, to bake cookies that they could stress-eat together. He was a grown man.

…But even grown men needed a little reassurance sometimes.

Finally he sighed, deciding that worrying wasn't getting him anywhere, that he needed to just hit the damn Call button and see what happened.

So he did.

"McDowell & Coffey Adoption Agency, how can we assist you?" the receptionist answered in a cheery voice.

"Um, hello." Blaine's voice came out squeaking like a fourteen-year-old boy's. He cleared his throat, tried again. "Hello. My name is Blaine Anderson-Hummel, and I'm a former client of Karen Baker's – is she in?"

"She is! I think she's at her desk – let me transfer you."

A click, and classical music began to play softly in Blaine's ear. His heart picked up the staccato rhythm while he waited.

Finally, she picked up. "Karen Baker speaking, how may I assist you?"
"Karen? It's Blaine – Blaine Anderson-Hummel?"

"Blaine … oh, it's wonderful to hear from you!" she exclaimed as recognition filled her voice. "How are you and Kurt?"

"We're good," he said, trying to sound strong, convincing. "We, uh, we were just wondering – what's the process for starting over with this whole thing?"

"Starting over with adoption?"

"Yes," Blaine said, his heart still pounding.

"Oh – oh," she said, clearing her throat, obviously trying to remain professional when there was excitement screaming through the phone. "Well, it will be much like the first time, just a little shorter since we have all your paperwork on file. How long –" she paused, and Blaine heard soft typing in the background. "Wow, it's been a year, hasn't it?"

"A really, really long year," Blaine told her. "But we're ready to try again."

He could hear the smile in Karen's voice. "I'm so glad to hear that. I'll set up home study update today, if that's alright with you – it won't be as intensive, but we'll still need to do a home inspection and a follow-up interview since it's been over a year since your last one."

"Um," Blaine gulped, suddenly nauseated, "um, I – I don't know if this will make a difference but – I –"

"Blaine?"

"I'm on an antidepressant. Have been since, um, October. Will that – will they count us out because of that?"

"Well –" Karen paused. "Obviously you don't have to disclose this to me if you don't want to, but
"was there a suicide attempt that went along with your doctor's decision to start medications?"

"No!" Blaine said. "No, it was just – well, a lot had to do with Violet, and –"

"Blaine, you don't need to explain it to me. I only asked because a recent suicide attempt would probably affect your report – but we take people being treated for depression all the time. Children are placed in homes with parents on medications like that just as frequently as with parents who aren't. As long as you're straightforward about it, none of that should be a problem."

He breathed a huge sigh of relief. He'd been so worried that he would be the reason they wouldn't get chosen, that the little bottle of pills that had made his life so much easier would turn on him, make his life that much harder.

"…a good time for you?"

Karen was speaking, and he wasn’t listening.

"I'm sorry, can you repeat that?" he asked, an embarrassed flush rising to his cheeks.

"I just asked when would be a good time for you and Kurt to do the follow-up with your home inspection," she said. "Later this week, maybe?"

"We can do whenever," Blaine said quickly. "Whatever's good for you guys. We – we'll do anything –"

"Okay," she said, her voice kind. "What about Wednesday? Before the holiday?"

* * *

"Wednesday?" Kurt screeched into the phone, slamming his office door closed. "Blaine, what were you thinking?"

"I don't know, I just said whatever was good for them, I thought the sooner the better –"
"How am I supposed to get the house clean by Wednesday when I work tomorrow?" The whole office knew he was yelling at his husband by now, they couldn't not, his voice carried, but god…

"Um – do you want to maybe calm down a little? I thought you'd be excited that we're getting this done," Blaine said, sounding thoroughly affronted.

"Of course I'm excited, Blaine, of course I'm glad we're getting it done, but I have to clean the house."

"Wow, welcome back to reality," Blaine muttered. "You know, if you haven't forgotten, I do kind of stay at home during the day, and I do have two hands and two feet and the capability of using a Swiffer."

That took Kurt down a few notches. "Blaine –"

"But if you feel that I'm so unqualified to clean the house to your standards, by all means, take another day off work and do it yourself."

"Blaine, I didn't –"

"No, that's exactly what you meant, and I'm just not taking it, Kurt. Jesus Christ." Kurt heard him take a deep breath, could almost see him pinching the bridge of his nose, trying to calm down. "Look, I'm going to go work on it, and if it's not up to your standards when you get home, feel free to take over. But I'm not going to just sit here and let you tell me I can't do something as simple as cleaning. I'll see you tonight."

"Okay," Kurt said meekly, feeling quite guilty indeed. But he also felt proud in a strange way – Blaine had been taking up for himself more since therapy with Dr. Jacobson and starting on his meds. Kurt never intended to be bossy with his husband, or make him feel inferior, but sometimes it happened anyway, and it was refreshing (and also painfully humbling) to see him refuse to be talked down to.

Kurt hung up the phone and typed in a reminder to buy Blaine flowers on his way home.
"Well, you certainly have a lovely home," the inspector said. "I'm impressed – it's practically spotless!"

Blaine shot Kurt a look, and Kurt sighed – it would take him years to live this down.

"You have my husband to thank for that. He cleaned all day yesterday," Kurt said, widening his eyes once he realized what he'd said. "Not that we normally live in a pigsty! We're clean people, I promise, there was just some – um, tidying, and –"

The inspector laughed. "I always try to tell people that we don't expect perfection, and they never believe me. All we're looking for is safety, here – everyone has clutter. If you'd seen some of the houses I've been in, you'd understand that a cereal bowl in the sink and an unmade bed – even a floor that might need a little vacuuming – is nothing in the grand scheme of things." She smiled at Blaine. "Although I do appreciate the effort you put in."

Kurt didn't know whether to be relieved for himself or worried for the rest of humanity – who in their right mind would allow a home inspector to come into a messy home?

"Now," the inspector continued, "Lisa should be on her way shortly to do your interview, and then you'll be good to go! Congratulations, guys."

"Thank you," Blaine said graciously, and showed her to the door. Once it was shut, he turned back to Kurt with a gleam in his eye. "Spotless, Kurt. She said the word spotless."

"…Actually, she said practically spotless …"

A split second later, Kurt found himself upturned and slung over Blaine's shoulder, being marched back to their bedroom. He landed with an oomph on the bed, and Blaine straddled his hips, holding him down, his fingers finding Kurt's most ticklish places.

"No, stop, stop!" Kurt squealed, peals of laughter being tugged from his belly.
"Not stopping until you admit that I can clean just as well as you can," Blaine said, a wicked grin on his face.

"I give up, I give up! You –" Kurt gasped, pausing to laugh so hard it almost hurt, " –you can clean! You can clean!"

"As well as you?"

"Yes, yes!"

Blaine stopped the tickling and snaked his arms around Kurt's back, completely encasing Kurt in a big pile of his husband. "We're gonna have another baby."

"Eventually. Don't forget, it took us almost a year to even find Abby," Kurt said, trying to be practical. "It could take even longer."

"I can wait," Blaine said softly. "I expect to wait. It's just, knowing we're on the same page again …"

"I know," Kurt said softly. "Now let me up, you big lug – I don't want to be rumpled when we meet this Lisa person."

* * *

Thursday, July 4th, 2024

Gazing at the view that the rooftop offered, Kurt walked happily through the throng of people toward the food, clutching Blaine's fingers in one hand and a sparkler in the other.

In true Rachel Berry form, her party was littered with pitchers of red, white, and blue sangria, and after two glasses (two full glasses, thanks to Blaine's heavy-handed pouring), Kurt was feeling buzzy and warm, even quite patriotic.

He'd dressed for the occasion, too – the tank he'd worn as a vest in high school, one with stars and
red and blue stripes, was practically painted to his now-filled out chest. It had definitely been the right wardrobe decision, for Blaine kept running his fingers up and down his biceps, making shivers zing down his nerves.

They got to the folding tables adorned with every possible type of summer potluck dish imaginable, and Blaine slipped an arm around Kurt's stomach, discreetly reaching up with his thumb and rubbing lightly over Kurt's nipple.

"Blaine!" he hissed, clamping his hand over Blaine's and dragging it back down to a more appropriate position. "We're in public."

"But you're so hot," Blaine whined softly, and Kurt couldn't help but grin – the heavy-handed pouring hadn't stopped at his glass.

Kurt was saved by none other than Rachel, who came sidling up to them, obviously a little tipsy herself.

"Hello, boys," she drawled, slinging an arm over both their shoulders. "Enjoying the party?"


"Oh, good!" she exclaimed.

"Rach, come here, we need to tell you something," Blaine said, taking her hand and tugging her toward a relatively empty corner. "It's a secret." He nodded exaggeratedly.

She raised her eyebrows and Kurt smiled. "Just go with it," he said. "It's not really an announcement that we'd like to make public just yet…"

"An announcement, huh?" Suddenly she and Blaine had switched roles, and it was her tugging on him. "Do tell," she said in a stage whisper, trying to be heard above the music.

"We're adopting again," Blaine blurted out.
"Well, we're *trying.*" Kurt amended, rubbing Blaine's back.

"Oh!" Rachel cried, clapping her hands together. "Oh, that's wonderful news! I –" All of a sudden, she stopped and burst into tears.

Kurt and Blaine stared at her in horror. "Rach," Kurt said, reaching for her hand, "what's wrong sweetie?"

"I just – I feel so guilty," she said, hiccupping. "I'm a girl with a functioning uterus, and I'm too selfish to use it to help my best friends –"

"But Rachel, we've never even mentioned surrogacy," Blaine said, stroking her hair. "Where's all this coming from?"

She sniffled. "I had a pregnancy scare last week. I – if the test had been positive, I – I'm just not at a place where I can be pregnant right now –"

"Oh, *sweetie,*" Kurt cooed, gathering her into a hug while she cried on his shoulder, shrugging at a few of her *Funny Girl* costars as they gave her a questioning look. "*Shhh,* *shhh,* that has *nothing* to do with us, we would never have expected –" The words came out easy, but his heart clenched just a little bit. It wasn’t fair, Rachel being able to create something she didn’t even *want,* not that it was her fault …

"I know, I know," she said, her breath coming out in short gasps. She wiped at her eyes, smearing mascara all over her face. "I just – things with Liam are really good, and –" Her lips pressed together in a thin line while she tried to hold it together. "I wouldn't want something like that to break us up. We're so *happy* – and the show – but then, what kind of person does that make me? Getting rid of a baby, after everything you guys have been through …"

"*Shhh,* Rachel, Rachel, it's okay," Blaine said, taking over for Kurt, kissing the top of her head. "You should know we wouldn't have been upset, it's not like it would've been *our* baby. It's your body, sweetie, your life …" But Kurt knew he was feeling the same, judging by the grimace Blaine shot him over the top of her head.

"I know. I know," Rachel repeated. "But I never even offered – I never even *thought* about it –"
"And how could you?" Kurt asked, choosing not to be that friend as Blaine released her, tipping her chin up to look into his eyes. "You're playing Fanny Brice, Rach. On Broadway. The role you've dreamed of your entire life. How could you give that up?"

"I —" She broke off, tears rolling silently down her face. "I'm sorry."

Kurt clucked at her. "Nothing to apologize for. Nothing even happened – just a scare, right? Just promise that this next time, if we ever get a baby placed with us again, that you'll still be up for being the godmother?"

A tearful smile broke her frown. "Do you mean that?"

"Of course we mean it," Blaine said. "Who else would be qualified for it but you?"

"Oh, I love you guys!" she said through her tears, throwing her arms around both their necks.

"We love you too, Rach," Kurt chuckled. "But maybe lay off the sangria for the rest of the night? We wouldn't want you crying straight through your own party."

She looked sheepish as she pulled away from their hug. "Maybe so," she admitted.

"Go find Liam. Get him to cheer you up," Blaine suggested, grinning.

"Yeah, and maybe let us watch. He's cute," Kurt said with a cocked eyebrow, and Rachel let out a scandalized squeal.

"Kurt!!"

* * *

The sun sat lower and lower in the sky as the evening wore on, and the guests at Rachel's party consumed pitcher after pitcher of sangria, waiting for fireworks, eating burgers and dancing to the music booming from the speakers set up at the corners of the rooftop.
Blaine was trying to dance with Kurt, arms draped over his shoulders, lazily swaying to the music, but his husband’s mood had been a bit subdued since their conversation with Rachel. “What’s wrong, baby?” he finally asked, the pet name coming out loose and easy through his sangria-fuzzy thoughts.

"I shouldn’t be upset … but I’m a little upset."

"She wasn’t, though. She didn’t," Blaine said, knowing precisely what he was referencing.

"But she would have. And – what I said, about it being her body, her choice – all that’s true. But damn, it stings more than I would’ve thought. It’s not my fault I’m in love with the same set of reproductive parts as I have."

Blaine smiled a little, gasped. "You only love me for my genitals?"

Kurt rolled his eyes, but smiled back. "Seriously, Blaine – aren’t you even a little bit jealous?"

"Of course I am. But it’s not like she was doing it on purpose, and it really would be a terrible time for her to get pregnant. It just – it would suck all around. For everybody."

"I’d never say anything to her though …"

"Of course not," Blaine said. "I don’t want you to think I’m brushing your feelings off – it stung me a little too, when she said it. But it didn’t happen, and even if it did, the only thing we could really do is be supportive – I mean, it’s Rachel, you know?"

Kurt nodded. "I know."

"Now, dance with me? Please? Everybody else is getting their mack on …" Blaine nodded toward the other couples, and caught a glimpse of Rachel and Liam, kissing as they swayed back and forth.

"Aww, is Blainey Days feeling a little left out of all the fun?" Kurt cooed.
Blaine nodded sullenly, playing it up, and dragged Kurt out amongst the swaying bodies. Kurt loosened up after that, helped along when his favorite song blasted over the speakers, and when the fireworks began, they were locked in a sensuous kiss. When Blaine finally tore his lips away from Kurt's and looked into the sky, light was raining down from the dark heavens above.

"Gorgeous," Blaine murmured.

"You hated them last year," Kurt pointed out.

"I wasn't talking about the fireworks." He grinned at his own line and pulled Kurt into another kiss, his tongue snaking into Kurt's mouth. "But you're right. I did," he said when they finally surfaced for air. "Not so much this year."

"I'm glad. I don't like to see your sparkle dulled," Kurt said, grinning. "Cause baby? You're a firework."

"Oh my god, you did not just say that," Blaine cackled brightly, tipping his head back. "How much sangria did you drink?"

"Enough," Kurt said with a coy smile and gave Blaine a little shimmy to the beat of the music. "You wanna dance? Let's dance."

* * *

**Friday, July 5th, 2024**

"Dad?"

"Hey, kiddo! What's up?"

Kurt scowled, holding his head gingerly. After being woken up by an early call from the adoption agency, he was feeling less than stellar, but who was he to complain …
"Not so loud, Dad."

"Somebody have a little too much fun at Rachel's party last night?"

"How’d you know where we were?"

He could hear his dad's smile over the phone. "A little bird – I think it was a warbler, actually – sent me a text message last night."

Kurt chuckled in spite of himself. "Of course he did. I need to talk with you."

"Must be important if you're calling me hungover."

"Not hungover, really, just a killer headache," Kurt said. "But it is important." He paused. "You know how I was talking about maybe trying again a couple weeks ago? With a family, with Blaine?"

"Mm-hmm," Burt said.

"Well – we talked with the adoption agency, and we've done our follow-up home study and … we're on the list again. They let us know this morning that everything went through. I just wanted you to know."

"Oh, Kurt." His dad sounded so happy, warm and kind through the phone, and Kurt imagined a calm, peaceful smile on his dad's face. "That's great."

"It is. And now … we just wait again, I guess."

"You know me and Carole are waiting right there with you. You boys ever need a break from all the stress in that big city, you just come on home," he said.

"Thanks, Dad. We will."
"And once you get me that grandbaby? You'd better be coming on home a lot."

Kurt laughed, then quickly stopped as spikes seemed to drive into his head. "I promise. Our child will know you, Dad. How could it not? You're the best granddad in the whole world. I've seen you in action before, you know …"

"Kurt. Thank you." Burt paused. "I'm so happy for you and Blaine. You know that, right? So proud of both you boys."

"I know, Dad." He was surprised to find that his eyes were suddenly wet, and swallowed thickly. "I – it has to end better than last time, right? They say lightning can't strike in the same place twice …"

He knew it was a lie, both literally and metaphorically speaking. He and Blaine had read of couples who'd had failed adoptions three times in succession before ever getting to raise a baby. He couldn't imagine surviving that disappointment more than once …

"I sure hope it does, Kurt." Burt was quiet after that, and Kurt reminded himself for the umpteenth time that he and Blaine weren't the only ones who'd lost something when Abby took Violet back.

"Just have to be patient, I guess," Kurt said after a while, but he knew his voice wasn't convincing.

"I know you and Blaine will get through it together, no matter what happens," Burt said. "And you know your old man's always here."

"Thanks, Dad." He sighed. "I might go back to bed – I was gonna get up and make breakfast, but my head is killing me, and I just don't feel like it …"

"No shame in that," Burt told him. "Take some medicine and get Blaine to rub your neck – or is he hungover, too?"

"He's asleep," Kurt said, looking fondly at his husband's sleeping form in the bed.
"Okay. Keep me posted, then."

"You know I will. Love you, Dad."

"Love you too, kiddo."

* * *

Tuesday, July 9th, 2024

Beads of sweat swelled on Blaine's forehead and butterflies flew in a frenzy in his stomach as he sat across from Alex, a large desk between them, Nick in a chair at his side.

"You ready?"

"I guess as ready as I'll ever be …"

Alex grinned and unearthed a book from a box under his desk.

Blaine blinked once, twice, then took it, running his fingers over the book's cool spine. Tunnel vision took over, and the only thing he could focus on in the entire room was the book cover, a picture of his own hand outstretched, reaching for something, underneath the title: *Nothing Left for You to Hold: a collection of short stories*.

"It's perfect," he breathed, tears pricking at the backs of his eyes, threatening to spill over. "It's exactly what I wanted …" He turned to Nick. "Thank you so much –"

Nick pulled him into a tight hug, and Alex squeezed his arm. "It's good, Blaine," Alex told him. "You should be proud."

"I – I am, I think," Blaine said. "There's more of me in this one than normal …"

"And that's why it's so good," Nick said. "I've read it. It's fantastic. Don't you dare tell Jeff, but it
made me cry."

"Really?" It had made Blaine cry while he was writing it, but it was so personal, so raw – he didn't really expect other people …

"Hell, it made me cry," Alex said with a grin.

Blaine raised his eyebrows. "Really?"

"Well, almost."

"So," Blaine said, patting the book affectionately, "twenty days till this baby hits the shelves?"

"And counting," Alex said. "Kurt planned a shindig for you yet?"

Nick laughed. "What do you think? You've met Kurt, right?"

"I have," Alex grinned. "Always reminds me of a very brightly colored hurricane."

Blaine burst into laughter. "Oh, I'm totally telling on you when I get home. Being married to him is like having my own personal event planner though."

"Well it's not like this isn't a reason to celebrate," Nick said. "We're all proud of you, man."

"Thanks." Blaine took a breath, sat back in his chair, flipped the book open.

*His eyes meet yours, fury 'neath the calm façade, and he speaks a mere four words: no son of mine …*

Mmmm, maybe not that chapter. Not today. He flipped forward several pages.
The mother, who once shared her baby's eyes, kneels on loose dirt and folds prostrate, hands curling, digging earth under fingernails …

Huh. Maybe not that chapter, either. "…It's really depressing," he said with a self-deprecating chuckle. "I think I'd forgotten how much – do you think people will want to read something this sad?"

"I wanted to read it," Alex said.

"Yeah, but you're my agent," Blaine countered. "You kind of have to read it."

"I don't have to enjoy it. But I did."

"Well – if you really think so …"

Nick took the book from his hands, flipped through the pages, and handed it back to him.

"You tell me this part won't make them want to keep coming back."

"Emily Dickinson once said that 'Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul,'" John says. His mother looks at the table instead of his eyes. "But I don't think so. I think hope is waking up in the morning and choosing to try again."

"That part?" Blaine asked. "That was almost an exact replica of a conversation Kurt and I had."

"Well, I guess that's why it hit me so hard," Nick said, squeezing Blaine's shoulder. "It's good, Blaine. Don't second guess yourself."

Blaine took the book back, flipped through a few more pages. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess it is."
"So, how's the waiting going?" Dr. Jacobson was asking, fanning herself with a stack of papers since the air conditioner in her office was on the fritz.

"We haven't even been waiting for a week," Blaine laughed. "I'm in this for the long haul – we're completely okay with the fact that it might take a year or two, maybe more. I'm just glad Kurt and I are on the same page."

"Good. I'm glad to hear that."

Blaine let himself sprawl for a moment before saying anything – the heavy July heat infiltrated everything, and he just seemed to stay wilted. He'd been having to get up earlier and earlier for his runs, if he got to run at all.

"So how are you?" Dr. Jacobson asked when he stayed quiet. "Still feel like your meds are working for you?"

"I'm good," he said. "Meds are good. June was hard, but this month – I don't know, I feel better than I've felt in a long time."

"You seem balanced," she commented. "Calm."

"Maybe it's the running?" Blaine wiped a bead of sweat away just before it dripped into his eye. "Endorphins, something?"

She smiled. "Getting out of the house? Maybe being comfortable being alone with yourself?"

"Still working on that some of the time," Blaine admitted. Of course, things were better than they used to be, but he still had his days …

"Maybe that's what we'll work on the next several weeks, then," Dr. Jacobson suggested. "Can you try to practice enjoying your own company?"
"I – I'm not entirely sure how to do that."

She smiled at him. "Well that's why you need to practice, isn't it? Try doing something you enjoy, whether it's just getting a cup of coffee, or reading – no writing though, this can't be work – and do it by yourself. Go to a movie. Go for a walk. Just practice being alone with yourself. Come back in two weeks, and we'll talk about how things went, alright?"

He smiled, standing up from the couch, pulling his t-shirt away from his chest where the fabric had stuck there. "You always manage to figure out new ways to stretch me …"

"That's what I get paid the big bucks for," she laughed. "I'm really, really happy for you and Kurt, by the way."

"Thanks. We're happy for us, too."

"Let me know if there's anything I can do for you; otherwise, I'll see you in a couple weeks!"

"Sure thing, Dr. J," Blaine said, waving at her as he walked out the door.

Practicing alone time. He'd never thought about it before – he usually only wanted to be alone when there was intense thinking that needed to be done, or when he needed to write, but when he wanted to enjoy himself?

This was going to take some practice.

* * *

Thursday, July 11th, 2024

"Kurt-Kurt-Kurt, guess what!" Finn exclaimed boyishly into Kurt's ear.

"What?" Kurt asked, adjusting the phone on his shoulder as he sewed a neon green whip stitch into
"We had our doctor's appointment yesterday," Finn said, sounding like he was going to burst with excitement at any moment. "Everything's great, Em's eighteen weeks and a day today and we found out – we're having a boy."

Kurt set the dress on the table and scooted his chair back. "Oh my god," he said, the situation suddenly feeling a lot more real. "I – the only designs I've put together for the nursery are for girl nurseries! I didn't even do anything gender neutral! What was I thinking??"

"What?" Kurt squealed, kicking his feet. "Finn, that's great!"

"Yeah. It kind of is," Finn said. "I feel weird. Like I'm some kind of real grown-up now or something …"

"Well, we'd better be 'real grown-ups,' Finn. We are all over thirty now," Kurt pointed out with a grin.

"And that is still weird. But you know what I mean," Finn said. "I just – I never thought I'd be this excited, having a baby, settling down. But it's awesome. I love going to Em's appointments with her, watching those ultrasounds …"

Kurt's heart sank the tiniest bit, remembering the ultrasounds he and Blaine witnessed, the joy they brought. "I understand, Finn."

"Yeah, sort of, but you and Blaine were always going to settle. I mean, I didn't know if you guys would have kids or not, but you were definitely going to end up married forever. I never – I don't know. After Rach, I just couldn't ever see myself trying again, putting myself out there like that. Until now."

"I'm glad you're happy, Finn," Kurt said, and meant it. The pain of Emily's pregnancy had dulled
even further with the advent of his and Blaine's new season of waiting, and he found himself thinking about her, how she was doing, what she would like in a nursery. "We'll wait until closer to time, but I can't wait to help you guys design the baby's room. Have you talked about names yet?"

"Some. We're giving it a while, I think – we don't want to make any rash decisions just yet." Finn paused. "Kurt, I'm gonna have a son. That's so weird."

"Somebody you'll be able to play football with, right?" Kurt said.

"Maybe. Or he might turn out to be like you," Finn said fondly.

"Hey! I can play football!"

"You played one game, Kurt. You kicked one field goal."

Kurt huffed. "I kicked the winning field goal."

"Yeah, yeah, I remember. I'm just saying – my kid doesn't have to come out just like me in order for me to love him, you know? Like, if he wants to paint or sing or something instead of doing sports – I just want to be as good a dad to my kid as Burt is to you."

Kurt felt himself soften, and he leaned back in his chair. "If you'd told me sophomore year of high school that I would hear those words come out of your mouth, Finn …" How very far his brother had come over the years. "Thank you for saying that. It means a lot to me. It would mean a lot if you told Dad, too."

"I did," Finn said. "Accidentally made him cry. Mom, too. We went for dinner last night."

"Oh, I bet they both loved that."

"They dote on Emily like she's their long-lost daughter, actually," Finn chuckled. "I think they like her better than either one of us."
"Even better than Blaine?" Kurt asked.

"Well … I don't know, maybe not better than Blaine. But they're about even, I think." Finn paused. "How'd that happen, exactly?"

"I guess we picked good people."

Kurt could hear the warmth in Finn's voice, and the warmth spread to him as well. "Yeah. We really did."

* * *

Sunday, July 14th, 2024

A flirty brush of fingers, and tingles ran all the way up Blaine's arm. He shot Kurt a sultry grin, then bumped Kurt's hip lightly with his own.

It was a lazy Sunday afternoon after a lazy Sunday morning of sleeping in, and they'd managed to amble their way into the park with Romeo on his leash and a picnic basket on Kurt's arm.

Their hands flitted back and forth, fingers brushing against each other like when they'd first started dating, only the sparks they were making weren't from nerves but years of chemistry. They could make *explosions* if they tried.

But they weren't trying just then, and Blaine was content to flirt with his husband, sneaking touches and one quick stolen kiss on Kurt's temple when he wasn't paying attention, until they found a spot to lay their blanket.

"You know what would be great?" Kurt said, pillowing his head in Blaine's lap.

"What's that?" Blaine asked, bending to kiss him then opening the picnic basket to pull out a bag of grapes. He gently placed one at Kurt's lips, and Kurt sucked the grape inside.

"If we had a baby by Christmas." He chewed the grape, swallowed. "I know it probably won't
happen, but Finn and Emily's little boy will be here by then, and I just – it'd be fun to have kids the same age, you know?"

Blaine idly petted Kurt's hair as he thought of a baby at Christmastime. Baby pictures in Christmas stockings, tiny Santa hats – but no, he couldn't get his hopes up. Rein it in, Blaine…

"It would be great," he agreed. "It might dull the sting from last year a little…"

They'd spent the last Christmas at Burt and Carole's, walking around in a daze, feigning excitement and holiday cheer, quietly gorging themselves on Kurt's Christmas cookies and eggnog. Any Christmas they had would be better than the last one.

Kurt smiled at him a little sheepishly. "I guess it might be a little early, getting excited about Christmas in July. Who knows what'll happen by then …"

"Honestly, Kurt? We'll probably still be waiting."

"At least we have something to wait for."

"Mmm, since when are you Mr. Silver Lining?" Blaine asked, placing another grape between Kurt's lips and bursting it with his own teeth in a juicy, sweet kiss.

"Better than being Mr. Grumpy Gills, isn't it?" Kurt asked when they parted.

"Oh, definitely."

"You're flirty today, mister." Kurt's grin shined up at Blaine from his lap, and god, he loved days like this. Everything felt so right when he and Kurt had play days, no work allowed, reserved only for loving each other.

"Yeah? So are you."

Kurt's cheeks blushed pink as peonies. "Well," he said, casting his gaze away from Blaine's eyes,
"it's easy, flirting with somebody as ... well ... you-ish as you are."

Blaine laughed easily, leaning back on his hands. "What does that mean?"

Trailing his index finger in one long line down Blaine's chest, Kurt elaborated. "Well – you're dark and handsome –"

"Hey, you forgot the tall part!"

"Oh honey."

"Fine, I will continue my delusions of grandeur by myself," Blaine huffed playfully. "Continue."

"You're funny and silly at only the right times. You've got a killer voice and you're not too bad in bed and – well, you married me. It's easy to flirt with the guy who married you, right?"

"I guess so," Blaine said, slipping another grape between Kurt's lips, "because I've been doing it for most of the day."

"Mmm, you have," said Kurt, swallowing down the grape juice. "You don't have to quit, you know."

"I could never quit you." He chased the grape with another kiss, longer and deeper this time, and Kurt sat up on his knees, changing the angle. "I almost tried once, remember?" His hand came up to cup Kurt's face, and he brushed his thumb over Kurt's beautifully high cheekbone. "Didn't work out so well for me."

Kurt sighed, high-pitched and wistful. "You," he said, then sighed again. "I love you."

"More than anything," Blaine agreed, and slipped his arms around Kurt's torso in a warm, tight embrace. He loved days like this.

* * *
Friday, July 19th, 2024

Blaine's feet flew over the sidewalk, the morning light just beginning to break over the New York skyline.

It had been over a week since he was first prescribed alone time by Dr. Jacobson, and he hadn't been particularly proactive in seeking it out. It wasn't that he hated himself, not by a long shot anymore. It was just *easier* to be with people.

But he'd been restless when he woke up extra-early that morning, and with the summer heat, just before dawn was the best time to run. He'd pulled on his running gear, left a note for Kurt, and jogged out the door and down the street.

Now, with sweat pouring down his face in rivulets, staining his t-shirt in large circles on his back and under his arms, he appreciated the time with himself.

In the four miles he'd already run, he'd been ruminating over the last year, over where he and Kurt had started and how far they'd come, over how comfortable he'd gotten in his own skin. How comfortable he was in their decision to adopt again, how at peace he was with *waiting* again, with whatever happened, really.

Whether it be six months or two years, or never, as long as he was with Kurt, that was all that mattered to him.

He turned, changing directions on the sidewalk, and ran back toward home.

* * *

Kurt woke alone in the bed.

Eyes still closed, he'd reached out for Blaine, only to find an empty space where his husband should've been. His eyes flew open, heart racing, a side-effect of the year prior that just kept hanging on.
Then his hand landed on a small piece of paper on Blaine's pillow, and he let himself breathe. Blaine wasn't gone. He was running.

*Just* running. Not running *away.*

Heart beginning to calm, Kurt swung his legs over the side of the bed, forcing himself up. The sun outside was just beginning to take on that morning brightness that he loved so much, and he stumbled to the living room and opened the blinds.

It was a good morning for yoga.

He started with a sun salutation, his hello to the morning, then stepped into warrior pose and held it, letting calm energy flow through him.

He was strong. His and Blaine's love was strong. They'd made it this far, they could make it through another waiting season.

He closed his eyes, sensing the sun's rays on his face where they shined through the window. Just as his arm was beginning to shake the slightest bit, he heard Blaine's key in the lock.

Kurt moved into a half-moon pose, his leg extended in the air, toes pointed to the sky.

"God, you're beautiful," he heard Blaine say. Behind him, the refrigerator opened, and he could hear Blaine guzzling down a bottle of water. He held the pose, keeping his leg strong.

"Can I join?"

Blaine's voice was suddenly much closer, and Kurt could feel the warmth of Blaine's body. He nodded his head, taking a second to glance behind him and watch Blaine settle into the same pose.

They moved in silent synchrony, Blaine following his lead, and the calm energy that coursed through Kurt's body soon morphed to iron-clad, steady love.
Blaine was folding clothes, humming to himself, when Kurt got home from work that evening.

"Blaine, honey? Do you have a minute to go over a few things for your party?"

"My – oh! My party! I almost forgot!" Blaine exclaimed, dropping the shirt he was folding onto the top of the dryer.

"Yes, the party that we're hosting upstairs on the roof in just over a week, that we don't have tables or tablecloths for. That party. Remember?" Kurt teased.

"I do now! What do you need to know?"

"Well, the guest list is done and invitations have been sent, but we still have to finalize the menu, get tables, figure out a couple kinds of wine, decide what we're wearing …"

Blaine chuckled. "Okay, I get the point. I was just gonna do easy dinner tonight, that good organic frozen pizza and some salad. Wanna set up shop at the table while I throw the pizza stone in the oven, and we can get to marking stuff off your list?"

"Sounds perfect."

Blaine resumed his humming as he finished folding the shirt, then propped the laundry basket full of folded clothes on his hip, carting it to their bedroom.

"Look at you, Mr. Domestic." There was a fondness in Kurt's voice that made Blaine's heart thrum.

"Look at you, Mr. Creative Director and Party Planner and Gourmet Chef and Multi-tasker of the Year," Blaine said, glancing behind him and shooting Kurt a wide smile. "I'm just trying to help out where I can."

Kurt's face softened, and he all but ran forward, throwing his arms around Blaine, pressing against
his back. The laundry basket nearly launched itself to the floor, and Blaine half-dropped, half-tossed it on the bed, trying not to topple all the folded clothes over. When he was sure that they were still folded, safe and sound, he pulled Kurt's arms around him even tighter, leaned back into his chest.

"What was that for?"

"I'm just so proud of you," Kurt murmured, kissing his cheek. "Your book, Blaine, it's going to touch so many people and you seem so happy and so calm and I'm just so in love with you still …"

Kurt's voice was thick, and it made Blaine's heart feel the same way, like it was trying to grow a size bigger. He turned in Kurt's arms, facing him. "I'm so in love with you still, too. Thank you for planning a party for me."

"You deserve all the parties in the world, honey," Kurt said fondly. "I just – I don't know, I just feel really, really in love with you tonight."

"Good. Maybe – dance with me while the pizza cooks, then?"

"Mmmm, yes, please."

* * *

Thursday, July 25th, 2024

Blaine slept late that morning, a full hour past when Kurt left for work, extra-tired from a late-night workout session with Nick. When his alarm rang for the third time, he dragged himself from the bed, pouring a cup of the coffee that Kurt had made and left for him. The morning paper was waiting for him on the table, and Blaine smiled and sighed. He was so lucky.

He took his mug and the paper into the living room where the morning light was streaming through the windows. Planting himself in the cushy navy easy chair that neither of them typically sat in – it was Burt's chair, even in his absence – Blaine closed his eyes and sipped his coffee, basking in the stillness of the morning. He was trying to be more diligent with the alone-time, was trying to develop a good morning routine for himself on days Kurt worked. Over the last week, on the few days he didn't run, he'd taken to soaking up the sun, letting himself enjoy the paper and two cups of coffee before he got ready to face the day.
His morning routine was interrupted that morning, however, by the ringing of his cell phone.

It was the adoption agency.

"Hey, Karen," he said, sloshing coffee on his sleep shirt when he reached to answer the phone. He frowned down at it, wondering if he needed to strip out of it and spritz it in Shout before it stained. "What's up? Did we miss sending part of our paperwork?"

"Blaine!" She sounded delighted. "No, actually I have unusually happy news for you."

"Oh?" he asked, settling back. "What kind of happy news?"

"It almost never happens this fast, but there's a baby. It's a girl – she's two days old, and she was set to be adopted by the mother's second cousin and her husband, but they backed out at the last minute – the birthmother wants a few potential parents to interview."

First shock, like he'd been hit with a brick.


"Yes, Blaine."

Then joy. Unadulterated joy coursing through his veins; the sky was lit with it. "Seriously? When can we come? Where do we need to go?"

"Blaine, wait. Before you decide, I have to tell you – the baby's in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit."
Thursday, July 25th, 2024

The baby's in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

The words rang like a gunshot in Blaine's ears. "...What? Is it – was she really early? Is she – god, isn't that where really, really sick babies go?"

"She's term, but the birthmother tested positive for drugs, Blaine. So did the baby. Mom's been in and out of jail several times following up to and during her pregnancy, and she's finally gotten in a methadone clinic, but the baby was positive for several other things on her admission to the hospital. She's in severe drug withdrawal right now."

"Wait – I don't understand." Blaine dragged a hand through his hair. "The – the baby? Is in drug withdrawal?"

"Yes. The drugs pass through the placenta, Blaine. Once the baby's born, it doesn't feel the effects of those drugs anymore, and goes into the same type of withdrawal as an adult would. I don't know exactly how long she'll be in the NICU, but from what I've seen, it usually takes a while."

Blaine sank back against Burt's chair. He felt like he'd entered the twilight zone. "What does a while mean, exactly? Are we talking days, here? Weeks?"

"Weeks, at least. Sometimes months, from what I've seen before."


"Some research shows an increased chance of learning disabilities or ADHD. But so much of it depends on what point in development the mother was taking the drugs, and on the baby – there’s a lot we just don’t know, Blaine. Is this still something you want to consider? Do you need to talk it over with Kurt?"

"I – Kurt's not even home. He's at work. God, I – when do we have to let you know?"
"Today," she said. "The mother is interviewing parents this afternoon. If you're going to act, you need to act now, Blaine. It would be best if you could call me back in an hour at the most. I'm sorry it's such short notice. I will say – it could be months or even years before something like this happens again. You might want to take advantage of it while you have the chance."

"Okay. Of course. I – thank you. I need to call Kurt …"

Blaine hung up the phone, put his head in his hands and tried to breathe as he dialed Kurt's number.

"Hey honey, can I call you back in about half an hour? I'm about to walk into Marc's office –"

"No. No, Kurt, you need to come home. Right now," Blaine said.

Blaine could practically hear Kurt stop in his tracks. "Blaine? What happened?"

"Karen called. There's a baby –"

"Oh my god. Oh my – a baby? Already?"

"Yes, but – look, just leave now and I'll fill you in on your way home, and then we'll talk about it when you get here, okay?"

"I – okay – um, hang on, let me tell Marc –"

"You don't have time to tell Marc, Kurt, we only have an hour to decide."

"What's there to decide? Did you not say yes? Why didn't you say yes, Blaine?"

"Because – look, the baby – she, it's a girl – she's in intensive care, Kurt. She's going through withdrawal because her mom took drugs throughout her pregnancy. I didn't want to make a decision like that without at least talking to you first –"
"She what?" Kurt exclaimed. "Oh my god, that's awful." He paused. "…What does that do to a baby?"

"Long-term, it sounds like they don't really know? Karen mentioned potential learning disabilities or ADHD, but she also said a lot of it just depends on the kid," Blaine said. "She wasn't specific about what's happening to her now."

"Well … shit," Kurt said. "I'm leaving now."

"'Kay. See you in a minute …" Blaine hung up, put his head in his hands. It was like he'd just been thrown into a washing machine on the spin cycle. He'd been so prepared to wait – it could've been years. And now? Right now? Were they even ready?

He walked into the office, half blind with shock, his legs carrying his body by muscle memory. Violet's memory box sat on the shelf in the closet where it always had, and he pulled it down, carefully fingering the little hospital hat, gazing at the joy in his and Kurt's eyes in one of the pictures they'd kept.

He slumped down in Kurt's desk chair, the picture clutched in his hand. He'd be lying through his teeth if he said he wasn't ready, if he said he didn't want this so bad again his heart could burst with it.

But drugs? A baby in the NICU? Right now?

Yes, he wanted, but oh, he was terrified.

* * *

"She's basically abandoned," Blaine said softly after Kurt got home and they'd curled into each other on the couch. "Her mom can't take care of her, her family doesn't want her …"

"The hospital bills are going to be astronomical if she has to stay for months," Kurt said, looking up at the ceiling, and a flash of anger coursed through Blaine.
"Do you want a baby or not?"

"Yes, of course I do, but –"

"But nothing. It's not like we can't afford it, Kurt. If we'd used a surrogate, and that baby was sick or had a heart problem or something and needed to be in the hospital, there would be no question. There shouldn't be a question here."

"I just don't want us to take on something we can't handle. This is – I don't know, it's really sudden, and –"

"I know." Blaine paused, sighed. "I'm sorry I just sort of sprung this on you …"

"It got sprung on you, too."

Blaine sat, holding onto Kurt's hand for dear life. "Bright side: if her mom is testing positive for drugs, there's no way she'll be able to take the baby back."

Kurt smiled sadly. "That's a good point."

"This might be our only chance, you know."

"I know," Kurt said softly, dragging a hand through his hair. "I know. You're right."

"So – do we call Karen? Or not?"

"What do you want, Blaine?" Kurt asked.

Blaine squeezed his eyes shut. "I want a baby. I don't – I don't think I care about anything that might be wrong with it. I was looking at Violet's box, and – we were so *happy*, Kurt, and another *girl* …"
"Then we call Karen." Kurt pressed a hard kiss to Blaine's temple. "Because that's what I want, too."

* * *

"So, have you met this girl?" Kurt asked Karen over the phone as Blaine looked up directions to the hospital in a frenzy. "Any helpful hints for getting on her good side? And how many sets of parents are we competing with, here?"

It was awful, but it helped if he thought of it like the fashion industry, cutthroat and unforgiving. It was a competition, after all, even if it was for a baby.

"I think there are three, including you."

Three. Two to beat. Decent odds, he had to admit.

"As for suggestions, don't coddle her. She's only twenty, but she's lived a lot of life in those twenty years. She isn't stupid. Tell her the truth, and don't pretend to be something you're not. She'll respect that."

"What if we hate her?"

Karen sighed. "It seems that she hates herself, so you might be in good company, there."

* * *

An hour and a half later, they found themselves getting off the 4-train and walking across the street toward the Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center.

Kurt cringed as they entered through the automatic double doors, walking past smokers in hospital gowns with IV poles loitering outside the front entrance. His heart clenched as they passed a woman crumpled on a bench in the lobby, crying loudly and alone. He hated hospitals.
Blaine took his hand and squeezed it tight as they walked toward the desk, where Blaine confidently asked for directions to the women's center. After being directed to the fourteenth floor, they made their way to the elevators.

"Do you think we're underdressed?" Blaine asked quietly once the doors closed on them. They hadn't put much thought into their clothes, both of them in jeans, Blaine in a polo and Kurt in a striped crew-neck t-shirt. It was sweltering outside, definitely not suit weather, and they'd been too busy trying to hurry and get there to worry about the impression their wardrobe would make.

"Not to sound snooty, but Blaine, she's a drug addict. She's been in jail off and on all spring. I'm not sure she's expecting us to show up in Armani, you know?"

Blaine nodded, looking at the ground. "Truth?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm scared shitless."

Kurt sighed and stepped closer, slipping his arm around Blaine's waist and leaning his head against Blaine's. "Me too, honey."

Fifteen minutes later, after going to the wrong wing and getting lost on a floor that had few women and no babies, they made it to the postpartum nurses' station.

They were shown to a waiting room where Karen was waiting for them, along with another social worker and another couple. The other couple was straight and older, at least 40, a tight-lipped woman in a fitted navy suit paired with a man in Dior gray who kept dabbing at his balding head with a paisley handkerchief. Kurt hated them on sight.

They eyed Kurt and Blaine warily, sizing up the competition, and Kurt saw the woman raise her eyebrows at her husband out of the corner of his eye. He was glad they seemed haughty and pretentious. It would've been harder to hate them on principle if they were nice.

An awkward silence filled the room, none of them saying anything, and Kurt watched as Blaine
took Karen's hand beside him.

A very long ten minutes later, a third social worker ushered another couple into the room. They were younger, maybe even younger than Kurt and Blaine, and the woman was crying. Kurt wondered if they'd tried the coddling route, and if it had gone badly.

"Martha? John? I think it's your turn."

The older couple were led out of the room, and Kurt looked down at his hands as the girl beside him continued to sniffle.

"She's awful," she eventually whispered.

"Bitch," her husband muttered bitterly.

Blaine chanced a glance at them, and the girl shook her head. "She's horrid. She should never be allowed to reproduce again. Can't they do something about that? I mean, really …"

Kurt kept looking at his hands.

Finally Martha and John came back, both of them scowling. "She threw my portfolio at me. Right at my face," he grumbled, plopping into the chair and swiping at his brow with the handkerchief again. "Jesus. I hope that personality isn't genetic."

Kurt and Blaine rose silently and followed Karen into the hall. "I think I might do well to do the talking at first," Kurt said softly, squeezing Blaine's hand. "I think you're too nice."

Blaine nodded, squeezing back.

When they got to the birthmother's room, Kurt was surprised – the girl in the bed was beautiful, if you looked past the arms marred with track lines and obvious scars from self-injury, and a truly awful bleach job on her hair. Even in the hospital bed, her eyeliner was too dark and harsh, her cheekbones too sharp. She wasn't in a gown, but her own clothes, black and tight with a lacy pink bra peeking from beneath her top, showing off cleavage so deep she could house a small family of
rabbits between them.

She laughed out loud when she saw them. "What're a couple of fairies like you doin' in a place like this? Don't you belong in the Hamptons or somethin'?"

Her Bronx accent was thick, and Kurt raised his eyebrows at her.

"We're from the East Village, actually."

"Yeah, well, close enough."

Karen cleared her throat, stepping in. "Guys, this is Kayla. Kayla, this is Kurt and Blaine Anderson-Hummel."

"Yeah, whatever, nice to meet you and shit. I just wanna know two things: what the hell you want a cracked-out baby for, and why I should let you take mine home with you."

This struck a nerve with Blaine, apparently, because he did not follow Kurt's request to stay quiet. "We want your cracked-out baby because she doesn't have anybody else, and we – or, I, at least, know what it's like to feel abandoned. And I don't want that happening to a child when I can prevent it."

Kurt gazed at him, impressed and proud.

"Hey, Lover Boy over there – you wanna stop staring at him and answer that second part? What about two queers should say to me, 'Oh, damn, they'll make really great parents'?"

"Well, first," Kurt said, frowning at her, "you obviously hated the other couples that you saw, so we might be your last option." She gave them an appraising look but didn't say anything, so he continued. "Second, we would make really great parents. We're financially stable and could give the baby a good life, but you already know that or we wouldn't be with an adoption agency." He sighed. "Look, when you're gay, and you decide to have a kid, you really, really have to want it. And we do. And we'd like to take yours home to raise, since you can't."
She sat back in the bed. "You done this before? You have any other kids?"

"Yes, and no," Blaine answered softly. "Her name was Violet, and her mother took her back after we'd had her home for eight days."

"Shit," she said, her eyes widening. "Well, count on me not doing that. They wouldn't give her to me even if I wanted her."

"Good to know. So why'd your cousin back out?" Kurt asked, hoping it wouldn't provoke her into throwing things at them like they had with the Martha and John couple.

Anger flared in her eyes. "I never said I'd answer questions."

"Well, I think it's only fair. There had to be some reason she didn't want her."

To their surprise, Kayla's eyes filled with tears. "She couldn't deal with her, she said. She heard her crying and it was too much, and the hospital bills, and she already has three kids …" And just like that, the anger was back. "Fuck," she said, wiping her eyes and swiping black mascara onto her face. "I'm done with this."

Kurt nodded and took Blaine's hand. They walked out toward the hall, then to Kurt's surprise, Blaine stopped and turned back around.

"You know, whether you pick us or not, this is a really great thing that you're doing for your baby. No matter what anybody else tells you, you made the right decision."

Kayla laughed drily. "It's the only good decision I've made since I was twelve. Might as well do something right, I guess."

They could hear the other couples badmouthing Kayla before they even got to the waiting room.

"Dude, I bet she really ripped you guys to shreds," the younger guy said as they walked in and sat down.
"No, actually," Kurt snapped, cold in his response. "And I try not to judge. She's not as bad as she seems."

"Are you crazy?" the older woman, Martha, snipped.

"No," Kurt said softly, playing with Blaine's fingers. "It's just that in another world, under slightly different circumstances, I could've been there, too."

* * *

Out of spite, Blaine figured, she made them all wait another hour and a half, and then said she wanted them all to meet the baby, and have the nurses let her know who bonded best.

Blaine felt like he was in a weird, twisted version of The Hunger Games, where instead of food, fame and fortune, the winner got a child.

* * *

They were ushered by the social workers into the NICU, a locked ward that seemed to be a mystery to anyone who wasn't part of its strange universe.

They were made to wash their hands – "Scrub with the brushes for a full three minutes" – remove all jewelry but wedding bands, and follow along behind the three social workers leading their destiny like the Israelites following Moses to the Promised Land.

They came to a room – Pod 3, they called it, and Kurt formed a mental picture of tiny little babies being blasted into space in tiny, individual, pod-like spacecrafts.

And that's where the ladies they followed stopped, and just like Moses did, turned their fate over into the hands of other leaders. A nurse in navy scrubs took over and led them into the pod, where some of the beds did in fact look like spacecrafts. Some of the beds were open and Kurt wondered how on earth those tiny little naked babies weren't freezing to death.
Then they came to a crib dressed in hospital blankets, and the nurse stopped and nodded her head toward it. "Here she is," she said, "and you're in luck, because it's almost time for her to eat."

And, as if on cue, the little bundle in the crib started wiggling around. Kurt leaned forward to try and see better, and as he moved, the baby let out the most blood-curdling wail Kurt had ever heard. He jumped back, clinging to Blaine's hand.

"Oh my god," Blaine murmured.

It was nothing like Violet's cry.

The nurse pressed through the six of them to get to the baby, made quick work of the diaper and took a temperature while they all stood and watched, dumbfounded as the baby shook violently. After several minutes, the 40-year-old couple turned and left. "I just don't think she'll be a good fit," Kurt heard the husband tell the social worker.

And then there were two.

The nurse turned to the remaining couples. "Let me feed her and then you can hold her," she said.

"Can we not feed –" Kurt started, but the nurse quickly cut him off.

"No," She sighed and looked up at him. "At this point, it's not like feeding a normal baby. She's having trouble eating, she gets really messy and she's been projectile vomiting a lot. We just need to make sure she gets enough food, okay?"

Kurt nodded, feeling like a student who'd been scolded by his teacher.

They watched as the baby ate, then threw up, then screamed like she was being tortured, and repeated the whole cycle over again. Suddenly the other couple didn't seem quite so much like mortal enemies as terrified confidants. They exchanged wary glances as the nurse finished burping her, then held her up. "Who wants to go first?"

The girl from the other couple tentatively held out her arms, but immediately seemed to feel
awkward as the baby began to scream again, throwing her head from side to side. "Shhh, shhh," the girl chanted, but Kurt noticed she didn't hold the baby close, and she didn't rock her or try to give her a pacifier. Her husband seemed even more reluctant to do anything. "I'm sorry," she told the nurse, raising her voice over the baby's cries. "I just – I've never heard a baby cry like this …"

Kurt and Blaine hadn't either, but when the girl finally gave up, Blaine reached out his arms and snuggled her to his shoulder, murmuring softly to her even as she screamed in his ear. "It's okay," he whispered, and only Kurt could read his lips to tell what he was saying. "I've got you. Dad–" He cut himself off, squeezing his eyes shut tight, his dark lashes fanning out against his tanned skin. "I've got you."

Kurt wanted to cry.

Blaine finally handed her over, still whimpering, frantic for her pacifier, but not crying nearly as loud as she'd been when he'd taken her. Kurt cradled her in his arms and really looked for the first time. Her little head was covered in wispy light brown hair, wild and frizzy from sweat and rubbing her head on Blaine's shoulder for several minutes solid. Her cheeks were flaming red, with what could only be scratch marks from her own fingernails. Her eyes were squinched shut too tightly for him to see their color, but she had a precious button nose that reminded him of Violet's. She was tiny, smaller than Violet had been, with long, skinny arms and legs that threatened to come out of her blankets. He barely felt like he was holding anything at all. As he held her, blinking back tears and bouncing gently, she finally relaxed and went to sleep. The worried expression on her face never left, though, and she never really seemed to relax.

By force of sheer willpower, he held her out to the other couple. "Do you want her back for a few minutes now that she's not crying?" he asked.

They took her and cooed over her and Kurt stepped into Blaine's space because there was nowhere else he could go, Blaine's arms circling his stomach and anchoring him to the ground.

* * *

"Kurt."

They'd found solace in an empty elevator, and Blaine's head was swimming as they made their slow descent back to the bottom floor. He felt a little like he was going to throw up, mostly from shock and the roiling nerves that boiled in his belly.
How could a mother knowingly do something like that to her child?

What if she didn't pick them?

What if she did?

"Blaine."

Kurt's eyes were as anguished as Blaine felt. It made him feel – well, not better, just less alone, and he sighed heavily, rubbing a hand across the back of his neck. "I don't know if I can do this."

"…Which part?" Kurt asked carefully.

"I – all of it. I feel like – I don't know, Kurt, I don't even know how I should feel."

"Are you scared?" Kurt asked softly, looking at the ground. "I'm scared."

"I'm petrified," Blaine murmured.

"Then let's be petrified together." Kurt reached for Blaine's hand just as the elevator doors opened, revealing the hospital lobby.

They squinted as the late afternoon sun flared through the lobby windows, piercing their eyes and stunting their vision. They blindly stumbled out of the elevator and toward the doors.

Kurt looked at Blaine with weary eyes after they'd left, the sticky July heat making Blaine's hair frizz. "I just realized – we haven't had anything to eat all day. Do you want to grab some dinner before we go home?"

"I saw a McDonald's on the block where we got off the 4-train. Can we please just go eat some grease?"
"Oh my god, yes."

* * *

Kurt closed his eyes as he dipped two fries in his vanilla milkshake. This was exactly what they needed.

"Oph my odd, iss is so oooood," Blaine moaned around a huge bite of Big Mac before taking a huge slurp of coke from his straw.

"Mmm, Mickey D's, perfect for drowning your sorrows in unadulterated lard," Kurt grinned.

"I love it. We haven't eaten here in years."

Kurt dipped two more fries in his milkshake and licked them clean, smiling as Blaine's foot grazed his ankle. "Okay, real talk," he said. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I need to go back to the hospital and have my arteries unclogged," he quipped. Kurt gave him a look, and he shrugged. "I don't know. I feel like my emotions are all over the place. I'm still totally in shock. I want to hate her mom, but … you heard her in the room, it sounds like she's been doing shit since she was twelve. It's pretty obvious that nobody really cared about her growing up."

The corners of Kurt's mouth dipped downward. "I know. I wasn't kidding earlier when I said that under different circumstances, that could've been me." He took a huge bite of his quarter-pounder.

Blaine shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "That's not something I really like to think about, Kurt. But then … holding that baby just about killed me. It's been – god, since Violet, I guess, since I've held any baby, and then she was hurting on top of that, it was so obvious. I just don't understand how you can willingly and knowingly hurt an innocent child like that."

"I don't know," Kurt said after swallowing. "I guess that's what makes an addict an addict …"

"Yeah, I guess so," Blaine said, looking down and playing with a fry. "Kurt – do you think we can handle a baby like that?"
"I don't think we have a lot of room to be picky if we really want a baby."

Blaine shrugged.

"Honey?" Kurt asked, a wave of discomfort curling in his abdomen that had nothing to do with the burger he'd just eaten. "Are you wanting to back out of this?"

"I – no. No, that's not even – I want to love her, Kurt. I want to love her like I loved Violet, but I want it to last, and I'm so, so scared that we're never even going to set foot in that hospital again. And if we do take her home – what if I don't love her? What if she cries so much that we can't stand it and we're miserable all the time? What if we regret it? What if –" His voice dropped down to a whisper. "What if I end up like my dad?"

"Oh, Blaine," Kurt murmured, "are you still worried about that?"

"I don't know," Blaine mumbled, dunking a fry in the little blob of ketchup on his napkin. "I think I'm worried about everything right now."

"Well, that's what the McDonald's is for, isn't it?" Kurt asked, giving him a small smile and squeezing his hand. "To tide us through one more session of hurry-up-and-wait?"

"Yeah." Blaine managed to smile back. "It's just – I don't even know, Kurt, I'm ready, but this is so soon. We've only been on the list for what, three weeks? None of this has even had time to sink in …"

Kurt slid his hand over on top of Blaine's. "I know, honey. I feel shell-shocked, almost – but if this is really what we want …"

"It is. It is. We could be bringing home a baby soon. Or – well, who knows when, but still – Kurt. She could be ours."

Tears sprang to Kurt's eyes. "Well. I guess we've both made our decision, then."
"I guess we have," Blaine said, breaking out into a watery smile. "Dammit, we can't cry, Kurt. Think of food. Grease. I think we're gonna need a couple of apple pies for the road."

"Oh my goooood," Kurt groaned, swiping at his eyes, "I haven't had one of those things in so long … Brilliant plan, honey. You're a genius."

"Let's get four," he said. "One for now, one for later. There's nothing wrong with eating our feelings after the day we've had, right?"

"Right. And I bet they go great with ice cream."

* * *

McDonald's apple pies, it turned out, paired wonderfully with ice cream. Which they were still eating at midnight.

"Let's give it up, Blaine," Kurt said, blinking his bleary eyes hard. "She's not calling tonight."

Blaine tipped his head sideways. "Is no news good news, you think?" he asked, half-buzzing from all the sugar he'd ingested. "Or is it bad news?"

"Considering the birthmother's attitude from earlier, no news is probably just her stringing us all along, trying to make us sweat a little," Kurt said, yawning a huge yawn. "I'm sure we'll hear something by tomorrow."

"Do you think you can sleep?"

Kurt raised his eyebrows. "I've been up since five this morning. I'm kind of dying for some sleep."

"Right. Well … bed, then?" Blaine asked.

"Do you think you won't be able to sleep, honey?" Kurt asked, looking concerned.
"I – I don't know. I still feel like a bundle of nerves …"

"I think I'm tired enough to let you octopus cuddle me without caring too much, if that helps," Kurt said with a grin.

Blaine smiled softly. "That might help, actually."

"Well then, come hither, my darling."

Blaine followed Kurt to their bedroom where they shed their clothes down to their underwear and crawled sleepily into bed. Kurt opened his arms and Blaine's heart softened a little as he scooted closer, wrapping his arms all the way around Kurt's back and tangling their legs together. Kurt rubbed his back soothingly for a moment, but then the motion stopped and Blaine could hear the tiniest of snores come from Kurt's nose.

Blaine sighed, cuddled closer, and tried to relax.
Friday, July 26th, 2024

Kurt woke up in a sweaty tangle of blankets and limbs to the sun shining through their window.

Blaine was still wrapped around him, now breathing slow and steady, and Kurt frowned, wanting to extricate himself from Blaine's heavy grasp, but not wanting to wake him up. The dark circles under Blaine's eyes told him that his husband hadn't been asleep for long.

Kurt picked up Blaine's arm, causing him to stir, and when Kurt slid out from under the sheet, his eyes blinked open.

"Shhh, honey, go back to sleep," Kurt whispered. "I'm just running to the bathroom, I'll be back."

Blaine looked confused for a moment, then turned over on his stomach and within seconds, his breathing was steady again.

Kurt sighed, watching him, then walked into the bathroom. He stood, looking in the mirror for a long time, worrying and wondering about what the day would bring. He felt like he was standing on a precipice, ready to either fly or fall, uncomfortable that someone else would ultimately make the decision that would seal their fate.

Eventually he took a breath and washed his face, then tugged on a pair of shorts. After making sure that Blaine was still asleep, he went and called Marc at the studio.

"Kurt!" he answered, sounding like he was ready to burst. "What's the news?"

"No news yet," Kurt told him. "We're playing the waiting game today – I was calling to let you know I won't be coming in."

"You'd better not!" Marc chided, and Kurt could practically see his hand on his hip, his eyebrows raised. "You take all the time you need; this ship will run itself for a while."
"Just don't put Gavin in charge," he said, smiling.

Marc laughed. "I do have more sense than that, Kurt. We're all sending good vibes to you and Blaine today."

"Thanks. I think we need all the good vibes we can get."

Kurt hung up with him and stared at his phone, willing it to ring. When it stayed silent, he went and stood in the office, taking in the green walls, his desk that faced the window. Oh, how he longed to replace that desk with a glider, to put a crib where his sewing machine was once again.

He closed his eyes and let himself hope, let his mind wander to color schemes and nursery themes. Would they go bright and cheerful, with coral and aqua? Would a neutral gray-scale help keep her calmer? Did they want flowers, or animals, or geometric shapes?

* * *

Two hours passed, and they were still in bed.

Blaine was sleeping still, letting out heavy puffs of breath every now and then, making Kurt smile fondly.

Kurt was trying to read a book, but it wasn't going well as he'd read the same sentence four times and still had no idea what it said. He kept stealing glances at their phones, side-by-side on his nightstand.

They were infuriatingly quiet, their screens dark.
He sighed and put the book down, scooting back down in the bed and pulling the covers over his head.

It was then, of course, that his phone rang, buzzing and dancing erratically.

He shot out from under the covers, fumbling for the phone with one hand and shaking Blaine's shoulder with the other.

"Hello?" he answered, trying not to sound too frantic.

"Kurt?" He couldn't read anything from Karen's voice, and his heart pounded hard in his chest.

"Yes, yes, please tell me she's decided. Please tell me we don't have to wait any longer –"

"Is Blaine there?"

"He is," Kurt said, his heart dropping into his stomach. How could this be good news?

"Why don't you put him on speakerphone? I'd like you both to hear this at the same time," she said.

"I – okay," he said, breathing a little faster, "hang on a second …" He put the phone down, then shook Blaine's shoulder again. "Blaine, honey, wake up – Karen's on the phone."

Blaine sat straight up in bed, his eyes wide. "What? What'd she say?"

"She hasn't yet. She wants to tell us both at the same time. I kind of have a bad feeling, though …"

Blaine sighed, then nodded solemnly. "Okay. C'mere." Kurt grabbed the phone and settled back into Blaine's arms, slipping his arm around Blaine's waist as they propped up against their headboard.
Kurt hit the speaker button on his phone and took a breath. "Okay Karen," he said, "we're both here."

"Good," she said. "I just finished speaking with Kayla, and she said she spent all night thinking about what she should do. Her attitude was completely different from yesterday – she was almost somber. I think this was a harder decision than she thought it would be, and I think she cares more than she ever thought she would."

"And?" Blaine asked, squeezing Kurt's hand so tight it was almost painful.

"And I hope you guys are ready for a long commute for the next couple months to visit your baby at the hospital," Karen said, and Kurt could finally hear the smile in her voice.

"What?" he asked, completely taken aback.

"She chose you. She was absolutely certain when I talked with her, no doubts in her mind. She said, and I quote, 'They seem pretty kick-ass.'"

"What?" Blaine repeated, his face slowly lighting up.

"The baby's yours."

"Well …" Kurt said, still feeling skeptical. He couldn't believe it. "She's ours after a 30-day probationary period and then months of waiting for a court date and then it's only if all the i's have been dotted and t's have been crossed …"

"Kurt, sweetie, Kayla's going back to jail as soon as she gets released from the hospital. Even if she wanted custody back, the state would have to obtain custody first because she's been positive for drugs, and the baby would be put into foster care. I don't think that's going to happen this time around."

"I – okay," Kurt said, reluctant to believe her.
"So did she say why she chose us?" Blaine asked. Kurt looked at him, and saw a single tear running down his cheek. He hoped desperately that Blaine wouldn't get his heart broken all over again – obviously he wasn't keeping as thick a guard up as Kurt was.

"She said she was expecting you to be snobby and pretentious," Karen answered. "She said she wanted to hate you just like she hated the rest of the parents, but you were the only couple who was straight with her, who didn't try to impress her. I guess she respected that."

"So, um, what do we do now?" Kurt asked, unable to keep from smiling at the joy that colored Blaine's face.

"Well, I've got some paperwork here with me that needs to be filled out, and then you can go visit her if you'd like to."

"I – yes. Right. Okay. Let us get ready, and it takes a while to get there, and – I don't know, what do you think, Kurt? Maybe an hour and a half?" Blaine asked.

"Something like that. Can we just call you and meet you in the hospital lobby? Or do we need to meet you somewhere besides the hospital?"

"No," Karen said, "the hospital should be fine. I can't wait to see you!"

* * *

This can't be real.

Blaine braced his hands on the wall under the showerhead and let his head hang between his arms, rivulets of water streaming down his face, so full that he couldn't tell if he was crying or not.

It can't be.

Relief and unadulterated joy and sheer terror were all flooding his body at once, threatening to reduce him to a sobbing wreck on the floor, but that wasn't an option anymore. He had a baby to take care of.
A baby.

Their baby.

He was a dad again.

And oh, god, he couldn't wait to see her.

* * *

Kurt wandered back into the office while Blaine showered.

He sat down on the floor in the place where Violet's rug used to be, sank down into child's pose and closed his eyes. He remembered doing this over a year ago, heartbroken and sick with grief, and winced at the memory.

Now he rested in the hope of things to come, the tension leaving his back and his shoulders little by little. It was true that he hardly believed it was happening, and his heart was full of trepidation, fearful of being broken again. But hope.

* * *

Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, Blaine had recited to him once, and oh, Emily Dickinson wasn't lying, because he certainly felt like he could fly.

He heard the water in the bathroom turn off and sighed, content to let Blaine come find him.

Ten minutes later, he got his wish.

"Hey, whatcha doing?" Blaine asked from the doorway.

Kurt turned his head to the side and watched as Blaine towel-dried his mop of wet curls. "Designing the nursery."
Blaine smiled, raising his eyebrows. "From the floor?"

"Think outside the box a little, honey."

"Mmm, I'll be sure to do that. Bathroom's all yours."

Kurt gracefully shifted out of child's pose. "You should time me. This might be the fastest shower I ever take."

* * *

Karen greeted them in the lobby of the hospital with a huge hug and a stack of papers. After they signed what felt like their lives away for the second time, and made copies of every piece of identification they owned, they headed back up to the NICU to see their daughter.

Daugther.

The word alone made Kurt's heart do flip-flops and somersaults inside his chest, and he vacillated between being wary as hell and wanting to jump up and down and clap his hands like a child.

They did the handwashing routine for the second day in a row, and god, how did the nurses keep their skin from sloughing off if they had to do this every day? Kurt's forearms were already growing red, and it had only been the second day he'd used a scrub brush. He needed to invest in a new heavy-duty moisturizer.

After their hands and arms were squeaky clean, Blaine gave Kurt a meaningful look.

"Are you ready for round two?" he asked, reaching to grasp Kurt's hand.

"Ready as I'll ever be," Kurt answered, unsure if Blaine was talking about a second round with the baby, or a second round as dads altogether.
Blaine nodded and they walked, hand-in-hand, toward Pod 3.

As they approached their baby's bedside – they had to give her a name soon, Kurt realized – they were met by a nurse in the standard navy scrubs, smiling and looking friendly. "Hi! I'm assuming you guys are Kurt and Blaine Anderson-Hummel – Karen called and told us to be expecting you," she said, and Kurt let out the breath that he'd been holding.

"Hi," Blaine said with a wide smile, always so outgoing, and shook the nurse's hand. "I'm Blaine, and this is my husband, Kurt."

"It's nice to meet you both," the nurse said. "My name's Sarah Grace. I'm taking care of your baby today. Does she have a name yet?"

"Not yet," Kurt said, cringing. "I'm sorry, it was so sudden, we just finished signing the papers a few minutes ago –"

"Speaking of which, you probably need copies of these … here you go," Blaine said, handing over the stack of their copies of everything they signed. "We have the adoption papers and copies of every piece of identification we own – I don't know if you need all that, or if Karen gave you guys anything yet or what –"

"Guys, guys, calm down," Sarah Grace said with a smile. "Take a breath. We can take care of all of this stuff in a minute, okay?"

Kurt gave her a sheepish look. "Sorry," he repeated. "I guess we're a little high strung today."

"Nothing to apologize for," she said, patting his arm. "Now, let's go see that sweet girl of yours, hmm?"

They followed her nervously to the crib where their daughter was sleeping and peered underneath the hospital blanket that was draped over her.

"Is that – can she breathe under there?" Blaine asked, looking at the blanket warily.
Sarah Grace smiled. "She can. It's just to keep everything dark for her, so that she's more comfortable. But if it makes you feel any better, we've also got her hooked up to monitors that keep track of her heart rate, how many times she's breathing, and what the level of oxygen in her blood is. We've got her covered, I promise."

Blaine blanched. "I didn't mean to imply that you weren't taking care of her," he said in a rush. "I just wanted to make sure –"

"Blaine. Take a breath," she said, still smiling. "It's okay."

Blaine still looked unsure, and Kurt placed a steady hand on the small of his back.

"I think I know what might make you guys feel better. Would you like to hold her? She's having a really good day – her scores are so much lower than they were yesterday."

Kurt looked at her blankly, but nodded. "Yeah, we'd love to hold her – but you'll have to explain what exactly you mean by her 'scores.'"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Sarah Grace said as she pulled back the blankets, revealing a much calmer baby than what they'd seen the day before. "It's how we measure the severity of her withdrawal. She gets assigned a number depending on her symptoms – stuff like increased muscle tone, not sleeping well, fussiness, lots of things. Yesterday her scores were anywhere from fifteen to eighteen. Today they're down to eights and nines."

They blinked at her, and she smiled again. "You'll get used to the jargon eventually, I promise. For now, here. Meet your daughter. Baby girl, meet your dads."

She picked the baby up and cradled her lovingly, then handed her to Kurt, who stretched his arms out for her greedily.

The tension and the nerves and the terror vanished into thin air as he stared down into the sweet face of his little girl. She was perfect, scratched face, red cheeks and all. "Hi, sweetheart," he murmured, cradling her close. He looked up at Sarah Grace. "Can I kiss her? Is that allowed?"

The nurse beamed at him. "She's yours, Kurt. Of course it is."
"Right. It just – it hasn't quite sunk in yet," he said. "We weren't really expecting to get a baby for at least a year…"

"And how long has it been?"

"Three weeks," Blaine answered.

"Oh my word! That's not long at all!" Sarah Grace exclaimed. "Well don't worry about it. I completely understand."

"Um," Kurt said, wrinkling his nose, "can we bring her some clothes to wear? I know these t-shirts are probably really easy to work around, but…"

"Oh, of course you can! Bring anything you want – clothes, blankets, socks, whatever. No shoes, though, and to be honest, stuff that zips is a little hard to deal with just because of her leads. But anything with snaps, or little baby gowns or whatever is totally fine."

Kurt breathed a sigh of relief – he hated to see her lying there in standard-issue hospital blankets and a boring, ill-fitting white t-shirt. She'd look so much cuter with some color…

"Good. We'll fix you up tomorrow, sweetheart." Kurt hugged her close to his chest and bent his head, pressing a gentle kiss to her smooth forehead.

"Oh, Kurt." He looked up to see Blaine looking at him with watery eyes, blinking fast. He moved closer, wrapping his arms around Kurt's, cradling their baby, and hooked his chin over Kurt's shoulder. "Look at her."

"She's perfect," Kurt whispered.

"She's ours."

* * *
They spent the remainder of the day at the hospital, holding and cuddling their baby, whispering to her when she cried, and Sarah Grace even let Blaine try his hand at a bottle. Kurt was proud of his self-restraint – he didn't laugh, not even a giggle, when the baby looked straight at him and threw up all over Blaine's t-shirt.

Leaving the hospital that evening was strange. It felt wrong to leave empty-handed, but to Kurt, it still didn't feel real enough that they should take a baby home with them, either. They had nothing ready for her – the crib was still in storage collecting dust, they hadn't even talked about a nursery, they didn't even have any bottles or formula.

In some ways, Kurt thought guiltily, it may have been a blessing in disguise that the baby would be in the NICU for a while.

She didn't even have a name yet, after all.

* * *

Blaine was drifting toward sleep that night, curled into Kurt's side, when Kurt threw Blaine's arm off his side and sat straight up in bed.

"My dad. We never told my dad."

Blaine's eyes widened. "Oh my god, you're right." He watched as Kurt went into full-on panic mode, nearly falling out of the bed as he fumbled around looking for his phone.

"Shit, shit, shit, where is it?" he said, looking around on the floor, his hips and legs the only parts of him left on the bed.

"Kurt, babe, just use mine," Blaine said, pulling up Burt's number in his contacts. "I'll put him on speaker."

Kurt jerked himself back up and grasped Blaine's hand tightly.
When Burt answered, his voice was fearful. "Blaine?" he asked. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything's fine, Dad, we're both here," Kurt said.

"Oh, thank god, you nearly gave your old man a heart attack."

"Dad."

"Sorry, sorry, not funny. But it's eleven at night, I see Blaine's face on my caller ID, I get a little worried about you, son. What's going on?"

"We just – we need to talk to you," Kurt said. "Put Carole on, too."

"... Okay," Burt said, sounding wary.

They heard some fumbling, and eventually Carole's voice saying, "Oh, give me that – you've got to learn to use this thing, honey."

"Okay, got her," Burt said. "Now, what's up?"

"Well ... not to usurp Finn and Emily's excitement, but –"

"Oh my god you've already got a baby," Carole breathed.

Blaine couldn't keep the grin off his face. "We do." And then he wished they'd been on Skype instead of their phones, because Burt and Carole both burst out into joyous laughter and Blaine knew they were hugging, and wished he could see it.

"There is one thing, though," Kurt said, wincing at the news he was going to have to give.

"She – Dad, she's in the NICU."

"She? She. Oh, another girl," Burt said, overjoyed. Blaine didn't even know that Burt was able to reach this spectrum of emotions. "Oh my god … but – what'd you say? She's in the what?"


Their side of the line fell silent, and Blaine squeezed Kurt's hand.

"Why – why is she there?" Burt asked.

Kurt took a deep breath. "Because she's in drug withdrawal. Her mother was on – well, we don't know exactly, but a lot of stuff, and – Dad, she'll be there for at least six weeks."

"Oh, Kurt," Carole sighed sadly. "That poor baby. Does she have a name yet? Do you have any pictures?"

"We – oh god, we didn't even take any," Blaine said, guilt washing over him like a tidal wave. "We don't have any pictures of our own child, god –"

"And she doesn't have a name yet, no. We just signed all the papers today, we – we're not doing very well at this parenting thing so far, are we?" Kurt asked.

"You're doing fine," Burt reassured them. "It's just a little more sudden this time around. You guys weren't expecting this anytime soon …"

"No. It doesn't quite feel real yet," Blaine said, squeezing Kurt's hand. "And it's harder, with her not here …"

"You'll get there," Carole said, her voice thick. "Oh, I can't wait to see her –"
"Guess that party of yours is on hold for now, huh, Blaine?" Burt said.

They gasped in unison. "The party!" Kurt exclaimed. "Oh my god I hadn't even thought about that _-

"Shit, my book –" Blaine said, dropping his head into his hands.

"Boys, it's fine. All you have to do is let the people on your guest list know – it's all friends and family, right? Everyone will understand," Carole said. "And Blaine, your book will get published whether you're there or not. That's what you have an agent and a publisher for, right?"

Blaine breathed deep and slow. "Yes. Thank you. I – we're not being very practical right now –"

"You don't worry about any of that tonight," Burt warned them. "It's been a long day for the both of you already. Get some sleep and you can focus on all that tomorrow. Just – let us know if we need to cancel our plane tickets, okay?"

"No!" Kurt exclaimed. "No, please come, we want you to meet her. Dad, I really want you here –"

"Okay, okay, I'll be there, kiddo. I promise. Hey, and send a picture or two from your next hospital visit, you got that?"

"Got it," Blaine said.

"Boys? Congratulations," Carole said. "I can't wait to meet her."

"Thank you, Carole," Kurt said, emotion filling his voice.

"Night, guys," Burt said, and Blaine tugged Kurt back against him as he hung up the phone.

"I cannot believe that I forgot about your party," Kurt groaned, falling backwards onto the bed, his hands covering his face. "Worst husband ever …."
"If having the worst husband ever means our baby getting the best dad ever, I'm still the luckiest man in the world," Blaine murmured in Kurt's ear, curling up to him again. "Your dad's right. We can't worry about this tonight. We need to rest up so we can be on our A-game for her tomorrow. I couldn't care less about my party."

Kurt took his hand, played with his fingers. "Blaine, we have a baby," he sighed, settling into his pillow. "I love her already."

"So do I," Blaine whispered to the quiet room as Romeo whined at their feet, digging a nest in their blankets.

* * *

**Saturday, July 27**th, **2024**

Kurt and Blaine were up with the dawn, showering quickly and quietly, Kurt throwing some cereal in two bowls while Blaine called the hospital for an update.

"How is she this morning? Did she have a good night? Can we still come see her?"

Kurt smiled to himself as he poured their milk – nothing could have been more attractive in that moment than his husband's concern for their daughter.

He had a daughter.

He had a *daughter*. With *Blaine*.

He wondered if the waterworks would ever stop – they'd be crying through July and August again this year it seemed, but for an entirely different reason.

"She had a decent night," Blaine told him after he hung up with the nurse. "They said her scores were running eight to ten, whatever that means – think we can get them to explain that better today?"
"Maybe," Kurt said, checking the time on his phone and seeing a reminder to pick up tables. "Ugghh," he groaned, "I still have to cancel the caterers …"

"Kurt, it'll work out. We have more important things to worry about than caterers – just send a mass email and tell everybody what happened at the same time. We can write it on the subway, send it as soon as we're above ground."

Kurt sighed. "At least one of us has a brain today. We have so much to do, Blaine. Like the nursery. Oh god, I have to design two nurseries …"

"Hey," Blaine said, striding over and wrapping his arms around Kurt, gently pressing Kurt's head to his shoulder. "Shhh. You don't have to design two nurseries yet. She's not coming home tomorrow. Can we worry about the more pressing things now and concentrate on that later?"

"Like clothes?" Kurt asked, his voice muffled by Blaine's shoulder.

Blaine stiffened a little. "We got rid of all Vi's clothes, didn't we?"

Kurt nodded.

"Okay. Well. We'll just – buy new ones, then."

"This morning?" Kurt looked at Blaine with doe-eyes, silently pleading. He hated to walk into that pod another day and see his baby girl in naught but an ugly white t-shirt …

Blaine sighed. "This morning. But only a few things, Kurt …"

***

"This isn't a few things, Kurt," Blaine said, a wry grin on his face, as they approached the cash register.
Their hands were full of soft cotton clothes, onesies in flowery prints, gowns covered in tiny rosebuds, sleepers in soft pastels, and a sleep sheep was tucked under Kurt's arm.

"As much as she spits up? She's going to need several changes of clothes every day. And then we'll have to do laundry … I just don't want them to run out," he explained. "Ooooh, Blaine, look at that skirt!"

Blaine chuckled, walking over to it. "Do you really think they could take care of her while she's wearing a tutu, Kurt?"

He made a face. "I guess we should stick to onesies for right now …"

"We can play dress up when she gets out of the hospital," Blaine assured him. "Less wires, less people …"

"I know. I'm just ready to treat my baby like a baby and not a science project or something." "Kurt, they're trying to make her better."

"I know. I know that. It's just hard – I'm ready for her to wear my clothes already, but I know she can't – we don't even make clothes that small –"

"Hey," Blaine said softly, turning to him. "She'll get there. We'll get there. Chin up, okay?"

He managed a smile. "You're right. And I know I'll feel better once we get to see her …"

* * *

The baby had just fallen asleep after her feeding by the time Kurt and Blaine arrived at the hospital, packages in tow, and Sarah Grace asked them not to pick her up, saying that she needed the sleep to get better.

"We can put one of these on her when she wakes up though, right?" Kurt asked, holding up a bag of
"Of course you can," Sarah Grace said, sitting down at another baby's bedside.

"And we bought her a sleep sheep," Blaine said, holding it up. "We thought it might help her stay calmer. Is that okay?"

Sarah Grace smiled at them. "That's perfectly fine, Blaine. You can turn it on now, if you want to. They usually do well with them – it was a great idea."

"Good," Blaine said, looking pleased, and set to work with the batteries.

"So, can we ask you – what do those scores measure, exactly?" Kurt asked as Sarah Grace picked the baby up to feed it. "You mentioned some stuff yesterday, but I guess what I want to know is what a score of eight means."

"Well, a lot of things make up that score. There are a lot of different signs and symptoms that babies have when they're withdrawing," she explained. "The score adds up the symptoms that the baby is experiencing to give us an idea of how bad the withdrawal is. So, her score this morning was an eleven. The things I scored her for were not sleeping well between the last feeding and this one, having increased muscle tone and moderate tremors, excessive sucking, projectile vomiting – right over the side of her crib and onto the floor, actually – and sweating."

"And is that bad?"

Sarah Grace shrugged. "It's not terrible, but it's not great, either. If she keeps having scores greater than ten, we might have to increase her dose of medication."

"Is that bad?" Blaine asked.

"Well, we'd rather not do that, but we will if she needs it. It'll just take longer to wean her off of it if we have to go up on her dose," she explained.

Kurt sighed, rubbing his temples. It was a lot of information to take in about a baby that had only
been theirs for two days, that they'd only known about for three. He felt completely unprepared for this situation, so unlike their first attempt at parenting.

"You look stressed," Sarah Grace said. "Is there something I can try to explain better?"

"I don't think so," Kurt said. "It's just – a lot, I guess. Going from no baby to a baby in drug withdrawal in like three days…"

"That would be a lot," Sarah Grace agreed. "Listen, I've got to go take care of the little guy in that box over there, but you can call me if you need me. I'll be in the pod the whole time. And if she gets fussy, feel free to pick her up, but please let her sleep if she will, okay?"

They nodded, and slumped in the rockers to watch their baby sleep.

Hurry up and wait, indeed.

* * *

"She still needs a name, honey," Kurt said softly over the baby's fuzzy, frizzy head of hair, sinking back into the vinyl cushion covering the back of the rocker. "What does she look like to you?"

"Gorgeous," Blaine said, clearly entranced by the scene in front of him.

"Well we can't call her that," Kurt said. "Not on a birth certificate, anyway." He turned to the baby, sleeping just a little restlessly in his arms. "But you are," he cooed quietly. "You are so gorgeous. Especially in your brand new clothes!"

The baby furrowed her eyebrows in her sleep.

Blaine smiled. "She looks like you, doing that."

"Mmmm."
"We loved those flower names you talked about last year," Blaine said after a pause. "Can I see her a second?"

"Just don't wake her up," Kurt whispered, and very, very slowly handed her over to Blaine.

"Shhhhh," Blaine breathed as she started to stir, then cry, tucking her onto his shoulder. Kurt watched her blankets tremble with her tiny body, heard her start cranking up, the high-pitched cry growing louder and louder. Blaine wasn't fazed for a second. "Shhhhh, you're okay …" he whispered, patting her bottom.

She gradually calmed, and he held her out in front of him in his lap, giving her a pacifier. She sucked on it like she was starving, but Sarah Grace had already said that was just another symptom of the withdrawal. Kurt flinched, thinking about the agony their child must have been going through before she was started on medication …

"She doesn't look much like a Rose," he eventually said.

"No," Blaine agreed. "Not a Rosemary or a Poppy, either. But – what about Lily? I like that name …"

Kurt cocked his head and gazed at her. "Are you a Lily?" he whispered to her. "You kind of look like a Lily."

"Lily Grace?" Blaine asked.

Kurt made a face.

"Okay … Lily Anne?"

"Are we even sure about Lily yet?"

Blaine's face fell a little. "Do you not like it?"
"Oh, honey, that's not what I was saying," Kurt said, placing a hand on Blaine's knee. "I just want to be sure before we move onto middle names." He smiled. "You really like it, don't you? Lily, I mean."

"I think I do, yeah," Blaine said, his smile returning. "It just seems to fit her. But if you have other suggestions …"

"I think that Lily is perfect."

Blaine beamed, and Kurt thought he might've named her Noodle if it would've earned him a smile like that.

"Hi, Lily," Blaine breathed, carefully maneuvering her back to his chest. "Oh, you have a name. Hi."

Kurt thought for a moment, watching them. "What do you think about Lily Kate, honey? Or Lily Elise?"

"Lily Kate reminds me of a baby version of Kate Spade, like green and pink polka dots or something. Lily Elise sounds softer, somehow," Blaine said. "Like a watercolor painting? Am I crazy?"

Kurt grinned. "You're cute."

"Thank you," Blaine laughed. "But I like either one. Do you have a preference? What does she make you think of – polka dots or watercolors?"

Kurt cocked his head and gazed, tried to picture what she'd be with no tremors and no sweating and fewer tears.

"I kind of like Lily Elise," he said finally. "Our watercolor girl." He smoothed his hand down the baby's back, ridding her onesie of wrinkles.
Blaine beamed at him. "Perfect," he said, then looked back down. "Daddy loves you so much, Lily Elise …"

Sharp, stabbing pain shot through his lip as Kurt bit down hard, trying to keep the sudden tears at bay as his heart lurched in his chest. He never thought he'd have this again, and yet there it was. Not quite what he pictured, a hospital crib and monitors and medicine and nurses in blue, but in the midst of all of it there was Blaine and a baby girl made from a soft palate of peaches and pinks, with streaks of blue and white at times, mottling her skin. No matter how her colors ran, he'd take her, and love her all the same.

* * *

"Finn?"

"Hey, little bro! What's up?" Finn asked, sounding cheery on the other end of the line.

"Well, I have news to tell you. We're on our way home from the hospital –"

"Oh god, did something happen? Is Blaine okay? Are you okay?"

"Finn, Finn, calm down – we're fine. More than fine. We – I actually feel a little guilty, stealing your thunder like this – we got a baby."

"You –A baby. –What?" Finn stammered.

"We're adopting again. A little baby girl. We're naming her Lily," Kurt said, squeezing Blaine's hand as they walked down the sidewalk together.

"You – dude. Our kids are gonna be almost the same age!" Finn exclaimed, obviously thrilled with the news. "Oh my god, Christmas is gonna be so fun this year!"

Kurt laughed fondly, thinking of his and Blaine's conversation in the park a few Sundays before. "It definitely will be."
"So when can we come see her? Are you gonna try to bring her to Lima? What's the plan?"

"Well … it won't be for a while," Kurt said, his smile fading. "She's in the hospital."

"She – wait. Not just with her birth mom? Like, she's sick?"

Kurt sighed heavily, already tired of telling the story. "She's withdrawing from drugs, Finn."

"She – how can a baby be on drugs?" Finn asked, sounding completely befuddled.

"Her mom took them while she was pregnant." Anger still flared through Kurt's whole body each time he said it out loud.

"What? What kind of person even does that?"

"An addict," Kurt said, letting go of Blaine's hand and pressing his fingers into his temple. "Listen, we're about to get on the subway, I just wanted to call and let you know –"

"Whoa, whoa, you can't just tell me something like that and then hang up! That's my niece you're talking about! You could at least tell me how bad off she is, if she's gonna be okay!"

Kurt was a little surprised at how much Finn cared, how strong his reaction was. "I – she's fine, Finn. She's – well, not fine exactly, but she's not at death's door or anything. Can I call you when I get home? I'll explain more then, okay?"

"Only if you promise to send me a picture before you get on the subway," Finn chided, and Kurt could hear the pride in his voice. He smiled in spite of himself, in spite of the exhaustion and the pain of leaving empty-handed again, at the massive amount of growth he'd seen in Finn since they'd found out Emily was pregnant. Fatherhood looked good on his brother, and the baby wasn't even born yet. And Finn was right – it would be fun, having kids the same age.

"Deal," Kurt answered. "I'll talk to you later, okay?"
"Cool. Congrats, dude!"

Kurt hung up and scrolled through the pictures on his iPhone. "Finn's gonna make a really fun uncle," he said, choosing a picture of the three of them that Sarah Grace had taken.

*Three.* They were a family of three again.

"I hope Lily and Finn's baby get to be close," Blaine said. "I never really knew my cousins that well …"

"Well, I guess we'll be taking lots of trips to Ohio, then," Kurt smiled, taking Blaine's hand and kissing his knuckles. "God, Blaine, can you believe this? I still haven't really gotten used to Finn having a kid, and now we've got one too …"

Blaine smiled. "I can't. But I guess we'd better get used to it, because she *will* come home eventually …" He squeezed Kurt's hand. "Do you want to stop by Pottery Barn Kids on the way home? I saw this really cute bedding online that I want you to look at …"

"You are perfect," Kurt said, squeezing back. "Yes. Yes, yes yes."
Chapter 9

Monday, July 29th, 2024

"Kurt!"

They heard Burt's jovial shout from the other side of baggage claim.

Kurt whipped around and caught sight of his father trying to jog down the escalator steps while they were still moving, Carole's hand grasped in his, stretched over a span of steps. She was laughing, trying to keep her carry-on strap on her shoulder.

"Dad!" Kurt called, cupping open hands around his mouth, trying to help his voice carry. Blaine was waving his arm in the air at Kurt's side, and Kurt smiled fondly, holding his tongue before he made a joke about how it was a good thing they'd heard him, because the tips of Blaine's fingers were surely all they could see.

Burt and Carole were making their way through the crowd when Finn's head appeared at the top of the escalator.

"I didn't know you brought Finn, too!" Kurt exclaimed, pushing through the mob to throw his arms around his dad's neck, knocking Burt's hat off with the force of it.

"He begged," Carole said, laughing, engulfed in two armfuls of Blaine. "Like he was five again. He brought Emily along, too."

"It's okay for her to fly?" Blaine asked.

"Her doctor gave her the go-ahead, said everything looked great," Burt assured them, pressing a hard, dry kiss to the side of Kurt's head. "God, it's good to see you boys."

"You too, Dad." Kurt never really realized how much he missed his dad until they were together again, the reunion stirring feelings of nostalgia in his blood. "So the plan is to drop off luggage at home, then we'll head to the hospital. I thought you'd want to see Lily first thing —"
"You bet your entire collection of vintage McQueen I do!" Burt said, making Kurt beam. He was so grateful for the ties with his father, so grateful for Burt's constant support and love over the years, even at times when they spoke completely different languages. "And then, after we meet her, if I can bear to tear myself away from that hospital – we're going to the closest bookstore. Don't think I haven't forgotten what day it is, young man," Burt continued, grinning at Blaine and reaching forward to squeeze his shoulder. "Heard how the sales are going so far?"

Blaine laughed. "That is so far from my mind right now, I don't even have a clue. Alex can keep up with all that. Right now, all I care about is you guys meeting Lily."

"We're on the same page, then," Finn said, finally catching up to them. "Little bro!" He pulled Kurt into a tight, squeezing hug as Emily used her carry-on to clear a path for herself and her growing belly behind him.

"You okay back there, Emily honey?" Burt asked, craning his neck around.

She stepped under Finn's arm, which automatically wrapped around her, her little belly protruding in a ball underneath the maxi dress she wore. "Peachy keen," she said, giving Burt a thumbs-up. "But we might need to make a bathroom stop before we leave. This little guy's sitting right on my bladder…"

Carole smiled at her. "I've got to go too, honey – let's leave these guys to grab the suitcases, and we'll go find a ladies' room."

"It's a little different than when we had Violet," Blaine warned after the girls had trotted off, shouldering Carole's bag as it popped out of the baggage carousel. "She has bad days sometimes, and the hospital has pretty strict visiting rules, so you can't all come in together, and –"

"Thanks for the warning, Blaine, but that's my grandbaby we're talking about. I don't care what hoops I have to jump through, I don't care what her nurses tell me to do, I don't care how much she cries or what her mother did while she was pregnant. I'll love her just as much as I love Kurt and you and Finn – maybe even more."

"Hey!" Kurt protested. "More than me?"

Burt's eyes twinkled as he turned around from grabbing his suitcase. "Kurt, you know I love you son, but I'm gonna spoil her so bad that you boys won't know what hit you. A week with Carole
and me, and she'll be a sugar-infested demon-child."

Kurt held back a laugh at Blaine's wide eyes. "Oh come on, honey, he's only joking."

"I'm not so sure about that, Kurt…"

"It's only right that you get your fair share," Finn said, bringing up the rear. "At least you live far enough away where he hasn't offered weekly babysitting services to – and I quote – ’stuff him full of candy and send him home when he gets rowdy.’ It's nice to have somebody else to share the torture with."

Blaine chuckled. "Anytime, man. Anything to take that terrible burden of free babysitting services off your shoulders …"

"Hey," Finn said, "I'd tackle you if we weren't in an airport."

"You'd tackle me if you weren't scared I'd beat your ass," Blaine joked back.

"Boys …"

* * *

Kurt watched with a quiet smile as Burt scrubbed his hands a full minute longer than the sign posted in the NICU instructed.

"Dad. I'm pretty sure that's good."

Burt looked up at him, eyes full of apprehension. When they'd walked through the hospital doors, Burt's demeanor had changed dramatically – Kurt hadn't seen his dad so nervous since he'd had a pacemaker put in his heart after his second heart attack. "You think?"

"Well, if you scrub any more you aren't going to have any skin left, so yes. Come on." He led his dad back to Pod 3, waving to Sarah Grace as they entered.
"Kurt! And a visitor!"

"Actually, we brought four," he said proudly. "My family's here for the day. Blaine's book release party was supposed to be tonight, and – actually, long story, never mind."

Sarah Grace's eyebrows rose. "Book release?"

"I – we'll explain all that later. I think this guy's ready to see Lily," Kurt said, stepping to the right and gesturing to Burt standing behind him. "This is my dad, Burt Hummel. Dad, this is Sarah Grace."

Sarah Grace squirted her hands with sanitizer and walked over. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Hummel," she said. "I'm one of Lily's nurses."

Burt reached forward, placing a hand on Sarah Grace's shoulder. "Thank you so much," he said seriously, "for taking care of my granddaughter."

"My pleasure," Sarah Grace smiled. "She's a sweet baby. You ready to meet her yet?"

"He'd better be," Kurt said. "How's she doing today?"

"Well, she had a rough night – lots of spitting, and her scores were pretty borderline. She's been a little restless, but she's okay right now. She was awake but quiet the last time I checked."

Kurt walked to her crib, Burt trailing close behind. Sure enough, her eyes were wide and she was sucking on her pacifier, dressed in a gray onesie with flowered pink ruffles on the backside, lying on a bed made with a coordinating blanket with a white, pink and gray chevron pattern. "Sarah Grace, her bed looks fantastic!" he exclaimed.

"That was Serena's doing – her night shift nurse from last night," Sarah Grace grinned. "I think she loves this baby as much as I do, so she might've gone the extra mile. But you do give us some pretty great stuff to work with. It's hard not to make her look cute."
"Hey there, sweet pea," he cooed, looking down at the baby, and she blinked. He lifted her from her crib, managing to catch her pacifier in the crook of his elbow as it fell out of her mouth. He could do this. "I've got somebody really, really important for you to meet, okay?"

He turned around to face his dad with Lily curled in his arms, her monitor leads hanging down, tethering her to the machines Kurt hated so much. He knew he should be glad that she wasn't connected to more, that she wasn't sick enough to require oxygen or a breathing machine like so many of the babies did. But even so …

"Dad, meet Lily," he said, smiling proudly, banishing all negative thoughts from his mind as he tried not to step on a monitor cord. "Lily, this is Grandpa."

Kurt heard all the air rush from Burt's lungs. "Dad?"

In a hushed voice, "She's so little." A pause. "You said she was small, but I didn't know –"

"Oh, she's not that little," Kurt said, trying to allay his dad's nerves. "Or so they tell us, at least. 'There are lots of babies here an awful lot smaller than Lily is,'" he parroted, and kissed her head. "But she does seem kind of small to me, still. Here, Dad, why don't you sit down and hold her?"

"She – is it okay, with all those wires?"

"Yeah, they're just little sticker things. If they come off, they just stick right back on, no big deal." He glanced up at Sarah Grace to make sure he'd said the right thing, and she nodded encouragingly.

Burt looked up at him, unsure. "You sure seem to have this whole … thing … figured out, kiddo."

He coughed. "Yeah, probably not as much as I let on, honestly." He stopped, looking at his dad's face, open and vulnerable and absolutely terrified. "Dad? Are you scared of her?"

Burt's face contorted a little, then shifted back to the anxious expression he wore the second before. "I – I don't want to hurt her."
Kurt smiled. "You are definitely not going to hurt her. I was a little scared, too, at first, but she's been just fine with us the last several days, haven't you?" He pulled up another chair, sat down, held Lily out in front of him so they could look at each other. "You wanna go meet your grandpa, sweetie?"

"Okay," Burt said after a beat. "Okay, let me see her, I guess – but god, Kurt, don't let me drop her."

"I won't, Dad, I promise," he said, transferring her into his dad's arms.

Burt got her settled, cradling her like she was a piece of fragile china. "Hello," he whispered, completely fascinated with the tiny thing in his arms, and Kurt's heart warmed at the sight of it. "Hi, Lily. It's Grandpa."

Kurt sighed, smiling, and discreetly took his phone from his pocket, opening the camera.

"We've never met before, but I hope we can get to know each other," Burt continued. "You're gonna need a buddy when your dads get old and boring and start embarrassing you." Kurt smirked, snapping a picture to send to Blaine. Burt's face was calm and content, free of the fear that had clouded his eyes just moments before. He'd finally settled back in his chair, shoulders relaxed, feet planted firmly on the floor.

"So I don't know if your dads have told you anything about me or not, but if they have, you might think twice about believing it..."

Kurt listened to him talk to her, drifting back in time to when he was little, remembering how his dad had talked with him. Even when he was a child, Burt didn't engage in much baby-talk, and he had always treated Kurt like he was important, like what he had to say mattered just as much as the words of any grown-up. He couldn't wait to watch Lily experience that very same thing. He only hoped he could live up to the legacy of parenting that his dad had started – it was a high bar to reach.

The soothing sounds of Burt's voice ended abruptly, though, when Lily had a bout of tremors, her little arms and legs trembling against Burt's arms. He looked up, panic-stricken.

"Kurt –"

"Dad, Dad, it's okay," he said, taking Lily before Burt started shaking worse than she was. "They're
just part of the withdrawal symptoms. She's fine, aren't you honey?"

Lily's clear blue eyes stared at him for a split second before they squeezed shut and she started wailing. Burt's eyes widened to the size of dinner plates, but Kurt just cuddled her close to his chest, tucking his chin on the top of her head, and draped a blanket over her. "Shhh, baby, shhh, sweetheart," he murmured, relaxing back into a rocker with her.

Burt stared at them, shaking his head as she slowly quieted. "Do you have any idea how proud I am, Kurt? That little, tiny baby, all the shit she's being put through, and – god, just to be able to keep your head like that –"

"You know that I learned it from you," Kurt said.

Burt shrugged. "Not sure I could've dealt with all that, though. She's lucky to have you and Blaine."

"We feel pretty lucky to have her, too," Kurt said, pressing a kiss to the peach fuzz on top of her head. He hoped she'd get hair eventually.

Burt nodded, patted Kurt on the shoulder. "Well, I think I've taken more than my fair share of time – I'm gonna go get Carole, okay?"

"Okay." A nervous tingle suddenly ran through Kurt's body. "Um, Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"What do you think?" Kurt cleared his throat. "About Lily?"

Burt looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"I mean – I don't know, what do you think?"

"What do you think I think, Kurt? She's my grandbaby. I think she's gorgeous. I think she's going to be the best thing that ever happened to you," he said. "Yeah, I'm maybe a little skittish with her right now, but she's only, what, 5 days old, and in an ICU. Were you worried that I wasn't gonna
like her or something?"

"I – don't know," Kurt said, feeling sheepish. "I don't know what I was worried about."

"Well I don't either," Burt said. "I'm gonna go get Carole, okay? She's been itching to meet her."

* * *

"Dude." Finn looked down at Lily, back up to Blaine. "Dude."

"Yes?" Blaine asked, amused.

"Am I allowed to hold her?"

Blaine beamed, thrilled with Finn's reaction. "Sure you are. Want me to get her?"

"Nah, I need the practice," Finn said, bending to cradle Lily in his arms. He was a little awkward, trying to figure out the best way to hold her, and she started squirming, her face turning. Blaine instinctively reached out for her, but Finn shook his head. "I got this, man. Seriously, I need the practice."

Finn settled back in a chair, and out of the corner of his eye, Blaine could see Sarah Grace watching, amused. Finn dwarfed Lily even more than normal, and she looked miniscule, rolled in a little bundle on his chest.

"Hi," Finn said to her softly. "Hi, Lily, it's your Uncle Finn." Lily opened her eyes and looked at him, and Blaine smiled, his hand traveling of its own accord to his chest, over his heart. "I'm gonna have a little baby like you at Christmastime. You guys are gonna be best buds, right? But you're gonna be a little older, so you have to be nice to him, okay?"

Blaine was amazed at how quickly Finn warmed to her, how much he clearly wanted to try. Watching him hold her, Blaine could see that Finn was going to make a wonderful father.
"She's so little," Finn said to him, pulling him from his thoughts. "Is that normal?"

"The drugs sort of stunted her growth," Blaine said. "They said her umbilical cord was tiny, so she got less blood and less nutrients from her mom."

"Well, that's okay," Finn told Lily, holding her up so he could look at her face. "You'll still probably be taller than your Daddy when you grow up."

"Hey!"

Sarah Grace snickered from across the room, her hands stuck in the portholes of an incubator.

"Oh, I see you laughing over there, Sarah Grace – you guys are both in trouble," Blaine grinned. "Watch out – Lily and I are gonna plot ways to get you both back." He rolled his chair over close to Finn and Lily. "Feel free to spit up on him, sweetheart."

Finn chuckled. "Might as well get used to that, too, I guess …"

Blaine looked at him. "You're really excited, aren't you?"

"Honestly? I'm still scared shitless. But excited, too – it's really cool, thinking about having a family with Em. It feels right, with her, you know?"

Blaine smiled, watched his baby curling Finn's shirt into her tiny fist. "Yeah. I do."

Finn shifted uncomfortably in his seat for the first time since he picked Lily up. "I – wanted to apologize, actually. To Kurt, too, but – last year? I kind of acted like a jerk. Not intentionally, but – I just didn't get it."

"Finn, you didn't act like a jerk –"

"No, I did. I didn't mean to be – I never mean to be – but I didn't understand. I had no concept, but now …" His face turned very serious, and he looked down at Lily, stroked her back. "If something
happened to our little guy? If somebody tried to take him from me, or if – god forbid – something happened with Em's pregnancy, I don't know what I'd do. I can't imagine what you guys went through, losing her. And I know you've got Lily now, but still …"

"Finn. It's okay."

"It's not, but thank you." He held Lily closer, and she curled up, her head on his shoulder.

"She's pretty cuddly, isn't she?" Blaine asked, smiling.

"She is excellently cuddly," Finn said. "Even with all the wires."

"Thank you," Blaine told him. "For the apology, and for just – I don't know, I was nervous that you guys would be freaked out by everything, the wires, and her tremors and –"

"Dude. She's adorable. She's my niece. She's your kid. Isn't that all that matters?"

"Yes." Blaine looked up, saw Sarah Grace beaming at him from across the pod, nodding her head. "It really is."

* * *

"Please don't read it here," Blaine asked as Burt headed straight for "his" chair that evening, Nothing Left for You to Hold grasped tightly in his hand.

Burt slowed, looked up at his son-in-law. "Alright, kiddo, if you insist," he said slowly, laying the book down on the end table.

"I just – there's so much sad stuff in there," Blaine said, his voice sounding a little too pleading, too helpless. "There's too much to celebrate right now to read something that sad. And – I hate when people read my books in front of me; you know that."

Burt grinned. "Okay, you win this time. There is an awful lot to celebrate – we were supposed to be
here for a party, after all."

"So why don't we have one?" Emily piped up. "I'll cook, and maybe Kurt can help me –"

"You're not lifting a finger," Kurt chided her, but she ignored him.

"Kurt can help me cook," she repeated pointedly, "and I know you guys have to have some sort of game or something around here – it'll be fun!"

Which is how, an hour later, they all ended up piled around Kurt and Blaine's living room, bowls of hummus and pita and cubes of cheese and grapes and crudité with ranch dressing spread out on the coffee table, a rousing game of Charades in full swing.

Blaine raised his eyebrows as Finn crouched down on the ground and then sprang up, jumping high in the air with his arms still plastered at his sides. "Um … bullfrog?" he guessed, but Emily yelled over him.

"Toaster!" she exclaimed, and Finn let out a joyous whoop, running over to high-five her.

Blaine couldn't help but smile, not because his team just won another point, which they had, but because he understood the synergy that Finn and Emily shared, and it made him so, so happy. He and Kurt sometimes had game night with Rachel, Liam, Nick and Jeff, and when they played CatchPhrase, it was like he and Kurt shared a brain. He was glad that Finn had someone like that in his life.

They added the tally mark to their score, and then it was the opposing team's turn, Kurt, Burt and Carole. Kurt was up, and Blaine turned to watch, so happy.

Kurt drew a card and rolled his eyes, flouncing off the couch to the small space they'd made in front of the TV.

Blaine knew the word the second that Kurt mimed placing a hat on his head, the subtle movements of his eyes and his chin giving him away.
"Fedora!" Carole guessed, and Kurt shook his head.

He swung his leg over an invisible horse, held onto invisible reins.

*Cowboy*, Blaine thought, and Kurt glanced over and winked at him.

"Um … horse?" said Burt.

"Equestrian?" guessed Carole.

"Cowboy!" Burt finally exclaimed when Kurt started to twirl an invisible lasso over his head just before the time ran out, and oh, how Blaine loved him. *Cowboy*. They should do some kind of cowboy thing for Halloween that year; Kurt would look fantastic in tight, muscle-gripping plaid and pointed fabulous cowboy boots …

"Blaine, you're up," Finn said, snapping him back to attention.

He drew his card, and snickered behind his hand.

*Marilyn Monroe*.

"Here we go …" he muttered under his breath.

* * *

**Tuesday, July 30th, 2024**

"You're sure you don't want us to take you to the airport?" Kurt asked for the umpteenth time at the early breakfast the six of them were sharing at a nearby waffle place.

"Kurt. You guys have lived in this city for years. We've come to visit I don't even know how many times. I think we can get it from here – you've got to go to work, and Blaine needs to get to the hospital," Burt insisted.
"We're big girls and boys," Emily said, smiling gently as she patted Kurt's hand. "We'll make it. And besides, we won't be able to stay away for too long, not with that sweet baby girl to visit."

"We've still got to work on your nursery plans, too," Kurt smiled back at her. He sighed, looking around at the entire table. "I suppose Blaine and I can release you to fend for yourselves …"

"We'll let you know if we get mugged," Carole grinned.

"Please don't even suggest that," Blaine said, threading his fingers in his hair. "I think we've got plenty to worry about without worrying about that, too…"

"Kid's right," Burt agreed. "We'll be fine. Now," he said, taking the check out of Kurt's hand, "let your old man pay for your breakfast, okay?"

* * *

When Blaine got to the hospital that morning, his first solo visit, Lily was being cared for by a nurse he didn't know.

"Um … hi," he said, hanging back cautiously at the entrance of the pod, feeling once again like he was entering someone else's world. "I'm one of Lily's dads?"

"Hey, come on in – it's about time for her bottle," the nurse said, and he shuffled in, anxious to see his baby. "She had a bad night last night, lots of spitting, so I'd rather do her feeding this time. "Her medication is also due, and I have to give that."

Blaine blinked at her. "But – we've fed her ever since –"

"I'd really prefer it if I did her feeding," she repeated firmly. "It's nothing against you at all, I just need to assess–"

Blaine shook his head. He didn't want to argue with the person taking care of his child. "No, go
He sat in silence, missing Burt and Carole, Finn and Emily, and oh, especially Kurt, as he watched a stranger feed his baby, watched Lily spit up into the floor. His hands ached to reach for her, take her and comfort her, but he stayed still.

Blessedly, the nurse handed Lily over to him after she was done eating, and he slid down in the chair so she could comfortably rest on his chest.

He was halfway through a lullaby – Good night my angel, now it's time to sleep; And still so many things I want to say – when a doctor walked in with a different nurse and passed him on the way to another baby's crib. "You'd better not make that a habit," the doctor said as she walked by. "You'll never get her to go to sleep by herself – you're just setting yourself up to be miserable." Blaine stared at her, baffled. Setting himself up to be miserable? What about Lily? He'd rock her to sleep until she was five if it could make her stop suffering, and miserable couldn't have entered the picture – after losing his first child, being able to hold and comfort this one was nothing short of a blessing. He shrugged, unsure of what to say, and the doctor moved on.

But by the early afternoon, Blaine was worn out. Lily was restless, worse than restless at times, and Blaine's shirt was still wet from a thorough drenching in spit-up.

"You've gotta eat sometime, you know," Laura, Lily's nurse, told him as he shifted in the rocker for the umpteenth time.

"I – what?"

"Lunch. You should eat. You'll feel better," she told him.

"I feel fine now."

"You won't in a few minutes if you don't eat, Mr. Hummel-Anderson. It's almost two o'clock, and you've been here since what, nine?"

Blaine, choosing not to correct her on the proper order of their names, looked up at the clock, shocked at what he saw – she was right. "I – oh. Wow. I guess the time got away from me …"
She smiled tenderly at him, the kindest look he'd seen from her all day. "Listen, I know it's hard. Believe me. But you have to take care of you in order to take care of her. I promise she'll be fine with me while you're gone. Take a couple hours, or come back later tonight or in the morning if you need to. You look like you could use a break."

He sighed, kissed Lily's head, feeling impossibly guilty. "I might need a short one, yeah …"

"Go. Get some food. I promise she'll be fine until you get back."

Blaine nodded as his stomach growled, but even so, placing Lily back in that crib felt like torture. He wanted her home so badly, where they could have their own kitchen, where he could hold her and still be able to make lunch where nothing beeped, goddamn, the beeping in this place…

"Mr. Hummel-Anderson?"

Blaine looked up.

"I promise it's going to be fine."

* * *

* * *

_Navy corduroys and green polo before the red dress, or after …_ Kurt pondered silently, staring at the sketches of the designs that would eventually go in the magazine spread.

"Kurt? Can I come in?"

Kurt's head jerked up at the knock, and he saw Rachel's head peeking in his office.

"Rach!" he exclaimed, hopping out of his seat, happy to leave his work for a bit. "Oh god, I miss you sweetie!"
They met in the middle of the room in a tight hug, and she kissed him on the cheek. "I can't believe I had to track you down at work to be able to find you. You guys doing okay?"

Kurt closed the door. "Yes, no, and I don't know …" he said with a sigh.

"What's going on?" she asked, running a hand down his arm. "Tell me."

"Well … it's just been such a whirlwind," he said. "We found out about her on Thursday, we got her on Friday, my family came yesterday and left this morning, and – I don't know, it's been five days and she still doesn't feel like ours. I love her, don't get me wrong, but – I don't know if it's the hospital or what, but she doesn't feel like my baby yet."

Rachel smiled tenderly at him. "I'm sure that will pass as you get to know her better, Kurt."

"And it's hard seeing her like this. The withdrawals are so bad, sometimes, plus I feel bad today that Blaine's there and I'm not –"

"What about paternity leave?"

"Well, we talked about that," Kurt said. "And I'd rather take it when she gets home so Blaine doesn't have to take care of her all by himself. Even though I feel like this is a lot to put on him too, doing the hospital thing alone. It's not easy, Rach."

"I know it's hard," she murmured. "I wish there was something I could do to make this easier on you."

"Can you add hours to my day?" Kurt chuckled. "That would help more than anything. I doubt we'll get home before ten tonight. I know we just need to get in a routine, and this is the first sort of 'normal' day we've had, but I'm afraid the routine is going to be exhausting."

"What about dinners? If I brought some frozen stuff for you guys, would that help?"

"Oh, Rach …" Kurt was a little surprised to feel tears stinging at his eyes. "You've brought us more dinners than I can count. But – if you have time, and if you feel like it – that would actually be
"It's done." She paused. "Um … when do you think I can see her? I'm not trying to push, but I feel sort of like I have an imaginary goddaughter. I want to meet her so badly, Kurt."

"I know. Maybe give her a little time to calm down and feel better? I'd hate for you to meet her for the first time on a bad day …"

"I don't care if it's a good day or a bad day; you know I'm going to love her regardless, honey. Just like you guys do."

Kurt sighed again, suddenly feeling so tired, like the weight of it all had just hit him all at once. Rachel could tell, apparently, because she leaned forward and wrapped her arms around him, pulling him close. "It's going to be okay," she whispered in his ear, rubbing his back.

He leaned into the hug, taking in the smell of her sweet perfume, his cheek cradled in her soft, long hair.

"She's going to come home to you," Rachel continued, "and everything will be wonderful. You'll get there."

* * *

As soon as Kurt got home that night, he dropped his things on the kitchen table, took Romeo out for a quick potty break, and he and Blaine were right back on the train. "This would be easier if she wasn't in the Bronx," Blaine sighed, glancing at his watch.

"I'm sorry," Kurt said, pained. "I should have left work earlier –"

"Kurt, no, that's not what I meant. Not at all. It's just – I just feel so far away from her. I took a break this afternoon," he confessed guiltily. "After lunch. I just felt like I was in the way …"
"Blaine, honey, you can't live at the hospital. You have to have time to yourself at some point. And we're going back to see her, right? We'll be able to tuck her in bed and sing her to sleep, and it'll be fine," Kurt told him, but Blaine thought that he was probably trying to convince himself as well.

At the hospital, they planted themselves at Lily's bedside, relieved to see a familiar face.

"Hey guys!" Serena said, waving at them from the incubator three beds down. "Feel free to go ahead and pick her up – I'll be there in just a minute, and we can do her bath together. Would you like that?"

The guilt still churning in Blaine's stomach from leaving earlier dissolved a little at her words, and he flashed her a grin. "We'd love to."

Lily unfortunately did not love it so much. "It's a little over-stimulating, doing sponge baths," Serena explained, raising her voice over the volume of Lily's wails as Blaine hurriedly washed her flailing arms and legs with a soapy washcloth. "She'll like it better when her cord falls off and we can put her in the tub."

"It's okay, sweetie," Kurt crooned. "Daddy's almost done, and then we'll get you dressed and warm again."

It was so frustrating, fighting against limbs stronger than Blaine could have imagined after having such an easy time with Violet when she was home with them. He felt like he was hurting her if he stretched an arm or a leg out at all, but if he didn't extend them, he couldn't get her clean. And he wanted to take his time, run the warm water over her soft baby skin, play this little piggy with her tiny baby toes, but that wasn't happening, not with her screaming the entire time.

Finally Blaine was done with everything but her head, and Serena wrapped Lily up in a towel and let Kurt walk her to the sink, holding the top of her head under the water as he shampooed her fuzzy hair. Slowly, she stopped crying, quieted, and looked up at him.

Blaine walked over, placing a hand on Kurt's back. "Is that better, my love?" he said. "Does that warm water feel nice?"

"Oh, yes, she says," Kurt cooed, grinning down at her. "Look at that face. That is a happy baby if I ever saw one."
Carefully, Kurt rinsed the suds away as she blinked at them, and they took her to the baby scale and Blaine began to dry her off as Kurt picked out an outfit for her to wear.

"She's had a pretty decent afternoon," Serena told them as they worked with her. "Her scores were five to eight today, so we're improving. I bet they'll try to wean her in the next day or two."

"Wean her – medicine?" Kurt asked, looking up.

"But – they told me she had a bad night last night!" Blaine said. "They wouldn't let me do her feeding this morning because of it."

Serena's eyes narrowed. "Seriously?"

"Yeah – the nurse said she needed to assess something – I don't know. And her methadone was due that time."

Serena sighed heavily. "Right. Well … to each his own, I guess, but her night was really not that bad according to her scores. I'm sorry you didn't get to do her feeding."

Blaine shrugged. "It's not like I'm never going to get to feed her again. I don't want it to be a big deal. I just don't want her medicine to decrease if she still needs it."

"I'm a little concerned about that," Kurt said. "Do you really think they'll wean her?"

"Well, we've got to start sometime. She's not nearly as bad as she was when we first started this process. It'll be rough for a day or two after we decrease her, but your little girl's a fighter." Serena walked over, stooped in front of the chair Kurt was sitting in. "Hi, honey," she cooed at the baby. "She's beautiful."

"She is," Blaine agreed. "We're already kind of head-over-heels …" He paused. "Um, you said she had a good afternoon – her morning was a little rough, at first. I – does she do better when we aren't here? Do we need to make shorter visits?"
Serena's eyes narrowed again. "Absolutely not. The best thing for her is to bond with you – you come as often as you like and stay as long as you want to."

"Okay – but what about holding her? I – are we holding her too much?"

Recognition bloomed in Serena's face. "Oh, honey, Dr. Bramlett got ahold of you today, didn’t she? Don't listen to her – this is your baby, and you know what's best for the both of you. We'll tell you if she's too sick to hold and play with."

"Okay," Blaine said, chewing on his lip nervously. He watched Kurt lean over and plant a kiss on Lily's head, her hands and feet trembling violently even as he held her. "If you're sure."

* * *

"What a long day," Blaine murmured, holding Kurt in their bed that night.

"I don't think they'll get any shorter anytime soon."

"Let's not talk about that." Blaine pulled Kurt closer to him, nuzzled into his neck. "Let's talk about how great it'll be when she comes home."

Kurt sighed happily in his arms. "We'll never have to go to the Bronx again."

Blaine chuckled; Kurt sounded so relieved. "That is very, very true."

"And I'm not at all sad about it."

"Well … we might need to make a concession or two to go back and visit Sarah Grace, right?"

"We can visit Sarah Grace in neutral territory. Like the park."
"Okay, fine, we'll see her in the park. No more hospital. And no more wires to get knotted up …"

"No nurses telling us to let her sleep …"

"No doctors telling us that we shouldn't hold her …"

They paused, listening to the quiet. Blaine half-expected to hear some sort of dinging alarm in the background.

"What do you want for her, Blaine?" Kurt asked softly, breaking the silence, threading their fingers together.

Blaine blinked. He didn't even know how to answer a question like that – he wanted the world for her, wanted her to be happy and content and loved and not addicted to drugs anymore. "I guess – I want everything for her that I wanted for Violet," he said eventually. "Most of all, I want her to be her own person, and I want her to be happy with who that person is, no matter what it looks like."

Kurt gave him a watery smile. "You're such a good dad."

"Mmm, you too." A kiss to Kurt's hair. "First vacation you want to take her on?"

"Something simple. Maybe the beach. We're definitely doing Disney, but not till she's old enough to remember it and enjoy it and not spend the entire day screaming her head off. First big New York outing we go on?"

"Definitely the zoo," Blaine grinned. "We can take her there when she's little. It'll be so fun. Kurt, what if she loves penguins? I bet she'll love penguins." Kurt pulled his arms tighter around him. "First exposure to Broadway?"

"Annie. Or The Sound of Music, for obvious reasons. Or – Blaine, that is an impossible question. All of them." Blaine laughed, and Kurt got quiet. "I hope we don't miss her first smile."

"I don't want to miss anything. I was honestly a little worried that I wouldn't get as attached to her as I did to Violet," Blaine confessed, "but I don't think that's going to be an issue. I love her so
much, Kurt. I just want to protect her from everything." He did – he loved her at least as much as Violet, if not in a slightly different way. With Violet, he was completely enamored, head-over-heels, but with Lily – she needed protecting, she needed comfort, she truly needed him, even more than Violet did. He already felt fiercely loyal to her, desperate to shield her from all the bad in the world, from her own withdrawals.

"You're the best dad," Kurt said fondly, twisting backwards to give him a kiss. "It should probably not be as attractive as it is, but … damn."

Blaine grinned, kissing him back. "How attractive are we talking?"

"So attractive that I kind of want to jump your bones even though I'm so tired I barely remember my own name."

"You don't hear me complaining," Blaine said. "We can do 'jump my bones: the lite version' tonight if you want, though."

"And what would that entail?"

"Rubbing off on each other like we did in the 'no hands south of the equator' era?"

"God, that actually sounds perfect," Kurt said, and Blaine could hear exhaustion in his voice, but hunger, too.

"Excellent," Blaine said, lowering his own voice a little as he turned Kurt in his arms, slotting their legs together. "We can pretend we're teenagers, right?"

"Minus the hair-trigger orgasms, maybe …"

"I don't see how that could be a bad thing," and Blaine let his weight fall on his husband.
"So I guess you got my email," Blaine told Dr. Jacobson as he fidgeted on the couch worse than he had in a long time.

"I did! Congratulations, Blaine! But – you seem upset today. What's going on?"

"It's just so hard," he said, his voice cracking on the end of the word. He took a deep breath to steady himself. "Just, watching her suffer like that. They just weaned her medicine yesterday and she was horrible today, and – god, it's just like torture. I want to hate her mom, but I can't hate her mom because her mom is the only reason we have her, and she's just so little to be suffering so much, and –"

He trailed off, holding his hands up in the air, surrendering.

"Okay," Dr. Jacobson said soothingly. "You're going to be fine, Blaine. Take a deep breath, and let's focus on the positive – you have a baby."

"I do," he said, dropping his arms. "I have a baby."

"And it is highly unlikely that anything will go wrong with this adoption, considering her birth mother is in jail," she said.

"Right."

"I know it has to be difficult, trying to bond with your child when they aren't at home, watching your child suffering. I know you must be exhausted, taking the trip up to the Bronx a couple times a day. But it's a season, and that season will pass, and you will bring her home."

"Yeah … god, I feel like such an ass complaining like this. In the pod next to us, there's a baby who – I don't know, it doesn't look like he's doing very well. I always see his parents crying in the hall …" He pulled a hand through his hair. "I know we're lucky. I know that; we've gotten Lily so much sooner than we could have ever hoped for, and she will be okay eventually. It's just – god, if you could just see her …"
"I know. It's terrible. And you have every right to feel all of the things that you're feeling toward her birth mother, whether it's gratitude or anger or both. I know it must be hell on earth seeing such a tiny baby suffer that much. But it's a season –"

"–And it will pass; I know. I know that, I just need to know how to get through the season."

"You got through last year."

"Barely …"

"All I know to tell you is just be there for her as much as you can, in the best way that you can. Your doctors and nurses will know how to do that better than I could. And equally as important, you need to take care of yourself."

"I just want her to be home. And we haven't even scratched the surface, it's barely been a week –"

"Blaine. Take a deep breath. I don't want you to just skim over what I just told you – you have to take care of yourself."

Blaine nodded, thinking of the other day when Laura had to remind him to go eat lunch. "Okay. Okay, I hear you."

"And you and Kurt can't forget to take care of each other, either."

"I definitely don't want to end up where we were last year…"

"Take it one day at a time. I have faith in you, Blaine."

Blaine really, really wished he had more faith in himself. "I feel really ungrateful right now."

"Ungrateful for what, exactly?" He couldn't answer, and Dr. Jacobson sighed softly,
sympathetically. "You're not ungrateful, you're stressed. And with good reason. Your book just came out, you just got a pretty unexpected baby who's in intensive care. Can you let yourself be where you are, and be okay with that?"

"I guess I can try that. Any advice on how, exactly?"

"Journal about it. Go running. Practice breathing techniques. Talk to Kurt. Scream really loudly into your pillow if you need to – whatever you need to do to let yourself experience the things you're feeling."

"So I'm supposed to feel ungrateful?" Blaine frowned. "I'm really confused, Dr. J."

"I don't want you to feel ungrateful, but if you're feeling stressed, I want you to let yourself be stressed and not try to mask it. If you're scared, be scared. If you're sad, be sad. You have to give yourself permission to feel in order to get past those feelings, or you'll be stuck in a perpetual loop of negative emotions. I'm not trying to tell you to dwell or mope, but you don't have to be Superman, Blaine."

He smiled wryly. "Well, as much as I've tried, I haven't quite learned to fly yet…"

"As long as you're walking, I'm happy."

"Thanks, Dr. J," Blaine said, happy that he'd chosen a therapist who could keep up with him, who could keep up with Kurt. "Walking I think we can manage."

* * *

Friday, August 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2024

Kurt straightened up, stretching his arms to the sky, twisting to make his back pop. He'd been working for what seemed like hours on piles of paperwork, an unwelcome and woefully unexpected part of his job. He rubbed his weary eyes, almost admitting that ok, yeah, maybe reading glasses would help the headaches, fuck getting older…

Fuck getting older – he wasn't old; he had a new baby. And the thought of that baby made the headache dissipate even more than pressing on his temples.
He took out his phone, scrolled through his photo album, sighed over photos of her and her Daddy. He missed them so much.

**To: The Husband**

Hi, honey – how's your day going?

Love you <3

A few seconds later, a reply came from Blaine.

**From: The Husband.**

Can't talk, at hospital with Lily.

Kurt sighed and closed his eyes, headache creeping back like bony fingers slipping tight over his skull. He knew Blaine was at the hospital with Lily – what he was hoping for that Blaine might step off the unit for just a moment and give him a call, send him a picture, an update, something.

It hardly seemed fair, Blaine getting to spend his mornings and evenings with Lily while Kurt plugged away at his work with catty designers and only got a couple of hours with her a day.

He wanted to clone himself, to be in two places at once. He already felt like a failure as a parent – Blaine could calm Lily faster than he could, Blaine could change her diaper faster, Blaine knew all the songs she liked (could she really like songs at just over a week of age?). But he also felt like a failure at work – he'd made three different mistakes in the last two days that he never would've made before, all because his mind was in the Bronx at that hospital with his child and not in the studio.

Everyone on his team had been forgiving and understanding, of course; how could they not when he had a baby in the NICU? But Kurt had standards, and he wasn't meeting them on either end.

He sighed again, pushed his phone to the side – it was obvious he wasn't getting any more from Blaine than that one text. The fingers held a vice grip on the back of his head, throbbing with each beat of his heart, and he took out his pen, the words on the pages in front of him going in and out of focus.
Blaine rolled his eyes, annoyed as his phone buzzed loudly with a text. Kurt knew he was always at the hospital visiting Lily this time of morning …

"Sorry," Blaine apologized to Sarah Grace, who was back and taking care of Lily that day. "I know no cell phones – Kurt just texted me, and I wanted to let him know that I couldn't talk."

"No problem, just go wash your hands again and let me cuddle that baby," she told him with a grin, holding her arms out. He handed his baby over into Sarah Grace's capable hands, trying not to be perturbed.

Kurt knew the rules. He knew that Blaine couldn't take calls or texts while he was on the unit – it was the hospital's policy. He didn't understand why Kurt couldn’t remember that during the day; he remembered it at night well enough.

He sighed heavily as he scrubbed his hands again, glancing across the pod as another baby's monitor started screaming, numbers flashing red. His heart pounded a little as a nurse hopped out of her chair to tend to the tiny child on the gigantic contraption they called a "warmer." He was so glad that he'd never seen Lily's numbers flash red …

It was like another universe, this place. A bad, bad universe that he never wanted to visit again after they were out …

"Blaine?" Sarah Grace said. "I didn't mean you had to scrub for five minutes or anything."

"Oh," he said, looking down, suds covering his hands and wrists. "Sorry Lil, Daddy's coming."

*I * *

"I can't believe we missed bathtime," Kurt grumbled as they exited the hospital together close to ten o'clock that night. "They know we come for bathtime every day –"
"Maybe we should bring our food with us next time instead of eating at home," Blaine said. Kurt bristled – there was no bite to Blaine's voice, but it rubbed him the wrong way, like it was his fault they missed Lily's bath …

"And what? Eat at the hospital? We can't bring food in the unit, Blaine."

"We can eat on the subway," Blaine said. "It's not like we don't have time – it's a 45-minute trip at best."

Kurt gave him a look. "Think about what you just said. The subway? You know how dirty the trains are – and you want to take food on them?"

Blaine sighed. "Well, it was just a suggestion."

_It's not just that_, Kurt wanted to say. _I need at least a few minutes to unwind from work before we run off again to the hospital …_ But he knew Blaine wouldn't understand, would judge him for it. _Who in their right mind has to unwind before they see their kid? _"Never mind," he said aloud. "I'm sure we can catch her bath tomorrow."

"Maybe Serena will be back," Blaine said. "I don't like that Rita girl who had her tonight very much …"

"I'd have liked her more if she'd at least waited for us."

They walked in silence for a few steps, Kurt silently stewing in a pot of guilt and frustration, until Blaine pulled his phone out of his pocket.

"Nick just texted me," he said. "He and Jeff are going out tonight. He wanted to know if we wanted to come."

Kurt looked up at him. "You aren't actually _considering_ it, are you?"

Blaine made a face. "No, are you?"
"Yeah right – I can barely move, let alone dance…" Kurt sighed. "Remember when we used to go out?"

"Seems like light years ago," Blaine chuckled. "But man, we could tear up a dance floor."

"Yeah …"

"It was good then. We were good then," Blaine said, grabbing Kurt's hand. "But it's better now. Our baby – she's so incredible, Kurt. I wish you could've been there this morning. Lil was making the funniest faces."

Kurt smiled, trying not to be jealous of the extra visit that Blaine got every day. It would be so much easier if they could just get her home …

"Hey," Blaine said, bumping his hip. "You okay?"

"Just tired," Kurt said, and it was true. He was exhausted. "Ready for our bed."

"Well, our smelly chariot awaits." Blaine gestured to the stairs leading down to the subway. "After you, my love."

* * *

**Sunday, August 4th, 2024**

"Blaine, come on, get up," Kurt yelled from the bathroom for what seemed like the umpteenth time that morning. "Do you want to go see Lily or not?"

"Ugh, just a few more minutes – it's so early, still," Blaine grumbled from the bed, pulling a pillow over his face.

"Which means that we have all day to see her!" Kurt said, coming into the bedroom, rubbing his
hair with a towel.

"Exactly. We have all day to see her." Blaine flopped over on his stomach.

"Look, it's not my fault that you insisted on staying up until one AM finishing that stupid zombie movie. I don't know about you, but I'd like to see my daughter."

Blaine propped up on an elbow and scowled, rubbing his eyes. He grabbed his phone, looked at the time, and blinked at Kurt. "And it's not my fault that it's pouring outside right now. You know rain just makes me want to sleep."

Kurt sighed at him.

"Just fifteen minutes. Give me till eight, and I'll get up and get ready and we can be out the door by nine, and at the hospital before ten. Okay? It's not like you're ready yet either."

One-two-three-four-five ... "Fine," Kurt said, too frustrated to make it all the way to ten. He knew full well how cold he sounded, but couldn't bring himself to care too much. "I'll just finish getting ready and feed Romeo and take him out while you sleep, then. And we'll only miss her first feeding this morning. No big deal." He walked back into the bathroom and tried not to slam the door, gripping the sides of the sink hard.

It was the first weekend they'd had without Kurt's family there since they'd gotten her, and while they'd been with Lily at the hospital all day the day before, there wasn't a moment that Kurt didn't want to spend with her. And now Blaine was taking precious minutes away from him, purposefully or not. Blaine took for granted his sprawling hours of free time; he could never appreciate how precious each of Kurt's seconds with his daughter were to him.

But to take an entire hour? Maybe more?

Kurt would not be playing nice that day.

* * *
"Morning boys!" Sarah Grace greeted them as they entered Pod 3, Lily's home-away-from-home. "Did you guys get some good sleep in this nasty weather?"

"We got some sleep, at least," Blaine said. "I don't know about good. And the subway smelled like old feet and wet dog, which is always fun." He glanced at Kurt, hoping for a neutral reaction. Kurt didn't even look up."How's our girl today?"

"Doing well," Sarah Grace said. "We've had a nice morning in here away from the rain. Her scores have been good. You just missed her feeding though – she ate at nine-thirty. We had a nice little talk, and I turned on her sleep sheep and put her to bed. She's out like a light."

"We figured we'd miss it," Kurt said. "We were planning to stay most of the day again, though, if that's okay with you, so we'll catch her next one." He still hadn't looked at Blaine, not since they got on the subway, and Blaine knew he was really in trouble for this. But he couldn't help it – he'd been so sleepy …

"That's fine," Sarah Grace said. "Pull up a chair – as soon as she wakes, you can get her up."

Blaine rolled two chairs in the direction of her crib, and they plopped down wordlessly, beginning the wait-for-Lily-to-wake-up-so-we-can-rock-her-back-to-sleep routine.

"So I wanted to let you guys know – I signed up to be her primary," Sarah Grace said, sticking a bottle of milk in the warmer for another baby.

"Her what?" Kurt asked.

"Her primary nurse. It means I'll get to take care of her every day I'm at work. Obviously the days I'm off, she'll have somebody else, but it lets her have more consistent care that way."

"Oh," Blaine said, his eyes widening the slightest bit, and caught a smile on Kurt's face out of the corner of his eye. It was the first he'd seen since the night before. "Thank you."

Sarah Grace laughed. "Oh, Blaine, you don't have to thank me for it – I wanted to do it. I've gotten pretty attached," she said. "Babies on methadone are kind of my thing – you either love them or you can't handle them, and I just – I don't know, there's a special place in my heart for them." She smiled over at Lily, sleeping in her crib. "And this one – she just wormed her way right into the
Blaine swallowed. He felt so **touched** that it wasn't just them, that someone else could love their child like that, even on her bad days, even on the **worst** days –

"And I have to say," Sarah Grace continued, looking around to make sure there were no other parents in the pod, "having you guys as her dads is kind of a nice little bonus. Usually the parents are – well, they're not like you, for sure. It's so wonderful to see a happy ending for once."

Blaine chanced a look in Kurt's direction, and saw an emotional expression on his face.

"I – thank you, Sarah Grace," Kurt told her. "You don't know – I can't be here all the time. I know Blaine is here a lot, but I – it's just nice to know that there's somebody taking care of her, somebody who loves her when we can't be here."

She grinned. "Well, I'm glad you guys trust me. You'll probably also be happy to know that Serena's signed up to primary her on nights. I know you guys have met her –"

"Oh, we love her," Blaine said. "She's so funny."

"She is," Sarah Grace agreed. "I'm glad you guys like her – not everybody knows how to take the loud, sarcastic Italian lady …"

Kurt grinned. "We kind of grew up with a loud, sarcastic Latina girl – Serena's pretty mild-mannered compared to Santana. We don't scare very easily."

"Good," Sarah Grace smiled. "She loves that baby – and lucky for you guys, she works a lot of overtime, so you'll see her even more."

"Well, aren't you lucky," Kurt murmured to his baby. "See how many people love you already?" He turned to Sarah Grace. "Seriously, thank you so much – you have no idea how much better this makes me feel. I hate not being here, and just knowing that there's somebody besides me and Blaine …"
"I'm glad we can give you some peace of mind," she said. "The pleasure's ours, though. That baby girl of yours is sweet as sugar, even on her bad days. Now, if you guys need me, I'll just be right over on the other end of the pod …"

* * *

It was a good two hours later and Lily hadn't made a move. Kurt and Blaine sat at her bedside in silence, Kurt not quite ready to let go of his current grudge. Blaine kept nearly nodding off, probably a little entranced by the soft waves Lily's sleep sheep whispered.

Kurt shifted in his seat, sitting on his hands. It was so hard not to reach in and pick Lily up, especially when Kurt hardly got to see her during the week, but he knew she needed the sleep …

"Did you guys have a surrogate?"

Kurt looked up to see a small woman sitting alone next to an incubator across the pod. They hadn't even noticed her come in.

"No, actually, we're adopting her," he said. "Is that your baby?"

She nodded. "My first – and only, now. They had to take my uterus when she was born …"

"I'm so sorry," Kurt said, his heart going out to the poor woman. "What's her name?"

"Maggie," she said with a soft smile.

Blaine looked up at her, smiled back. "That's pretty."

"Thanks. What's her name?" she asked, gesturing to Lily. The baby stirred in her crib, lifting an arm over her head.

"Lily Elise," Blaine answered, narrowing his eyes, trying to peer into the incubator from across the room. "Your baby looks … little. Is she okay?"
"Two pounds, five ounces when she was born." Kurt nearly gasped, he couldn't imagine — "But she's gotten just above three, now," she said. "She's hanging in there … we finally got off oxygen last week." She paused, looking at the squirming mound of blankets in Lily's crib. "What's she here for? Was she early?"

"No," Kurt said, raising his voice over the cry that was just starting up, feeling grateful that he was getting to hear a cry. Two pounds, five ounces. He didn't normally believe in miracles, but that … "She just looks small. She actually – um – she's here for drug withdrawal. Her mom – well …" he trailed off, a little unsure of how to explain, getting up from the glider.

"Oh," the woman said sadly. "Oh, that's terrible."

"She's a tough little cookie, though," Blaine said. "Everybody tells us she's done really great so far."

Kurt could feel Blaine's eyes on his back as he got up to check Lily's diaper and change her. He gently pulled her legs down – it was a symptom of the withdrawals, increased muscle tone, and she still kept her knees practically plastered against her stomach. It was just one more thing that Kurt wondered about – would that ever go away? Or would every diaper change always be this big of a fight? "Come on, sweetie, relax for Papa …"

She screwed up her little face more, and he smiled, shook his head, and wrestled the diaper around her legs.

"Poor little baby," the woman sighed from the other side of the room.

Lily let out a particularly loud wail as Kurt tried to wrap her.

Poor little baby, indeed.

She calmed quickly, though, when he'd finally swaddled her and gave her a pacifier as he cuddled her close to his chest. Humming softly, he rocked her back and forth in the glider as Blaine hurried to get her bottle ready. They still hadn't spoken a word to each other.
"Good luck with her," the woman across the pod said.

"Yeah, you too," Kurt said. "Just three pounds … I hope she grows fast." He turned his attention back to Lily, who was starting to squirm in his arms impatiently. "Hey sweetheart, we're getting it – Papa's got you –"

Sarah Grace walked by, lightly placing her hand on Kurt's shoulder. "You guys are old pros already," she said with a smile. "If you need anything, I'll be over here with Maggie – let me know when she's done eating so I can grab a temp and score her, okay?"

"Okay. Her diaper was just wet – no loose stools this time," Kurt told her as Blaine silently handed him the bottle.

Sarah Grace grinned. "Keep it up, and I'll promote you."

"Oh god, please don't do that," Kurt said with a laugh. "Papa wouldn't know what to do with all these babies." He slipped the nipple into her mouth, and she began to eat hungrily. "You seem to be feeling better today," he cooed at her as she stared up at him in all her tiny wonder.

"She does," Blaine said quietly, the first words he'd said to Kurt since the subway that morning. "Is that bottle good, baby?"

Kurt regarded him for a moment, then took a breath. They could hash this out when they got home – there would probably be at least a small fight over it, if Kurt knew their relationship well enough – but he could be man enough to table everything for the sake of his daughter.

He was so preoccupied thinking about it that he didn't notice she'd inhaled the entire bottle down without him ever realizing it. "Uh oh!" he said, gently removing the nipple from her mouth. "Time to burp!" He leaned her over, his hand taking up her entire torso, her chin resting on his thumb and forefinger. He still couldn't get over how little she was.

Gently patting her back, he burped her until he got one, and a large blob of spit-up with it, all over the back of his hand. He made a face, but Blaine was at-the-ready with a washcloth. "Thanks," Kurt said, managing a half-smile as Blaine cleaned Lily's face, then his hand.

"That burp was maybe a little too good, Lil," Blaine told her with a very serious expression on his
face. She looked toward the sound of his voice, and Kurt's heart warmed. There was still bonding to be done for sure, particularly on Kurt's part, but oh, he was definitely getting there. "Maybe next time try not to shower Papa with a present, okay?"

Her reply was a whimper, face screwing up again, and Kurt shook his head. "Papa took your food away, huh? Want some more, baby girl?"

* * *

"Okay, we need to talk before this gets even more out of hand, Kurt," Blaine said the moment they entered the condo. "I know you're upset because I slept late, but really, don't you think you might be taking it a little far at this point?"

"I –" Kurt stopped himself. Mad about that morning, madder still that he'd have to go back to work in eight short hours and start the resentment cycle all over again, he knew that no discussion they'd have that night would be productive. "Do you think we could meet with Dr. Jacobson? Together?"

It was obvious that wasn't the reply that Blaine was expecting. "Um – sure, I guess, but – Kurt, is there something I need to know?"

"No. No, nothing like what you're probably thinking – I'm sorry, that didn't come out well. It's just – there are things I'm just not dealing with very well, and it wouldn't be fair to you to yell at you about them, which is what would happen if we talked tonight."

Blaine blinked at him. "Wow. Um, okay. I can respect that."

"I'm surly, I know, and I'm sorry, but – this is harder than I ever expected and – I'm just going to stop there for tonight."

"Okay," Blaine said slowly. "Well – what can I do in the meantime to help you not be surly?"

This time it was Kurt who was surprised – maybe during all that therapy they'd had, something had stuck in both of them. "Well – that's nice of you to offer. Um – maybe send me some pictures of Lily while you're visiting her during the day?"
"I – okay," Blaine said, looking a little wary, clearly waiting for the other shoe to drop. "Is that all you're asking?"

"For now. Will you have time to call Dr. Jacobson tomorrow?"

"I should. Do you have a day or a time that's better with your stuff at work right now?"

Kurt shook his head. "I can take a couple hours off whenever she's available – this is important to me, Blaine."

Blaine nodded. "Okay, then."

An awkward silence fell over the room. They hadn't had a conversation that stilted in a long time, and while that was preferable over the yelling it could've been, it made Kurt prickly and uncomfortable. He never did "too polite" well, not with Blaine at least, who he was normally so comfortable with that he could wear Blaine's presence like an old, cozy sweater. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other, looked at the floor.

Out of nowhere a huge yawn took over Blaine's face. "Are we done for tonight? Do you have anything else you need to talk about?"

"I don't think so, no."

"Can we go to bed, then? Lil wore me out today …"

"Sure we can."

Kurt followed him down the hall. They undressed in uncomfortable silence, both of them sneaking glances at each other, and crawled into bed in their underwear. The small dip in the covers between them felt like a chasm.

"Hey," Kurt said eventually. "Are you still awake?"
"I am."

He turned to face Blaine. "I love you, okay? Even when I'm surly."

"I love you even when you're surly, too," Blaine smiled.

Kurt pulled the pillow out from under his head, whacked Blaine with it. "Ass."

Blaine shrugged. "Maybe." He laid his hand, palm up and open, in the space between them. "But you married me anyway."

The glint of Blaine's wedding band reflected the city lights outside their bedroom, and Kurt ran a finger over the smooth metal. "That I did," he said, placing his own hand on top of Blaine's, smiling to himself as Blaine's fingers curled around his own.

"Still glad?"

"Every day."

"Mmmm, me too," Blaine said, his voice growing heavier, and Kurt picked up his hand and kissed his knuckles.

"Night, honey."

* * *

Monday, August 5th, 2024

"Blaine, what are you doing right now?"

"Well, good morning to you, too, Alex," Blaine said, jogging to the fridge with the phone balanced precariously on his shoulder while he tried to button his pants. "I'm trying to get ready to go see Lily and not kill myself in the process. What are you doing?"
"Drop everything and get your ass to a computer," Alex said.

Blaine sighed. "Can this wait? Is this more important than my child?"

A beat. Then, "Just look at the damned New York Times Bestseller List, Blaine."

He froze, then hightailed it to his laptop, skidding on the hardwoods and landing hard on the couch. He typed in the address, scanned over the screen and almost dropped the phone.

**COMBINED PRINT & E-BOOK FICTION**

1. **BLUEBIRD** by Mattie York

2. **ON THE RIVER THAMES** by Jonathan Plier

3. **NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU TO HOLD** by Blaine Anderson-Hummel

4. **IF I DIE** by Amie Marcos

5. **THE WHALE'S SONG** by Tobin James Walker

"Oh my god," he breathed. It was the best he'd ever done – his first book had hit number five at its peak, his second hadn't even made top ten. "Oh my god – Alex. Oh my god."

"People are eating it up, Blaine," Alex said. "I wouldn't be surprised if you got to number one before it's all over. Congrats, man."


"Yep. Except, my reaction was more like holy fucking shit. Whatever blows your skirt up."
Blaine laughed in spite of himself. "God, I could look at that all day …"

"Well, you could …"

"Shut it, Alex. I do actually have stuff to do and places to be, so I can't actually sit here. But … how weird would it be to take a picture of the screen with my phone?"

"Nerd."

"Tell me something I don't already know."

"God, I swear sometimes you're ten years old."

Blaine frowned. "Kurt tells me that sometimes."

"Well, Kurt's right sometimes. You sure you don't want to tour with this one?"

All the air that had Blaine's chest puffed up leaked out his mouth in one loud whoosh. "Alex, you know I can't. Not with Lily."

"Just thought I'd try," he said. "No big deal, man – looks like you're doing just fine without one."

"Yeah … looks that way." It hardly seemed real, staring at that computer screen. He blinked – seeing his own name on the internet, in the New York Times, would never, ever, ever get old. He hoped Kurt might think to bring a paper home that night, would know that Blaine would never ask for one, but god – to see his name like that – maybe he could get a paper on his way to the hospital…

"Okay, well, just wanted you to see it. Go have fun with your kid."

"Alex?"
"Hmmm?"

"Thank you."

"I didn't write the fucking book, bud, you did. I'm proud of you," Alex said, and Blaine could hear his smile.

"I'm proud of me, too," he said once Alex hung up, staring at the screen one more time before he darted off to see his daughter.

* * *

Blaine stood over a cutting board brimming with chopped vegetables, their colors mimicking an interesting sort of rainbow, orange carrots and peppers, green cucumbers and celery, purple lettuce, pink radishes, red tomatoes – it was beautiful, the things that nature could give them.

He smiled to himself as he tipped it over, scraping the veggie rainbow into a bowl, knowing Kurt would think of the same things, Kurt who appreciated things like Blaine appreciated things, who tried to take care of the earth and its creatures and its people. He hoped this would make Kurt feel at least better, if not good – he was worried about Kurt, about the session he'd set up that day for them to meet with Dr. Jacobson. He didn't completely understand; Kurt hadn't dropped quite enough hints for him to really know what was going on. But the fact that Kurt was upset was reason enough for Blaine to make a concerted effort, to try. If all he ever did his entire life was make Kurt happy…

And sometimes fresh, colorful veggies helped with that.

"Blaine!" Kurt exclaimed, pulling him from his stupor. Blaine turned around just in time for Kurt to throw his arms around Blaine's neck, hands full of packages be damned. "I am so proud of you, you have no idea –"

*Oh. Oh yeah. Blaine had almost forgotten about his book after his long visit with Lily earlier that day, after sitting on a bench in the park, trying to figure out what was going on with his husband. He hugged Kurt hard, kissing him squarely on the lips. "Thank you. I love you."

"Mmm, I love you too," Kurt said. He drew a bouquet of flowers from behind Blaine's shoulders
and held them up, his expression faltering. "These aren't feeling old hat, are they?" he asked. "Should I have gotten you lilies? Would that have been more appropriate in light of recent events? You're not … bored with these, are you?"

Blaine sighed over the red and yellow roses in Kurt's hand, sticking his nose down in them, breathing in the soft fragrance. "Never."

"Oh, good," Kurt smiled, clearly relieved, then held up a brown paper bag. "I also got champagne."

Blaine smiled back. "Thank you."

"That salad looks fantastic," Kurt said, grabbing a towel from the oven handle and throwing it over the champagne cork.

"Kurt? We can't drink that now," Blaine told him, his forehead furrowing as he placed a hand on Kurt's forearm.

Kurt looked up. "Why not?"

"We've got to go to the hospital," he said. "We can't – we're not showing up to visit our baby with alcohol on our breath."

Kurt narrowed his eyes, confused. "Blaine – it's not like we're about to get wasted or something. Not even tipsy. I was going to pour us each a glass. To celebrate your book."

"I know." Please don't demonize me here, Kurt, you know we can't … "I know. And I appreciate your enthusiasm –"

"My enthusiasm?"

No, no, no, not today, we can't fight today …

"I wasn't trying to be an ass," Blaine said. "I really do appreciate it – thank you for the flowers, the
champagne, I love it, but … let's just celebrate when we get home, okay? We'll be able to drink the whole bottle that way, and I just don't want to do anything to jeopardize our status as guardians … you know we're still not done meeting with the caseworkers and all that."

"And you think the caseworker would take Lily away from us because we each had a glass of champagne to celebrate that you wrote a book that ended up third on the New York Times bestseller list."

"I –"

Kurt sighed heavily, his I-am-being-patient-with-you-but-I'm-not-happy-about-it sigh. "Whatever. We'll drink it when we get home. At eleven o'clock. When we're both too tired to enjoy anything."

"Kurt." He knew the second Kurt's name came out of his mouth like that that it was too harsh, too stern, and Blaine instantly wanted to take it all back – the tone, the worry over such a stupid thing, because Kurt sort of crumbled in front of him.

"I'm sorry. You're right, it's just – god, it's so hard, Blaine, this go to work, come home, eat in two seconds, travel to fucking Mars to see our kid, come home empty-handed thing we're doing. We're completely neglecting our dog, I feel like I'm neglecting myself, and I'm just tired. I just wanted a nice bit of normalcy – I'm so proud of everything you've done with your book, and now –" He broke off with a defeated look on his face, setting the bottle of champagne down on the counter with a thunk.

"Hey," Blaine sighed, opening his arms for Kurt to step into. "I know you're tired. You're amazing, keeping up this pace, working so hard for us. You know I appreciate it, right? How hard you work, how dedicated you are? We'd never have been able to do this in the first place if it wasn't for you."

Kurt sighed into the hug, but Blaine could feel him rolling his eyes. "I don't make all the money, you know," he said, his voice a little thicker than normal. "Book advances, remember? And now – royalties."

Blaine squeezed around Kurt's waist. "Lots of royalties, apparently."

"Oh, good." He could tell that Kurt was putting on his I'm fine, Blaine" voice and face and demeanor, and could see straight through it.
"So many royalties," he sighed into Kurt's hair, "that I think even if the caseworkers come after us, we can buy their loyalty."

Kurt picked his head up, gave Blaine a questioning look.

"I shouldn't have freaked out over something so small. One glass and a 45-minute trip and nobody will ever know the difference. You were trying to be nice, and I was a total buzzkill."

"Are you sure you're okay with it? You don't just feel guilty?"

"I'm sure. I really am sorry, Kurt. And maybe we can finish the bottle when we get home tonight."

Kurt chuckled, appeased for the moment. "Yeah, right. We say that now, but once we get home, do you think we'll actually be lucid enough to sit here and drink it?"

"Champagne in bed, then."

"Now that," Kurt said, grabbing the towel again, "is something I can toast to."

* * *

"Oh my god I just want our bed," Kurt whined as Blaine unlocked the door. It was almost midnight – Lily's methadone had been weaned that morning, and she was beginning to feel the effects that night. Neither Kurt nor Blaine could bear to leave her side while she was still crying.

"The rest of that champagne might go on the back-burner tonight," Blaine said, his words heavy with exhaustion. "Just want sleep."

"If I drank champagne now, I think I'd sleep a hundred years," Kurt yawned as they stumbled back to the bedroom. He kicked his shoes off, shedding his clothes in a pile next to the bed, and fell face-first onto the mattress, clad only in a pair of boxer-briefs.

"Call you Rumplestilskin," Blaine murmured, shirtless in the bed next to him already, still in his
"You mean Rip Van Winkle, right?" Kurt's laughter shook the mattress, and a weak smack came at his arm.

"You know what I meant."

The giggles turned into a snort, and he laughed even harder. "I can just see it, one of my tempter tantrums turning out so bad I stomp a hole through the floor …"

"I'm kind of surprised it hasn't happened, yet," Blaine said, curling up with his pillow, a wide, sleepy grin stretched across his face.

"Mmmm," was all Kurt could reply with, reaching over to stroke his fingers across Blaine's five o'clock shadow. "Sleep?"

"Mmm-hmm." Blaine yawned. "Love you."

Kurt scooted close enough to plant a sweet kiss on Blaine's cheek. "Love you too, honey. Sweet dreams."
Chapter 11

Wednesday, August 7th, 2024

Blaine was nervous about seeing Dr. Jacobson for the first time in ages. Kurt had kept mum about what they were meeting her for, Blaine hadn't pressed the issue and the elephant in the room was reaching gargantuan proportions, even for a pachyderm-sized problem. He felt blind and unarmed and tried to breathe as they rode in silence up the elevator to her office – raising his hackles wouldn't help anything in this situation.

"Kurt, Blaine, good to see both of you together," Dr. Jacobson greeted them, holding out bottles of water and motioning for the couch. "First off, I have to say – congratulations on your book, Blaine! I saw it in the paper, and I'm so proud of you!"

Blaine beamed at her, still a little in shock over the news, thankful for a happy ice breaker. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Now, how are things?"

Blaine looked at Kurt, unsure of how to answer, but Kurt did the answering for him. "It depends on what time of day you're asking me that question, to be perfectly honest."

Dr. Jacobson nodded. "Understandable, in your current situation."

"So, I wanted to come today to get something off my chest," Kurt said quietly, cutting right to the chase. "I didn't feel right talking to Blaine without some sort of mediator present. None of this is his fault and I recognize that, but I'm kind of emotional about it and I don't want things to get out of hand …"

"Very wise," she mused. "What's going on?"

Yeah, Blaine thought, what is going on?

"It's been … difficult for me, I guess, trying to split my time," Kurt said, fidgeting. "I, um, I feel like I'm just sort of floundering around, doing an awful job at everything I'm trying to accomplish right now. When I'm at work, my head's at the hospital. I'm distracted and I'm not doing a good
job, and everybody's being so patient with me, but …" he sighed. "And when I'm at the hospital, I feel guilty because I'm not there more. I feel like I've come down with a temporary case of either ADD or insanity – I don't know where my brain is half the time. While we were waiting for Lily's feeding time the other day, I dreamed up a preemie line for Little Marc Jacobs. Like anybody with that many hospital bills wants to buy clothes that expensive that are going to get bled on and grown out of in a month …"

Blaine cocked his head to the side, listening.

"Anyway, I'm getting off track. If you're wondering what any of this has to do with you," Kurt continued, looking at Blaine, "there's some resentment there. Some jealousy. You get to spend so much time with her and all I can think about while I'm working is that you're there with her and I'm not. That you're being the better father, that she'll love you and resent me when she gets older because you were present and I was absent when she was sick and tiny." He paused. "And then – you blow off my texts, you never tell me how her day is going until I get home that night – I just feel so out of the loop."

"Kurt –" Blaine was dumbfounded. It hadn't even occurred to him that day, or any of the other times Kurt had tried to contact him, that he was merely trying to be more involved. Which, Blaine realized, was a really stupid thing to overlook. "I didn't – god. I'm an idiot."

"Blaine, don't," Kurt said. "This is not your fault – this is me, not being able to deal with my current situation. Don't martyr yourself."

"I just – I should've realized. And – god, I hope you don't think I believe that, that you're being an absent father. You see her every day."

"But you see her twice as much as I do."

"Does it need to be a competition?" Dr. Jacobson asked, her voice casual. "A race? Why do you think you're comparing, Kurt?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's my brain's way of dealing with the guilt. Maybe because I'm jealous that Blaine can get her to calm down faster than I can, now. Maybe because I think Blaine is a fantastic dad, and I want to live up to his parenting standards. I just know that it's hard, and we've still got weeks before she comes home, and it won't get any easier."
Dr. Jacobson nodded as Blaine reached for Kurt's hand. "I've probably done a lot to perpetuate this," he said, feeling guilty himself. "Before, when you've texted me while I'm at the hospital, I just got irritated that you were ignoring hospital policy. I am so dense, god, I could've walked out of the unit long enough to text you back or send you a picture or something. And – I don't know, I talk about her a lot. Do you think I'm gloating? I'm not trying to gloat …"

"I don't think you're trying to gloat," Kurt said carefully. "And it's not that I don't want to hear about her; I do. I don't know what I want you to do, how I want you to act, which is why we're here…"

"Okay, I think, first, we need to figure out what the root problem is," Dr. Jacobson said.

Kurt nodded, took a breath, and Blaine breathed, too – this was going well, better than he expected, even though he still felt so guilty for not seeing it earlier.

"Okay," Kurt said, "here goes. So I'm having all these feelings as a reaction to a thing. That thing is working full-time with a sick daughter in the hospital. Am I doing okay so far?"

"Keep going," Dr. Jacobson said.

"So, not working isn't really an option right now, because I want more time off later when she's actually home and Blaine needs help," he said. Blaine squeezed his hand – that day couldn't come soon enough. "So I have to figure out how to work and how to visit Lily and how to still be a competent member of society and how to not expect perfection from myself or resent Blaine while doing all of those things." He paused. "And, at some point, put together a nursery. All that seems impossible."

"That's because you're looking at it all in one big clump," she said. "Can we break it down a little? Take one thing at a time?"

"Can I interject something?" Blaine asked.

"Of course," Dr. Jacobson said.

"So, I can't do anything about the work situation right now – I think we've both agreed that we both need to be at home when Lily gets discharged. But with visiting Lily – I know you're comparing
your time with her to my time with her."

Kurt nodded.

"Okay, do you know Susan? The mom of the baby right next to Lily?"

"That little boy? I think so…"

"You saw her interact with him last Saturday. Do you think she's a good mom?"

Kurt narrowed his eyes at Blaine. "Blaine, I've seen the woman once."

"Okay, fine, do you think she's a bad mom?"

"I have no idea!"

Blaine sighed – Kurt was not helping him make his point. "Okay, well I have seen them interact. She loves that baby more than anything. But she only gets to visit him for half an hour every other day. She's a single mom to three kids, she works, and she can only get childcare for that amount of time. Can she help it? Not at all. Does she visit the baby every chance she gets? Absolutely."

Kurt sat back, looking at Blaine.

"Look, all I'm trying to say is that I'm the anomaly here. Most parents visit their babies about as much as you get to see Lily, or even less. There are some parents that I have actually never seen. It's not fair that you're comparing yourself to an outlier."

"It's not fair that I have to go to the Bronx to see my baby in general," Kurt said, pulling his knees to his chin.

"No," Dr. Jacobson said softly, "it's not. None of this is fair. But Blaine's right, this time – you can only do what you can do, nothing more. The fact that you travel to the Bronx every day after working all day speaks volumes to me about how much you love her. Jealousy that Blaine gets to
spend more time with her is a completely appropriate human reaction – you just have to be careful not to let that jealousy turn into resentment, or hard feelings toward Blaine.”

Kurt nodded slowly.

"Sometimes," she continued, "and I hate giving this answer, but sometimes it's not going to get better for a while. Sometimes the situation just is what it is, and I'm afraid that this might be one of those cases. You say you have to work right now; I respect that. But Lily isn't going to get any closer to you guys until she's home, so I'm afraid you're just going to have to be patient and keep plugging away for a time. The only thing you *can* control about the situation is your reaction to it.”

"I know," Kurt said, his voice small.

"I wish I had more answers for you, Kurt."

Blaine turned, regarded his husband's down-turned face. "I have one answer."

"What's that?" Kurt asked, lifting his head.

"We have a daughter." Blaine's voice came out soft, tender. "And when she gets better, she's going to come home with us. That's what's getting me through right now. Can you just hold onto that?"

The corner of Kurt's mouth raised in a half-smile. "I can hold onto that," he said, grabbing Blaine's hand, "if I can hold onto you, too."

"Always," Blaine murmured, squeezing back.

Dr. Jacobson smiled in front of them. "Sometimes my clients have wiser words than I do. You'll do well to listen to each other through all of this," she said. "And try to remember – it will end. Before you know it, you'll be bringing Lily up here for me to love on."

"That will be a happy day," Blaine said, nearly sighing with the beauty of that image, Dr. Jacobson in all her hippie-flower-child-tree-hugging glory planting kisses on his daughter's face. He wanted *everyone*, he wanted the world to love his daughter. "Kurt, we need to take her to meet *everyone*
Kurt smiled softly. "Flu-season, honey," he said, rubbing his thumb affectionately over Blaine's knuckles. "We'll have to be careful."

"We'll make them sign contracts that they've been vaccinated. You'll get a flu vaccine to see Lily, right Dr. J?"

* * *

Blaine held Kurt's hand as they walked home, quiet and contemplative. He was just about to open his mouth and say – well, what, exactly, he wasn't sure, when his phone rang.

"Hey, this an okay time? You're not at the hospital?" Nick asked through the phone.

"No, it's fine," he answered. "What's up?"

"Well, Jeff and I have been talking …"

"That usually leads to bad ideas," Blaine smiled.

"Not true ever, but especially not this time. We were wondering – would it help if we took Romeo for a while? I know you're gone a lot, and we just thought, I don't know, it might give you a little more time with Lily if you didn't have to worry about feeding or walking him. We'd take good care of him, I promise, and of course you can have him back whenever you want …"

"Nick," Blaine said, his voice, soft, "that would be incredible. You have no idea how guilty I've felt – it's like I'm abandoning one responsibility for another."

"What?" Kurt was hissing beside him. "What's he saying?"

"Well, now you don't have to. As long as it's okay with Kurt, I mean. You can bring him and all his things whenever you're ready."
"I don't think that Kurt is going to have a problem with less responsibility…"

"Less responsibility about what?"

"Listen, I'm gonna run this by Kurt," Blaine said. "I'll text you when we might bring him, okay?"

"Anytime," Nick said. "Just say the word. Anything we can do to help …"

"Thank you," Blaine said, a little surprised at the amount of relief he felt.

"What was that?" Kurt asked when he'd hung up the phone.

"Nick and Jeff are offering to keep Romeo for us."

Kurt's eyebrows raised. "Oh? For how long?"

"Indefinitely, it sounded like. Until we're ready for him again. What do you think?"

"I think," Kurt said, "that I might feel guilty about how sad I'm not going to be when he's gone."

It took Blaine more than a few beats to work out exactly what Kurt said, then squeezed his hand. "Me too."

"Would I be a terrible person if I wanted to drop him off tonight?"

"Not at all," Blaine said, kissing his knuckles as they descended into the subway tunnel.

***
Thursday, August 8th, 2024

"No. Nooooo …"

Kurt started awake, attuned to Blaine's voice whining pitifully beside him.

"Blaine? Blaine, honey, what's wrong?"

"…Can't …"

Kurt blinked, trying to focus in the dark room, and realized that Blaine was tossing restlessly next to him, still asleep. "Blaine, wake up," he whispered gently, wrapping Blaine's body in his arms.

Blaine gasped as his eyes popped open, his chest heaving like he'd just finished one of his long runs. "Kurt –"

"Shhh, honey, it was just a nightmare –"

"She came. She took her."

"Who, love? Who took her?"

"Kayla …" Blaine said, his voice thick.

Kurt clucked his tongue, kissed the side of Blaine's sweaty head. "Honey, Lily's fine. Kayla's in jail, nobody's going to come take her –"

"It was so real, though. They let her out and she came and brought a gun to the hospital and she took her –"

"Okay, okay," Kurt murmured, smoothing Blaine's wild curls down. "Serena's taking care of her tonight. She'd never let anything happen, but I bet – would it make you feel better to call and check on her?"
Blaine nodded, a pitiful expression on his face, and for the first time, Kurt realized there were tears shining in his eyes.

"Oh, honey, it's okay," he said, gently wiping his finger under Blaine's eyelashes, vanishing the dewy drops that had gathered there. "Here. We'll call." He grabbed his cell phone off the dresser and dialed the number that had become so familiar.

"NICU, this is Jessica, how can I help you?" a nurse answered on the second ring.

"Hi," Kurt said, "this is Kurt Anderson-Hummel – I need to speak with Lily Jackson's nurse, please."

"Hey, Kurt – let me get Serena for you, okay?"

"Thanks." He covered the speaker, said softly to Blaine, "She's coming."

"Kurt?" Serena said after a moment. "It's three in the morning – everything okay?"

"We're fine, we just – well, Blaine was worried. I'm gonna hand you to him, okay?"

Kurt passed the phone to Blaine, who swiped at his eyes with the back of his hand. "Serena?"

Kurt squeezed his hand.

"Yeah, it sounds stupid now, but I just had this crazy dream where Kayla came and took her, and – yeah, I know you wouldn't. …Good. That's good, I– …Well, it would, but I'd hate to drag Kurt all the way up there in the middle of the night …"

"We can go see her if you want, honey," Kurt whispered into the dark.

Blaine looked at him, surprised. "Really?"
Kurt nodded.

"Okay, well – we might see you in a little while Serena, if that's alright with you … Okay. …Okay, that sounds good. Thanks."

Blaine hung up the phone. "Are you sure? It's the middle of the night. We'll have to be – I don't think you'll be able to hold my hand, Kurt."

Kurt immediately understood what he meant. "We'll be careful. If it means you feeling that much better …"

"I'm sorry, I'm being stupid. It was just a dream, but god …"

"Come on, up, up," Kurt said, tugging on his arm. "Clothes on, time to go."

* * *

Four o'clock in the morning was a completely different universe in the NICU than the hustle and bustle of the daytime. Lights out, pallid-faced nurses who looked like they'd been infected with some sleep-deprived zombie disease, a hushed and eerie calm hung over the unit like they'd never seen on dayshift.

Serena met them at the entrance to the pod.

"Hey guys," she said, her eyes bleary.

"I'm so sorry to bother you this late," Blaine said quietly, following her to Lily's crib. "I was just really shaken up …"

"No problem," Serena said with a smile. "You guys will help me wake up. Freakin' four AM – it's always rough, this time of night. And you're in luck – you made it right before her feeding. She's awake."
Blaine leaned over her crib and stared into quiet eyes. "Hey Lil," he whispered. "Daddy and Papa came to see you."

She squirmed, making the blankets bounce.

"Go ahead and get her changed," Serena said. "And pardon me while I go swallow half a bottle of Rolaids. Freakin' four AM, ugh ..."

Blaine was grateful for Kurt, who sat contentedly and let Blaine do all the work, change Lily's diaper, take her temperature, fix her bottle. He settled in a glider with Lily in his arms, and Kurt squeezed his elbow. "Feel better?"

"I do." He paused, listening to the sweet little sounds of Lily eating. "I'm just so ready for her to be home."

"I know, honey, I am too."

"You guys are such pros," Serena said with a grin, coming back into the pod. "You're so cute with that baby I might have just thrown up in my mouth a little."

"Why thank you," Kurt said, crossing his legs primly. "Feel better?"

Serena made a face. "Not really. It'll get better after I get some sleep." She plopped down in a chair next to them. "So, tell me your story. You guys grow up in New York?"

"We're both originally from Ohio, actually," Kurt said.

"Wow. Ohio, huh? You guys know each other before you moved here?"

"High school sweethearts," Blaine said, smiling at Kurt. "Got married the fall after we graduated college."
"Now I'm really gonna throw up in my mouth a little," Serena laughed. "You two are too much. But kudos, adopting this little one. I've got a soft spot for these kids – adopted two babies from NI myself. My bio-kids are nearly grown, my youngest's about to graduate high school. Some people call me crazy, starting over at my age, but – my first NI baby, Niko, his mom was a prostitute who already had seven kids she didn't have custody of. I signed up to be his primary, and she signed rights over to me."

"Wow," Kurt said. "Was he … like Lily?"

Serena smiled. "Like Lily, plus a G-tube to feed him with and a lot of developmental delays. He was a little over three months early."

Blaine looked up from where he was making faces at Lily. "Oh my god, Serena …"

"He's my little angel. He's four now."

Kurt caught Blaine's eye, and Blaine could read his expression loud and clear – *Can you imagine when Lily's four?*

He couldn't. He could hardly imagine her ever getting out of Pod 3, let alone coming home, let alone *birthdays*. He looked back toward Serena. "How'd you do it? Survive a hospital stay that long with a baby that sick?"

She smiled, her brash, sarcastic exterior melting away as she spoke of her son. "Every day I thought, *I get one more day with him. I will not waste it worrying about when he's coming home.* It got me through a lot of really bad days. It was hard, because I wasn't allowed to take care of him after I got custody, so I had to go visit him like all the other parents. I worked in a different pod, and when we were slow, I'd just go sit by his bedside and hold his hand."

"It could be so much worse," Kurt murmured, stroking a hand down Blaine's arm.

"Mmm, we're so lucky to have you," he said, hugging Lily close, kissing the very tip-top of her fuzzy little head. "We love you so much …"

Just then, a group of white coats walked into the pod, led by a very short Indian man.
"Resident rounds," Serena said quietly, rolling her eyes.

They made their way down the row, discussing babies and their treatments – "Isn't that some kind of privacy violation?" Kurt hissed at Blaine – until they got to Lily.

"Jackson, Baby Girl," one of the residents droned. "Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, day fifteen of life, on 0.29 of Methadone, which is just over 0.1 per kilo, weaned times two, scores six to nine the last 24 hours."

Blaine looked up at them, only understanding about half of what they were saying.

"Social history," another resident piped up. "Mother positive for Methadone, benzodiazepines at delivery, prenatally positive for cocaine, methamphetamines, opiates. Currently being adopted by – well, I guess them."

For the first time, all the residents' heads turned away from their notecards and to Kurt and Blaine.

Kurt smirked at them and gave a little wave. "Morning."

"Mr. – ah –" one of the residents stammered, flipping through his clipboard.

"Blaine," Blaine said, pointing to himself, then, "Kurt," gesturing to his husband. "No formalities necessary."

"Our plan is to probably wean again in the next couple of days, as long as his – uh, 'scuse me, her scores have continued to be stable," a different resident said.

"Do you know how many weans she has left before she'll come off the medicine completely?" Kurt asked.

Six brows furrowed in unison, and six pens came out, scratching on clipboards. "Um," one of them finally spoke up, "I would guess –"
"We don't guess," the attending physician said, soft but firm, his accent heavy but musical, the lights from the monitors reflecting off his glasses. Blaine looked up at him. "It is not fair to parents, this guessing game. You tell them a number, they expect the number. We cannot always meet that expectation. So when we do not know, we tell them that." He turned to Kurt and Blaine, speaking to them kindly. "Your baby's weaning schedule depends entirely on her. How much she will tolerate and how quickly she will tolerate it. Sometimes we can wean quickly, sometimes we have to wean very slowly, with very small increments. I am sorry I cannot give you an exact answer, but I don't know it myself."

"That's alright," Kurt said. Blaine could hear the disappointment in his voice.

"But do not get discouraged," the doctor said with a small smile. "She's doing well. She will come home to you in due time."

They nodded. "Do you think – I know you can't say exactly – but," Blaine stammered, "in your professional opinion – will we at least have her home by Halloween?"

The doctor smiled bigger, the lines in his face growing deeper. "Mr. Anderson-Hummel – Blaine, excuse me – I can confidently tell you that something very drastic would have to happen for your baby to still be in this unit on Halloween."

Kurt breathed a huge sigh of relief, echoing Blaine's.

"Realistic expectation," the doctor told his residents. "Makes parents happy, lets you give an answer. Learn this skill." Pens out again, the residents scratched on their notepads.

"Now, do you have any more questions for me or any of these doctors?" he asked, turning back to Kurt and Blaine.

They shook their heads. "Your baby, she is beautiful," the doctor said, placing his wrinkled, coffee-colored hand on her head, and herded the residents over to the next bedspace.

"You must also learn kindness," Blaine heard him tell the residents. "This place, it is difficult for parents. They are scared for the most important thing in their life. You must learn to let go of ego here, we are all humans, not one of us is better than the other. You must not make them feel intimidated, or they will never understand or trust you."
"That," Serena said quietly, "is Dr. Patel. We love him."

"I can see why," Blaine murmured.

"He's older than dirt, and he's the smartest doctor in this unit – and his soul is the kindest soul I've ever met," Serena said. "He sat with me all night one night at Niko's bedside when we thought he wouldn't make it, and just held my hand."

Kurt blinked wearily. "I'm so glad she's not that sick," he said, his hand curling around Blaine's arm.

Blaine gave Lily the rest of her bottle, then bundled her like Sarah Grace had taught them, swaddling her into a tight little burrito. She was still wide awake, her hands tucked right under her chin, her mouth rounded into a tiny "o."

"Too cute for words," Kurt said, shaking his head. "What are we gonna do with you? We'll never be able to say no to you."

"Oh god, let's not talk about discipline," Blaine groaned. "She's going to be perfect. She's never going to do anything wrong. Right?"

Kurt grinned. "Whatever you say, honey. We'll talk again the first time she flushes one of your bowties down the toilet."

* * *

Friday, August 9th, 2024

"Blaine! Blaine – hurry up, my hands are full!" Rachel yelled from outside Kurt and Blaine's front door, apparently knocking with her foot.

Blaine rushed to open it for her, and there she stood, two large bakery boxes in her hands and a pink gift bag dangling from her forefinger.
"Rach, what's all this?" he asked, taking the packages from her.

"I got the nurses some of those great mini cupcakes from Melissa's," she said, "just as a thank you."

Blaine's eyes widened. "Shit, we haven't even gotten the nurses anything yet —"

"Well they are from you, silly. Here, I even got a card for you to sign. I know neither one of you have had time to think about things like that."

Blaine could've smacked his head against the wall he felt so dumb, but he wrapped Rachel in a warm hug instead. "Thank you," he said. "I know you've got to feel like we're the worst friends ever …"

"No way," she said. "It's just that you're trying to be the best dads ever, and that kind of has to take priority. I understand." She held up the bag in her hand. "I brought Lily something too – I hope that's okay."

"Of course it is." Blaine took the package and opened it to find the most adorable outfit, a gray and white polka-dotted onesie with a bright green L embroidered on the front, and a matching bright green poufy tutu.

"For playing dress up," Rachel said. "I didn't know if she could wear the tutu in the hospital, but I thought the onesie would probably be okay by itself …"

"Thank you," Blaine repeated, hugging her again. "Thank you so much, Rach."

She grinned at him, reaching up to bop his nose with her finger. "Anytime, Blaine Warbler. Ready to brave the subway ride to the Bronx?"

"I hope your cupcakes make it."
The cupcakes did make it, and Blaine and Rachel were greeted with a warmer welcome than Blaine had ever received when the nurses saw what was in their hands.

Apparently NICU nurses really loved cupcakes.

"So, she's in here, Pod 3," Blaine explained after depositing the cupcakes at the nurses' station. "It's a little weird, and the setup took some getting used to, but – I don't know, it's kind of getting to feel like home. It's hard to believe she's over two weeks old now…"

"Oh, god, I can't believe I'm finally getting to meet her!" Rachel squealed, grabbing his hand. "Oh, Blaine, thank you for today – I hate that Kurt couldn't come with us."

"Yeah, me too, but he's excited about shopping with you this afternoon," Blaine smiled. "You know it's important to him when he's getting off work early. Come on, come meet your goddaughter."

Blaine walked into the pod, Rachel trailing behind him, and found Sarah Grace burping Lily.

"Can I take over that bottle for you?"

"Blaine!" she grinned. "Sure, she's already burped once."

"How's she doing today?" he asked, doing the baby swap he'd perfected after a week. "Scores okay?"

"Not bad," Sarah Grace told him. "Not the best day I've ever had with her, but not too bad. She's running 7's to 8's."


Rachel stepped from behind his back and gasped, reaching out to touch her tiny hand.
"Sarah Grace, this is Rachel, Lily's godmother," Blaine said. "Rach, this is Sarah Grace, Lily's daytime NICU mom."

"Thank you for taking care of her," Rachel breathed, her hand on her chest as she took in the sight of Lily perched on the nurse's knee. "You – they love you, Kurt and Blaine. I don't know what they'd do without you …"

Sarah Grace laughed. "Well, I'm flattered, but the pleasure's all mine. I love this little girl." She stood with her hands on her hips, gazing at the baby for a moment. "Well, I'll leave you guys to it. I'll be on the other end of the pod if you need me."

Blaine took her squirmy little body and held it close, nuzzling his cheek against her head. Her hair, her skin, everything about her was just so soft, it was impossible how soft she was …

"Hi, Lil," Blaine murmured, and kissed her. "Daddy's here to see you."

He heard Rachel make a sound, and looked up – he could see her melting. "Do we need to call housekeeping to mop you up?" he asked, amused.

"Maybe," she said. "God, it's sickeningly sweet, you and that baby." She sat down in one of the vacant chairs Sarah Grace had left for them and sighed. "I'm so happy for you."

"I'm pretty happy for us, too." He perched on the edge of the empty chair, picked her bottle back up.

"She's so tiny," Rachel cooed at her. "Kurt said she was small, but I never expected exactly how much."

"But I'm growing!" Blaine sang as Lily sucked on her bottle hungrily. He ran his thumb over her little cheek – the baby acne that had popped up on her face a few days before looked even worse, and there was a little scratch where she'd clawed at her cheek. "We need to clip your nails, sweetheart," he said, a little worried. He wished Kurt was with him so they could fumble through it together.
"So those scores you guys always talk about – are they okay today? Or is that high?"

"They're about what she's been running," Blaine said. "I'm ready for them to drop again, though, so we can get one more wean closer to home…"

He smiled down at her as she sucked her bottle happily and hoped the good mood stayed – he was all too aware of how quickly she could turn on a dime, could be calm and content one minute and screaming the next.

"Well, I think she's the most perfect, precious baby I've ever seen!" Rachel declared, stroking her hand over Lily's head. "Look at that sweet peach fuzz!"

"We don't know if her hair's ever gonna grow in," Blaine smiled, bending to kiss her forehead. "We'll have to get lots of hairbows for you, won't we?"

Rachel grinned at him. "You are such a good daddy, Blaine. You and Kurt are gonna be her heroes for the rest of her life."

"Can you remind her of that when she turns sixteen? Because I have a feeling that might get rough," Blaine said, smiling back.

"It'll all be worth it. You saved her, Blaine."

"Her mom's the one who let us."

"Her mom's the one who put her here," Rachel said scathingly.

"Yes. That's true. And – god, it's hard, Rach. Because we want to hate her – but how can we hate the mother of our child? Lily wouldn't exist without her. And she did the right thing, placing her for adoption …"

Rachel sighed. "This whole adoption thing is rough."

"No shit," Blaine chuckled, then gasped, realizing what he'd said. "Sorry Lily!" he groaned. "Oh,
god, our daughter is going to have a sailor's mouth when she turns two if we don't watch ourselves …"

Rachel laughed. "You better tell your daddy to behave," she told Lily as Blaine sat the baby up to burp her. "He's gonna get in trouble with Papa."

"He might," Blaine agreed, shaking his hand off after she spit up on him. "Hey, will you hand me that washcloth?"

"Seriously, Blaine – you're so good at this," Rachel said, watching him wipe puke off his hand like it was nothing.

He shrugged. "It's just formula," he said. "No big deal."

"It's a big deal to her," she said, placing a hand on his arm. "Everything is a big deal to her. She can't do anything for herself, and here you are, taking care of her like you were born to do it …"

"I kind of feel like I was," he told her, his heart warming with the idea. "Want to hold her? I think she's done eating – can't promise about the spitting up."

"Are you kidding?" Rachel squeaked. "I've been waiting to hold her for two weeks!"

She let him place the baby securely in her arms, and Blaine sat back in his chair, watching in wonder as yet another person in his life fell in love with his daughter. There was something about Lily, something in her that just drew people in. He didn't know if it was pity or just love, but she seemed to catch everyone she came in contact with hook, line and sinker. He hoped that wasn't a quality that would fade with time.

"Here, let me take a picture," he said, grabbing his phone out of his pocket. "I want to send it to Kurt."

Rachel posed in typical Rachel Berry fashion, holding Lily up close and smiling brightly. "Is it good?" she asked after Blaine had taken a couple. "Let me see – you need my approval before you send anything to anybody, Blaine, okay?"
"So I see you've met our baby girl," Kurt said, meeting Blaine and Rachel at his office door with a smile.

"She is so precious, Kurt!" Rachel squealed, jumping into his arms. "I love her so much already."

Kurt and Blaine shared a knowing smile over Rachel's shoulder, and once she squirmed out of his arms, Blaine walked around her to peck Kurt lightly on the cheek. "Hi honey," Kurt said softly.

"Hey you." Blaine touched his forehead to Kurt's for just a moment, and Kurt sighed. Things had been a little easier since their meeting with Dr. Jacobson, but only because everything was out in the open and Blaine was making a determined effort to include Kurt more even when he was at work. They hadn't gotten any alone time other than at night when they fell into bed, exhausted, and they certainly hadn't gotten to talk much…

"Alright!" Rachel said, clapping her hands together and making them jump. "Are we ready to conquer this dress dilemma?"

"Whenever you are, Rach."

"So it's Liam's college roommate who's getting married," Rachel explained, holding both Blaine's and Kurt's hands, forming a single-file line on the busy sidewalk. "He's in the wedding, and I'm not, and I don't know anybody and I'm afraid it's going to be so awkward …"

"Well it's not like you're shy," Blaine grinned. "I'm sure you'll find somebody to talk to."

"And you can pass the down time staring at that beautiful British man of yours …" Kurt said.

"Hey now," Blaine said in a warning tone. "Watch who you're calling beautiful."
"Boys, boys, refocus. My dress. It has to be perfect – not too fancy, I don't want to make it look like I'm trying to be the center of attention, because that honor of course should go to the bride, but I also don't want to blend in like some wallflower. Liam's ex-girlfriend is going to be there, and I need to look better than her for sure."

* * *

Kurt was tired of shopping.

"Oh my god," he muttered under his breath, putting his head in his hands as Rachel came back to her dressing room, arms loaded with at least eight more dresses.

She'd tried on no less than thirty already.

"Kurt, I can't do it," Blaine hissed in his ear after the door shut behind her. "I literally do not think I can look at her in another dress without losing my mind."

"Dress numbers two, seven, nine, twelve, eighteen, and twenty-seven all would've worked just fine," Kurt grumbled, referencing the notes he'd made on his phone. "I don't know what her deal is."

Suddenly a frustrated groan came from Rachel's dressing room.

Kurt scooted to the edge of the bench he was sitting on. "Rach? Honey?"

"I'm screwed," she moaned, and they heard a loud thunk that Kurt imagined was her head hitting either the door or the mirror. "Nothing works. Everything looks awful."

"Have you tried on all those dresses already?" Blaine asked.

"No. I'm giving up. I might as well just not go to the stupid wedding," Rachel said, emerging from the dressing room with a defeated expression on her face, her arms crossed over her chest. She was
zipped into what Kurt thought was a gorgeous dress, a flared A-line that accentuated her curves, the skirt swirling just below her knees, in a lovely light plum color that complimented her olive skin. 

"What's wrong with that dress?" he asked. "I think it looks great."

She pointed to her pelvis. "It makes me look hippy," she said, frowning. "And I'm not hippy – I don't think, at least…"

"Rach, you have a lovely figure," Blaine said, and Kurt could just hear the hint of tiredness in his voice that he was so good at hiding. "In fact, most of the dresses you've tried on have looked fantastic on you. What's going on? You usually have more confidence than this."

Her face fell even further. "I just don't want to screw this up," she said, slumping down on the bench in between them, practically sitting in their laps. They both scooted to the side to make room for her, and Kurt slipped his arm around her shoulders.

"It's just a wedding, sweetie."

"No, I mean everything with Liam."

"Liam? I thought things were going great with Liam," Blaine said.

"They are," she moaned, flopping her head forward in her lap. "That's the problem."

Kurt and Blaine exchanged a confused look above her. "And … why's that a problem?" Kurt asked. "I thought you were happy with him."

"I am," she said, sitting up, obviously blinking back tears. "But – I don't know, it's too good. We've been dating for just over four months now and nothing's fallen apart, he's not tired of me yet, and I'm just waiting for the bottom to fall out. I'm so scared that we're going to go to this wedding and he's going to realize how much better he could do. His ex – guys, she's blonde. She's a size zero. She's like eight feet tall."
"And you are Fanny Brice on Broadway in New York City," Kurt reminded her with a little poke to her arm.

"And she gave up a major in musical theater to go become a pediatric surgeon," Rachel said, her head falling into her lap again. "How can I compete with that?"

Blaine clucked at her, rubbing her back. "Rach. Will you look at me?"

She turned her head in her lap, one eye peeking up at him.

"You're a catch. You're the most special girl I've ever met. You got me to date you for two days. Do you know how incredible that makes you? No other woman could've accomplished that," he said, and earned himself a little smile accompanied by a sniffle.

"Liam's dating you for a reason, honey," Kurt said. "Can you just let a good thing be a good thing? Look at us. If we'd listened to what everybody else said …"

"Oh, you," she huffed, smacking his thigh. "You were never normal. You guys are like the antithesis of how normal relationships work. Nobody ever gets as lucky as the two of you did."

"Maybe you have, this time," Blaine said, leaning over and kissing the back of her head. "Come on, up up. No crying in the store."

She heaved a deep sigh, and sat up, bracing her hands on each of their arms. "Okay. But – I still need a dress," she said, looking at her lap.

Kurt patted her knee. "Go try on dress number nine again – the emerald green one? It was great as is, but I had an idea for a little alteration that might make it exactly what you're looking for …"

"Really, Kurt?" she asked, wiping tears from her eyes. "You're already so busy."

"What I have in mind won't even take me a couple of hours," he assured her. "No time at all. And we can't have that little blonde doctor stealing your thunder, even though I can already tell you you're prettier than her …"
Her face threatened to crumple again. "I love you," she said, leaning into his arms, wrapping hers around him. "Thank you so much."

He pressed a dry kiss to the top of her head. "I love you too, Rach. Everything's going to be fine, okay?"

* * *

"Do you have time to do this?" Blaine asked Kurt, gesturing to the dress bag he was carting to the hospital so he could work on it when they got home that night.

"Honestly? Not really," Kurt said. "But you saw her, Blaine – I really think Liam is it for her, for real this time. And I think it scares her to death. If this makes her feel better? Totally worth it. It'll be one late night, two tops. I'll be done before the weekend is over."

"Really late nights, though," Blaine said. "I'm not saying not to do it, I'm just saying – it's going to totally suck."

"I know it is," Kurt sighed. "But you know as well as I do that I can't ever resist her when she's crying. Neither can you."

"I know." Blaine ran a hand through his hair. "Maybe Lily will be having a really good night tonight, and we can sneak out once she goes to sleep."

* * *

"I feel like we're breaking and entering, Kurt."

"It's not breaking and entering when you have a key, you doofus."

"Yeah, but it's midnight – I don't want the police to think we're breaking and entering. We look like we're up to foul play."
Kurt raised his eyebrows. "Foul play? I'm borrowing some black lace from the studio, which I will replace tomorrow when the fabric shops are open."

"But they don't know that. I just don't want to spend the night in jail."

"Blaine."

"Okay, okay. Just … make sure you don't 'borrow' some crazy expensive imported lace from Spain or Thailand or the Arctic Tundra--"

"I hope you know how ludicrous you sound right now."

Blaine gave a sheepish smile. "I do know. But hurry, please. I'm sleepy."

"I would've been done by now if you'd not blathered on about how we're criminals, honey. I'll be two minutes, tops."

* * *

Saturday, August 10th, 2024

Kurt was in the middle of a particularly messy diaper change when his phone rang.

"Blaine, can you fish that out and see who it is?" he asked. "I think I've got poop on my hand…"

Blaine laughed and did as Kurt asked, nimbly pulling the cell phone out of Kurt's back pocket. "It's your dad. Want me to run out and talk to him for a minute?"

"Sure. This might take a while to get under control …"

Blaine pecked him on the cheek, then darted out of the unit, answering the call when he'd gone
through the locked double doors guarding the entrance. "Burt?"

"Blaine! You guys at the hospital?"

"We are – Kurt's up to his elbows in poop right now, so I figured I'd let him handle that," Blaine grinned. "How are you?"

"Doing great – missing that girl of mine. That's what I was calling about, actually – got anything planned for next weekend?"

"Probably just hanging out at the hospital," Blaine said. "Why do you ask?"

"One of my customers at the shop works for Delta, and offered to let me use his discount on tickets. We were wondering if we could come visit again – Finn and Emily want to come, too."

"Of course you can!" Blaine exclaimed. "Man, that's a nice customer you've got."

"He's a real stand-up guy. You sure we're not imposing, though?"

"Burt, you know you're welcome here anytime. Especially now that Lily's here – no way we're denying you time with your granddaughter."

"We sure do miss her."

"I bet you do – you won't believe how much she's grown in the last two weeks. She's gained seven ounces since we got her already."

"That's great news, Blaine. That baby needs some meat on her bones."

Blaine laughed. "Well, I'm not saying she's gotten chunky or anything, but … you know, baby steps."
"And you're sure you don't mind us coming? You think Kurt will be okay with it?"

"Oh, I can't wait to tell Kurt – he'll be thrilled. He misses you more than he'll admit, Burt."

"Well that's music to my ears," Burt said, obviously grinning into the phone. "I'll book the flight, then, and either Carole or I will call you when we know more specifics. That okay?"

"Sounds perfect!"

Blaine hung up the phone and happily trotted back to Pod 3 – this bit of news would definitely make up for the elbows-deep-in-baby-shit situation.
"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are gray …" Kurt sang to Lily as his work number blinked on his cell phone for the fourth time that morning.

"Kurt, just answer it. Maybe they'll stop calling if you just tell them you're busy and can't talk …" Blaine said, clearly as exasperated with it as Kurt felt.

"Probably not, but I can try, I guess," Kurt grumbled, grunting a little as he stood. The floor was a long way down, and his joints were definitely feeling the lack of yoga he'd been doing …

He heard Blaine continuing the song as he stalked out of the pod with his phone.

"What is it?" he snapped as soon as he'd called the office. "This had better be the kind of emergency where somebody's arm has been cut off. I'm with Lily right now."

"I'm so sorry Kurt." Gavin's voice came through the phone, and Kurt wanted to bang his head against the hospital wall – who had left him in charge? "Um, you know the winter photoshoot's today –"

"Yes, of course I know the winter photoshoot's today," he snapped. "What's the problem?"

"Well … you know how you said that my brother's stepsister's goddaughter could be in the shoot?"

Kurt closed his eyes, fingers pressing at his temples. He'd said yes in a moment of weakness on a day when his head was splitting open, just to get Gavin to shut up about it. "Yes, Gavin?"

"Well … um, she kind of just puked all over the place. And. Um. It got on her outfit."

This time Kurt did bang his head on the wall. "What look is it?" Please don't say the cashmere hoodie. Please don’t say the cashmere hoodie.
He heard Gavin gulp. "Um. The cobalt cashmere hoodie paired with the red corduroy skirt …"

"… And the heart tights, great," Kurt sighed. "Please tell me it didn't get on the shoes. Or please tell me you fucked up and put the wrong shoes with that look, anything but the suede …"

"No. Um. No, she got those too." He paused. "So the issue is that we're down a look and a kid …"

"Yes, I'm aware of that. And you haven't tried to call anyone and resolve the problem yourself?"

"Well, um, I called Marc, but he's at Louis Vuitton today, so –"

"You called Marc?" Kurt thundered. "You never call Marc when he isn't in the office. You report directly to me, you call me if there's a problem, do you understand?"

"Y- yes sir," Gavin said, his voice wavering, and Kurt refused to feel bad. He would not feel guilty about disciplining an incompetent employee, no matter how shaky Gavin's voice got …

"Okay, look," Kurt said, trying to calm down a little. There was no sense in taking Gavin's head off; it'd only serve to make him that much jumpier. "It's going to take me about an hour to get there, and I won't have anything with me. Call Dana, have her bring that extra pair of red ankle pants and we'll just pair it with – I don't know, a navy tee or something, I'll figure it out when I get there. Nothing we can do about the shoes though …"

"You loved those shoes," Gavin said softly.

"Well, we made those, we can make more," Kurt said, still disgruntled. "Get the kid out of there, make sure the puke is nowhere to be seen or smelled by the time I get there, and Gavin?"

"Yes sir?"

"Never, ever, ever, ever ask me if your uncle's cousin's baby brother once removed or whatever can do a photoshoot ever again. I pick the models. Period. Got it?"
"I'm sorry."

"Well – what's done is done. I've got to say bye to Lily first, and then I'm on my way." Kurt wanted to cry – he barely got to see his baby as it was, and on his off day …

"Kurt, I didn't mean –"

"Do not make me feel sorry for you, Gavin," he snipped, tears prickling the backs of his eyes. "Do not. Just do your job. That's all I want."

"Yes sir."

Kurt hung up the phone with a loud groan, hoping desperately that this wouldn't reflect poorly on him in Marc's eyes. He trudged back into the unit, dreading the early goodbye he'd have to make to his tiny daughter.

Lily and Blaine were playing on the floor when he came back in, Lily on her playmat, Blaine dangling a stuffed rabbit in front of her face.

"Well? What was that about?" Blaine asked, craning his neck to look up at Kurt from the floor.

"I have to go. Child model vomiting crisis," Kurt said flatly.

"Kurt, seriously?" Blaine said, obviously annoyed. "Can they not handle a little puke themselves?"

"Maybe they could've handled puke, but they apparently can't handle figuring out a different look or getting another model. Stupid Gavin called Marc of all people, so I'm probably gonna get an earful when he gets back in the office next week …"

Blaine scowled at the floor. "Did you tell them you were with Lily today?"

"What do you think, Blaine?" he asked. "Of course I told them. Do you think I want to leave?"
"Well, no, but it's just – you don't get any time with her to begin with, and –"

"I know that, thank you, darling. I don't need reminding." Kurt took a breath and closed his eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm not mad at you. I don't want to go, but I have to –"

Blaine nodded, a glum expression on his face. "I know. I understand. It just really, really sucks."

"Yeah … I've got to see if I can't salvage the suede mouse shoes –"

Blaine cringed. "She got the mouse shoes?"

"So says Gavin."

"But those were your favorites."

Kurt nodded, sighing. "Hence why I'm going to try to save them. We'll see …" He stooped down to the play mat where Lily was still lying on her belly.

"Hey honey, Papa's got to go save the day at work, okay? I'm so sorry – I was really looking forward to spending the day with you." His heart ached at the words coming out of his mouth, and he scooped her up and stood up with her. "You be a good girl for Daddy. No spitting up on his shirt – we like this one, okay?"

He gave her a kiss and handed her to Blaine. "We'll miss you," Blaine said, waving her hand at Kurt and making a pouty face.

"Oh, stop, you're going to make me even sadder," Kurt whined, leaning forward to give Blaine a quick peck on the lips. "Love you."

"Love you more. See you tonight. Want me to have dinner ready?"

"That would be fantastic, honey."
"Late that evening, when all the shoppers had gone and the doors were shut and locked, Corduroy climbed carefully down from his shelf and began searching everywhere on the floor for his lost button. Suddenly, he felt the floor moving under him, and quite by accident, he had stepped onto an escalator, and up he went!"

Blaine smiled down at Lily as he turned the page, her eyes wide and trained on him, listening to the sound of his voice. They'd started a tradition of reading together at night, he, Kurt and Lily, and, sad after Kurt had been forced to leave, he pulled a book out of one of the cubbies in her crib, swaddled her up and started early.

She started getting fussy two pages later, so he put the book away and held her up on his shoulder, pressing his face to her silky soft cheek. "Shhhh," he whispered, patting her bottom. "Shhhh, Daddy's got you. Daddy's here."

Oh, his heart melted just saying those words. Daddy's here.

He rocked her gently, murmuring his love into her ear, telling her how badly they wanted her, that they'd go through it all over again just to have her in their lives. Slowly, she fell asleep.

And sitting there in the glider with Lily propped on his shoulder, warming his neck with soft puffs of air, Blaine had an idea.

He and Kurt had talked at length about how they were going to tell her how she was born, how she came to live with them, but never really agreed upon an answer. But the answer was so obvious, it was sitting in front of him – they could tell her with a book.

He was a writer, after all. Surely a children's book couldn't be that difficult.

"Hey, Beth?" he said, craning his head to look at Lily's nurse for the day. "I know this is a really weird question, but is there any way I can have a couple pieces of paper, and maybe borrow a clipboard? And a pen?"

* * *
Kurt and Blaine got home at the same time that night, meeting on the sidewalk outside their condo. Kurt looked exhausted, prickly, and like he could very much use a glass of wine, and Blaine's stomach fell somewhere on the concrete when he realized – he'd promised Kurt dinner.

There was no dinner.

"Hey," Kurt said tiredly with a little wave. "You forget something at the store?"

"Um. Actually." Shit, he was in so much trouble. "Um, Kurt, I'm just now getting home. I – haven't started dinner yet. But – I can! I'll go do it right now – or, we can just go grab Thai or something –"

Kurt's face fell even further, and Blaine could see a storm brewing in his eyes. Oh, god, of all the days to get wrapped up in writing…

"You're just now getting home from the hospital?"

"Well – I sort of made a detour on the way home to Bean Me Up so I could read this over without monitors beeping in my ears," he said, holding up the stack of papers that Lily's story was written on, "but, yeah, I was at the hospital kind of late …"

Kurt closed his eyes.

"How was – um, how was your day?" Blaine chanced, knowing he was playing Russian Roulette in Kurt's present state.

"How do you think my day was?" Kurt asked, his voice surprisingly calm, his eyes still shut. "Let's just go inside."

Blaine worried the entire elevator ride up to their floor as Kurt stayed quiet, fingers gently pressed to his temples.

"I'm going to bed, Blaine," Kurt announced tiredly once they got inside, shrugging off his bag and
kicking his shoes off in a very un-Kurt-like fashion.

"But – you need to eat –"

"I would be eating if you'd done what you told me you were going to do. Or if you'd at least texted me so I could stop and get something on my way home."

His words hit Blaine in the chest like a baseball bat – and Blaine had no leg to stand on in an argument, because everything Kurt had said was true.

"I'm sorry," he said, trying to sound as sincere as he felt. "Kurt, I – I just got distracted. I, um, we were reading, and I had this idea – I could write a story to tell her about how we got her –"

Kurt walked to the bedroom.

"Kurt, she was so good today. Please – it's not like it was your fault, I know I was snippy when you first left, but it wasn't like you were leaving her on a really bad day or something, and she wasn't alone –"

"Can we please, please not talk about Lily right now?" Kurt asked, whipping around, tears brimming in his eyes.

Blaine understood, he knew Kurt had been through the wringer at work on what was supposed to be his day off, but the words still rubbed him the wrong way. "Really? What would you like to talk about then, the weather?"

Kurt stared at him. "I would like, just for a second, for your head to get out of that hospital and into our home. I would like to vent for a minute about how I'm going to have to fire a really, really nice guy because he's an incompetent employee. Today was the last straw – do you know I've already written him up three times? And I would like to maybe even cry for just a minute because I am dreading what Marc will say to me on Monday."

Blaine's temper flared for a moment, but he stopped, closed his eyes and took a breath. "This is what you're talking about, being pulled in so many different directions, isn't it? Days like this are when you feel torn? And mad because I was with Lily and you couldn't be?"
Kurt coughed out an angry laugh as his face twisted. "Yes, well, you could say that."

"Kurt –" Blaine walked to him, enveloped him in his arms. "I'm so, so sorry I forgot dinner. Please, let me go grab us some Thai and you can tell me about your day. I swear, I won't mention a word about the hospital, or Lily –"

"God, no," Kurt said, sniffling a little as he rubbed his nose, already turning red. "No, I didn't mean that – I want to hear about her. I just – I can't only hear about her."

"Okay. That's fair," Blaine said, running a hand through his hair. "Just let me go grab some dinner – you'll feel better after you eat; you know that – and you can vent to me all you want to, and hear about our day. Deal?"

Kurt nodded, swiping a hand across his eyes. "Deal. Do you mind if I just wait here while you go get it, though? I don't know if I'm really up for people …"

"Not at all. Love you," Blaine said, and pressed a kiss to Kurt's forehead. "I'm sorry I'm such a dingbat sometimes."

"Oh, stop it, you are not a dingbat and you know it," Kurt said, plopping down on the bed.

"Even though you've called me one before?"

"Well, you might've been acting like a dingbat at the time, but that doesn't mean you are one."

"I'm still sorry," Blaine said, crouching down into a squat so his face was even with Kurt's.

"It's okay," Kurt said, but he still looked like he needed a hug, so Blaine slipped his arms around Kurt and held him for a second, just for good measure, and also because Kurt felt so nice in his arms. It'd been a long time since they'd just held each other …

"You're right, anyway," Kurt said, his voice muffled by Blaine's shoulder. "I'm starving – and I'm
always a bitch when I'm hungry. I'll be nicer once I've eaten."

"I know," Blaine said, nodding. "What do you want?"

"God, *everything.*"

Blaine grinned. "Got it."

* * *

Half an hour later, Blaine knocked on the door with his foot, hands full of Thai packages.

"I got a *feast,*" he said when the door swung open. "Pad See Yew, Masaman curry with duck, the Pad Cashew stir-fry with shrimp, a side of Thai fried rice and some of that coconut sticky rice for dessert."

Kurt didn't answer, and slung his arms around Blaine instead, Thai takeout packages and all.

"Well hello to you, too," Blaine said. "What was that for?"

"I read it," Kurt said softly into his ear. "The children's story you wrote for her. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever read, and I'm so sorry – if that's what you were caught up with earlier, I would've waited hours …"

Blaine awkwardly hugged him back. "I hope I'm not getting curry on your shirt …"

"I don't care," Kurt murmured, but Blaine managed to shuffled them over toward the table, still attached, and drop the takeout boxes there. Hands free, he was able to squeeze Kurt tight like he wanted to. He made a mental note to take at least five minutes out of every day, just to hold his husband.

"That book, honey – it's beautiful," Kurt continued. "It needs to be bound and published and illustrated and –"
"Hey, hey, let's not get ahead of ourselves here," Blaine smiled, pulling back. "Can we at least eat dinner before we take over the world with another book?"

* * *

Tuesday, August 13th, 2024

"Kurt," Rachel breathed, staring at herself in the mirror. "It's perfect."

Blaine stood back, watching her, hands on his hips. "I have to say, Rach – you look hot."

Kurt had taken what was already a nice, emerald green dress, and worked his magic on it. Now backless with black lace accents, it fit Rachel's tiny body like a glove.

"Liam's not going to know what to do with himself," Kurt said, a proud little smile on his face as Rachel twirled.

"Oh, Kurt, thank you so much!" she squealed, throwing her arms around his neck. "I was so worried – I'm still a little worried, but, god, even I think I look good."

"You look incredible," Kurt said, pecking a kiss on her cheek.

"I can't believe you took the time to do this for me," she said. "I don't know when you took the time to do this for me, but thank you – I owe you."

"The only thing you'll owe me is all the juicy details of what went down at the wedding," Kurt told her. "Now, let go of me, sweetie – you're going to rumple it."

* * *

"Ohhhhhhh, I wish I were an Oscar Meyer weiner, that is what I'd truly like to be …" Blaine sang over Lily's wailing, trying to get her to calm down during her bath. "And if I were an Oscar Meyer
"Stop, stop, Blaine, oh my god," Kurt was laughing, smacking him on the arm. "That's obviously not helping – you're just making it louder in here."

"He's not lying!" Serena called from across the pod.

Blaine put on his best pout. "You guys don't like my singing? Lily loves my singing, don't you, baby girl?"

Lily wailed on as Kurt washed her round little belly.

"Yes, it's obvious she'd give you a standing ovation if she could just support her own weight," Kurt said drily, and the nurse taking care of the baby next to them snickered into her hand.

"Whatever, Lil," Blaine said, conspiring with his daughter. "We'll show them – when you're big, we'll put on shows for Papa and then he'll see – he'll be the one giving the standing ovation then."

He looked up, saw Kurt grinning as he washed her toes, and oh, life was good.

* * *

**Thursday, August 15th, 2024**

Kurt sat in his office taking slow, deep breaths, trying to calm himself down.

It was the first time he'd ever fired someone, and he never wanted to do it again – Gavin hadn't reacted in anger, like Kurt had expected, but instead sat on the other side of Kurt's desk and crumbled, crying into his hands.

He didn't stop crying when Kurt tried to give him reassurances about how it wasn't personal, he didn't stop crying when he left to gather his things, and he cried harder when a security guard showed up to walk him out.
Kurt felt like his insides were being wrung out.

His phone buzzed on his desk, making him jump, and when he looked down, a picture of Blaine and Lily had been sent through, Blaine kissing Lily's cheek, Lily looking rather unimpressed.

Kurt wanted to throw the phone against the wall.

He ached with how much he wanted to be there, ached with impatience and love and with the injustice of it all. It wasn't fair to Blaine, who was keeping his end of the bargain, who was trying so hard, so Kurt did the responsible thing and didn't reply at all. He sighed and slumped over in his chair until his head was resting on his desk, cold and hard underneath his forehead.

Not fair. Not fair, not fair, not fair, not fair! went his brain. His fingers twitched in his lap; for the first time in a long time he wanted to organize something oh my god, just give me something to straighten …

He got up, stalked and paced his office like a caged animal. His eyes alit on a microscopic streak of dirt on his desk, and he went straight for the Clorox wipes he kept in the bottom of the filing cabinet.

But as the familiar scent wafted into the room when he opened the tub of wipes, it dawned on him who he should talk to rather than scrubbing until his hands went raw, who could actually make him feel better.

In a feat of great courage and willpower, he put the Clorox wipes back and picked up his phone.

To: Dad

So glad you guys are coming this weekend. Just had to fire an employee for the first time. Kind of freaking out a little :(
Less than a minute, and his phone was ringing.

"You okay, kiddo?"

"Dad," Kurt sighed, "he cried the entire time I was talking to him."

"Ouch."

He was quiet for a moment. "I miss Lily, Dad." Tightness in his throat, the kind that only comes when one tries very, very hard not to cry, a hard exhale. *Hold it together…*

"I'm sorry, Kurt. I don't understand how you and Blaine are doing it – I would've gone crazy if they'd kept you in the hospital that long after you were born."

"I'm not sure I'm *not* going crazy, Dad. I just took someone's job from them. And right after that, Blaine sent me a picture of Lily, and I got so *angry*. I hate that I'm not there. I hate that I can't be in two places at the same time. I just – I don't know what to do."

"I don't think there's a lot you can do right now," Burt said, sounding slightly helpless. "That's never an answer you want to give your kids, but I don't know what else to tell you. Just try to hang in a while longer – any idea when she might be home?"

"They haven't even started talking about that yet," Kurt told him. "I think we've got a long way to go, still."

"Well … Carole and Finn and Emily and I will be there tomorrow night, and we'll have a whole weekend, just the family. You don't have to think about work for a second. We can spend every moment at that hospital, if you want to."

Kurt took a deep breath. "Okay. You're right. I just need to make it until tomorrow night …"

"I don't know if this will help, but you know I believe in you, right? As corny as that sounds? As much as you guys have been through – I know you still have weeks there, but there's an end. Just keep your head up like you always have, and you'll get there."
"Thanks, Dad. You always know how to make me feel better."

"'S what I'm here for, right?"

"I guess so."

"You won't be guessing so when Lily comes crying to you with her first heartbreak, I can promise you."

Kurt smiled – it seemed like light years, another world away. "No, I probably won't."

"Okay, kiddo, I gotta get back to work, but I can't wait to see you tomorrow night."

"Me either, Dad. Love you."

He hung up, feeling significantly better than before. Better enough, in fact, to text Blaine a reply to the picture.

To: the Husband

Look at all the fucks she doesn't give :)  

* * *

Friday, August 16th, 2024

"I can't believe you've made this trip twice in almost three weeks," Blaine told Carole as Kurt slipped into a tight hug from his dad at baggage claim.

"Blaine, sweetie, you might as well get used to it," she grinned at him. "From now on, the Hummels vacation to New York, and New York alone."
"What about when we take her to Disney World?" Kurt asked, turning around. "Are you not interested in that?"

"I am interested in that!" Finn exclaimed, pulling Kurt into a hug of his own. "How are you, little bro?"

"Oh my god, cousins trip to Disney World, we have to plan it now!" Blaine cried, clapping his hands happily.

"Oh no – what have you started?" Burt asked, smiling along with the rest of them.

"I'm pretty sure you just opened a can of worms that's not closing anytime soon," Emily told Kurt, hooking her arm through his. "It's okay though – I bet we can sneak off to the spa one day while Blaine and Finn corral the kids. They probably won't have any issues, since they're five-year-olds at heart themselves…"

"And we, the old souls, will go get pampered. I like where you're going with this," Kurt said, patting her hand. "How are you? Can I carry your bag?"

She obliged, handing it over. "I'm good. Zofran's still working, I'm eating and obviously growing," she said, gesturing to her slowly rounding belly. "I hit 23 weeks yesterday, which they say is the age of viability, so that's one sigh of relief I can breathe now."

"All good news," Kurt said as they followed the pack of family ahead of them.

"Hey Kurt," Burt called behind him, "we're gonna make a late-night visit to the hospital to see Lily – that okay with the two of you?"

Emily held her hand up in a thumbs-up sign, and Kurt mimicked her. In no world would he ever refuse an offer to see his baby girl.
Saturday, August 17th, 2024

Sarah Grace met Blaine, Kurt and their family at the front door of the NICU the next morning as they were deciding who would get to see Lily first.

"Quick, the four of you," she said, gesturing to Blaine, Kurt, Burt and Carole, ushering them inside, giving Emily and Finn a wan smile. "Sorry guys, you can come in in just a few minutes."

Blaine followed her, confused. "What's going–"

"I'm performing a covert operation," she hissed, "and you're going to blow my cover if you don't hurry up."

Blaine's brow furrowed but he increased his pace, gripping Kurt's hand, following her to Pod 3. Lily was awake, looking around, and a girl Blaine didn't know was standing at her bedside with an expensive-looking camera. A black fleece blanket was draped over Lily's crib.

"This is Lauren," Sarah Grace said. "I don't know if I've ever told you, but I do photography for extra money, and she's my assistant. I thought that since Grandma and Grandpa were here …"


"I am. Here," she said, shoving a consent form at him. "Sign this so it's legal for me to take pictures of her. And you can thank me later – she's in a good mood right now, and we've got to be quick. You know how narrow her margin of happy is…"

Blaine looked at her, mouth still slightly ajar.

"I can't believe – you're letting us pay you for this, right?" Kurt asked, looking just as shocked as Blaine.

"Oh god, of course not. For one thing, I'd be fired, probably. For another, the pictures won't be as good as normal," she said, twisting her fingers together as he signed the paper. "I hope they'll be halfway decent, actually – the NI isn't the best space to work with, but –"
Blaine stopped her in mid-sentence, wrapping his arms around her and squeezing tight. "Thank you so much," he said. "You have no idea what this means to us."

She squeezed back. "It's really no problem," she said. "I'm happy to do it." She crawled out of his grasp and turned her focus to Carole and Burt. "Okay. Grandpa. You first – in that glider, right there."

"Yes, ma'am," Burt said, plopping down where she pointed.

She handed Lily to him, and Blaine realized for the first time that Sarah Grace had taken all her monitor leads off. A lump formed in his throat as he stared at her, dressed in a pair of white bloomers that Sarah Grace had clearly gotten monogrammed, Lily's initials written across her bottom in bright pink.

"Okay, great. Now just talk to her, play with her, act normal."

Burt looked uncomfortable as Sarah Grace grabbed the camera from Lauren and started snapping pictures, but soon he relaxed, grinning at the baby on his chest. "Your grandpa feels a little ridiculous," he told Lily, chuckling. "Your grandpa isn't very photogenic."

"Oh, stop it Mr. Hummel," Sarah Grace told him from behind the camera. "These are gonna be fantastic."

Blaine couldn't stop beaming at Kurt, who was beaming at his dad.

"Okay," Sarah Grace said, looking at her camera. "I think I've got enough – Mrs. Hummel, do you want to switch places with him?"

Carole grinned, holding her arms out. "Gimme that baby."

"Only because I love you so much," Burt intoned, making a dramatic show of handing over Lily.

"Hello my sweet one," Carole clucked at her, tucking the baby under her chin. "Oh, you are precious. Yes, yes you are." And then everyone in the pod let out an awed sigh, for Carole had
moved Lily to her lap, leaned down, and touched noses with her.

*Snap, snap, snap* went Sarah Grace's camera, and *thump-thump-thump* went Blaine's heart. Kurt squeezed his hand *hard*, and he turned and looked to see tears welling in Kurt's eyes.

"My perfect, perfect Lily-love," Carole was sing-singing, her smile as bright as the afternoon sun's. "Oh, I can't wait till Christmas – *two* babies to love on." She turned around. "Burt. I don't know if my heart can take it."

"Oh, I'm pretty sure you're gonna be fine," Burt grinned, and Blaine could see the love for his wife shining in his eyes. "And if not, well – I'm pretty sure I can take at least one of them off your hands for you."

"You'd better not!" she laughed happily, cuddling Lily's face close to her cheek, and Sarah Grace snapped more pictures. "When it comes to grandbabies, I'm not sure that I'm very good at sharing."

"Okay, want to put her in the crib and get a few of her by herself while she's still calm?" Sarah Grace suggested.

Carole kissed her cheek and did as the nurse asked, placing her on the soft fleece blanket set out in the crib. Lauren positioned her and Sarah Grace snapped picture after picture.

When Lily finally began to tune up and get fussy, Blaine immediately rushed forward and tried to calm his baby girl. "*Shhhhh*," he soothed, picking her up and whispering right next to her ear. "*Shhhhhhh*, baby, Daddy's so *proud* of you. You did so good, Daddy loves you so much."

"Okay, dads' turns before she *really* starts to get cranky. Blaine, you first since you've already got her."

He settled in the glider with her and tried to forget about the camera, kissing her, singing to her, making funny faces. He glanced up once and saw Kurt laughing silently, tears rolling down his cheeks. Burt leaned over and whispered something to him, and he laughed out loud, nodding and crossing his arms over his chest, and right there in the NICU, Blaine had the most wonderful sense of *family* he might've ever felt.

A few pictures more and then it was Kurt's turn. Blaine was pretty sure that Sarah Grace managed
to capture the baby handoff between them, as well as the kiss that Kurt planted on Blaine's cheek before he sat down with her. He walked over to Burt as Kurt wiped his eyes.

"No fair, making me go last," Kurt said with a wet laugh. "My eyes are all puffy and my nose is red."

Sarah Grace smiled. "You look fine, Kurt. Like a daddy in love with his little girl."

And then it was Blaine's turn to tear up as he stood with Burt's arm around his shoulders, watching his husband love on their baby.

"Sarah Grace, I can't – thank you so much," Kurt said after she'd gotten several pictures of the three of them together. "And you," he said, looking down at Lily, who'd drifted to sleep, "you were perfect. I should just put you in all my photo shoots; I know you'd never puke on Papa's suede mouse shoes."

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure of that," Sarah Grace said, smiling. "Seriously though, guys, this is not a big deal. It's something I wanted to do for you. Just – maybe don't mention it around here – I don't know how my manager would feel about it."

"Of course," Blaine said, coming over to hug her again. "Thank you so much …"

"Does Lily need anything? A bottle or anything?" Kurt asked.

"It's not time for her to eat yet – I fed her right before you guys got here so she'd be happy for the pictures. But I bet she'd love to be dressed and swaddled, if you want to do that."

"I'd love to," Blaine said, depositing her onto the soft blanket again and digging through her bag for a warmer outfit than just a pair of bloomers.

"And then do you guys want to let your other family come in? I know we've made them wait a while …"

"Carole and I can leave," Burt said, taking his wife's hand.
"I'll go too – I'll send Finn in so he can hang with you and Lily," Blaine said, relinquishing Lily's bag over to Kurt, who gave him a smile.

"Thanks, honey."

Blaine pecked him on the cheek, then stepped between Burt and Carole, feeling warm and loved as an arm from each of them draped over his shoulders.

"Those are some pretty incredible nurses taking care of that baby," Burt murmured as they walked out of the pod.

"You're not kidding," Blaine said, shaking his head. "Sarah Grace is practically her mom. I don't know what we'd do without her…"

* * *

Sunday, August 18th, 2024

"You're sure you're okay with this?" Emily asked, her movements tentative as she approached.

"Of course I am!" Kurt exclaimed, tucking Emily's arm through his as they walked out of the hotel lobby where he picked her up. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well, I know you don't get much time with Lily as it is …"

Kurt swallowed down the lump of guilt forming in his throat. It wasn't fair, being torn like this all the time. He couldn't wait for the day that he could just wheel Lily's stroller down the sidewalk …

"No, no, don't worry about that," he assured her. "It's so good to finally spend some time with you! You're sure you're up for walking?"

"It's just five and a half blocks, Kurt, I'll be fine," she assured him, patting his hand. "I probably
walk more than that when I round at the hospital."

The hospital. Right. Out of all of Kurt's family, Emily had been the most comfortable with Lily, never flinching at a single wire or monitor, not even when the baby next to Lily started alarming like crazy. Kurt finally realized on this second visit that it was because Emily was used to it – that's what she did for a living, worked with deaf babies and children, prescribing cochlear implant surgery, working with them until they could comprehend the sounds they were hearing. Hospitals weren't foreign to her, nor were children who needed just a little extra attention.

It was no wonder Finn loved her so much.

"This is one of our go-to Sunday brunch places," Kurt said, leading her down the sidewalk. "Their omelets are fantastic, and the eggs benedict, oh my god –"

Emily smiled at him. "Unfortunately, no hollandaise for me – I can't eat raw eggs. But an omelet does sound pretty delicious …"

Kurt cringed. Of course she couldn't eat raw eggs, she was pregnant … "I'm sorry, I didn't even think –"

"Kurt, please don't apologize. You've been so sweet already – you're designing a nursery for the baby – no one would've thought about that. I do kind of wish I could have a mimosa, though …" She sighed.

"I'm sorry. It must be hard giving up all those good things for almost ten months," Kurt said sympathetically.

"Oh, it's fine," she said, still smiling. "All worth it for this sweet little guy …"

"I can't believe you're over halfway there."

"I know! Twenty-three weeks already – I'm getting so excited," she said, placing her free hand on her growing belly. Her voice lowered to just over a whisper. "We've picked out a name," she said conspiratorially. "Finn doesn't want anybody to know, but I've got to tell somebody –"
"Oooh, what is it?" Kurt squealed, his eyes lighting up. "I swear I'll keep it a secret."

"You won't even tell Blaine?"

"Not even Blaine. Pinky-promise," Kurt said, holding up his little finger.

"Pinky-promise it is," Emily grinned, hooking her pinkie with his. She leaned close and whispered in his ear, and he beamed.

"Miles Daniel – oh, I love that!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Emily, I can't wait to meet him."

"Mmm," she sighed, happily rubbing her belly. "Neither can I."

* * *

"God, so you were right, that omelet was incredible," Emily said as they walked toward the subway. "...And the potatoes. And the Nutella crepe. I am such a cow."

"You are not," Kurt said, quickly squeezing her hand. "You're feeding another person in there. A person who happens to be Finn's offspring. You've seen Finn eat. I'm amazed that you aren't eating more."

She laughed and squeezed Kurt's hand back. "Thanks," she said. "You're fun, you know that?"

Kurt laughed with her. "Tell that to my disgruntled employees," he quipped. "They tell me I'm a slave driver."

"I refuse to believe there's any truth to that."

"Well," Kurt grinned, "maybe just a little." He clutched her elbow protectively as they descended into the subway tunnel.

"Thank you so much for taking me out today," Emily said. "I still feel so bad for stealing your time
from Lily …"

"Lily will still be in the NICU tonight when I go see her," Kurt assured her, surprised to realize how much he meant it. He felt oddly rejuvenated after eating brunch out for the first time in ages, and told her so.

Emily smiled. "Actually, that's not as unusual as you'd think. Sometimes you need a break from that place – NICU psychosis isn't something to mess around with."

"NICU what?"

"Oh," she laughed, "it's sort of an affectionate term a lot of NICU nurses use for parents who get a little stir crazy after being cooped up in the unit for too long. It's not anything official, but it is really mentally taxing, having a sick baby. You shouldn't feel guilty for needing to get away, for wanting to get away once in a while. Actually, I'm glad you're getting something out of this day – I was a little worried you'd resent me for it."

"Never," Kurt said. "Now … ready to see how much trouble we can get in?"

Emily grinned. "Oh, I think we're capable of getting in a lot of trouble …"

* * *

Kurt and Emily burst through the door in a flurry of bags and fabric samples, and one round baby belly. "Honey, we're home!" Kurt called, giving Emily an awkward side-hug, their arms full of packages. "I had so much fun today," he told her. "Thank you so much."

"Believe me, the pleasure was all mine," Emily grinned, pecking him lightly on the cheek. "Thank you for designing my entire nursery for me!"

Finn and Blaine looked up from the floor where they were both sitting cross-legged, XBOX controllers aimed at the TV. "Oh my god, Em," Finn said, his eyes widening when he saw all their bags, "are we gonna be able to fit all that on the plane?"
Blaine jumped up, excited. "I want to see!" he exclaimed. "I haven't even looked at boy designs – what kind of stuff do they have? What'd you get?"

Kurt set the bags in a row on the couch and as Blaine began to dig through them, Finn got up and slid his arms around Emily's waist. "You know I was just kidding about the plane thing – mostly," he said eyeing the bags. "Did you guys have fun?"

"So much fun. Your brother is the best shopping buddy," Emily said, smiling up at him.

"Mmm, I bet you didn't have as much fun as we had …" Burt baited.

"Why's that?" Kurt asked.

"Grandpa got christened today," Burt said drily, and Kurt noticed for the first time that he was wearing different clothes than he'd been wearing when they'd left that morning. "Puked all over me."

"Oh, I am so sorry we missed that," Kurt said, holding back laughter.

"I'm sure it won't be the last time," Emily smiled. "How'd you handle it, gramps? Were you a trooper or did you dry heave?"

"I did no such thing, thank you very much," Burt said, sounding highly offended.

"I didn't either!" Finn said victoriously.

"You weren't even in there when it happened, Finn," Blaine snickered.

"Yeah, but there was puke on his shirt …"

"Well, I don't know about you guys, but I've heard enough about puke for one day. I want to see all this new nursery stuff!" Carole said.
Kurt smiled at her and began digging through the bags with Blaine, pulling a crib sheet out of one of them as Carole began to coo.

* * *

**Monday, August 19th, 2024**

Six in the morning, and Kurt and Burt were on their way to Bean Me Up.

"So this is getting to be a thing, then," Burt said, "you and me and early mornings at this coffee place of yours. Except, no dog this time."

"Is it a crime to want to have some time with my old man before he goes home?" Kurt asked, bumping his dad's shoulder.

"Only if you don't call him old," he said, bumping Kurt's shoulder right back. "I'm gonna miss you, son. I hate we have to leave today."

"I know you have to, though – somebody's got to keep the shop up, right? And Finn's got school… It's just – we'd really like you back for a little while after she comes home."

"All the kings' armies couldn't keep me away from that baby of yours," Burt smiled. "You name the date, we'll be there."

Burt pushed open the door of the coffee shop, and Braxton's face lit up at the sight of him. "Kurt's dad! Long time, no see, man! You guys see the paper this morning?"

Burt cocked his head, confused. "Not yet, why?"

Kurt shook his head, and Braxton dove back behind the counter, coming up with part of the New York Times in his hand. "Check it."
Kurt stared at Blaine's name, neatly typed next to the number one spot on the list. "Oh my god," he breathed, shoving the paper at Burt. "Dad, look – oh my god, look at this."

"Well holy shit," Burt said, taking the paper, a smile breaking out on his face. "Number one, Kurt – your boy's number one in the New York Times!" He began laughing, jerking Kurt into a hard, tight hug. "You guys, I swear –" He pulled back, stared into Kurt's eyes. "I told you that you were special. Both of you. I told you –" His eyes were brimming with tears, and Kurt's soon followed.

"Grab Blaine a coffee before you guys leave," Braxton said with a wide grin as Kurt stepped into his dad's arms once more. "It's on the house – tell him congrats."

"I wish he was here to tell you himself," Kurt said, "but I know he'd tell you he could never have gotten there without you guys. He does the biggest chunks of his writing here, and I know you keep him supplied with bottomless cups of coffee."

Braxton shrugged. "You two are basically our most loyal customers. It's the least we could do." He grinned again. "Number one, man," he said, shaking his head. "I can't believe it. Anyway, what can I get for you? Want your regular, Kurt?"

* * *

Blaine sat at the kitchen table with Carole, mugs of French press coffee steaming in their hands. He let out a wide yawn and smiled at her.
"I hate you guys have to leave today, but I'm really glad you got to come."

A soft, pleased look came over her face, and she set her simple, black mug down and patted Blaine's hand. "I'm glad we got to come too, sweetie." She paused, clearly unsure of whether she should continue, then said, "I'm sorry –"

She was cut off as the door swung open, hitting the adjacent wall with a loud bang.

"Blaine!"

He found himself nearly knocked out of his chair as Kurt tackled him in an awkward hug. "Wha –"

"Look! Look at this!" Kurt exclaimed, waving a paper in front of his face so enthusiastically that it was just a blur of black and white print. Burt walked in and closed the door, grinning at them.

"Whoa, whoa, slow down," Blaine said, trying to follow the flying paper to no avail. "What am I looking at?"

"This!" Kurt cried, shaking the paper harder at him. "Look!"

Blaine sighed, grabbed his hands and held them still. His eyes drifted down the page and finally his gaze rested on … well, a miracle.

"Oh my god." A pause. "Kurt – oh my god."

"Oh my god!" Kurt squealed, throwing the paper aside, taking his hands and pulling him up out of his chair, jumping up and down and spinning them in a circle.

"Oh my god, Kurt –" Joy and pride and disbelief overwhelmed him, making him worry that his heart might actually start beating outside his body as the room circled around them.
His husband's face was lit with a thousand-watt smile and it was so beautiful Blaine could barely bear it. "You did it!" Kurt sang, laughing loudly, still spinning, head thrown back. Burt was laughing in the background, a deeper echo of his son's, and he caught Carole out of the corner of his eye, staring at the tossed-away paper with her hand over her mouth.

He stilled, stopped them from turning, dizzy with the spinning and the shock. "I did." He chuckled. "I actually did."

Burt stepped in then, squeezing them both into his strong arms. "'Course you did!" he said, slapping Blaine heartily on the back. "I always said you were something special, both you boys, and now look at you —"

Carole, eyes damp and still watering, threw her arms out, the last piece in their jumbled circle of a hug. "I am so proud of you," she warbled, pressing a hard kiss to his cheek.

Blaine sighed and closed his eyes. "I'm proud of me, too," he said, his voice wavering just a bit. Kurt shrugged Burt and Carole aside and threw his arms around Blaine in a full-on bear hug.

"I can't tell you how much it means to hear you say that," Kurt whispered to him. "I love you so much."

And as much as his head was screaming Burt and Carole are standing right here!, a gravitational pull came over him, so strong he felt it in his core. "I love you too," he breathed, and sealed his mouth over Kurt's in a celebratory kiss.
Chapter 13

Tuesday, August 20th, 2024

"Hey, Blaine? I think you've got some visitors outside the unit," Alisha, the unit secretary, told him, coming into Pod 3.

Visitors? Blaine wasn't expecting anyone that morning …

He walked to the front of the unit and saw Nick and Jeff's smiling faces through the glass on the door.

"Oh my god!" he exclaimed, jerking the doors open and grabbing them both into a huge hug. "What are you guys doing here?"

"You are really hard to get ahold of," Jeff grinned. "So we decided to just come where we knew you'd be."

"We wanted to say congratulations," Nick said, thrusting a copy of the New York Times Bestseller list at him. "I know you probably have like twenty of these already, but here …"

"We also wanted to know if we could finally meet Lily," Jeff told him.

Blaine gasped. "You haven't gotten to meet her yet, have you?" he exclaimed. "Oh my gosh, I can't believe that – only one of you can come in at a time per hospital rules, so who wants to go first?"

* * *

Blaine grinned as Nick cradled his baby, eyes wide with awe. "Blaine, she's so small."

"That's what everybody keeps telling us," Blaine said. "I guess I'm just used to her now."

Nick and Lily contemplated each other, and Blaine's heart grew even more for his baby as she stared up into his friend's eyes.
"I mean, she looks good …" Nick said eventually, looking up at Blaine.

"You mean she doesn't look like she's suffering? Her scores have been good lately," he said.

"When do you think they'll let you bring her home?"

"No idea. They keep telling us that everything goes at her pace, so … whenever she's ready, I guess. But they also keep telling us she's doing really well, emphasis intentional, so I'm hoping soon…"

Nick leaned back, quiet for a moment. "You guys are gonna be her heroes. You know that, right?"

Blaine looked at him, eyebrows raised. "You're not the first person who's said that."

"Well, it's true. You saved her life. I know you know what kind of place she could've ended up in – but you came in and swept her up and it's so obvious that you love her so much already … I mean, she's screaming in your ear, taking up all your time and your sex life and you just keep going back. You're like her knights in shining armor. You and Kurt are going to be her whole world."

"Well, she's already ours," Blaine said softly, smiling as he pictured all the moments yet to come. Painting the nursery again, deciding once and for all what bedding they'd buy, night-time cuddles and lullabies, bathtime in Lily's bathtub instead of a little pink bucket. "Okay, so really quick – I need to get caught up on the gossip. I feel so out of the loop. First, how's Romeo?"

Nick grinned. "He is the most adorable little dog – we're kind of in love with him. He adjusted to our place really well."

"Good," Blaine said, grinning. "Thank you so much again for keeping him for us."

"Anytime, man – glad we can help. You can come see him anytime, you know …"

"We might do that, actually. I miss him. But more importantly … How're things with you and Jeff?
I want all the dirty details."

Nick beamed. "I've never been so happy in my entire life."

Blaine couldn't help but grin back. "So shacking up was definitely the right decision, then."

"Oh, definitely." Nick dragged a hand through his hair. "Being in love with your best friend …"

"Pretty awesome, huh?"

"It's better than I could have ever thought. We just fit, you know?"

"Three months in, and he's already smitten …" Blaine said.

"I've been smitten for longer than that," Nick said, flushing. "We're both smitten. I just – I can't imagine living a life without him in it. Even more so, now that we're living together. You know how I said you guys would be Lily's whole world? Well, he's mine." He paused, stroking Lily's cheek. "I don't know," he said softly to her, "we might even have one of you one day."

Blaine nudged Nick with his shoulder. "I'm glad you're so happy."

"It's just – I don't know, something about the reciprocity. I mean, I'm obviously crazy about him, but he is about me too and it's like – we're on the same level about it, and I don't know that I've ever been on the same level like that with someone before, not that level –"

"I know," Blaine said. He knew it like he knew the sun rose in the east and set in the west, he knew it like gravity. That same reciprocity was what kept him going in the mornings, what completely stole his heart in high school, what ultimately saved his marriage the year prior. "Believe me, Nick, I understand."

Nick smiled, apparently happy to have someone who got it. "Sorry to get all babbly. He just – he has this effect –"
"Do you remember me junior and senior year in high school? Babbly? I was, like, high all the time. My drug of choice was Kurt."

"Very true," Nick said.

"My drug of choice is still Kurt, actually …"

"I'm glad. It makes me feel like there's some hope that Jeff and I could stay this happy forever."

Blaine smiled. "Oh, there are definitely ebbs and flows. We go through times where we're just insanely in love, like teenagers again, I'm obsessed with him. And then there are times when he gets on my nerves so bad I could just strangle him. But – I don't know, the good times are worth the bad, as long as that foundation's still there. That's what's important – the roots of your love. Grow them deep, Nick."

Nick looked down at his lap, a lovesick expression painted on his face. "Working on that," he said softly, then looked up. "I guess Jeff should get a turn at some point in here, huh?"

"He'd probably appreciate it," Blaine agreed, standing to walk Nick out. "It was so good to see you, man."

Nick pulled him into a hug, clapping him on the back. "You too. Take care of that little girl, ok?"

"Oh, no worries. We will."

* * *

Kurt sat across the table from Blaine that night, inhaling the twice-baked potatoes that Blaine had thrown together before their nightly trip back to the NICU.

"…and we've gotten 300 applications," he said around a mouthful of potatoes. "Three-hundred! For one position! I'll be sifting through resumes for the next month."
"Kurt, I think it's time to paint the nursery," Blaine said casually. "Not that your resumes aren't important, of course …"

"Oh god, I am fine with a subject change. We still have to decide on colors and de– wait. Wait. Blaine – do you know something I don't?" Heart fluttering in his chest like the wings of a hummingbird, Kurt almost let himself hope.

"I was there for rounds today."

"And?"

Blaine beamed. "The doctors told me that if everything goes well, we've only got about two weeks left. She's on a really low dose right now, and they'll need to do two more weans, one of which they're doing tomorrow, and the second wean she'll come off completely. She's got to be off meds for five days before she comes home, but Kurt …"

"Oh my god."

"That light at the end of the tunnel? I think we're beginning to see it."

Kurt, unable to help himself, jumped up from the table, came around and threw his arms around Blaine's neck, perching in his lap. He hadn't felt utter joy like that in a very, very long time, not since the few days they had Violet. "She's coming home."

"Well, not tomorrow. And they said it's possible for her to still have setbacks. But she's done so well so far, and we're over three weeks out now …"

"Blaine," Kurt said, burying his head in Blaine's shoulder, "she's coming home." He let himself relax, sink further into Blaine's arms, and Blaine bore his weight with ease.

"So – we need to paint the nursery," Blaine repeated softly, his fingers tracing long paths over Kurt's bones, the length of his spine, the breadth of his ribs. Incredible, how he could soften and strengthen Kurt's frame at the same time.
Kurt emerged from Blaine's shoulder with watery eyes. "I'll take tomorrow afternoon off," he said. "We'll go shopping then."

* * *

"You know what we haven't done in a really long time?" Kurt asked at midnight that night, fingers tangled together as they did the familiar sleepy stagger to their bed.

"What's that?" Blaine asked, slipping his t-shirt over his head and face-planting into the mattress. Why did the NICU always make him so tired?

"Sex."

Blaine lifted his head, frowning. "That's true." He thought back, trying to come up with exactly how long it had been – one and a half weeks? Two? God, that was a travesty, going that long without tasting Kurt's milky skin, but (why is there a but, Blaine?) he was so tired, they were both so tired, there was no way they'd be able to make it through anything without one of them falling asleep, and that would just create hurt feelings."It's not that I don't want to, Kurt, but tonight…"

"Oh, no, that's not what I was saying. Tonight it's late. I'd probably go to sleep on you, and we both know how that would turn out. But – and you can say no to this – I thought maybe we could have a date day on Saturday? It's Lily's one-month birthday, so I thought we might bring her and the nurses some cupcakes that morning and have a little party and then just … I don't know, spend time together? I miss you, Blaine, and if she's coming home in two weeks…"

Blaine slid himself under the covers, curling up next to Kurt. Brilliant. His husband was brilliant… "I think that's a fantastic idea. I miss you, too. And we both know it'll be miraculous if sex happens after she comes home."

Kurt sat up in bed, towering over Blaine, a very stern look on his face. "No ifs, Blaine. Do not say if. The miracle of sex will be a when."

Blaine nodded, his head bobbing in frantic agreement. "Yes, of course, you're right, when sex happens. When. I don't know what I was thinking."

"I was thinking naptime."
"I hope she takes long naps."

Kurt grinned. "Yes. Anyway, back to the topic at hand – maybe on Sunday we can plan to fix up the nursery? Buy stuff tomorrow afternoon and maybe reassemble the crib –"

"Which we still need to get out of storage," Blaine interjected.

"– and paint on Sunday? What do you think?"

"Honestly, that sounds like the most perfect weekend I could imagine," Blaine said, tugging at Kurt's arm, pulling him back down to his pillow, then closer than that. He ran a foot up and down Kurt's leg, feeling the hair dusting over them underneath the pads of his toes. It was a simple gesture, but they'd been in such perpetual motion the past three weeks, any touch felt intimate. When Kurt had perched himself in Blaine's lap earlier that night, he'd almost cried just from the weight and mass of him, a weight he hadn't felt in too long. The last sex they'd had, he'd finally figured out, had been thirteen days prior, a hurried handjob exchange in a race against sleep the night after they'd met with Dr. Jacobson together. Clearly something hadn't stuck after their meeting – everything had been fine between them, but they'd been so busy that something had to give, and apparently intimacy was what they'd chosen.

Blaine's heart felt sore, almost, when he thought about the path they were heading down – a stale marriage, a distant relationship, a life too busy for each other. He tugged Kurt harder, closer to him.

"Blaine, honey? What's the matter?" Kurt asked, his voice close to sleep.

"I just – I feel like an idiot," Blaine said, his voice surprisingly thick. "I don't want to lose you."

"Who said anything about losing me?" Kurt's hand came up to caress his cheek, and he nuzzled into Kurt's palm. "You're not losing me, sweetheart – it's just been a bad couple of weeks. I'm not mad; I've been just as tired as you."

"Okay," Blaine said, content to be touching Kurt at so many points of their skin. "We'll make up for lost time this weekend."
"Thanks so much for meeting me for lunch, guys!" Blaine said, holding his arms out for Jeff and Nick to step into. He smiled, noticing that they never let go of each other's hands.

"Thank you for taking time away from Lily to see us," Jeff grinned. "How are you and Kurt?"

"We're excellent," Blaine beamed, still on a bit of a high from a fantastic morning with Lily. "Lily's doing so well – she had a score of two this morning. She was in such a good mood – they're doing a big wean on her medicine today, and I think she's going to do great."

"That's awesome, man!" Nick exclaimed, pulling him in for another hug. "Will she get to come home soon?"

"I hope so," Blaine said. "Apparently nothing's set in stone until we walk out those doors, but I don't know, I just have a feeling …"

"Daddy instinct," Jeff grinned. "So what's the occasion? Or do you just miss us that much?"

"Both, actually," Blaine told them as they moved into the line to order their food. "I do miss you, but I kind of have a favor to ask of Nick …"

"Name it."

"Well, I kind of want to surprise Kurt with something. I wrote this children's story about how we got Lily, but I need an illustrator …"

"Hello, Lily darling – Papa brought you a toy!" Kurt said, bending low to talk to her in her crib after he'd washed his hands. "Did she have an okay evening?" he asked Serena. "Do you think we can play with her for a little bit before bathtime?"
"I think that'd be fine," Serena told them. "I'll leave you two to it."

Kurt pulled a stuffed bunny out of the giftbag in his hand. "Lily, look – look what Papa brought you, my big girl!"

Blaine lifted her from her crib and set her in his lap as Kurt played with her, hopping the bunny up and down her arms, touching its nose to hers. She waved her arm at it, managing to make contact once or twice, and her daddies both beamed, rays of sunshine pouring from their faces.

"Oh, Daddy is so proud of you, Lil!" Blaine cooed, curling over her to kiss the top of her head. "You touched the bunny!"

"That's because I'm the smartest little girl in the whole world!" Kurt sang, bopping her nose with the toy once more. He leaned over and kissed her cheek and as he was pulling back, the corners of her mouth twitched.

"Lil?" Blaine said. "Wait, oh my god, is she – oh my god, my phone –"

Her mouth twitched again as Blaine handed her to Kurt, digging in his pockets.

"Lily? Are you – oh, I think – will you smile for Papa? Please? Smile for Papa, sweetheart –"

"Brush over her cheek with your finger," Serena said, stopping what she was doing to walk over to them.

Blaine fumbled with his phone, and Kurt shifted her in his arms, took the pad of his finger and brushed it over her impossibly soft cheek. And sure enough …

"Oh my god. Oh my god," Blaine said, his voice turning suddenly thick. "Oh my god I'm so glad I caught this on camera …"

Her face, the sweet face that had been twisted in frowns and scowls and wails for so long, cracked
into the most precious grin Kurt had ever seen. It was impossible not to beam back at her – they were all beaming, Kurt, Serena, and Blaine, his smile so big it looked like his face would split in half.

"You," Kurt whispered, awe in his voice, "are the most beautiful baby –"

And just like that, it was over, the smile gone, the inquisitive, wide-eyed look that she kept on good days replacing it. Blaine turned the phone off and flopped forward, draping his arms around Kurt, pressing Lily between them.

"Kurt," he said. "Kurt –"

"I know, honey –" he started, then felt the moisture of Blaine's tears dripping on his neck. "Oh, honey, shhh …" He hugged him as best he could with a baby in his arms. "It's okay –"

"I never thought – I was so worried she was just miserable all the time," Blaine said, pulling back, swiping his fingers under his eyes. "She can't be miserable if she just smiled, right?" He looked up toward Serena, who was standing over them, watching with a huge smile on her face.

"No way is that baby miserable," she assured him. "Definitely not all the time, at least." She paused, shaking her head at the baby fondly. "I can't believe you got your phone out that fast."

"I know," Kurt said, giving Blaine a quick kiss on the cheek. They usually tried to stray from any public affection at the hospital, but oh, his heart… "Please send that to Dad."

"On it," Blaine said, grabbing his phone. "Oh, I can't believe she did that." He looked up. "I'm so glad we were here for it."

"You can't possibly be as glad as I am," Kurt said, clutching Lily to his chest. "Thank you, sweetheart – what a wonderful gift that was for your Papa tonight …"

* * *

Saturday, August 24th, 2024
Blaine blinked heavy lids open as the sun shined through their bedroom window, finding Kurt's face hovering over his.

"Morning," Kurt whispered.

Blaine grunted in reply.

"Guess what?"

"Mmmm?"

"Our thirty days are up."

Blaine squinted, trying to make himself wake more fully. "Wha?"

"It's been thirty days since we first got Lily. The probationary period is over, Blaine. Nobody can take her away from us now. Plus, she's a month old."

A sleepy smile crept over Blaine's lips as he pulled Kurt in for a kiss complete with morning breath. "We have a baby."

"We have a baby."

"I'm so glad it's with you."

* * *

"Happy one-month-old birthday to you, happy one-month-old birthday to you, happy one-month-old birthday, our sweet Lily Eliiiiiiiiiise —" Blaine grinned, drawing out the note.

"Happy one-month-old birthday to you," he, Kurt and Sarah Grace finished, stretching to fit too
many syllables in the rhythm of the song.

"Now, quick, one of you guys eat that cupcake before we all get in trouble," Sarah Grace hissed. "We're not allowed to have food in patient care areas."

* * *

"You're sure it's okay?" Kurt asked for the tenth time as they gathered their things.

"Kurt." Sarah Grace looked at him sternly. "I'm here today. Serena's here tonight. I'm back tomorrow. If you do not trust us to take care of her by now, then we've got some issues."

"No, no, it's not that," Blaine hurried to correct her. "It's just – we don't want you guys to think we're just leaving her –"

"Listen," she said with a sigh, walking over and plopping down in a chair next to them. "You've been here for a month. It's hard. It's really hard. I know you both must be exhausted – you're here probably twice as much as most of our parents, and I know you've got jobs and lives. Go out for a night. Take a break. Have fun. And don't worry about her."

Kurt sighed. "Okay, but if –"

"If anything happens, we will call you. I promise. Just – please trust me, okay? You deserve a break."

Blaine nodded, squeezing Kurt's hand. "We'll leave her in your capable hands, then. Remind Serena to read to her tonight, since we won't be able to."

Sarah Grace smiled. "It's going to be fine, guys. I promise. Now, go."

Kurt looked at Blaine. "You gonna argue with her?"

"Guess not," Blaine said, but his feet seemed to be stuck to the floor. He laughed nervously. "I
don't know why it's so hard this time – we leave her here every day …"

"It's the first time we won't be able to tuck her in at night," Kurt said softly. "Come on, honey." He bent over Lily's crib. "Bye, baby girl – Papa loves you so much."

Something inside Blaine ached to stay, but Kurt took his hand and squeezed hard, and whatever part of him that was finally decided to let go. "Okay," he breathed. "Be good for your NICU mommies," he whispered to Lily. "We'll be back to see you soon, I promise."

* * *

"So – today's agenda?" Kurt asked, playing with Blaine's fingers on the train ride home.

"I want to take a nap."

Kurt looked at him. "You want to take a nap? On our date day?"

Blaine nodded, grinning. "Just think about it, Kurt. When do we ever get a day just to lounge around and do nothing? When do we ever get to catch up on sleep? When do we have time to cuddle? We don't."

The brilliance of Blaine's suggestion slowly dawned on Kurt. "Actually …"

"Sounds pretty awesome, right?"

Kurt smiled at him indulgently. "You win. Nap it is."

* * *

Blaine was warm and cozy and surrounded by Kurt's scent all around him as he woke, and without opening his eyes, he rolled over and nuzzled his face into Kurt's chest.
"Morning, Sleeping Beauty," Kurt whispered, scooting down deeper in the bed.

"Mmmm, how long did we sleep?"

"Long enough that we missed lunchtime."

Blaine snuggled closer – it had been too long since they'd been able to do this, just cuddle in bed, the city teeming with life outside their window below. "Don't care." He shifted, curling his arm up so he could stroke Kurt's hair, and his stomach growled loudly. "…Maybe I do care a little." Blaine finally opened his eyes to see Kurt smiling brightly.

"That nap was a good idea, honey. I feel incredible."

"Me too," Blaine said, kissing Kurt's bare shoulder. "Just hungry. Lunch?"

"Lunch," Kurt agreed.

They padded into the kitchen, Kurt leading Blaine by the hand, and Blaine let himself stare, low-slung, tight-fitting boxer briefs hugging Kurt's hips, tempting him to reach out and touch. He smiled, thinking of how long it had taken them to get there after they'd started living together, how long it took Kurt to shy away from his own modesty and put himself on display. Even now he had to be in the right frame of mind to laze around the house half-naked, even now he wouldn't walk back to the bedroom from the shower brazenly naked like Blaine did. (Not that Kurt minded when Blaine did…)

He remembered the first time he came home from class to find Kurt baking in briefs and an apron and nothing else, flushed with embarrassment and the heat from the stove. Blaine had pushed him up against the fridge, and Kurt's cake had almost burned.

As if Kurt could read his mind, he turned around and coyly shook his head. "Patience, honey."

They made chicken salad sandwiches and ate them in their underwear, sprawled on the couch, wallowing in the early afternoon sun blazing through the sheer curtains.
"Let's get ice cream," Blaine suggested after they were done and empty-handed, drawing lazy patterns on the top of Kurt's bare foot.

"But we have to put on clothes," Kurt whined, and Blaine laughed aloud. Yes, he was definitely glad that they'd gotten there.

"I've never known you to not want to put on clothes."

Kurt set his jaw and poked Blaine in the stomach with his toe. "Oh, sometimes you have. Sex first. Then ice cream."

"Wow. Not arguing with that," Blaine said, making a valiant effort not to go bug-eyed. He let go of Kurt's foot and bent to hover over him. "Hi."

"I've missed you," Kurt whined again, grappling for Blaine's shoulders. "It's been so long …"

"I know. I'm sorry, baby," Blaine murmured, stretching out to lie atop Kurt's body. "Can we make up for lost time now?"

"Please." It came out as a whisper on Kurt's lips and Blaine couldn't help but duck forward, kiss it away, kiss everything away but the two of them. Kurt's mouth parted and Blaine slipped into it, the slide of a lazy, love-filled kiss.

He felt known when he was kissing Kurt, almost even more so than when they were having sex. Kurt's hands were soft on his face, in his hair, tugging him closer; little contented sighs escaped Kurt's mouth and pulled them from Blaine's as well.

"Love you," Blaine whispered against his lips. "Love you so much."

They kissed until Blaine's lips were buzzing, half numb, until he felt Kurt hard against his hip, rubbing gently.

"Want you," Kurt murmured, the words muffled by Blaine's skin. "Closer, please …"
"Tell me how," Blaine said, nipping tiny love bites down the expanse of Kurt's chest. "You can have me however you want …"

Kurt stilled underneath him, and he looked up, catching Kurt's gaze.

"Actually – I want you in me," Kurt said, flushing a little, the color high on his cheeks, spreading down and out. "If you're okay with that."

"If I'm okay – Kurt." Blaine said, blinking. It'd been a long time since they'd had any kind of sex, two weeks now, but it'd probably been months since Kurt had asked for this. "Kurt, baby, yes."

Almost shyly, Kurt stood and took Blaine's hand, leading him back to the bedroom. Once they got there, he crowded Blaine against the wall, a finger trailing up and down the prominent bulge in Blaine's briefs. Blaine's head thunked against the wall.

"Kurt …"

A few more minutes of kissing, groping chests and asses and thighs and cocks all the while, and Blaine staggered backwards, pulling Kurt toward the bed. He was slightly surprised when Kurt gave his chest a push down toward their mattress. He gave Kurt a quizzical look, and Kurt's eyes twinkled a bit.

"I – thought I might ride you?"

"Oh Jesus." All the air left Blaine's lungs and he scurried up on the bed and backwards in a rush, making room for Kurt to straddle him.

Kurt ground his pelvis against Blaine's, once, twice for good measure, and Blaine mewled with pleasure.

"Mmmmm," Kurt moaned, thrusting his underwear-clad cock smooth and slow against Blaine's. "Want to draw this out."
Blaine forced himself to open his eyes, to look at Kurt, wanton and unrestrained, mouth parted and back arched against the afternoon sun. It was a beautiful sight to behold, Kurt uninhibited like this. Blaine tried to savor it, watching his life-long lover pleasure himself with Blaine's body.

"You're incredible," Blaine whispered, awe-struck.

Kurt looked up, blushing with a wide smile. "You're not too bad yourself," he said, rubbing his hand over Blaine's cock, making him shudder and groan. He lifted his hips off the bed, looking for friction, and Kurt smiled even wider, holding himself up just high enough to be out of Blaine’s reach.

There was no one else in the world who could get him riled up that fast like Kurt could. Kurt's boxer briefs were pulled taut over his erection, soft, tight burgundy cotton that made Blaine want to drool. "Kurt. *Shit*, you're killing me …"

"How so?" Kurt asked, an innocent look painted on his face, but Blaine could see the minx-like twinkle in his eyes. "You need something?"

Blaine smiled, laid his head back on the pillow behind him. "Not at all, actually. Take your time."

And Kurt did, ghosting kisses over Blaine's chest, teasing at the waistband of his briefs, inside his inner thighs. "Told you I wanted to draw this out," he whispered in Blaine's ear, and Blaine understood – Kurt was teasing himself equally as much.

It wasn't long, though, before the teasing turned into rutting again, and it was clear that Kurt was losing himself in it this time around. "Want you so bad," he purred, arching his back like a cat. "Feels so good, honey …"

Blaine hooked his thumbs into the waistband of Kurt's underwear. "Off?"

"*Hell* yes."

He dragged them down slow, made Kurt's cock bounce and wobble and if Kurt didn't have other plans, he would've taken him immediately into his mouth because *god* he just wanted to taste, but … Kurt had other plans.
He grabbed the lube, dripped some on Blaine's fingers. "Please."

"I love you." Blaine looked straight up into Kurt's clear blue eyes as he said it, his finger snaking back, back, hitting home. Kurt melted as his finger slipped inside, eyes closing, head lolling back. A moan came from Kurt's throat like Blaine hadn't heard in a while.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," Kurt breathed, rolling his hips, moving Blaine's finger inside him. "God, that's exactly – oh –"

Blaine took his time, exploring and stretching with one finger, paying attention to every sigh and moan and movement that Kurt made. This day was all about attention and quality time with his husband, and Blaine planned to do it right.

"Uunnnhhhh, more please," Kurt eventually sighed, his hips rolling. "Need more –"

Two fingers, and Kurt was riding them. Blaine was trying not to get impatient – he loved doing this for Kurt, loved giving him pleasure like this, especially when Kurt was so open and willing and practically begging for it, but god – soon Kurt would be riding his cock, and it gave a little twitch at the thought –

"Why are these still on?" Kurt asked, snapping the elastic on Blaine's briefs against his hip. "Want to slick you up, want you in me –"

"Shhhhh," Blaine whispered, propping up to kiss Kurt's mouth. "Patience, baby."

"Too turned on to be patient. Now." Kurt yanked Blaine's briefs down under his balls and grabbed him, firm but gentle, and Blaine let out a loud groan, unprepared for the stimulation.

"See? God, you want it too – it's been so long, I'll be so tight around you –"
Blaine thought his eyes might actually roll back in his head. So much for taking his time ...

"Fuck, Kurt."

"Come on, I want you inside."

Blaine took a deep breath, slipped his fingers out of Kurt's ass. Kurt grunted with it, fumbled for the lube, and Blaine wiggled the rest of the way out of his briefs.

"Gorgeous," he murmured, gasping as Kurt took him in hand, slicking the whole length of him up. "Love you so much."

"Love you, Blaine," Kurt whispered, holding him steady as he lined up, and Blaine felt the head of his cock pressing bluntly at Kurt's hole.

"Kurt. Jesus fucking Christ --" Blaine panted as Kurt sank down in a slow crawl, moaning loudly.

"Oh, god --" Kurt said, settling down on Blaine's lap, Blaine's cock twitching a little inside him. "So full."

"Good?"

Kurt could only moan again in reply. He tipped forward, pulling off just a little, lips begging to be kissed and Blaine obliged him, their tongues tangling messily.

"Blaine -- fuck --"

It was heaven, being ridden by his husband, all lean and willowy and perfectly pale, abs and quads flexing deliciously as he sank down and pulled back up again. What a beautiful connection they made, a full circle of desperate love as Kurt rolled his hips, bringing Blaine waves of pleasure like the waves from the sea, kissing and stroking and gasping. Blaine's toes were curling into points as he sank into Kurt over and over again, and one hand had a fistful of Kurt's hair.
Kurt shifted a little and let out a loud purr, whirling his hips in a small circle. "Oh, honey, there – there, right there, mmmmmmm ..."

He'd found the perfect angle, apparently, for Blaine's cock to drive against his prostate, and Blaine's fingers clenched Kurt's hair tighter as Kurt started to really ride him.

From there, it felt like a blur of pleasure. Blaine knew he was getting louder, but so was Kurt, moaning and whining and whimpering. He moved his hand to Kurt's cock, ready to jerk him off and make him come, when Kurt's hand stilled his own.

"No," Kurt gasped, "I think – gonna try to come from this –"

"Fuck – Kurt –" There was no way Blaine was going to last long enough for that unless Kurt was a lot closer than he thought.

"It's okay, it's okay, just – shit, honey – fuck me, please –"

Blaine wasn't about to argue with that instruction. He gripped Kurt's hips and drove deep into him, animal instinct taking over. His balls drew up and he could feel it curling in his stomach, his body tingling and shaking ...

"Oh my god, Blaine – right there – right there right there –"

He erupted into Kurt with a cry, thrusting up even harder, riding the waves of his orgasm until he was trembling on the bed, breathing like he'd just run five miles.

"Come on – come on –" Kurt chanted, trying to catch enough stimulation to push him over the edge, but Blaine was already softening inside him. "Honeyyy –" he whined, grabbing the towel beside their bed, pulling off of Blaine and sitting back on his haunches, his face contorted in a mix of pleasure-pain.

"I've got you," Blaine breathed, propping up on a shaky elbow and scooting down the bed. Without any preamble, he poured lube over his hand and slipped two fingers into Kurt's body.
"Oh!" Kurt gasped, his back arching off the bed.

"I can suck your cock, if you want," Blaine breathed, moving his fingers, "or I can just do this."

"Just – I – fuck, I don't know," Kurt said, squirming, his toes curling and uncurling. "I – shit, Blaine –"

Blaine continued to tease at his prostate, drawing moans from Kurt's throat. "Your call, baby."

"Fuck – suck me, Blaine –"

He dipped his body down and took Kurt into his mouth, sucking on the crown of his cock.

"Oh god Blaine, yes, fuck, yes –"

"You're sounding quite dirty this afternoon," Blaine grinned, slipping off, and Kurt whined, circling his hips in the air.

"Please …"

And Blaine took Kurt's ironclad skin in his mouth again, this time sinking down, further and further, until the tip hit the back of Blaine's throat. He made quick work of it, sucking with abandon, never taking his fingers off of Kurt's prostate, until Kurt was moaning his name and he pulled back just far enough to catch a mouthful of thick, white fluid. Blaine swallowed, and Kurt spilled on his cheek, on his neck, still writhing on the bed, cock pulsing.

When Kurt's body finally relaxed, Blaine wiped his face as best he could and pressed kisses to Kurt's chest and shoulder and cheek. Kurt was panting, making tiny, high pitched noises, grasping at Blaine, who pulled him close and held him tight, sticky come be damned.

"Oh my god," Kurt eventually whimpered. "Oh my god, I think you broke me."

Blaine chuckled. "I hope in a good way."
"Mmmm," Kurt sighed happily, "in the best way." He tangled his legs around Blaine's and they lay together in intimate silence, their pounding hearts slowing, their breathing steadily returning to normal. Blaine kissed his hair, his forehead, his face, rubbing up and down his arm and shoulder, basking in the sheer **contentedness** that sex with Kurt always brought him.

"So," Kurt said after a long while, the drying come tacky between them, "I'm actually not sure if I'll ever recover from that."

Blaine grinned. "Can you recover for ice cream, maybe?"

"Ooooh …" Kurt managed to flop over enough to prop up on one shaky arm. "Give me a little bit, and I think yes."

"Good. Because you deserve everything sweet this world has to offer."

Kurt grinned. "You're corny."

Blaine grinned back. "You're perfect."

"Stop it!" Kurt laughed, weakly smacking him on the arm. "But you're perfect too."

Blaine just smiled, and kissed Kurt on the very tip of his nose.

* * *

A shower and a leisurely walk later, and they were settled on a bench outside Sundaes and Cones, bare arms pressed against each other in the sticky heat.

"I don't think I remember how to have free time," Kurt sighed, scraping the film of melted ice cream off the top of his scoop, licking the back of his spoon.
"Well, taking this afternoon into account, I think you do free time pretty well," Blaine grinned.

Kurt smiled smugly, closed his eyes, licked up another spoonful of ice cream. "I do try," he said, tilting his head to the sky, letting the sun warm his face. "What do you feel like doing tonight? You up for going out for dinner?"

"Honestly Kurt? I really just want to exist today. I don't want to worry about looking presentable or going out …"

"I would love to just exist today, as long as we're doing it together," Kurt said, opening his eyes to smile sweetly at Blaine. "Suggestions?"

Blaine's face turned hopeful. "Let's get Thai takeout and have a movie night in our pajamas."

God, how had he landed such an adorable man?

"I think that sounds like the most perfect way to spend tonight that I could possibly think of," Kurt said, and Blaine turned all heart eyes and melted Kurt's soul even more than he already had that day.

"This has been the most perfect day," Blaine said, almost shyly. "Thank you for spending it with me, Kurt."

"Oh, honey, thank you for spending it with me. A nap and then … well, earlier and ice cream, and I feel like 100 pounds have just lifted off my shoulders."

"Mmm, me too. I didn't know how badly I needed this," Blaine said, taking a bit of ice cream. Smiling, Kurt brushed a little sticky remnant of it off the corner of Blaine's mouth with his thumb.

"I can't wait to work on Lily's nursery with you tomorrow," Kurt said softly.

"I know. What do we still need to do? Let's make a list."
"Oh, now you're speaking my language," Kurt grinned, getting out his phone. "Let's see – we've got the paint, but we've still got to get the crib out of storage. The crib bedding should be in this next week, hopefully by Tuesday …"

Blaine grinned. "I can't believe we'll actually have her at home. It still doesn’t feel real yet."

"I know – I can't wait to get back to normal life, you know?"

"Oh, Kurt," Blaine said, licking his spoon, "I don't think life's ever gonna be normal again. It's going to be so much better …"

* * *

"Mmmm," Kurt sighed, "I feel like we're back in college."

He was sprawled on the couch with Blaine on top of him, gently mouthing at his neck, while The Notebook played quietly in the background.

"Why's that?" Blaine asked, grinning up at him.

"Well, it's way past our normal bedtime, we ate Thai takeout straight out of the boxes earlier, and now we're ignoring the movie we said we were gonna watch in lieu of making out. Doesn't that sound an awful lot like college to you?"

"It sounds like an awful lot of fun."

Kurt laughed and tugged on Blaine's t-shirt, pulling him up closer. "That, too." Their lips met in a sweet kiss and Kurt let himself melt into it, the familiarity and the oh-god-feels-so-good of it. Blaine shifted on top of him, let his weight press Kurt into the couch and Kurt's arms tightened around his neck. "Blaine?"

"Hmm?"
"I love you more than anything."

Blaine smiled, pressed their foreheads and noses together, so close that Kurt's eyes nearly crossed trying to stare into his husband's. "I love you more than anything too."

They continued through the credits, sharing lazy kisses and gentle neck massages. It was so easy to get lost in Blaine, even after nearly eight years of marriage, even after thirteen years of knowing. Lips buzzing, Kurt felt weightless, gravity negated with the force of their love. He could kiss Blaine forever and never tire of it.

"Kurt, when we leave this world," Blaine murmured against his skin, bringing him out of the daze that making out like teenagers always brought, "I want it to be like Allie and Noah."

Kurt lifted his head, raised his eyebrows at that.

"I mean – I want our family close, and I want to go to sleep next to you and have us both drift off. I just don't want to think about living life without you. I had a taste of that last year, and – yeah, I don’t want to think about that."

"Oh, honey," Kurt breathed, tugging Blaine into a tight hug, "let's not think about that. There's so much living left to be done – we've got a daughter to raise."

"And a soon-to-be nephew to torment."

"And a nursery to paint. Tomorrow. We should probably go to bed …"

Blaine looked up at him with puppy eyes. "One more movie? I promise I'll even watch it this time instead of groping you."

"Blaine …"

"Please? We just – we never get to do this anymore, stay up and have fun, and it's probably the last time we will, and –"
"Oh, fine," Kurt relented. "Stop looking at me like that – you're not playing fair."

Blaine grinned triumphantly, and bounced over to their DVD collection. "Love, Actually? Or Notting Hill?"

"Ahhh, you're in a Hugh Grant mood, I see how it is."

"Well …"

Kurt smiled. "If we're going for Hugh Grant, I vote for Music and Lyrics."

"Oh, good call," Blaine said, running his finger over the rows of movies until he found the right one. "But only if you let me sing the songs…"

"When do I ever deny you the privilege of singing, honey?"

"Well, when we're in public sometimes, when we were at that charity gala and you told me I was not one of the paid musical performers so I was denied access to the piano, at any coffee shop other than Bean Me Up …"

"Okay, okay, point taken. You can sing the songs." Blaine did a happy, silly little dance in front of the TV, making Kurt giggle. "Oh, and Blaine? I don't really mind the groping all that much, either."

* * *

Sunday, August 25th, 2024

Music. There was music coming from somewhere …

Blaine was stuck in the sheets, rolling over, trying to unearth himself from under all the covers, trying to find out what that music was …

He managed to wrench his arm out of the sheets, and knocked the phone to the floor.

"Fuck," he muttered, reaching his arm down, blindly feeling for it.

_Caviar and cigarettes_
_Well-versed in etiquette_
_Extraordinarily nice_
_She's a killer queen …_

"Oh my god change your ringtone," Kurt groaned, pulling the pillow over his head.

Blaine's fingers finally found the phone, and he grabbed it, slipping his thumb over the screen to answer.

"Hlllg." He turned crimson, cleared his throat. "Hello?"

"Blaine?"

"Hmm?" he asked, swiping his hand over his face, trying to regain consciousness. _Fuck_, they'd stayed up way too late. That last movie had maybe been a bad idea…

"Blaine, it's Sarah Grace. I woke you up, didn't I?"

A surge of panic set his heart galloping, brought words to his mouth. "Sarah Grace? No. No, I'm up, what's wrong?" He sat up in bed, leaned against their headboard.

Kurt's head emerged from the pillow. "What happened?" he hissed, and Blaine shushed him.
"I – god, I hate to even ask you guys this, I know you had your date last night –"

"Sarah Grace, what is it?" Blaine asked, a little more harshly than he meant to.

She paused for a long time. "Lily's scores went up last night," she said carefully.

"Went up? Like, how high?"

"Seventeen." He could hear the cringe in her voice. "And … I was being generous this morning."

Blaine felt like his stomach fell out of his body. "Seventeen?" he asked. "Is that even possible? I don't ever remember her being that high before –"

"I know. I know," Sarah Grace said. The tone of her voice worried him more than anything – he'd never heard her flustered before, never heard her upset, but at that moment it sounded like she was feeling Lily's pain herself. "I want – I would hold her all day. I really would," she told him. "I want to hold her all day. But – there's a baby we're expecting – we're the admit pod today – he's really sick, Blaine. Really sick. Like – we will need every nurse in the pod to admit him. And Lily –"

"We'll be there as fast as we can," Blaine told her. "Just – take care of her until we get there, and we'll take over."

Kurt had already tumbled out of bed and rushed to their dresser, pulling out underwear and t-shirts, throwing them on the bed.

"I'm so sorry –" Sarah Grace's voice rang back over the phone. "I know I'm ruining your date weekend –"

"Sarah Grace, she's our child. It doesn't matter."

Her voice was small, quiet when she answered. "I know."
"We'll be there in a little bit," he said, kicking off the blankets. Kurt was already tugging a pair of jeans on.

"Her score is seventeen?" Kurt asked when he hung up, his eyes wide with worry.

"That's what Sarah Grace said," Blaine said, his heart still pounding. "We're taking a cab today – we've got to get there quick. She said they're getting a sick baby, and she won't have time to hold Lily …"

Kurt threw a soft, blue t-shirt at Blaine. "Let's go, then."
Sunday, August 25th, 2024

They could hear Lily crying as they scrubbed their hands at the front of the unit, before they ever got to Pod 3. It was unlike anything they'd ever heard before, even worse than the day they met her.

"I'm so sorry." Sarah Grace met them at the entrance, Lily clutched in her arms, screaming. "We're giving you guys a room so she'll be less over-stimulated – you can go ahead and take her, but I'll have to show you a CPR video –"

"What happened?" Kurt asked, horror written all over his face, and Blaine knew in an instant that he might very well need to play hero to both of them for a day. He loved them both enough; he could do that, be strong for a day. And what a long day it might turn out to be…

"Let me see her," Blaine said, and Sarah Grace, apology in her eyes, handed her over. "Shhh, Lily, shhhhh, we're here," he cooed as she wailed, loud and desperate. "Shhhhh, baby girl …"

But there was no calming Lily.

Even after they'd gotten into a quiet room, she screamed as if she was being tortured, through the video, in their arms, in her crib. It didn't matter if Kurt held her or Blaine, if they were sitting or standing or rocking. She cried and didn't sleep, eyes wide and frantic. Her arms and legs trembled hard enough to shake the crib when she was in it, and she rooted desperately for her pacifier, but wouldn't suck when it was in her mouth. She was soaking wet, sweating through her onesie, the downy hair on her head sticking up in a frizzy mess.

After an hour that seemed more like a week, both Kurt and Blaine were ready to cry with her.

"Oh my god," Kurt said helplessly as he paced back and forth with her. "Blaine –"

"I know." Blaine had fallen into one of the gliders in the room, his head in his hands, curls threaded through his fingers. He'd never felt so helpless in his entire life.

"Blaine, she's shaking so hard she's scaring me –"
"I know. Kurt, I know –"

And blessedly, a knock came on the door.

"Has she stopped crying at all?" Sarah Grace asked, poking her head in. Half her bun was falling out, and she had patient labels stuck to the pocket of her scrubs.

"No," Blaine said, the pain evident in his voice. "What's wrong with her? What is this?"

"It's withdrawal. Just – worse than she's had before," Sarah Grace said over the noise of Lily's screaming. "You know, we did that big wean two days ago, and she's gained quite a bit of weight over the last several days, so it could be that she sort of weaned herself a second time –" She pulled a syringe out of her pocket. "We're increasing her dose. She obviously needs it, but – I'm so sorry, I don't even want to tell you this, but this is going to push her discharge date back. I can't tell you exactly how long."

Blaine saw the last of the light fall from Kurt's eyes as he nodded dumbly, clutching Lily to his chest as a flailing arm caught him, the corner of her fingernail scraping a red scratch across his neck.

"I'm sorry," Sarah Grace said. "I got the medicine for her as fast as I could, but that baby got here and things are not good and the doctors were all tied up –"

"Please, give it to her," Kurt said, and Blaine looked up – suddenly Lily wasn't the only one in the room he was worried about. Something in Kurt's voice was off.

Sarah Grace retrieved a pacifier from Lily's crib, popped it in her mouth, and slowly pushed the medicine into the pocket of her cheek.

"It might take a while for that to work," she said. "Hopefully she'll calm down some, and –"

"Thank you," Kurt said in a clipped voice, effectively dismissing her. "We know you're busy."
Sarah Grace gave him a helpless look, hurried out the door, clicking it shut behind her, and Blaine stood up.

It was the right instinct, because seconds later …

"Blaine – I need you to take her for a minute –"

Kurt's eyes were wide and panicked as a frightened doe's; his back was razor-straight. Blaine nodded and gently took Lily, cradling her to his chest, and watched as Kurt began to pace like a caged animal without her there to steady him.

"I – oh my god –" And that was when Kurt broke. He didn't break very often; it wasn't in his nature to crumble, but crumble he did, big, round teardrops falling from his eyes. "Blaine," he managed, his face a picture of pain, "our baby …"

"Kurt." He swallowed – he couldn't break too; that would leave a room full of tears and that just wouldn't do. "Kurt, baby, I know –" He hiked Lily up on his shoulder – it didn't matter how he held her, really, the tears weren't letting up – and held his free arm out to Kurt, who fell into it.

Try as he might, he couldn't hold it together as Lily wailed in his ear and Kurt shuddered against his chest, and his eyes burned with tears of frustration and anger and fear. They stood there, the three of them, a small family with the weight of the world on their shoulders.

But, a tiny, persistent voice in the back of his head kept telling him, even with the weight of the world on them, even as Lily wailed and shook, she was still theirs.

"Okay," he finally said, his voice shaky. "Okay – it's going to be okay."

"I – I just don't know what to do for her, Blaine –"

"I know. I know, baby – I don't either – maybe the medicine will kick in soon –"

Kurt let go then, turned around, his arms clutched around his stomach. "It makes me feel sick, watching her like this."
"Okay," Blaine said, trying to sound soothing but feeling rather sick himself, "why don't you get out of here for a second, go out to the waiting room. Call your dad. Let him know what's going on. Take a motrin or something – and bring me one too, actually."

"Are you sure?" Kurt's eyes were red and puffy as he looked up, his face splotchy.

"Positive. Splash some water on your face; go breathe for a minute. It's so loud in here – go somewhere you can clear your head. I'll take a break after a while."

Kurt hesitated. "I – I don't want to leave her –"

"I'll be right here," Blaine told him. "I won't let her go until you get back, I swear Kurt, you know I love her just as much as you do –"

"I know," Kurt said, nodding as his face turned again. "I'm sorry –"

A heave of his chest, and the door clicked shut behind them.

"Lily," he said over the sound of her cries, his voice thick, "I need you to listen to Daddy very carefully, okay? You're not in trouble, but this is our first official really important Daddy-daughter talk." Blaine cradled her in his arms, rocking her back and forth, back and forth.

"I know you don't feel good, but I want you to try and pay attention," he said. "Are you ready?"

Her arms shook.

"Your Daddy and your Papa both love you very, very much," he said. "We are never going to leave you. We're not giving you up, and we're not giving up on you – you are Daddy's most precious thing, and I will not let anything happen to you, I promise."

He bit his lip, tears burning his eyes. "It's just so hard, sweetheart," he said, his voice quavering. "It hurts our hearts to see you hurt, and Papa doesn't really know what to do right now – he doesn't like
not being able to help." He took a deep breath. "Papa had to take a break for a second, and Daddy's going to have to take a break after a little while, but –" his face twisted into a grimace, a sob rising in his throat, but he pushed it back down. "But it doesn't mean that we don't love you more than anything, okay? We're just sad. Papa's really sad, and Daddy's really sad, and I know you're really sad to feel as bad as you do. But we're gonna do everything we can to help you get better, okay? Daddy will come up and hold you all day, every day if that's what you need."

Lily blinked her eyes at him, and hiccupped, her face finally beginning to relax, and thank god her medicine was finally starting to take effect. He shifted her so that she was cradled against his chest again. "Nobody's giving up on you, baby. No way, no how –" Blaine sucked in a breath and held his baby close, listening to the quiet squeak of the glider with each rock, back and forth, back and forth.

"It's going to be okay," he whispered, trying desperately to make himself believe it. "Everything's gonna be just fine, Lil."

* * *

"Dad?"

Kurt hated calling his father like this – Burt was always so perceptive, he could tell when Kurt was upset with just a tiny shift in his voice. It had been a long time since he'd called in tears, and he didn't want his dad to worry …

"Kurt?"

But it was Kurt who was worried once he'd answered. His dad sounded exhausted; there was barely any life to his voice at all.

Kurt sniffled, a different kind of panic coursing through him than before. "What's wrong?"

Burt chuckled, but no happiness filled his laugh. "I could ask you the same question. You first."

"Lily's scores went way up last night, and they're going to have to keep her in the hospital longer than they thought. I … might not be dealing with it very well."
"Huh. Well, not a great day for our family when it comes to babies, then …"

"Dad?" Kurt asked, fear creeping into his belly. "What happened?"

"Emily's in the hospital too."

Kurt felt his insides twist. "She – what for?"

"Contractions and bleeding."

"Oh god." Suddenly Lily's screaming felt like a welcome option. Kurt wanted to run back to the room, hold her close, because at least she was screaming, at least she could scream – "The baby. Is he okay?"

"They managed to get the contractions stopped last night, and he has a strong heartbeat and he's very active on his ultrasound," Burt said. "But they've got her on this medication – mag, they kept calling it, whatever that is – that makes her feel like shit, and she can't get out of bed. Carole was up all night with Finn – he's worried himself sick. Literally. He just about threw up in my truck this morning."

"Oh, Finn –"

"I know," Burt sighed. "If it's not one thing, it's another around here …"

"So – what if Emily's contractions come back? What if the medicine stops working?"

"I don't know. The doctor said that the baby's right on the verge of being big enough to live. They said if he was born now, he'd weigh just over a pound and there were all sorts of risks …"

Kurt thought of the tiny babies around Lily, how fragile they looked, how often their machines beeped. How sometimes when they visited, a bed that had once been full was empty. And he thought of Finn, so excited to be having a son, so nervous about Emily's pregnancy before this – he
couldn't imagine Finn in the NICU, couldn't imagine his brother having to live through a worse hell than he and Blaine had the year before.

"Dad," he breathed, the tears that had never really left prickling the backs of his eyes again.

"I know, kiddo. You should call him later – I think Carole's finally gotten him to take a nap, but I doubt that'll last very long. He'd probably appreciate having somebody to commiserate with."

"I will," Kurt said, trying to sound more together than he actually was.

"So … to change from one happy subject to another, I guess … tell me what happened to Lily. I thought they said she was coming home soon …"

* * *

Blaine was still rocking, back and forth, back and forth. His left arm was beginning to fall asleep and his shoulder was resting on the glider at a funny angle, but he didn't dare stop, because Lily was finally, blessedly asleep.

He shifted in the glider, settled more comfortably against the vinyl cushion, and Lily sighed, but didn't wake. He let out his own sigh of relief, and then …

"Hi," Kurt said, announcing his presence with a choked voice as he came into the room. "Blaine, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to freak out that badly –"

"Shhh," Blaine whispered, putting his free pointer finger over his lips, but it was too late. Lily was stirring.

"Oh my god, Blaine, was she asleep?"

Lily let out a wail. Her little arms trembled against his chest and her mouth opened wide, desperately seeking out something to suckle. Blaine closed his eyes. "She was. Finally."
"Here, here, I'll take her, come here baby girl –" Kurt sniffled, darting over to the glider and lifting her from Blaine's arms. "You take a break, honey, you definitely deserve one …"

"I will in a second, but first tell me what your dad said. Did he make you feel any better?"

Kurt lay down on the bed with her, placing her prone on his abdomen, belly-to-belly, and patted her bottom. She rooted against his shirt, and he popped a pacifier in her mouth, held it for her. "Kind of, in a really terrible way. Emily's in the hospital," he said, wiping away a tear with his free hand.

"What?"

"She started bleeding and having contractions last night, and now she's on some kind of awful medication and bed rest," he said. "Finn's beside himself."

"Oh my god …" Blaine breathed. "But – it's too early."

"I know. Kind of put things into perspective – Dad said that if her contractions come back and she has the baby, there's a chance he might not live, he's so small. I guess – it kind of made me thankful that Lily's not so sick she can't even scream. She'll get over this … eventually."

Blaine sighed and joined Kurt on the bed where Lily was finally starting to calm down again. "I think she likes that. We'll have to remember that when we get home."

"When we get home," Kurt repeated. "We'll get there, won't we?"

"We will." Blaine tried to sound confident but the words felt strange on his tongue, like he didn't quite believe them himself.

"I really am sorry I lost it like that, Blaine – I just got so overwhelmed, seeing her like this, and neither one of us got enough sleep last night …"

"I know," Blaine said. "And it's hard to think about anything clearly with her crying so loud."
Kurt patted her bottom again. "We might have to soundproof your nursery, Lily. You'll keep the whole complex awake."

She let out a little grunt, and Kurt and Blaine both laughed.

"Seriously, Blaine – go take a break," Kurt said after a few minutes. "Go grab some coffee, find a quiet spot – it helps. Really."

"The long haul will be worth it, you know," Blaine said as he got up from beside them, squeezing Kurt's hand. "It's hell now – the crying really is hell, god, I had no idea – but the long haul? When she's three and bouncy and having tea parties with your dad? This will all just be a blip on the screen with all the wonderful. Right?"

"Right," Kurt said, smiling through his tear-splotched face. "Hey, if you come across any coffee? Bring me back a cup too, please."

* * *

One feeding and three hours later, Lily was asleep in Blaine's arms.

Blaine was practically asleep in Kurt's arms as well – he was sitting on the bed in between Kurt's legs, leaning up against Kurt's chest, an Indiana Jones movie playing softly in the background.

Kurt was murmuring in his ear, whispering his hopes and dreams for their future as a family when Sarah Grace poked her head in the room.

"Just checking on you guys," she whispered, clearly trying not to wake Lily.

"We're fine," Blaine whispered back. "How are you? Is that baby okay?"

She closed her eyes, took a deep breath. "You know I can't tell you any information about other patients –" Her hand came up, gripping the doorframe like a vise.
"Sarah Grace?"

She didn't say anything else, but crumbled instead, her face twisting, tears rolling down her cheeks, and Blaine's heart dropped into his stomach, because he knew – clearly the baby hadn't made it, and man, was it ever a day for tears. Kurt slipped out from behind Blaine and tugged Sarah Grace inside the door.

"Sarah Grace sweetie – can I give you a hug?" Kurt asked, and Blaine watched as she gave a shaky nod, and Kurt pulled her into his arms. "Shhh," he murmured. "Shhh, you're okay."

With his arms secured tightly around her, she crumbled further, gasping into his shoulder, clasping her hands together behind his back so hard that they turned white.

"Okay," he repeated, rubbing her back, "okay …"

Finally she stilled, quieted, pulled back.

"I'm sorry," she said, sniffling and wiping her eyes, streaking mascara across her cheekbones. "That was so unprofessional of me, god …" Her fingers drifted to her temples, pressing in. "I think I just broke about six ethical standards."

"What are we gonna do, tell somebody you were sad because it was a bad day?" Kurt asked, fetching a clean washcloth off Lily's crib and running it under the cold water in the bathroom. He pressed it into her hand. "I cannot imagine doing what you do. I cannot imagine seeing that and not needing a hug."

"Sometimes it just gets to you, you know?" she said, hanging her head as she carefully wiped the washcloth across her cheeks. The washcloth came up streaked with black, like she'd just washed ashes off her face. "Some situations are just … it was just bad. It all just feels so … futile, I guess. They kicked me out when I started crying. Told me to come back here, take a break for awhile."

"So take a break," Blaine said. "What can we do for you?"

Sarah Grace smiled wanly. "That's supposed to be my line."
"Seriously," Blaine said, "What can we do? After everything you've done for us the last month – please let us do something. What would help you right now?"

Sarah Grace opened her mouth to say something, close it, then opened it again. "Do you – god, this is such a stupid thing to ask – do you mind if I hold her for a second? I just – I need a warm, squirmly, breathing pink thing in my arms, just for a minute …"

"Oh, Sarah Grace, of course you can," Blaine said, scooting over to the side of the bed and gingerly standing up. He carefully placed Lily in Sarah Grace's arms, then felt Kurt's arm slip around his waist as Sarah Grace rocked her back and forth with tears in her eyes.

"I know it's hard, having days like this," she said, her voice thick. "I hate it for her too, having to increase her meds, having her stay longer than you expected – but you guys are so lucky." She looked up. "You know that, right? She's so beautiful, and I know you don't feel like it right now, but you are going to bring her home, and she's going to be just fine. She's healthy; she's always been healthy. This is just a little bump in the road."

Blaine's heart sank – he felt guilty for ever worrying, ever complaining about a lengthened NICU stay when a pair of parents would be walking home childless that evening.

He gestured to the glider in the room. "Feel free to rock her for a while. Get your Lily cuddle on."

She smiled wanly. If you're sure you don't mind …"

"Not at all," Kurt told her. "Hide out back here for as long as you want to."

* * *

The train ride home was quiet that night. Exhaustion settled upon Kurt and Blaine like a heavy woolen blanket, leaving them with energy enough only to clutch each other's hands between them on the sticky subway seats.

At the first stop they came to, Kurt let the weight of his head drop to Blaine's shoulder and sighed heavily as Blaine tugged him closer, pressing a kiss to the top of his head. He let his eyes slip shut.
"I should call Finn when we get home," he said.

"Should?" Blaine whispered into his hair.

Kurt opened his eyes, rolled them up at Blaine a little. "Okay, I want to call Finn when we get home," he said, managing a smile. "Thanks, Dr. B."

"Okay, as long as that's what you actually want to do," Blaine said. "It's just been a really long, really tiring, really stressful day. I don't want you to think it isn't something you can't do tomorrow."

Kurt's smile turned genuine. "I know, honey," he said, letting himself enjoy being fussed over a little. "But I think I'll be able to sleep better once I talk to him and make sure that Emily's okay."

Blaine kissed the top of his head, then let out a long sigh. "What a day."

"No shit." Kurt squeezed Blaine's hand on the seat between them. "I don't think I ever realized what a big deal it is to have a healthy baby."

"Seriously. I just – I feel like such a pawn today," Blaine said. "Like life's this huge game of chance, and we don't get any say in how we move or where we land."

"I think fate's got it in for us."

Blaine squeezed his hand back. "Maybe … but we've still got a baby who's alive enough to scream for five hours solid."

Kurt chuckled. "Nothing wrong with her lungs."

"Silver linings," Blaine said, and rested his own head on top of Kurt's. "I guess we should just take all the good we can get, huh?"
"Drinking coffee at nine o'clock at night when you've got to be up for school tomorrow seems like maybe a less-than-stellar plan, Finn," Kurt said drily, leaning his chin on his hand, his elbow resting on the kitchen table in the dimly lit room. Even through the fuzzy computer screen, he could see the exhaustion on his step-brother's face.

"Not like I'm gonna get any sleep anyway, man," Finn said.

Kurt shook his head. "I have a better idea. Pour that coffee out and heat up some milk. It'll at least help you get some rest," he said. "It's your first day back tomorrow, right?"

The look Finn gave him was so weary, so aged that Kurt felt a pang of guilt for not being in Ohio with him. "No offense, but you think I'm gonna rest, Kurt?"

"Okay. We won't rest. But let's have warm milk, and we'll talk. Okay?"

Finn took a breath, wiped a hand through his hair. "Fine." Predictably, Kurt watched him pour some milk from the fridge and pop it in the microwave. Smiling, Kurt moved his laptop into the kitchen, pulled a saucepan from one of their cabinets.

"How was your day?" Kurt asked, stirring the milk, feeling a pang as he realized his mother used to do the same thing with him at night, used the same script.

"Okay, I guess," Finn said. "I was supposed to be looking over my lesson plans, but between all the nurses in and out and Emily being sick a couple times, I was distracted all day."

Kurt tried to look at him sympathetically through the computer screen. "I'm sorry."

"Yeah, well …"

"How is she, really? I just got some secondhand info from Dad earlier."
"Pretty miserable," Finn said, hopping up to retrieve his mug from the microwave. "They've got her on this medicine that she says makes her feel like she's burning from the inside out. She told me earlier that she felt like bugs were crawling in her skin. I'm really glad Carole's staying with her tonight." He paused. "Hey, what do you put in this to make it taste good, again?"

"Vanilla and nutmeg," Kurt said offhandedly, pouring the same things into his own milk, still heating on the stove.

"Cool." Finn disappeared from view for a few moments, and made a face when he came back. "I don't do that as well as you do, man."

Kurt grinned. "Well, we can't all be perfect …"

They fell silent, sipping their milk.

"So how are you?" Kurt asked eventually. "You handling things okay?"

"Not really. I don't think I've ever been so scared or felt so helpless in my life."

"Not even when Quinn was pregnant and you thought Beth was yours?" Kurt asked.

"That was – that was panic. This is, like, I can feel it in my bones. Which makes me sound ninety, but – Kurt, she's my life. I don't even know how it happened, how this happened, but I can't – the thought of losing her, of losing him –"

He broke off, looked into his mug of milk.

"I never thought I'd want a kid. And now the only thing I want is for him to get here safe. For Emily to come home safe."

Kurt sighed, propped his chin up again. "I think loving someone is maybe the scariest thing we ever do," he said softly.
"Yeah, man." Finn paused, then chuckled, taking a sip of his milk. "You know, if you told me fifteen years ago that you and I would be Skyping, drinking warm milk, talking about our fears, both of us having kids? I might've actually punched you in the face."

"Oh, you were never that low," Kurt said. "You would've just tossed my Marc Jacobs bag in the dumpster after me."

"Maybe." Finn let out a long sigh, leaning back. "Seriously though – some days I wake up, and I feel like I'm in the twilight zone. I'm in this awesome house, with this amazing girl – woman – who's pregnant with my child and it's what I want, you know? And now that all of it could be taken away from me? I don't even know, man – how do you deal with that shit?"

"One day at a time." Kurt brought his mug to his lips. "Sometimes one minute at a time. Sometimes you literally have to go from one breath to the next."

"I don't know how you and Blaine held it together last year," Finn said. "And now with Lily like she is ... you guys are a long stronger than I am."

Kurt smiled sadly – it was trial by fire that made he and Blaine strong, years of it, which Finn hadn't really ever had. And it wasn't like they were so strong the year before, anyway. "Well, we didn't really hold it together much at all last year," he said. "Lily's going to be fine, and even so, I nearly had a meltdown today because she was crying. We're not the men of steel you apparently think we are ..."

"I don't know. I just kind of feel like I'm going crazy."

"Do you not remember the gigantic wrecks we were when we lost Violet?" Kurt asked. "I think your memory's worse than I ever realized. We actually went crazy, both of us. You just weren't there to see a lot of it in person."

Finn sat, silent, for a long time, a still, grainy picture on the computer screen. "Kurt? Do you think Emily's gonna be okay?"

"I don't know Finn – but from what I know of her, she's gonna fight as hard as she can to be. She seems like a pretty tough cookie."
"She is," Finn said. "I'm really bad about treating her like this delicate flower, but I think she's tougher than I am, in some ways."

"I like her. A lot," Kurt said. "You did well, Finn. I'm glad I'm going to get her as a sister-in-law someday – I think we'll be good friends."

"I think you will, too. It's hard not to be good friends with her. She's just – infectious, you know? She sort of just seeps into you and you're in deeper than you ever thought you could be before you know it –"

Kurt laughed. "I don't think I'll be that close to her," he said. "But she seems like a genuinely good person."

Finn smiled a real smile for the first time since they started talking. "She is. That's the best way to describe her – I know it's so simple, but she is. She's just good. Everything about her. Her heart, god …"

"I'm glad she makes you so happy," Kurt said sincerely.

"It'd make me happier if they'd let her come home," Finn grumbled, and oh, those words sounded familiar.

"Believe me, Finn, I know what you mean."

* * *

Kurt let out a huge yawn as he slipped between the sheets of his bed, accidentally waking Blaine.

"Mmmm, was just dreaming about you," Blaine murmured sleepily, sidling up to Kurt's body. He was a furnace of a man under the blankets, but in spite of the summer heat, Kurt wrapped his arms around him and snuggled close.

"Nice dreams?"
Blaine blinked bleary eyes, smiled an adorable smile. "Best dreams."

"Good," Kurt said, kissing Blaine's cheek.

"Sing to me?"

"Always," Kurt promised. "What do you want me to sing?"

"Something sweet."

Kurt smiled, rolling Blaine over to an easier position for spooning, and began to sing softly. "*Come with me, and you'll be in a world of pure imagination ...*

** * * *

**Monday, August 26th, 2024**

"Good morning, Lil," Blaine greeted the baby with a kiss, his heart still pounding.

Just minutes before, he and Kurt had walked into Pod 3 and found another baby in the space where Lily's crib used to be. One look at their panic-stricken faces and a nurse pointed them in the right direction, two pods down. After they'd left the night before, the nurses had moved her into a different pod with more feeding, growing babies, and less tiny ones in incubators. Apparently she'd out-cried her welcome.

"How you like the new digs?" It was a nurse named Cory who had Lily that day, and Blaine had only met her a few times.

"I haven't really had time to notice them, honestly. I think I'm still getting over the shock of thinking she disappeared," Kurt said with a grin. "They should have some sort of sign on the door."

Cory winced. "Sorry about that – I thought they told you at the desk."
Blaine shrugged. "No big deal – all we care about is that she hasn't disappeared. I hope you don't mind too much, but we were kind of planning on staying all day today," he told the nurse. "If that's okay. Kurt took off work today because yesterday was so bad …"

"She's your baby, isn't she?" Cory said with a grin. "Doesn't matter to me – one less feeding I gotta juggle."

"How was her night last night?" Kurt asked.

"Not bad. Her scores were down some, nine to twelve. I think she's starting to get used to that new dose, but she's still fussy sometimes and she didn't sleep very well."

"And when was her last feeding?" Blaine wanted to know.

"Around six, and she ate four ounces, so she shouldn't start getting hungry till around ten. You guys just do your thing, and yell if you need me. Cool?"

"Cool," Blaine agreed, and sat down next to Lily's crib as Kurt picked her up.

"Whatcha think, Lily-pad?" Kurt asked, kissing her forehead as her eyebrows rose in recognition. "You like your new home-away-from-home?"

* * *

"Shhhhh, Lily, shhhhh," Blaine cooed, holding her up to his shoulder, gently bouncing up and down. "You're okay baby girl, you're okay, shhhhh."

She hadn't been asleep since they got to the hospital, had been fussy since she'd had her bottle, and Blaine had sent Kurt to the cafeteria for a break. They'd decided to take lunch in shifts, not wanting to leave Lily to cry by herself with an obviously busy Cory. They figured she'd gotten a stomachache after her bottle, and he and Kurt had done their best to get her calmed down but their efforts were fruitless – they'd tried singing, rocking, holding, swaddling, reading, you name it, they'd tried it, but still Lily cried and trembled.
"I think you guys get the patience award today," Cory said, walking in the pod with a smile on her face. "Where'd her other dad go?"

"To lunch, but I'll be more than happy to accept on behalf of both of us. What do we win?"

"A dose of methadone," she grinned, holding up a tiny orange syringe.

"Oh, thank god," Blaine sighed. "Everybody's been waiting for that, haven't we Lil?" He handed her over to the nurse, who quickly fed her the medicine, and Blaine could hear her lips smacking as she took it. "I don't know what we're going to do when she's off that stuff completely …"

Cory grinned at him. "You're gonna bust up outta this place and take this baby home, that's what you're gonna do."

"But what if she's like this when we get her there?"

"Honey, she's not gonna be like this. She'll be fussy sometimes, yeah, but I promise we'll make sure she's all better and not gonna rebound before we discharge her. Okay?"

He nodded. "Okay. Can I have her back?"

"Sure," Cory said, handing her over. "You be good for your daddy, Miss Lily. You let that medicine work and take a nap for him – he's been listening to you scream for a long time now. Be nice."

"She's always nice," he said automatically.

"Oh, you're in trouble," Cory smirked. "She's already got you wrapped around that little finger of hers."

Blaine smiled down at Lily's pouting face. "I wouldn't have it any other way."
"Wouldn't have what any other way?"

Blaine looked up to see Kurt walking back in, a wide smile on his face, looking refreshed after getting some food.

"The fact that I'm totally wrapped around her finger already," Blaine admitted.

"Well I could've told you that a month ago," Kurt grinned. "Here, swap with me, go grab some lunch. We'll hold down the fort till you get back."

* * *

Blaine checked his phone after he'd brought his tray to an empty table, and found a few texts from Burt and a missed call from Rachel. Burt was updating them – Emily's magnesium had been turned off, and so far she'd been doing well. As long as she wasn't contracting and didn't start bleeding again, she could be released in the next day or two. Blaine tapped a quick text back to his father-in-law before calling Rachel.

"Blaine, what's going on with you guys?" she asked after answering. "You haven't answered my texts, Kurt's not answering his phone – are you mad at me or something?"

"Rach –"

"All I wanted was to tell you how amazing the wedding was, and thank Kurt for the dress, wherever he is, but nobody wants to talk to me apparently –"

"Rachel."

She paused. "Yes?"

"We were at the hospital literally all day yesterday. Lily's worse. Finn's fiancé – or girlfriend, or whatever – she's in the hospital on bedrest in Ohio. We've been a little busy. I'm glad that the wedding went well, and I'm sure one of us will open a giant can of 'I told you so' if we ever get a chance to stop worrying, but right now is not the time."
She let out a little squeak. "Oh."

"Look, I know we've been neglecting our friendships lately, and I'm really sorry for that – I really am, Rach. But we're really stretched just doing what we're doing. I swear it'll be better when Lily's not hanging out up here in the Bronx, but until then …"

"No, I understand. I'm sorry – I should've thought –" She paused again. "You said she's worse. Is she alright?"

Blaine raked a hand through his hair before stabbing at his salad with his fork. "She's in really bad withdrawal right now. Her scores shot up yesterday, and – honestly, Rach, it was awful. I don't think I can explain what it's like to watch something like that …"

"I'm so sorry, Blaine. Is she – do they think she'll get better?"

"They say she'll be fine, but they had to go up on her meds. I think it's just going to take a while."

"Well, if you guys need anything, let me know." She paused. "How's Finn?"

"Finn's pretty scared, I think. Understandably so. Kurt Skyped with him last night."

"Well, if you talk to him – send him my love. Tell him I hope everything turns out okay. I – as bad as things were between us, I'm really glad he's happy." She sighed. "I think there's always going to be this place in my heart that loves him, in a way."

"Rach, he was your first love, right?"

"Well, yes, but –"

"They say you never forget that. I never did get over mine," Blaine smiled.
"I guess," Rachel said. "It's still so weird he's having a baby though … I just can't see Finn as a father."

"Oh, you'd be able to if you saw him now," Blaine told her. "He's gonna be a great dad."

"Good," Rachel said. "And speaking of – don't you have a little one you need to get back to? I'm sorry I interrupted your time with Lily."

"It's okay. I'm actually eating lunch right now – Kurt and I took shifts today." He realized then that he hadn't actually eaten any lunch at all, and took a bite of his salad. "I'm glad the wedding went well."

Rachel let out a tiny squeal. "It did. Blaine, Liam was so amazing … You've got to let me know when things calm down a little bit so we can have brunch and catch up, okay? Tell Kurt thanks for me again – my dress was incredible."

Blaine smiled. "I'm sure you looked gorgeous, as always. Did you guys take pictures? We'd love to see."

"Oooh, I'll text you one!" she exclaimed. "I don't want to gloat, but I looked way better than Liam's ex."

"Well, that was the point, wasn't it?" Blaine asked.

"I think – Blaine, he might be it for me. Like, end-all, be-all, I might have bought a bridal magazine the other day, it."

Blaine laughed. "I hope he is. We can't wait to hear about it, Rach, but I should probably finish my lunch and head back."

"Of course, I don't want to keep you from your baby. Just let me know when you guys get a free day!"

"Yeah, that's not happening anytime soon, but I promise we'll work you in. Have a good afternoon,
Kurt put his finger over his mouth, a silent command to *shhhh*, as Blaine walked back into the pod. Blaine's face lit up when he saw Lily's sleeping form draped over Kurt's chest, her head laid heavy on his shoulder.

"How long's she been out?" he whispered.

"I got her down about ten minutes after you left," Kurt answered softly. "We've been cuddling ever since."

Blaine bent and gently kissed the top of her head. "Good. She needs the sleep."

Kurt smiled as Blaine squeezed his shoulder, *I'm proud of you and I love you and thank god she's not crying* all palpable in his touch.

"I talked to Rach," Blaine told him as he sat down in the rolling chair next to Kurt's glider. "She says thanks for the dress, and that the wedding was awesome."

"Oh my god, the wedding – I almost forgot!" Kurt exclaimed, then immediately lowered his voice again. "I can't wait to hear everything – maybe we can go to breakfast with her and then bring her up here to see Lily again soon."

"We should definitely do that. I feel bad, like we've been neglecting all our friendships lately," Blaine said. "We need more hours in the day."

"I think 36 would do just about right," Kurt mused. Lily stirred in his arms, and he shifted, shushing her back calm, patting her diapered bottom.

Blaine looked on, smiling contentedly at the two of them, and Kurt reminded himself that they could be happy here for as long as it took, that joy was a choice, not something that happened or didn't.
It didn't matter where they were, in an ICU or at home or with Burt and Carole or even on the moon – as long as they were together, the three of them, he would choose joy. Wasting time waiting for the next step in their journey wasn't an option – he wanted to live in the present, to relish every moment with his still-tiny baby.

And *oh*, he thought as he shifted Lily in his arms, watched the light on Blaine's face across from him, what a beautiful present they had.
Chapter 15

Wednesday, August 28th, 2024

"Perfect." Blaine blinked, flipping through the pages in his hands again. "Nick, this is perfect, oh my god you are magic –"

"So this is what you were looking for?"

"This is – Nick. It's me and Kurt. And – I don't know how you did it, but that even looks like Lily. I just – it's incredible." Blaine took a sip of water to have something to do other than cry on his meatball sub.

"Oh, good. I haven't been this nervous about a project in a long time," Nick laughed, rubbing the back of his neck with his open palm. "You think Kurt will like it?"

Blaine flipped through the pages again, gazing at his illustrated words, amazed at how much more the story came to life.

"I think Kurt's gonna die," Blaine grinned. "I can't wait to get it bound and printed. Thank you so much, Nick, you have no idea –"

"I've told you a thousand times, it was seriously not a big deal, Blaine; I liked doing it."

"Well, good. I –" He broke off and looked down, ran his fingers over the first page again, caressing paper-Kurt's cheek. Even paper-Kurt was gorgeous, drawn by Nick's steady and careful hand. "I just –"

"You okay?" Nick asked as Blaine hung his head in embarrassment; oh my god he was not crying in a sub shop …

"It's just that – that's my family." Blaine looked up, blinked his eyes fast as a bird's quivery heart. "Seeing it on paper, in pictures, in this story – I don't know, it makes it feel real."
"It is real, Blaine."

"Yeah." He heaved a heavy sigh. "Which means we still have to paint the nursery soon, because she actually is coming home eventually."

"Hey, if Jeff and I can help … we've got four working hands, you know."

Blaine smiled. "I appreciate that. We might take you up on it – we don't have the crib back together, either. And speaking of – how are you and Jeff?"

Nick squirmed in his seat a little, not meeting Blaine's eyes. "Well …" he said, and Blaine's heart fell to his stomach.

"No! Nick, what happened?"

"No, no, nothing happened!" Nick quickly amended. "Nothing – it's just –" He looked up, his cheeks flushing into round red apples. "I've been thinking. About us. And how – Blaine, I can barely stand a day without him, let alone –"

Blaine waited patiently, and Nick breathed. "Um. So I kind of looked at rings."

"As in wedding rings?" Blaine asked, his eyes widening.

"Well, wedding, engagement, whatever you want to call them – but yeah. I just – do you think it's too soon? Do you think he'll feel rushed if I asked? Do you think he wants to ask? Oh, god, do you think he even wants to ask?"

"I think," Blaine told his friend, unable to stop the smile spreading like wildfire across his face, "that Jeff has loved you for as long as he's known you. And I think it will break him in the best way possible if you asked him to marry you."

"Right now, though? I mean, it's not even been a year. Our anniversary is in a couple weeks, but … is that too soon?"
"Do you love him?"

Nick's face softened. "More than anything in the entire world. I didn't know what love was before I loved him, not really."

"Can you picture your life without him in it?"

"I – I wouldn't want to."

"Then what's to wait for?" Blaine asked gently, his knees doing a happy dance under the table. "We only get one life, Nick. And – speaking from personal experience here – there's nothing better than spending it married to your best friend. And there's nothing worse than spending it apart from them."

"Okay," Nick said, taking a deep breath, and Blaine watched as his eyelashes dampened. "That was well-said. I just –"

"Do you really think he'd say anything but yes?"

Nick laughed. "No."

"Then I think you've got your answer. Although, I might be a little biased – you know how much I love being married. Plus," Blaine said, dropping his voice and leaning forward over the table. "Married sex? Is awesome."

* * *

"How was work?" Blaine asked that night, the door opening for Kurt the second he pulled out his keys. Blaine must've heard them jangling toward the lock, must've been waiting for him…

"Exhausting and stupid. I don't know how I can love my job so much when it exhausts me like this, Blaine …" Kurt sighed, letting himself be folded into a warm hug, and oh, how nice to be waited
for. "How's Lily?"

"Lily," Blaine said, voice so close to his ear, "really quite likes this new dose of medicine. She's good. She said she missed you today."

"Did she?"

"She did." A kiss, so familiar and sweet that even his fingernails sparked, better than any energy drink could ever hope to promise. "And so did I."

"Well, somebody's in a good mood this evening," Kurt said, flushing as he finally pulled back after getting just a little bit lost in Blaine's lips.

"Somebody's husband just came home," Blaine said, aiming a soft, lovestruck smile directly at Kurt. "Somebody has good reason to be."

"Mmm, aren't you sweet," Kurt said, then narrowed his eyes. "Do you want something? Is this you angling?"

"The only thing I want is you, for the rest of forever."

"Damn, what's gotten into you?" Kurt asked, grinning.

"I talked to Nick today – he's going to ask Jeff to marry him soon," Blaine said happily, pulling him into another hug.

"Oh." The realization dawned. "These are just secondhand romantical feelings brought on by our friends' happiness – I see how it is," he teased.

"No secondhand feelings about you," Blaine breathed, nuzzling his nose into Kurt's neck. Kurt sighed, more content than he'd been all day, and ran his fingers through the short, soft hair at the nape of Blaine's neck. Proposals always did make Blaine extra cuddly and touchy…
"I'm so glad we found each other when we did," Blaine murmured to him, head following his hand like a cat's. "I'm so glad I didn't have to waste time with the wrong people before I found the right one."

"Oh, honey, so am I." Another kiss, and Kurt was melting. Almost eight years of marriage, fourteen of knowing and being together – how was Kurt still melting?

"So, I have a weird request," Blaine mumbled against his lips.

"You have lots of weird requests," Kurt said, leaning his forehead against Blaine's, smiling a little. "What's this one?"

"I want – god this sounds weird – I want to make out for like fifteen minutes before we go to the hospital."

Kurt's eyebrow cocked up. "Make out?"

"Yeah, like – I just want to kiss you. Do you remember when we used to just kiss back when we were teenagers?"

"And you think after fifteen minutes we're not going to need to … take care of some things?"

"Well, we might," Blaine conceded. "But – I kind of don't want to. I just want to kiss you for fifteen minutes. Is that okay?"

"…Sure," Kurt said, a little hesitant. Blaine took his hand and led him to the couch, laid down there, and opened his arms for Kurt to crawl into.

And, as it turned out, Blaine was a genius.

Because kissing – just kissing, no hands south of the equator, Blaine gently reminded him every time his fingers drifted to Blaine's belt buckle – was about the most relaxing thing Kurt had done in a very long time.
"Love you," he whispered as Blaine licked over his throat. "Blaine –"

Their lips met again in a silent love song, and amazingly enough, his cock was not a problem, barely half-hard in the painted-on green pants he’d tugged on that morning. Apparently there were advantages to being over 30; the *no hands south of the equator* thing actually worked, unlike in high school when the ghost of Blaine's breath on Kurt's neck would leave his cock hard and leaking in his pants.

"Do you know how much I love being married, Kurt?" Blaine asked. "I love it so much. There's just something about knowing that you'll always come home at night."

"It's pretty nice having somebody to come home to," Kurt murmured, decidedly not thinking about the summer before, when all he came home to was an anxious dog and an empty condo. "I hate coming home to silence."

"Pretty soon we'll be thankful for all the silence we can get," Blaine said, smiling so hard Kurt worried his face might actually break.

"You know what? Bring on the noise." A laughing child and a singing Blaine, dance parties in the living room, fake British accents at tea parties, the whir of the mixer as they baked their first cake together, shrieks as they chased each other through the condo, these were the noises Kurt was looking forward to upon Lily's arrival to their home. He knew Blaine was referring to the inevitable crying, but *this too shall pass*, right?

"God, I love you." One more open-mouthed kiss – Blaine's tongue never could seem to get enough of the inside of Kurt's body – and Blaine's alarm was chiming, signaling the end of the fifteen minutes. Kurt kind of didn't ever want to stop.

"Soooo," Blaine drawled, "any problems that need to be taken care of?" His hand swiped over Kurt's crotch for the first time all evening, and Kurt swatted it away.

"There will be if you keep doing that," he said, chuckling. "But no, I think I'm okay."

"Good. How do you feel?"
"Amazingly refreshed, and more in love with you than ever."

"Excellent," Blaine said, his voice deepening into his 'villan-voice.' "My evil plan has succeeded."

"Evil plan?"

"To seduce you for the rest of our lives. To seduce you until you can't see straight."

Kurt pulled a grin. "Keep talking like that, Blaine Warbler, and I'm not sure if we'll make it to see our daughter at all tonight." God, that word. Daughter. Would it ever stop making butterflies in Kurt's stomach?

Blaine ducked his head, a smile spread on his face. "We really should go. I set a timer so we wouldn't get so carried away …"

"Blaine." Kurt cupped his cheek, lifted his face.

"Hmm?"

"Nothing, honey. I just like saying your name."

Blaine visibly melted at that. One last kiss, just for good measure, and oh, said Kurt's heart. Oh, oh, oh.

* * *

**Thursday, August 29th, 2024**

"You're sure it's okay for you to go into work so late today?" Rachel asked, wringing her hands guiltily as they sat at the counter, waiting for their pancakes. "Fashion Week starts in two weeks —"

"Which I am not a part of this year," Kurt grinned, patting her hand. "You know kids' clothes aren't featured there, and Marc decided back in the spring that we weren't doing the Kids' Fashion Week
This year. I don't even know if I'll attend this year – it depends on what's going on with Lily.

Rachel's eyes widened. "Wow – you seem so calm about it. Last year –"

"Last year I was depressed and drowning. Blaine wasn't home, you were basically keeping me alive and fed and groomed. This year – well, I have something pretty big to look forward to."

"You. You guys," she said, tears springing to her wide brown eyes. "You're going to be such good dads to her!"

"Hey, hey, no crying on the pancakes when they come," Blaine said, squeezing around her waist. "We're here to talk about you, remember?"

Rachel perked up a bit. "Yes, well…"

"So tell us already – I've been dying to hear. How'd the wedding go?"

"Kurt, it was so fun. It was a sweet wedding, I found sort of an acquaintance to sit with during the ceremony – a friend of Liam's – and I just watched him the whole time. I hate to say that I barely even remember what the bride's dress looked like –" Kurt's face fell a little at that. "– but his face. The groom is one of his closest friends, and he was so emotional. I saw tears at one point."

"Awww," Blaine said, bumping her shoulder with his. "I told you not all British people are frigid…"

"What else, what else?" Kurt prodded as the waitress brought their pancakes.

Rachel dug in as she continued, talking around a mouthful of pancake and syrup. "And then the reception – my dress was so wonderful, Kurt; it couldn't have been more perfect. We danced and danced, the food was amazing, there was an open bar and everything was so beautiful. He introduced me to everyone, like he was so proud of me, even to the ex-girlfriend. Who – I must admit, is not as terrible a person as I'd like her to be. She had a date too. It was a lot less awkward than I expected, and Liam's eyes lit up when he told them that I was a Broadway star – he used those words, I love him – and my dress looked better than hers even though she looked fairly pretty, and –"
"Okay, Rach, take a breath," Blaine laughed. "Don't choke on your pancakes."

She gave him a close-mouthed smile, took a sip of her orange juice. "Sorry," she said, "I'm just really excited. Everything is just easy with him, like it's never been with anyone else."

Kurt smiled, so happy for his friend. "I'm glad the dress worked."

"It was wonderful. I owe you big …"

"We'll take you up on a night of babysitting sometime and call it even," Kurt said.

"Wait, wait," Blaine interrupted. "We aren't through with this – you haven't gotten to what happened after the reception," he said, waggling his eyebrows up and down.

She blushed. "Well – we got a hotel room."

Kurt nodded solemnly. "There's just something about hotel sex …"

"Kurt!"

"He's not wrong," Blaine said.

"Well … no, I guess he isn't," Rachel admitted. "Liam – well, you guys have seen him, it's kind of like waking up and wondering if you haven't been transplanted onto a movie set. He is – insanely attractive."

"And the sex?" Blaine prodded.

"Was good," Rachel said, turning redder. "I – he made love to me. For hours. This wasn't your average 'oh, we've been to a wedding and now we should get it on because that's what you do after weddings' thing. This was –"
"Tell us, tell us!" Kurt exclaimed.

"It was just – intimate, I guess. It was – I can't even describe it, exactly. He laid his head on my chest and told me in that insanely hot accent that he just loved me so much, that I'm so special to him." She tucked her head down. "And then – well, hell, you can have a little detail – I had three more orgasms after that."

"Whoa," Blaine said, high fiving her over the table. "Nice."

"It was quite nice, actually," she said primly. "Now, can we move onto something more breakfast-appropriate? How's Lily doing?"

* * *

"She's home."

"What?" Blaine asked, looking up from the stack of bills he was working on at Kurt's desk. They'd gotten their first set of doctor and hospital bills from Lily's stay, and – well, he was glad to have something to focus on other than how they were going to pay for them and still have retirement money to live on when they were old and gray.

"Emily," Kurt said, hanging his bag on the hook beside their door, toeing off his shoes. "They finally sent her home. I talked to Finn today while I was at work."

"Oh, I'm so glad. I guess she's doing alright, then?"

"Well, they kept her a little longer than they expected to, something about blood? Maybe they gave her blood before she went home. And she's supposed to be on bedrest at least until her next doctor's appointment in two weeks, so she's stuck in the bed, bored."

"That's better than being stuck in the hospital, at least," Blaine said, getting up from the desk. "Definitely better than racking up bills. Look." He held up the three envelopes for Kurt, and Kurt took them.
"Holy shit."

"...Yeah. I've got to call the financial office at the hospital and see if we can't work out a payment plan with them or something. I know we can afford it, but --" Blaine made a face. "I don't even like *looking* at numbers that big."

"Bye, bye, book royalties …" Kurt sighed. "Thank you so much for handling this, honey. I know it's a pain in the ass."

"It'd be a bigger pain in the ass for you to have to do it and go to work at the same time," Blaine said, pulling him into a hug. "I just -- god, I had to put it down for a while this afternoon. It was making me sick to my stomach."

"Can you imagine how much some of these hospital stays cost if ours is this much?" Kurt said, shaking his head. "Like little Maggie, when Lily was in Pod 3?"

"And the babies that have to have surgery? I bet that adds up fast…"

"At least we won't have to deal with stuff at home -- did you see the baby last weekend that went home in our pod? I think the parents were carrying an oxygen tank with them. I bet that's expensive, too."

Blaine sighed. "I had no idea all the things that could go wrong with a baby before Lily was born. And she doesn't even *have* any of those things …"

"We're so lucky, Blaine," Kurt said. "I know it doesn't feel like we are sometimes, but at least she's not sick." He was quiet for a moment. "I hope Emily can make it through her whole pregnancy."

"Oh, Kurt, so do I," Blaine said, planting a dry kiss to his temple. "But she's doing better, right? They wouldn't have sent her home if they were still concerned about her delivering early."

"That's what I'm hoping, at least," Kurt said, nodding. "I wish we lived closer to them. I'm still worried about Finn -- I don't think he's taking very good care of himself right now."
"I'm sure it'll get better now that she's home and he's not having to drive back and forth from the hospital to the school and everything," Blaine said, trying to stay positive for his husband. "Finn's a tough guy. He'll be okay."

Kurt smiled down at Blaine. "He might be until he sees those medical bills. We might have to have another Skype session just to cry into our warm milk together while all our money gets sucked away."

"She's worth every penny of it, though. We could be in debt for ages and she'd still be worth it."

"Every penny," Kurt agreed. "Which means we should probably get our money's worth. Ready to go see her?"

"Always," Blaine said, and took his hand.

* * *

Saturday, August 31st, 2024

"Oh my god – Sarah Grace!" Kurt exclaimed as he and Blaine walked into Pod 5. A large vinyl play mat draped with blankets was taking up half the floor, and Lily was sprawled on her belly, her head held up, looking at the stuffed bunny that Kurt had given her with wide eyes.

"Hey guys! Surprise!" Sarah Grace called from the floor.

They made a mad dash for the play mat, dumped their things in a chair beside her empty crib, and flopped on the floor with her.

"She's over a month old now, so I thought it was high time for some developmental care," Sarah Grace explained. "We're having tummy time to work on head control. Look how well she's doing!"

Kurt rubbed a hand over her back, watching in awe as her little legs kicked the air, her face a picture of concentration.
"Has she been fussy?" Blaine asked.

"She was some last night, but she's been a little angel for me today," Sarah Grace said. "I can't believe how well she's doing with the wean we did yesterday."

Kurt met Blaine's eyes and they exchanged a cautious yet hopeful look. One wean down …

"Watch this," Sarah Grace said, picking up the bunny, and snapping them back to attention. She hopped it to the left, then to the right, and Lily's little head followed it in every direction it went.

"Oh my god," Blaine said, a delighted laugh escaping his lips as his face lit up. "Lil, look at you!"

Kurt beamed, gazing at his daughter, so enthralled by a stuffed bunny rabbit. If he'd been at work, if he'd missed this moment –

"So you won't expect her to intentionally reach for stuff for a little longer, but she's doing great – that's one thing I'll say about babies on methadone, all that increased muscle tone gives them fantastic head control," Sarah Grace chuckled. "Here, one of you guys try."

She held the bunny out and Kurt took it, sliding over to sit cross-legged in front of her. "Lily, sweetie, watch the bunny! He's so fuzzy!" He followed Sarah Grace's lead, hopping the rabbit from one side to the other, watching Lily's face. Her eyes were wide and focused, and though her arms and legs trembled every now and then, it didn't seem to phase her. "Is this fun? Do you love your bunny?"

Kurt looked up to catch Blaine holding his phone up, videoing them, his eyes bright with unshed tears. "The last time we played with the bunny, she smiled," he said, shrugging. "I just thought that maybe …"

Kurt gave the camera a smile. "Worth a shot," he said, then looked back down. After a few more hops to and fro, Lily's face started to turn, a little frown blooming at her lips.

"Have you had enough, sweetheart?" Kurt asked. "I guess you're not quite ready for delayed gratification yet." He looked up at Sarah Grace, who was tending to another baby a few cribs
down. "Can I flip her over? I think she's getting tired."

"Sure you can! She did fantastic, Kurt, I'm so proud of her," she smiled.

"You hear that, honey?" Kurt said, setting the bunny down and scooping her up in his arms. "Your NICU mama is so proud of you. And so is your Papa."

"And so's your Daddy," Blaine piped up from behind the camera. He scooted forward to catch her face better, and Kurt beamed down at her, cradled in his arms and sat down in the glider.

"Hi, sweetheart," he cooed. "Papa's so glad you're having such a good day today. And Papa's so glad he's not at work and missing all of this ..." He bent, kissed her little forehead, touched her nose with his, and as he was pulling back, the corners of her mouth twitched.

"Oh, look," Blaine breathed. "Oh – I think she's about to do it again –"

Kurt shifted her in his arms, brushed over her cheek like Serena had taught them the last time. And sure enough ...

"Oh, Lily, look at you."

Her face was lit with a smile, the kind of smile that they couldn't help but smile back at; it was infectious. The smile dropped, and she did it again, but that time ...

"Kurt, she's got dimples!" Blaine sang.

"Oh my god you're right." Kurt grinned up at Blaine. "When she starts doing this all the time, we are done for."

"I'm already done for," Blaine said softly. "I've never seen anything so sweet in my whole life."

All too soon, her smiles melted away, and Kurt handed her over to Blaine, who was squirming as bad as Lily with wanting to hold her. "I'm so glad she's feeling better," Kurt said as Blaine held her
on his shoulder and rubbed her tiny little back. "She had me so worried on Sunday …"

"She's gonna have us worried off and on for the rest of our lives," Blaine sighed, kissing her tiny head. "I guess we might as well get used to it."

* * *

Kurt turned his key in the lock and, with a tired but happy sigh, opened the door. "Home sweet home."

"It was a good day," Blaine said, squeezing his hand as they walked inside.

"It was a great day," Kurt agreed. Lily had smiled several more times for them, had barely been fussy at all. "There's only one thing that would make this day better, in fact."

"What's that?"

"A long, hot bath. Want to join?" Blaine's eyes lit up at the suggestion, and Kurt smiled back brightly. "I'm assuming the thousand kilo-watts coming out of your face means yes," he said. "I'll start the water."

"This would be a great time to try that new bottle of Syrah, yeah?"

"Oh," Kurt grinned, "this is going to be that kind of bath then …"

Blaine flushed, a bashful look coming over his face. "I wasn't implying …"

But the idea of Blaine naked in a bath with a glass of wine in hand was firmly planted in Kurt's mind, and he strode over to Blaine with purpose, tipped his chin up so Blaine was staring into his eyes. "You can imply all you want, honey," he said, trying to make his voice drip with confidence, trying to make Blaine's pants get just a little tighter. He hadn't really been planning for anything that night, just wanted to bask in the joy of seeing his daughter's smile, her dimples, but if Blaine was offering …
Blaine's eyes grew owlish and wide. "Oh," he said after a beat. "Well. If I'm implying … light some candles, while you're at it. I'll go get the wine."

"Good," Kurt said, hooding his eyes. "I'll be waiting."

* * *

True to his word, Kurt was waiting when Blaine returned, perched shirtless and barefoot at the edge of the tub, looking like sex incarnate. Blaine took a breath and toed his shoes off, setting the bottle down with a clunk.

"You look –" he said, unable to find the words. It was incredible, the spectrum of men that existed inside of Kurt. Just hours earlier, he was flopped on a vinyl mat with a stuffed rabbit in hand, cooing at a baby. Now, clad only in jeans, the soft skin of his abdomen and chest practically calling out to be touched, kissed, he looked like he'd stepped out of a the Sexiest Man Alive edition of People Magazine and into Blaine's bathroom. There was confident Kurt, vulnerable Kurt, playful Kurt, angry Kurt, countless versions of him, and Blaine loved every single one.

Kurt's face cracked into a sly smile. "I look?" he said, bracing his hands against the sides of the tub, his legs falling open a little. Oh. Sex-kitten Kurt, then.

Blaine swallowed.

"You look kind of delectable."

"Mmm … good enough to suck on?"

Blaine chuckled as he walked forward, unbuttoning his shirt. "Absolutely," he said, "although that was some line …"

"That was a good line!" Kurt said, indignant, closing his legs.
Blaine raised his eyebrows, undid the last button on his shirt, slid it down his arms. "Good, and also slightly amusing. But my answer didn't change. Are you going to pout, or are you going to let me suck you off?"

Kurt pretended to contemplate this, brooding a little. "Pour me some wine and we'll see." Blaine could see the light twinkling in his eyes.

He took the already-uncorked bottle and poured a glass, handing it to Kurt. "Tell me," he said after Kurt had taken a sip. "Is it good?"

"Why don't you taste it and see?" Kurt asked, playing coy.

"Okay," Blaine said, letting his voice drop low, and he bent, brushing his lips over Kurt's. He kept the kiss slow and chaste, wanting to tease, wanting to get Kurt hot and bothered and squirmy before he started anything. It was a good build-up, too – the kiss had just enough promise of what was to come. The delicious tug as his lips dragged over Kurt's made something inside him draw up like a fist clenching.

The tiniest dart of his tongue, and Blaine was pulling back, licking his lips. "Mmm. It's good."

Kurt rolled his eyes, but his cheeks were flushed. "I meant your own glass, Blaine."

"But it's so much more fun to taste it on you," Blaine said, a little grin coming over his face. He picked up his wineglass, poured some out, took a sip. It was good. He took another.

"Blaine?"

"Hmm?" he said, setting the wineglass down again, slowly pulling the gray tank top he wore under his shirt up his abdomen and over his head.

Kurt blinked as he tossed it to the side. "Um –"

"Yes?" Blaine asked, crossing his arms over his chest. He was thoroughly enjoying this.
Something in his face must have been a bit over the top, though, because in an instant, Kurt was laughing softly, standing up from his perch on the lip of the tub, wrapping his arms around Blaine's bare torso. "I've missed us," Kurt murmured, nuzzling his head into Blaine's shoulder. "I've missed you, I've missed this – I feel like we never get to just play anymore."

"Then let's play now," Blaine murmured back, gently tipping Kurt's head to one side, moving in to nip lightly up and down his neck. The way Kurt breathed, an almost relieved sigh, Blaine knew it was the right move, that he was going in the right direction.

He moved down to Kurt's collarbone and stopped there, laving over it, sucking hard enough that when he pulled back, a small, purple oval bloomed on Kurt's clear, pale skin.

"Blaine …"

"Kurt?"

"Honey, the bath water –"

"Oh." He reached over, turned the faucet off. "It wouldn't do to have a flood in here, would it?"

Kurt shook his head. "Much too distracting."

"Now, where were we?" Blaine asked. He kissed over a nipple, down Kurt's sternum, tongue in his belly button to make him squeal – he did – then, laughing, dropped to his knees and nipped at Kurt's hip, just above where jeans ended and skin began. "Kurt, I am so glad –" The words caught in his throat, and he stopped, staring up at Kurt's looming figure, his face still lit in a smile. This was supposed to be fun, they were supposed to be playing, but – "I'm so glad you could be there today."

"Oh, honey, I am too. I would've died if I'd missed that." Still on his knees, Blaine nuzzled his face into Kurt's stomach, and Kurt's hands automatically came around to clasp the back of his head. "I love you so mu– "

But Kurt was cut off when Blaine, grinning, blew a giant raspberry right below his belly button.
Kurt squealed and jumped back, smacking Blaine on the shoulder. "You're not playing fair!" he exclaimed, his eyes twinkling. "Here I was, declaring my undying love, and you have to go and ruin it. Don't think I'm not about to get you back."

Blaine giggled and stumbled to his feet, scurrying out of the bathroom and into the hallway. Kurt was at his heels, arms outstretched, seeking out Blaine's naked ribs. Blaine let himself be caught, pinned to the wall, tickled until they were both belly laughing, heads thrown back. It seemed like ages since they'd laughed together like this, played together like this, and happiness bloomed inside him like a crocus opening toward the sun.

He was still giggling when Kurt's lips caught his throat, tongue licking over his bouncing Adam's apple, and the giggles dissipated into contented sighs. Kurt's kisses trailed up his neck, across his jawline, finally made contact with his lips, and Blaine was melting from the inside out. It felt like home. He felt known as Kurt's tongue made contact with his own, as Kurt's fingers cupped his cheek.

They kissed their way back into the bathroom, stumbling against the walls, nearly tumbling to the ground when Blaine, walking backwards, tripped over the shoe he'd shed earlier. But Kurt's arms held him fast and up they stayed.

"You are my favorite person," Blaine murmured, planting a kiss on the tip of Kurt's adorable nose. "Do you know that?"

"I might've had an inkling," Kurt said, smiling.

Blaine couldn't help but smile back. "I'm so glad we're so good together."

"Honey, we're fabulous." A searing kiss that Blaine felt all the way to his toes, and his hands found their way to the button on Kurt's jeans. He snaked his hand inside Kurt's pants, and his cock jumped when he realized there was no cotton between his fingers and Kurt; all he felt was delicious, velvety skin.

"Kurt …" Fly pulled, pants flayed open, Blaine sank down to his knees once more, ran his tongue along the underside of Kurt's cock, reaching up to knead his balls with one hand.

Kurt let out a heavy breath, hand smacking against the wall behind him. He picked up his glass of
wine, took a sip.

"Oh god, I want to lick the wine off of you," Blaine said, the idea hitting him like a ton of bricks, making him even harder in his jeans. "I want to –"

"Yes," Kurt moaned from above him.

"This is gonna be so hot," Blaine murmured, twisting around to grab his glass and the bottle of wine. He downed what was left in the glass and poured another, dipping his fingers into the cool red liquid. He painted them down Kurt's cock, the wine running down and pooling in a large drop at the tip. He licked it off before it could fall, took Kurt's length into his mouth and sucked lightly.


The flavor of the wine combined with the taste of Kurt's skin proved to be a powerful aphrodisiac, as if Blaine needed one, and damn this was a good idea. One more dip of his fingers into the wine, skimming them over Kurt's length, another dip, another, and Kurt was whining above him.

"Pour me some?" Kurt panted, holding his empty glass up.

Blaine did, and Kurt wasn't sipping anymore – half the glass was gone before Blaine could even blink.

"My, my, what's gotten into you?" Blaine teased, licking the spicy wine off Kurt's cock once more.

"I think," Kurt panted, "that it's more of the fact that I've gotten into you – your mouth at least."

"Mmmm, Blaine said, giving up on the dipping and just dribbling wine from his glass straight over Kurt's cock, trying to catch the mess with his tongue. Kurt moaned.

"I never realized what a turn-on this would be," Kurt said. "Why haven't we ever done this before?"
"Lack of creativity," Blaine said, pouring more, then taking the whole of Kurt's cock in his mouth, milking him. Kurt nearly dropped his glass, actually sloshed a little over the rim and into Blaine's hair.

"Yeah … Blaine…" Kurt gasped above him.

"This is working for me, too, you know," Blaine said, feeling a little brazen. He quickly opened his own pants, tucking his underwear up underneath his balls.

"I can see that," Kurt said, breathless.

"More wine, and then fuck my mouth?"

"Blaine … yes."

_Fuck it_, Blaine thought, and poured the rest of his glass onto Kurt, tipping the glass sideways onto his abdomen, making an enormous mess on their bathroom floor. Kurt jumped with the shock, but Blaine's warm tongue followed it, laving every drop he could gather, finally sucking in Kurt's cock, his nose buried in the wine-fragrant curls of Kurt's pubic hair. Kurt's hips instantly stuttered forward and Blaine relaxed, his own cock lengthening and thickening against his belly as his throat was filled and stretched.

Kurt fucked him with abandon, loosened and liberated with the alcohol in his bloodstream. And when Kurt grabbed a handful of his hair, jerking his head even closer, Blaine took himself in hand, tugging on his own cock. They were oddly quiet, the only sound in the room their sharp, heavy breaths.

Blaine got very close, very fast, was moaning around Kurt's cock as his hips jerked rhythmically toward his fist. It was _so hot_, Kurt above him, thrusting into him, wine-sticky and reckless. His hand sped up, unable to help itself; he needed to come, it was going to burst from him any moment …

"Yeah, Blaine," Kurt breathed, catching on. _"Yes, fuck you take it so well, all the way down your throat, I'm buried …"_ Two hands on his head, two handfuls of hair, Kurt plunged into him, and his hand flew, cock wet with his own leaking fluid …
"Come on," Kurt prodded, his words turning dirty, "paint me with it, I want you all over me, I want to be covered with you when I come –"

A strangled cry, muffled by Kurt's cock, and Blaine came, spurting onto Kurt's jeans, his own shoulder, onto the underside of Kurt's balls.

"Yeah, baby," Kurt growled, hips snapping as Blaine grew boneless. "Just like that, swallow me down –"

Blaine managed to have the presence of mind and coordination to gather some of his come on his fingers, rub them together, and press one against Kurt's perineum, sliding back, slipping just barely into him.

"Blaine, fucking –" Kurt sputtered out before his hips shoved forward and he came, and Blaine swallowed and swallowed and swallowed.

And then he fell, grasping the rim of the bathtub and Kurt fell too and they looked at each other and burst into laughter.

"Oh my god I sounded like something out of a bad porno," Kurt giggled, hands shaking as he tried to wiggle out of his pants.

"Totally worked for me," Blaine grinned, shuffling his jeans off. "We should get in the bath."

"We should stay in the bath for hours."

Kurt's jeans finally a wadded pile of fabric on the floor, he stumbled up and half-tripped into the tub, legs shaking, splashing Blaine with water.

"Hey!"

"That just means you should get in with me," Kurt said, holding his arms out. "I require post-coital cuddles."
"Well I require post-coital kisses," Blaine said, shedding the remainder of his clothes and tumbling in after Kurt, planting a kiss squarely on Kurt's lips. "I love you."

"I love you too. And orgasms."

"Orgasms are the best," Blaine agreed happily, sinking down into the water and pillowing his head on Kurt's chest. "We should have more of them."

"We should have lots of them now because we won't get to have as many when Lily comes home," Kurt said very seriously. "Lots of orgasms."

Blaine looked up and gazed at Kurt, his face all gorgeous shadowy angles in the light of the candles. "We will," he promised, his voice going soft. He took his forefinger, traced a line down the middle of Kurt's chest, right on top of his breastbone. "Do you ever wonder how we managed to get here?" he asked.


"Just – everything, I guess," Blaine mused. "I mean – we met when we were sixteen. We didn't even go to the same school. Situations like that aren't supposed to work out in the long run."

"And yet, here we are – fourteen years later, and you and me and a baby makes three," Kurt murmured into his hair. "Sounds like the long run to me."

"It could've gone so many other ways," Blaine said. "I could've ended up with Sebastian." He pulled a face.

"You'd never have ended up with Sebastian," Kurt said. "I would've bashed his face in first."

Blaine grinned up at him. "My hero."

"I guess it doesn't matter how things could've gone, really," Kurt mused. "Because they didn't end
up any of those other ways. They ended up like this. And I don't think I'd trade any of it for what we have right now – not even last year."

"Mmm, we're better for it, I think. Maybe a little scarred, but definitely better." Blaine ran his hand down Kurt's bare arm, his fingers trailing water droplets after them. "And I absolutely know that there's nowhere in the world I'd rather be right now than in this bathtub with you."

"I'd rather it be a clawfoot tub. Extra-deep."

Blaine waved his hand. "Details."

"Important details."

"One day, then," Blaine smiled. "One day I'll sell a whole hell of a lot of books and buy you a lemon yellow clawfoot bathtub to go in our brand new bathroom in our brand new house, and we can soak in it as often as we want because we'll have a live-in nanny for Lily."

"Can we have two ovens in the new house?"

"Anything you want."

"Two ovens, then. And a yellow clawfoot bathtub and a garden terrace with a fountain and a gardener to go with it, and three walk-in closets and an outdoor kitchen and you and me and Lily."

"Go big or go home?"

"Honey, are you just now figuring out my life philosophy? I'm a little disappointed."

Blaine sighed, content in the fact that Kurt was not actually disappointed, was very much in love with him. He settled further down in the tub, making little waves with his movements, and rested in the warm water, dreaming of all the futures he and Kurt could make.
Tuesday, September 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2024

"The itsy-bitsy spider went up the water spout," Blaine sang to Lily as she lay on the big playmat that Sarah Grace had dragged into the pod again. "Down came the rain and washed the spider out."

A few smirks from the nurses as he did all the hand motions to the song, and he grinned right back at them. Who cared what kind of fool he was making of himself when Lily was all smiles that morning?

"Out came the sun, and dried up all the rain," he sang, making a big circle over his head with his arms. "And the itsy-bitsy spider went up the spout again!"

He bent over her on his knees, spider-crawling his fingers up her little round belly, and oh, that smile could melt his heart in no time flat. He glanced around the pod, saw that no one was looking – no one who really cared, at least, and pulled his phone out, snapping picture after picture of his smiley little baby, dimples and all.

And, very quickly, he shot a text to Kurt, attaching one of the pictures with it.

\textbf{To: Kurt <3}

I can't wait till we bring her home – I wish you got more than two mornings a week with her right now. She's so HAPPY in the mornings!

Not two seconds later, and his phone was buzzing in his hand.

\textbf{From: Kurt <3}

Stop it. You're going to make me cry.
From: Kurt <3

(But in the good way.)

Blaine glanced around again, saw Sarah Grace watching him. He put on an innocent expression and shrugged his shoulders, and she rolled her eyes, rubbed her hands together as if she was washing them, and then pointedly looked away.

He grinned. They were so lucky to have such good nurses…

To: Kurt <3

She's good this morning. REALLY good.

SG said they'll probably do another wean tomorrow – I hope they're not going too fast, but she's just handling them so well this time around… SG said her highest score since this last wean has been a 7, and most of them have been 2-4.

From: Kurt <3

Maybe it really was just the growth spurt?

To: Kurt <3

I really hope so. It looks like she's barely on anything already – SG gave her the meds this morning, and it was the tiniest little drop. I can't believe so little of something can do so much for

From: Kurt <3

Well, maybe that means that there's not much
more weaning to do. But that day she had to start
back – that was a lot of medicine in the syringe
Sarah Grace had … how have they gone down so
quickly?

To: Kurt <3

Oh, I asked about that too – SG said that when they
rebound really badly like that, sometimes they'll give
a bigger dose just once, to "capture" the baby, she
said – I guess that means they get a big happy dose to
get them really calm, then they started on a lot lower
maintenance dose. I think they gave her what she was
on before, just weight-adjusted.

From: Kurt <3

Makes sense.

To: Kurt <3

Yeah – so hopefully not too much longer?

From: Kurt <3

Crossing all my fingers and toes.

To: Kurt <3

Me too. Well, I should probably get back …

From: Kurt <3
Go. If she's in a good mood, you need to take advantage of it. Give her a kiss for me!

To: Kurt <3

Will do. Xoxoxoxoxoxoxo We miss you!

From: Kurt <3

Miss you too <3 <3 <3 <3

"And how's Kurt today, Blaine?" Sarah Grace asked, a smile playing at her lips while she came over to watch Lily on the mat so he could wash his hands.

"He's good," he replied, not even trying to hide his grin. "Just ready to get her home. We both are."

"Well," she said, perching on the edge of the play mat, placing a finger in Lily's outstretched palm, "if she keeps responding like she is now, it won't be too much longer before you guys get out of here. She's doing amazingly well."

"I know – I'm so, so proud of her," Blaine beamed, walking back over and kneeling by his daughter again. "It's hard to believe she was so bad just a little over a week ago …"

"Mmm, they're so resilient, these little babies," Sarah Grace said, gazing at her. "Nobody gives them enough credit, but they survive things that would kill an adult three times over."

They watched Lily, her feet kicking, her arms wiggling as she enjoyed the freedom from her blankets for a morning.

"Sarah Grace?" Blaine eventually said.

"Hmm?"
"I don't know that you hear this enough, but thank you for everything you do. You and Serena both have made this experience so much better and easier than it could have been – I feel like Kurt and I will owe you for the rest of our lives."

She smiled softly. "Thank you for saying that, but the only thing you'll ever owe me is a visit every now and then. And maybe some pictures."

Blaine grinned back at her. "You're easy to please."

She shrugged. "Well …"

"What's your favorite bakery in New York?"

"Oh, Blaine, you guys don't need to –"

"But we do. And we are. And my question isn't a hypothetical one. What's your favorite bakery?"

Sarah Grace sighed. "Well, there is this one place in Brooklyn – Milk Bar?"

Blaine shook his head. "Never been there."

"Go. Eat. Delight in foodgasms. Come back and tell me about it."

"What if we come back and bring you something?"

"Well, if you insist …"

"I insist," Blaine told her, making a mental note of the bakery's name. "Foodgasms all around."

"There are worse ways to spend an afternoon," she said. "Speaking of … I've got a circumcision to get prepped for. Will you guys be okay on the play mat?"
Blaine cringed, wanted to squeeze his legs together. "Poor baby. But yeah, I think we'll be fine."

"Okay. And as always …"

"Let you know if we need anything; I will."

* * *

**Wednesday, September 4**

It was with a little trepidation that Kurt approached his boss's office, knocking lightly at the door, creeping it open by a few inches. Why was this always so unnerving? He felt like the big oak door, sign brandishing *Marc Jacobs* in silver lettering, was as bad or worse as Principal Figgins office, a long, long time ago.

Marc looked up from his desk, clad in all black, a serious expression on his face. Yeah, definitely worse than Figgins. It didn't matter that they were friends in a way, didn't matter that they had a wonderful working relationship – when Kurt got called into an office, *any* office, he got nervous.

"What can I do for you, Marc?" Kurt asked, willing his voice not to tremble.

But Marc's face split open in a wide smile, and Kurt's bird-heart slowed to human speed again.

"I'd rather know what I can do for you," he said, his voice soft. "Come in, Kurt."

Kurt did so, the heavy door swinging shut behind him. "Um – I'm not sure what you mean, exactly …"

"Oh, nothing in particular," Marc said. "I'm just checking in. You haven't said much about Lily lately, or Blaine – although actually, most of that's my fault. I've been away from the studio so much."
The true relief only came when Marc spelled it out so plainly, and Kurt could breathe again. "They're good," he said, smiling. "Lily's doing really well – we had a bad day last week, you know, when I called in last Monday, but we're already back to where we were before that. Maybe even better."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"She's all smiles – would you like to see a picture?" And oh god, he was going to be one of those dads, wasn't he? Shoving his phone in everyone's faces, forcing picture after picture of his child on friends and strangers alike …

"I would love to see a picture, Kurt."

Well. It wasn't forcing if they agreed, right?

"I'm kind of biased, and maybe it's because she was just so miserable for so long, but I honestly think her smile's the sweetest thing I've ever seen in my life," Kurt sighed, scrolling through his photo album for a good one.

Marc cooed appropriately at the picture and patted his hand. "She's beautiful, just a little doll," he said. "I bet you can't wait to dress her."

"I'm dying to."

"Well, you'll have to bring her to the studio sometime once she's all better – I'd love to meet her in person. I actually have something in mind for a gift – do you know what her approximate measurements are?"

Kurt grinned, thrilled to have someone else who understood. "I know what her exact measurements are – or, what they were three days ago, but they change so often, it's hard to keep up. I kind of got ahold of the measuring tape they keep on her shelf …"
"Blaine is the best dad in the universe," Kurt said proudly. "I wish you could see him with her."

"I hope I'll be able to, sometime."

"We'll bring her by. We should be out in time for Halloween, and I have the perfect idea for costumes …"

Marc smiled. "I can't wait."

Kurt fidgeted in his seat. "Um, Marc? While we're in here – about Gavin's replacement –"

"I reviewed the five candidates you selected from the pool, and I would be more than happy with any of them on our team. I defer to your discretion."

Kurt nodded. "And about the Gavin incident –"

"Yes, about that. How many times do I need to tell you that I'm over it? It was out of your control. You needed to be with your daughter that day; I'm just sorry you had to come in." He sighed. "And also about the mouse shoes. I loved the mouse shoes."

"The mouse shoes were my favorite. But we made more, so …"

"Yes. We did."

Kurt squirmed in the awkward silence that followed, and Marc sighed. "You shouldn't feel bad about firing him, you know. We kept him on months longer than we should have."

Kurt just nodded.

"Really, I should never have hired him in the first place. He had almost no experience, but I felt something in him …"
Kurt smiled. "Didn't you say the same thing about me?"

"Yes, well," Marc said, smiling back, "aren't we glad that you lived up to that feeling? Unfortunate for Gavin, but good for you. And me."

"Thanks. Is that all you needed?"

"Just one more thing before you go," Marc said. "You know our Employee of the Moment videos? I want you to make one."

"You … really?"

"Really. You'll be fabulous. And if you'd like, we can wait until Lily gets out of the hospital, so she can be featured in it."

Kurt wanted to hug him across the table. "That would be fantastic!"

"Excellent. Now, I think I've wasted plenty of your time today. Let me know when it's time to fill out the paternity leave paperwork, alright?"

"Will do. Thank you so much, Marc!"

And as Kurt left, all the trepidation had been replaced by a bounce in his step and a smile on his face.

* * *

A buzz in Blaine's pocket, and a sinking feeling came over him. Kurt just had a meeting with Marc – it could be very good or very bad or very nothing and he didn't even care that he was holding Lily in the middle of the pod, he just needed to know …

From: Nick Warbler
Oh my god. I bought a ring.

Blaine blinked at his phone. It buzzed in his hand again.

From: Nick Warbler
Oh my god.

To: Nick Warbler
OH. MY. GOD.

From: Nick Warbler
I might be enlisting your help at some point?

To: Nick Warbler
I HAVE TO TELL KURT

From: Nick Warbler
KURT CAN'T TELL JEFF

To: Nick Warbler
YOU'RE GETTING MARRIED

From: Nick Warbler
Well … he hasn't said yes yet…

To: Nick Warbler
LIKE HE WOULD SAY NO
From: Nick Warbler

Blaine, why are you still yelling?

To: Nick Warbler

I'M SO EXCITED BUT I'M IN THE NICU SO I CAN'T YELL OUT LOUD BUT I HAVE TO YELL SOMEWHERE SO I'M YELLING HERE AT YOU

From: Nick Warbler

...Okay.

From: Nick Warbler

I'M GETTING MARRIED. (Probably.) (Hopefully.) (Oh god what if he says no?)

To: Nick Warbler

HE WON'T SAY NO YOU IDIOT YOU'RE GETTING MARRIED

From: Nick Warbler

Can I hide the ring at your place until I figure out exactly how to ask him?

To: Nick Warbler

Of course. We have an assortment of drawers, potted plants, cabinets, and hidey-holes that
I think would all suit your needs quite nicely.

From: Nick Warbler

Blaine, I am NOT hiding Jeff's ring in a potted plant.

To: Nick Warbler

Suit yourself. I think it's an excellent hiding place, one that Jeff would never think of.

From: Nick Warbler

JEFF IS NOT GOING TO THINK OF ANY OF THE HIDING SPOTS BECAUSE JEFF IS GOING TO KNOW NOTHING, DO YOU UNDERSTAND??!!?!

To: Nick Warbler

I read you loud and clear. Over and out – Lily

just puked in my lap. SO EXCITED!!!!

* * *

"Kurt, Kurt, Kurt!"

Kurt jumped a foot out of his chair as his office door flew open, the handle banging into the wall behind it. Blaine bounced inside, two cups of coffee in his hand, looking as wriggly and excited as a puppy with a new toy.

"Hi!" Kurt said back, breathing a little hard, trying to recover from the shock. "Not that I mind the
"Nick bought a ring for Jeff!" Blaine sang, dancing in a happy little circle. He held Kurt's coffee out for him. "We have to help, Kurt, please say we can!"

Kurt accepted the coffee and sat back, chuckling at his husband's antics. "Of course we can – that is, if Nick has asked for help."

"He did! I don't know how exactly, other than hiding the ring – I suggested a potted plant, but Nick shot that down. Don't you think that's a great place to hide a ring? That's where I hid your ring."

"You – wait, really? Which plant? How did I not know this?"

"Because I am extremely devious and sneaky," Blaine said, an easy grin lighting his face. "It was in the basil hanging in the kitchen window."

"The basil?" Kurt asked. "You mean I watered my own wedding ring?"

Blaine shrugged. "I got a little plastic box. The ring never even got wet."

"You are unbelievable."

"Because I hid your wedding band-slash-engagement ring in a plant, or because you are just finding out about that now, or because I'm just so dashingly handsome and charming that it's hard to believe I'm real?"

"You are unbelievable."

"Yes. Well." Blaine smiled his dashingly handsome, charming smile, ducked his head with a little shrug, and oh, that man knew exactly what he was playing at. "Hey."

"Hey."
"Our friends are getting married."

"Well, Jeff hasn't said yes yet …"

"What is it with you people and your complete disbelief in anything romantic today?"

Kurt cocked an eyebrow. "You do realize who you're talking to, here, right? Grand romantic gestures, picnics in the park, flowers – do you even know me at all?"

"Yeah … but … I mean, in what universe is Jeff ever going to say no? And why do I keep having to point that out?"

"…I guess you do have a point there."

"Thank you. Anyway," Blaine said, huffing, "what I was going to say before somebody decided to go all party-pooper on me was that our friends are getting married. And we should dance in your office to celebrate."

"Dance? In my office? As in break-it-down, Single Ladies, Baby Got Back style?"

Blaine rolled his eyes. "No, silly." He pulled out his phone, opened his iTunes. "Here."

Familiar music, and then a voice – At last …

"Oh, Blaine, the first dance at our wedding," Kurt sighed, taking Blaine's outstretched hands. The world always got smaller when he heard the music, his mind drifting back to a dimly lit dance floor and the circle of Blaine's tuxedo-clad arms, the only two people in a very, very full room.

My lonely days are over, and life is like a song …

They came together seamlessly, slotting like the puzzle pieces they'd found in each other at the
mere age of sixteen, and swayed along to the music.

"...I found a thrill to rest my cheek to, a thrill that I had never known," Blaine sang in his ear, effectively melting his heart.

"I'd do it a thousand times over," Kurt whispered, "marry you. Live our life."

Blaine nuzzled his head into the crook of Kurt's neck. "It's a good life we have."

"It is." Kurt kissed his hair, reveled in Blaine's scent for a moment. "I'm so glad I married you."

"Mmm, likewise," Blaine murmured. "Love you so much, Kurt."

"I love you, too."

* * *

Friday, September 6th, 2024

"Hey, guys!" Kurt waved carefully with a mug of warm milk in each hand, sliding onto the bed next to Blaine for their Skype session with Finn and Emily. "Sorry we're having to meet so late ..."

"Kurt!" Emily squealed, the screen suddenly zooming in on her face and chest. "That was me hugging the computer if you couldn't tell. Don't worry about the time; we're just happy to be able to talk to you guys. How are you?"

"We're doing great," Kurt grinned, handing Blaine his mug. "How are you? You look fantastic – are you still stuck in the bed?"

"Mostly," she said, leaning into Finn, who'd put his arm around her. "I had an appointment yesterday – I'm 26 weeks now – and they said maybe just a little bit longer since my blood pressure was borderline. I can get up to pee and eat, but no working, and I definitely have to take it easy." She smiled up at Finn. "This one here has been doing all the housework."
"Impressive," Kurt said, raising his eyebrows. "See, Finn, I told you that you'd eventually need to know how to clean toilets on your own."

Finn shrugged. "You're usually right, I guess."

Kurt preened.

"You're just now learning this?" Blaine laughed.

"Mmm, Finn's always been more immune to my training techniques than you, honey," Kurt smiled, patting Blaine's knee.

"Maybe he's not so immune to mine." Emily's grin was grainy but wide on the computer screen, and she sighed up at Finn, the fond look on her face making Kurt squeeze Blaine's hand. "Seriously, though, he's been such a help. I can't believe how hard he's working, between teaching and housework and the commute and still unpacking boxes …"

"How long is it you've been in the rental house again?" Blaine asked.

They looked at each other, thinking. "Um … we moved in mid-July, right? So … maybe a month and a half?"

"And how's it feel to be shacked up?" Kurt asked.

"I'm not sure how we'd have made it otherwise with this bed rest thing," Emily said. "But that aside – he's the love of my life. He's the father of my baby. How could I not love living with him?"

"Oh, I don't know," Kurt said, pulling a face. "I've smelled his dirty socks before."

"Dirty socks go in the hamper," Finn recited proudly. "I have grown up a little since we were teenagers …"
"See?" Emily said, bumping her shoulder against his arm. "He just needed somebody who could make him toe the line."

"So, um, man-training aside – how's Lily?" Finn asked.

"Doing really well right now. Our main problem is patience … we're just so ready to get her home," Blaine said.

"Are they being able to give her less medicine still?"

"Oh, yeah, she's actually weaning pretty well. Her scores are low most of the time, too, which means that she feels better," Kurt said. "It's amazing – she's like a different baby than she was when we first met her."

"Cool," Finn said, smiling.

"I wish we could see her," Emily sighed. "I feel so bad –"

"You don't need to feel bad for one second," Blaine chided her. "You need to take care of you and that sweet little baby inside you."

"I know …"

"Actually," Kurt said, an idea forming in his head, "we could see – one of the days that Sarah Grace is working – I bet she'd let us bring the laptop. The hospital has wifi – we could Skype at the hospital, and you could see her that way. She's smiling now."

Emily's face lit up. "Oh, Kurt, that would be fantastic. I get so bored here with Finn gone during the day and nothing to do. I'd love to see her."

"Sarah Grace is off this weekend," Blaine said, "but I think she's back on either Monday or Tuesday. I'll ask then, okay?"
"Perfect. Thank you so much," Emily smiled.

"Anytime. We want to keep the pregnant lady happy," Kurt said. "Now, Finn – I want to hear all your glee club gossip; what kind of drama's been happening this year?"

* * *

Sunday, September 8th, 2024

"Good news!" Jacklyn, Lily's nurse for the day, said as she walked into the pod where Kurt was feeding Lily.

"Yeah? What kind of good news?" Kurt asked, looking up from the bottle.

"I just signed all my orders for today," she said, "and they wrote to go down to once a day on her methadone rather than twice a day. More than likely, it's the last wean we'll do before she comes off of it entirely."

Blaine's eyes widened next to Kurt. "Seriously?"

"Seriously. She's on too small a dose for us to be able to wean it well, so we just decrease the amount of times a day she gets it."

"So … what kind of time frame does that put us at? I mean, for going home?" Kurt asked.

"Well – it all depends on how she tolerates the wean, but hopefully we'll be able to take her off completely after three or four days, and then she'll have to go five days off meds with good scores. So … at best, a little over a week?"

Kurt watched Blaine blink at the nurse, wondered if the same things were flying through both their heads.

Jacklyn nodded. "No problem. You need anything, let me know, alright?"

Blaine and Kurt nodded and looked at each other. A *week*.

"The nursery," said Kurt.

"I know," said Blaine.

"I have meetings tomorrow, but … Tuesday? Maybe I can take off Tuesday and we'll work on it?"

"We still need to clear out the storage unit, too. I can't believe we've been putting that off…"

And they had been putting it off, out of procrastination or general busyness or fear (of *what*, they didn't really want to think about), or some combination of all three. They'd been putting off a lot of things, like making sure that Violet's old carseat was still in good condition, like stocking up on diapers and formula, like assembling the crib.

Suddenly a week – even *two* weeks, if it stretched that long – seemed like no time at all.

Kurt looked down, leaned Lily forward on his hand to burp her. "Maybe – do you think it's time to start my paternity leave? Maybe I can go to my meetings on Monday, turn things over to Martha, explain everything, and then … just be off? To help? And get ready?"

"I think – yes. I think that's probably a good idea." Blaine paused. "Um, if things don't work out this time – I mean, if her scores go back up –"

"I can always start back to work and take it later," Kurt said, hoping desperately that wouldn't be the case.

"Okay," Blaine said, a little grin forming on his face. "Okay then. This – is actually happening."
A flare of panic in Kurt's chest, followed by a burning flame of joy. "It's actually happening. Blaine, we have so much left to do."

* * *

Blaine was almost asleep that night, drowsiness cancelling out gravity entirely as his body floated in the warmth of blankets and Kurt, when his phone went off, buzzing on the nightstand.

"No," he groaned, "no, no, no not again—"

But it wasn't the hospital calling. It was Nick.

"I figured it out!" he exclaimed, his words a little muddled by sirens and horns in the background. "I know exactly how I'm going to ask him, I just now figured it out, and I had to call you. He thinks I'm getting milk. …I should probably actually get milk, then, I guess, right? So it doesn't look funny?" A pause. "Blaine?"

"Nick." Blaine blinked his eyes in the dark, dark room. "Yeah, you should probably get milk."

"Right. Um … there's a market down several blocks. Wait. Did I wake you up? Shit, what time is it?"

"Probably a whole lot earlier than it feels," Blaine groaned, moving to get out of bed, but Kurt grabbed at his hip, tugging at his sleep pants, nearly pulling them off, and Blaine laid back and snuggled up to him. Kurt sighed, content. "But no, you didn't wake me."

"Oh, good."

"So, tell me the grand plan …"

"You know that piano bar we love? Well, I have to call them and make sure it's okay, but – I think I'll do it under the guise of a double date, if you guys are free. And – I was going to sing to him, if you might be able to play for me?"
Blaine yawned. "What song?"

"Well, if you're up for it … *Hallelujah, I Love Him So*. But like … Ray Charles style. I thought it'd be fitting for a piano bar, and … well, I do. Love him so. *Hallelujah."

"Hallelujah indeed. I'll have to brush up on my jazz a little, but I think I can swing that," Blaine said, stretching his legs under the covers, his thighs brushing against the backs of Kurt's.

"Maybe sing backup for me, too? I've got a sax player lined up, and also a drummer."

"You got it, man," Blaine grinned as Kurt turned over to snuggle into his chest. "This is gonna be quite the extravaganza. When are you planning on doing this?"

"Um – well, if everything's okay with the piano bar – I was thinking maybe Friday? I know it's soon, but …"

"*Wow*, that is really soon. I mean, not that we can't help – it's just, Lily's going to be coming home soon, somewhere between one and two weeks, and …" Blaine paused. "Actually … that might be perfect. One more date night before we're stuck in the house forever. Or at least until she's two. Or something."

"Awesome!" Nick exclaimed. "It's just – I don't want to wait too long, lose my nerve or something."

"Understandable," Blaine said, sliding his free arm under Kurt's chest and pulling him closer. "We'll just have to set up a couple practice sessions between now and then – I want it to be perfect for you guys."

"Yeah, me too. I – Blaine?"

"Hmm?"
"Thank you so much for helping me with this. I can't believe I'm actually doing it…"

"It was only a matter of time, though, really. Wasn't it? After you guys got together? I mean, I can't picture either one of you without the other…"

"God, I can't either," Nick sighed, and Blaine knew the feeling by the tone in his voice, the spin-around-you're-so-happy, dance-in-the-middle-of-the-street-like-life's-a-goddamn-musical bliss of it all. It was how he felt after Kurt said yes to him eight years before.

"Listen, I should probably go – I'm in bed with Kurt, and you've got a gallon of milk to buy. But call me tomorrow, and we can talk rehearsal times, okay?"

"You got it. Thanks again, Blaine. I really owe you one."

"Seriously, I'm happy to do it," Blaine said, grinning. "The look on Jeff's face will be worth every minute of piano practice I have to do. Have a good night, okay?"

"You too."

He set the phone aside and squeezed Kurt all the way around his middle, with both arms. "Something romantic about to happen?" Kurt murmured, half asleep.

Blaine chuckled. "To who, exactly?"

Kurt waved a lazy hand in the air. "Me. Jeff. Whoever."

"Jeff, yes, but are you interested in something romantic happening to you?" Blaine asked, making his voice go a little gruff.

"If I don't have to do any work, maybe," Kurt said, so sleepy and yet so coy.

"I can think of lots of things like that," Blaine whispered in his ear, his hand trailing down Kurt's chest to cup his crotch.
"Oh? Like what?"

Blaine squeezed and felt Kurt grow underneath his hand.

"That … should do nicely," Kurt breathed, his hips canting upward.

"Yeah?"

"Mmmmmmm-hmm."

Blaine teased at him for a while through the fabric of his boxer briefs until Kurt lazily worked his underwear down his legs. They were quiet, Blaine kissing at his neck as his hand worked slowly, until Kurt was making high-pitched sighs every few seconds.

"Good?" Blaine whispered.

"Mmm-ahhh – mmm-hmm," Kurt breathed.

With slow, torturous strokes, Blaine mapped out every inch of Kurt's cock with his hand, bringing him closer and closer to the edge. Suddenly Kurt's hand clamped down on his free wrist.

"Close?"

"Blaine … yes …"

Grinning, Blaine slowed down even further, and Kurt groaned, trying to pump his own hips into Blaine's fist. "Hey, I thought you weren't going to do any work."

"Don't care – need to –"
"Need to what?" Blaine murmured in Kurt's ear, dragging his hand down Kurt's long, leaking cock.

Kurt only moaned in reply.

"I love it when it's like this," Blaine prodded. "When you're loose and sprawled out, desperate for it …"

Kurt's hips juddered up, spilling all over Blaine's hand, and he let out a choked groan, flopping his head back on his pillow. "Hell, Blaine …"

Blaine, now rather hot and bothered, looked at his coated hand. "Um, Kurt, do you mind …"

A wave of his hand, followed by, "As long as I get to watch."

And Blaine took himself in hand, using Kurt's come as lube. He closed his eyes and pulled at himself, picturing Kurt, bent on all fours, his cock disappearing rhythmically into Kurt's body.

"You are so hot," Kurt whispered reverently from the other side of the bed, and Blaine gasped and spilled onto the towel he'd placed under his knees.

"So are you," he mumbled, fumble-crawling back up to their pillows and collapsing there.

"Mmmm. Who knew Nick and Jeff getting engaged would be so good for our sex life?" murmured Kurt, plastering himself against Blaine's chest.

"Who knew," Blaine repeated, closing his eyes and burying his nose in Kurt's hair. "Sleep now."

"Goodnight, husband. I love you," Kurt whispered, already near sleep himself.

Warmth spread through Blaine's body in tiny fireworks, sparking in his legs and fingers and belly and heart. "Goodnight, husband. I love you, too."
Monday, September 9th, 2024

"I'm bringing home a baby bumble bee – won't my Daddy be so proud of me, I'm bringing home a baby bumble bee –" Blaine sang, bouncing Lily on his lap. His repertoire of children's songs was expanding at an impressive rate, and he had at least one new song for her each day he visited.

She grinned back at him as he grinned at her, and oh, his heart was so light – soon they'd have her home, in her own crib in her own room –

"Blaine?"

He looked up and saw the hospital social worker who'd been following Lily's case. "Oh, hi Terrence!"

"Hey! I was just making rounds and wanted to make sure you guys have everything you need. The nurses were telling me we're getting close to going home…"

"We are! And, actually, I'm so glad you came by and asked – I keep forgetting to call the financial office, but we really need to work out a payment plan for our hospital bills."

Terrence frowned. "Hospital bills?"

"Yeah, I didn't realize they'd start sending them before she even came home –"

"Blaine, you shouldn't be receiving any hospital bills."

Blaine's knees stilled and Lily stopped bouncing. "Wait. What?"

"Lily's mother was on Medicaid, and because of that, Medicaid should also be covering Lily's entire hospital stay from her time of birth. I thought you were aware of that. Now, if she got discharged and readmitted, you'd be responsible for that readmit, but this time? You shouldn't be billed."
"I – I’m not sure – there are three bills sitting on my desk at home, one for $56,000, one for $70,000 and one for $30,000. And she's not out yet, so I'm pretty sure there will be more …"

Terrence sighed. "Okay, here's what we'll do. I'll go down to the financial office with you right now, and we'll get this straightened out – there's got to either be a miscommunication or a paperwork problem, but you can pretty much count on tearing those up when you get home tonight."

"I – I don't know what to say."

"Well, I'd like to apologize for the inconvenience and stress that I'm sure that caused you in an already difficult situation. Come with me – we'll get this figured out, okay?"
Chapter 17

Monday, September 9th, 2024

"Honey, I'm home – for twelve weeks!" Kurt exclaimed, bursting through the door to find Blaine at the piano bench and Nick leaning on the upright, rehearsing for Friday night.

"That's why I know, yes I know, hallelujah I love him so," Blaine sang along with Nick, winking at Kurt as his hands flew on the ivory keys.

Kurt grinned, hung his bag on the hook. "Love you too, honey," he said, pecking Blaine on the cheek, then giving Nick a hug. "Sounds great so far."

Nick pulled a face. "There are plenty of kinks to work out, but —"

"But it's gonna be fantastic," Blaine said, reaching up to punch him lightly on the arm.

"I hope so. Still keeping that ring watered for me, Kurt?"

"I am, but I just can't figure out why it's not growing!" Kurt quipped.

"Ohhhh, aren't we the comedian today?" Nick chuckled. "Thanks for letting me borrow your man for a while – I know you guys have stuff to do, though, so I'll get out of your hair for tonight. What'd we say, Blaine, Wednesday at three?"

"After my appointment with Dr. J, yep," Blaine nodded. "It was good to jam with you again."

"You too. You guys have a good night," Nick said, packing up his sheet music.

Blaine got up from the piano, the smile on his face the one he saved for Kurt and Kurt alone. "Welcome home," he said, grasping Kurt's biceps in his hands, kissing him squarely on the mouth.
Nick was shaking his head with a grin on his face when they finally resurfaced, the room a little  
topsy-turvy from Kurt's perspective. "You cannot say a word," he said, pointing at Nick. "I've seen  
you and Jeff … It's obvious you're fucking like rabbits, and even in public, you still can't keep your  
hands off of each other. So don't even talk to me about 'PDA' or whatever you were going to say,  
especially in our own home!"

"Hey," Nick said, laughing, "we've got a lot of lost time to make up for. And we do not fuck like  
rabbits."

Blaine raised an eyebrow and Nick's face colored.

"Oh, shut up. Do you want me to bring up that time you guys came to visit Chicago while I was at  
the Art Institute and I caught you sucking him off on my floor?"

"I think you just did," Kurt said, feeling his own cheeks get hot. "And on that note, I think it's time  
to bid our fond farewells."

"Thanks again, Blaine," Nick said, still laughing. "I'll see you guys later."

He closed the door behind him with a wave, and Kurt and Blaine were alone.

"Oh, paternity leave, I have waited so long for you," Kurt sighed, flopping down on the couch.  
"What's on the to-do list?"

"Well, tonight I thought we could make one, actually – like, a list of all the things we still have to  
do, and maybe form some sort of action plan. But first – we need to have a talk."

Kurt felt his forehead furrow. "What kind of a talk?"

"Oh, not a bad talk," Blaine said, reaching toward the desk. "These guys?" he said, holding up their  
quickly-mounting hospital bills.

"Oh, those," Kurt harrumphed. "Did the hospital grant us a payment plan, or do we have to pay  
them in full and live on ramen for a month or two?"
"Neither."

"...I wasn't aware there was another option, Blaine."

"Neither was I until today." Blaine took the bill charging them $70,000, the largest one, and ripped it in half. "We don't have to pay a dime of it."

Kurt's hand fell off the arm of the couch where it lay. "What?"

"Medicaid is covering Lily's entire hospital stay."

"But – but –" Kurt sputtered. "We make way too much money to qualify for Medicaid –"

"We do, but Kayla doesn't, and because she's the birth mother, Medicaid covers Lily's stay this time. Obviously we cover anything from discharge on out, but all this?" He picked up another bill, ripping it down the middle as well. "We're in the clear. We shouldn't have ever even gotten the bills – that was a mistake on the hospital's part."

"I – Blaine –"

"So at first I was pretty psyched about this. But then I started thinking – we're probably one of the few couples who actually could afford bills this large. Yeah, things might be a little tighter, but tighter to us means we can't get a new pair of shoes any time the mood strikes us. I was thinking about Maggie's mom, and have you seen that couple whose baby lives across from Lil in the new pod? They don't look like they have much, either. A lot of the parents in there look like they could probably use some help. And I started to feel guilty."

Kurt nodded, guessing where Blaine was about to go with this.

"I – of course, I had to talk to you about it first, but I – what if we made a donation? Or set up a fund to help the families who don't qualify for government assistance, but can't afford over $100,000 of hospital bills?"
Kurt sighed, warmth starting in his heart and radiating out to the rest of him. "I love you."

"Does that mean yes?"

"I think that's a fantastic idea. Maybe we could do a sort of yearly assistance fund type thing?"

Blaine beamed. "I can call and set up a meeting with the nurse manager and a couple of the hospital administrators tomorrow. I already sort of asked, just in case it was a possibility …"

Kurt chuckled. "You knew I was never going to say no to that, honey. We have more than enough resources for ourselves, and we make charitable donations every year – this is just going to be one that's especially close to our hearts."

"Good." Blaine nodded excitedly. "Good. Now that that's settled …"

"To-do list. Can we meet with the hospital people early tomorrow morning so we can spend the rest of the day cleaning out the storage unit?"

They planned and planned for the next hour, organizing truck rentals, paint purchases, crib assembly, rehearsals with Nick.

"So," Kurt sighed, sinking back into the couch cushions. "That brings us to Friday, which is the proposal so we probably won't get much done that day. And then we'll have the weekend, and then …"

"And then hopefully we'll room in with her and bring her home," Blaine said softly. "Except – Kurt. You know what we haven't figured into any of this?"

"What's that?"

"Actually visiting her."

"God, it'll be so much easier when she's here," Blaine groaned.

Kurt sighed, rubbing Blaine's back as he slumped over with his forehead in his hands. "I know, honey. I can't wait either."

***

Tuesday, September 10th, 2024

"Hey stranger."

"Hey Alex!" Blaine said, stretching as he stepped outside of the storage unit. The call was a welcome break from the vexing task of sorting through Violet's old nursery pieces – the small unit was full of ghosts, and he rather felt like he was being haunted.

"So that favor you asked for? The kids' book?"

"Yeah?"

"I just got it from the printer," Alex said, his voice a strange sort of bright. "You son-of-a-bitch, that book brought a tear to this asshole's eye."

"Really?"

"I mean, I think it's become your life's mission to get me to cry or something, Jesus. Maybe next time you can publish something with at least a little humor in it?"

Blaine grinned, and suddenly felt lighter – Alex's words were a patronus, chasing all the dark away. "I'll be sure to work on that."

"At least give it a scout's effort – I know you like your depressing shit and all, but damn, Blaine."
"Lily's book is not depressing."

"Still made me cry. Maybe you can avoid the extreme sap next time, too. Anyway, you can come get the book anytime. I know you just wanted a couple copies for you and Kurt to keep, but Blaine, in spite of the sap – I think there might be money in this one, too. You're a better children's writer than I'd pegged you for, I think."

Blaine paused. "I'll … have to think about that, Alex."

"Let me know. But for the time being, your copies are waiting for you in my office. Just give me a yell when you're coming by."

"Will do. Thank you, Alex."

"Whatever – I've gotta figure out a way to get rid of this damn soft spot you somehow wormed your way into." Blaine could hear his agent rolling his eyes.

"You know you love me," he sang. "Thanks again – I need to get back, though. We're getting stuff ready for Lily to come home!"

"Yeah? That's great, man. Let me know when I can come see her, will you? I'm sorry I haven't visited, but hospitals totally freak me out …"

"Hospitals freak a lot of people out, Alex, it's no big deal. I'll give you a call when we get settled. And if you think you've got a soft spot for me, well … just wait till you meet her."

"Yeah, trying not to think about that. I won't have a man card left, will I?"

"Nope. Probably not. But really, do you need one that bad?"

"What, a man card?"

"Yeah."
"Yes, Blaine, I actually do. Now, I'm very busy and important and I have shit to do, like *reclaiming* said man card, so hop along and do whatever the hell you were doing, alright?"

Blaine tried not to snicker, and failed. "I love you, Alex."

"Whatever, man."

* * *

**Thursday, September 12th, 2024**

"I thought I'd be over this," Kurt said softly as he and Blaine stood, very quiet and very still, in the room that once was Violet's nursery.

They'd just finished re-assembling the gorgeous white crib that they'd originally fallen in love with a year and a half before, and the memories they thought had faded, sepia filtered and translucent, had come back in full color and dimension.

"I keep thinking of when we put it together the first time," Blaine murmured.

"I keep thinking the walls should be lavender."

Blaine's arm slid around Kurt's waist and they breathed together, the kind of sighing that only someone who knew grief firsthand could understand.

"The bedding will help," Blaine finally said, sounding too confident, like he was trying to convince himself. Kurt figured he probably was.

They walked, legs stilted like those of mummies, into the living room where the packages of bedding and all their nursery paraphernalia sat waiting for them still unopened. Blaine picked the first one up, held it out to Kurt.
"You want to do the honors?"

Kurt took it, ripped it open, and oh. Right. That's how this felt.

They pulled everything out, piece by piece, gazing at it, running their hands over it. The yellow paisley bedsheets, the gray chevron bedskirt, gray chevron curtains with yellow ric rac at the hem. A yellow, gray and white striped quilt. A happy yellow rug, and the new charcoal slipcover for their glider.

"Oh, Blaine – I love it," Kurt sighed happily. "I hardly know how to feel right now – I keep waffling through all these feelings, like all over the spectrum, and –" He broke off, completely unsure of how to continue.

"I know," Blaine said quietly, and god, if they had to go through something this confusing, at least they were going through it together. "Maybe – maybe it'll be easier once we get her home?"

"We'll be too tired to notice anything else, more than likely," Kurt said with a wan smile, and this time it was him slipping an arm around Blaine's waist. "But – until then – it's going to be weird having an empty nursery in the house again."

Kurt could literally feel the air deflate from Blaine's lungs. "Oh god," he breathed, "I never even thought about that."

"Neither did I, until just now."

"We – at least we'll be really busy?"

"And it'll be waiting to be filled, instead of having just been emptied," Kurt said.

Blaine sighed, sinking down onto the couch in the midst of the baby sheets. "Is that ever going to stop chasing us?"

"It'll always be there, I think." Kurt settled next to him, picking up the quilt and placing it in his lap. "But Blaine – in a couple years, we'll be so busy with preschool and tea parties or ballet classes"
or soccer camp or karate lessons or whatever Lily's into at the moment – we won't have time to focus on it. We'll have our life."

"You're right, I know," Blaine said, leaning his head on Kurt's shoulder. "But do you ever wonder about her? Where she is? How she and Abby are getting along? She's walking now, and probably starting to talk a little …"

"Of course I wonder, honey. I wonder what she looks like and if she's wearing fabulous clothes and if Abby and Micah are still together and if Abby's still in school. I wonder what our life would be like now if things had turned out differently." Kurt paused, nuzzling his cheek on Blaine's curls. "But our life has turned out like this, and we're about to bring our own baby home that nobody can take away from us. I guess – we just need to focus on the present from here on out."

Blaine nodded glumly. "Maybe I should double up on my meds this week …"

Kurt kissed his hair. "If you feel like you need to, by all means, honey."

"Just for now. Just to get through. I didn't – I wish I'd thought to bring this up at my appointment yesterday."

"You can talk about it next week."

Blaine looked up. "I might not be going next week. We – Lily might be home by Wednesday."

Kurt frowned. "That doesn't mean that you need to quit going to therapy, though, Blaine."

"Well obviously that's not what I meant," Blaine said, frowning right back at him. "Just for the first couple of weeks, until we settle into a routine – I don't want to leave you here by yourself with her …"

Kurt could tell that Blaine phrased it wrong, regretted the words as soon as they left his mouth, but that didn't stop them from stinging. "And why not? Do you not think I can take care of her for an hour?"
"Kurt – you know that's not what I meant."

"What did you mean then?" he asked, his eyes and his posture turning icy.

"We'll have had her home for two days at the most next Wednesday." Blaine said, his voice strained. "It'd be different if I was really struggling, but – Kurt, we haven't gotten any time together just as family. I don't want to interrupt that for a second if I don't have to."

Kurt eyed him warily, wondering if he should say what he wanted to, what was on the tip of his tongue. Maybe it was the stress of the memories of Violet, maybe he was just tired, but it ended up coming out against his better judgment. "If you're not struggling at least a little, Blaine, then how come you're upping your meds?"

Blaine's face fell, more like tumbled off a mountain, then turned instantly stony. He wriggled away from Kurt's touch, stood up, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Blaine – I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

"No." Blaine blinked, looked away. "You shouldn't have."

"I –"

"I am going to go out," Blaine said, looking away, "and buy formula while I calm down. You can fix the nursery; actually, you can do whatever you want. I'll be back later." He walked quickly, steadily to the door, grabbed his wallet and keys.

"Blaine –"

The door slammed shut before Kurt could finish his sentence.

He sighed, ran his hands through his hair, tugged on it a little. They would make it through this week without killing each other …
* The nursery. There was a nursery to be put together. He got up with a grunt, walked into the room that wouldn't be an office for a long, long time, maybe not ever again.

* * *

Blaine opened the door, a meek expression on his face. He could hear Kurt humming in the nursery and deposited his bags on the table.

"Hey," he said quietly, leaning on the doorframe.

"Blaine," Kurt sighed, setting the black and white print of Blaine, Lily and himself that Sarah Grace had taken in the hospital on the seat of the newly covered glider. "I'm so sorry. It's been a day."

"It's been a week," Blaine said, walking into the room, pulling Kurt into a hug. "And I'm sorry, too. All this has affected me more than I expected."

"Same here, obviously," Kurt said, sighing into Blaine's shoulder. "But we can't make enemies of each other. Especially not right now."

"Kurt," Blaine breathed, his heart twisting a little, "I never want to make an enemy of you —"

"I know. I know that. But – it wouldn't be hard, not if we're not careful – we're stressed already, and I have a feeling we're going to be very, very tired, very, very soon …"

"You, as always, are right," Blaine said. "But I don't ever want to."

"I know that." Kurt cupped his cheek in his long, elegant fingers, leaned in, and oh, make-up kisses were always the sweetest kisses …

When he pulled away, Blaine's bottom lip stuck to Kurt's for the briefest of moments, as if it were telling Blaine no, that he shouldn't be stopping, that it wanted to be connected to Kurt's lips for the rest of forever. Blaine mostly agreed with his bottom lip.
But then Kurt tipped his forehead forward, leaning it against Blaine's, and that was almost as good, even though it made Blaine's vision go all blurry with the sheer closeness of him.

"I love you," Kurt promised him. "Even when I say things I don't mean. Even when the snark gets the best of me. Even when I don't feel it …"

"I love you, too. Even when I act like a dipshit."

"Lucky for both of us those times are few and far between," Kurt grinned, and Blaine grinned back.

"Lucky," he agreed. "Hey – the nursery looks fantastic. You kind of worked miracles in here for the amount of time I was gone."

"Thank you," Kurt beamed, looking around the room. "It does look pretty good, doesn't it?"

"It's incredible, Kurt. Doesn't even look like the same nursery as Violet's – which I think will actually help, at least with some of my issues. Thank you for doing this."

"Well," Kurt said, ducking his head, "there are still some things I need to work on, but …" He looked up, took Blaine's hand. "It's inhabitable. Which is what we're going for at this point, I guess."

"I just can't wait to have a baby to inhabit it. And speaking of inhabitable – I got a case of diapers while I was out. Where do you want them to live?"

* * *

"I want to go see her."

Kurt's eyes shifted to his husband's face, away from the painting of the yellow flowers he'd just finished hanging on the wall. Blaine looked a little tired and a little haggard.
"I know it's late," Blaine continued, "but – it just doesn't feel right, doing all this stuff for her, looking at all her things, and not even going to visit her today."

Kurt's expression softened, and he let go of the edges of the painting, his fingers brushing against the rough texture of the canvas. "Blaine, honey, of course we can go visit. You've spent less time with her this week than you ever have, I know."

"I just miss her."

"Of course you do. So do I."

So they got on the train. Over the weeks they'd been making the long trek to Bronx-Lebanon, there had been a multitude of train rides. On some, they'd chattered back and forth like two very cheerful squirrels. Some of them were spent bickering. Sometimes they didn't say anything at all, just clung to each other's hands and tried not to weep for the pain they left their daughter in. And on this particular night, the entire ride on the 4 Train was spent with Blaine's head on Kurt's shoulder. Kurt stroked his hair, clucking worriedly at him, and hoped desperately that the sight of their present child would be enough to pull their minds away from the memories of their past one.

Off the train, across the street, and up five flights of stairs because the blasted women's center elevator was in the middle of being repaired.

"What in the hell," Kurt grumbled in the middle of the third flight, "are women in labor supposed to do with this?"

"I think there was a sign that sent them to the ER," Blaine said, not a bit out of breath, and Kurt hated him just a little for it. Yoga was great, but maybe he needed to add some cardio … Maybe Zumba? Zumba could be fun. Zumba would also decidedly make him look like an idiot.

"Finally," Blaine sighed as they hit the fifth floor.

A nurse named Penny was taking care of Lily that night, and she smiled apologetically when they came in. "I'm so sorry about the elevators. Maintenance is fixing them as fast as they can …"

"No worries," Kurt said. "We needed the exercise. Or, I did, at least."
Blaine grabbed his hand, tugged him into the pod. "How's our girl? Is she asleep already? I know it's a little late …"

"Nope. She's bathed and I've fed her, but she's still awake. I know you guys keep books at her bed – if you want to read her a bedtime story, go right ahead."

Blaine grinned at that suggestion, and Kurt saw something just a bit secretive behind his eyes, but didn't question it for the moment. All he wanted was to see his little girl…

"Oh, my little darling," Blaine sighed happily, picking her up from her crib as soon as they entered the pod. "Daddy is so happy to see you tonight."

They sat, and Kurt picked a book – *The Runaway Bunny* – and read while Blaine held Lily close. As the book progressed, and the runaway bunny's mother promised to find him no matter where he went or what he turned into, Kurt's eyes pricked with tears.

"'If you become the wind and blow me,' said the little bunny, 'then I will join the circus and fly away on a flying trapeze,'" Kurt read. "'If you go flying on a flying trapeze,' said his mother, 'I will become a tightrope walker and I will walk across the air to you.'"

"Kurt," Blaine whispered, reaching out his free hand for Kurt's, and Kurt knew that Blaine was thinking of the same thing he was – the last book they'd read to Violet was of the same vein, their promise that their hearts and their love would go with her wherever she went.

"Maybe this was a bad choice of bedtime story," Kurt said, swallowing hard. "Lily? Do you mind terribly if Papa cuts this one a little short?"

"No," Blaine said, squeezing his hand, "finish it. Or, I will if you can't. Every word of it's true – you know we'd both climb a mountain or swim a sea or walk a tightrope for her. I want her to hear it, even if she doesn't understand."

Kurt looked up at Blaine's face, his eyes steely, determined not to cry.

"Okay," Kurt said, nodding. "Okay, we'll finish it." He took a deep breath. "'If you become a
tightrope walker and walk across the air,' said the bunny, 'I will become a little boy and run into a
house…"

When it was done, Kurt held out his hands. "Please? I just want to snuggle her for a little bit …"

"I cannot wait," Blaine said, his voice a little thick, "until we can do this at home, together, on the
couch or in the bed, or something. I just – I want to hold onto her and hold onto you at the same
time and we just can’t here, and –" He broke off with a sigh.

"Almost," Kurt said, trying to reassure himself just as much as Blaine. "It's almost done. We're
almost there."

"Too bad almost doesn't count," Blaine sighed, looking at his watch and squeezing his eyes shut.
"Kurt? It's ten already."

Kurt sighed. "I guess that means we should probably go …"

"It's just – tomorrow's more than likely going to be a late night, and I've got an early rehearsal with
the full band in the morning …"

"And it's already been a long day," Kurt added. "You're right. We should go home. Sleep will help
everything feel better anyway."

"It looks like somebody's over halfway there already," Blaine said, a soft smile lighting his face as
he gazed at Lily, blinking tiredly in Kurt's arms.

"Let's follow her lead, then," Kurt said, kissing her head and placing her carefully in her crib. "Just
think, Blaine – next week, we shouldn't ever have to leave her at night ever again."

* * *

**Friday, September 13th, 2024**

On Friday, the band rehearsal came and went, and in no time Blaine found himself in a weird sort
of overwhelmed, buzzing nervousness, sitting at the piano bar with Kurt, Nick and Jeff, nursing a gin and tonic.

"Please sing something," Nick begged when Jeff excused himself to the bathroom. "I need another drink before I do this, and if you guys would just break the ice a little …"

"You're not having second thoughts, are you?" Blaine asked, concerned.

"Not at all," Nick said, shaking his head vehemently. "I just – I feel like my stomach fell out on the ground about a block before we got here."

"He's not going to say no," Kurt said, patting the top of Nick's hand. "And I'm not sure that *liquor* is the best solution for a person whose stomach is getting stomped all over out on the sidewalk …"

"Liquid courage, Kurt," Nick said, shaking his glass at him.

"But," Kurt continued, "as rusty and *not* warmed up as I am, I suppose Blaine and I can do a little something if it will make you feel better. As long as you're up for it, honey …"

"I'd better be up for it," Blaine said, taking a sip of his drink. "It'll be a good warm-up anyway, get me used to the piano. But Kurt's right," he added, gesturing to Nick, "he's not going to say no."

Soon, as he and Kurt yammered back and forth about which song they were going to sing, Jeff was sidling back up to Nick's side.

"Miss me?" he asked.

"Always," Nick said, smiling fondly and giving him a quick kiss on the cheek. "Kurt and Blaine are gonna sing."

"Oh, good!" Jeff said, his face lighting up. "What song?"

"That," Kurt said coyly, "is a surprise."
He took Blaine's hand, eyes sparkling with something that Blaine couldn't quite read, and tugged him to the front of the bar.

"What are we singing?" Blaine murmured in his ear as they went.

"Wicked. You pick which one."

Blaine nodded. "I've got it from here," he told the pianist, then bent down and whispered, "I think I'll actually have the next two songs – I'm part of the proposal thing tonight."

"Ahh, and would you be the lucky guy?"

"Well," Blaine said, grinning, "I am a lucky guy, but it's because I'm already married to that guy. Eight years this November."

"Wow, congrats. Well, she's all yours," the pianist said, rising from the bench and gesturing to the instrument. "Be good to her, please."

"Oh, I will," Blaine promised, and settled in front of the keys. As Kurt pulled the stool and microphone closer to the piano, he caught his eye and winked, then played the opening chords of the song.

Something in Kurt's eyes darkened and one corner of his mouth quirked up just before he began to sing the first verse.

Kiss me too fiercely, hold me too tight – I need help believing you're with me tonight ...

The whole of Blaine's core shuddered as Kurt sang; even after years of no training or any real performing, Kurt's voice still held the power to mesmerize and hypnotize his audience, including and especially Blaine.

He was so hypnotized, in fact, that he almost missed his cue.
By the time they got to the second chorus, their voices blending together and sending chills down Blaine's spine, he was half hard in his jeans, staring straight into Kurt's eyes, barely looking down at the keys at all.

And when Kurt, eyes dark and expression completely intentional, stood up from the stool and walked to the piano bench where he perched himself beside Blaine, facing the rest of the bar – well, Blaine very nearly forgot how to play the piano at all.

He managed to make it through, though, and at the end of the song, when they were both breathing after the long held note at the end, Kurt smiled, coquettish and demure, down at his lap. Blaine gulped and said his line, "What is it?"

"It's just … for the first time I feel … wicked."

Blaine couldn't help himself – scripted or not, he crashed his lips into Kurt's in a searing kiss, only remembering precisely where he was and what he was there for as the room erupted in a cacophony of wolf whistles and catcalls.

"Sorry," he stammered to Kurt, blushing wildly, but Kurt just smiled.

"Oh, the things I'm going to do to you when we get home," Kurt murmured as he slipped off the piano bench. "Nick," he called into the microphone, "your turn to sing something while you've got a captive pianist. Although I'm not sure you could ever out-do that."

"Wanna bet?" Nick called from the middle of the bar, throwing his napkin on the table and winking at Jeff. He took the microphone from Kurt, and as he did, he hissed in Blaine's ear, "Fuck you, stealing my thunder like that," but he was smiling, so Blaine wasn't terribly worried.

Kurt flounced off the stage and Blaine watched him pull his phone from his pocket, ready to record.

"Soooo," Nick started, grinning at the crowd, and Blaine could see a flash of nervousness in his
eyes. Blaine himself had forgotten to be, too thoroughly wooed by Kurt to do anything else, and he chided himself as a once-performer for allowing himself to be that distracted onstage.

"The song I'd like to sing is for my boyfriend, actually, so Jeff – will you come up to the front where I can see you?" Nick continued, and yeah, Blaine really needed to start paying attention. He watched as Jeff rose from his seat, chuckling and shaking his head as he made his way to the front of the bar.

"What are you doing?" Jeff mouthed silently.

Nick grinned a little and shrugged. "I hope you don't mind, but I brought a few friends along, too." Jeff's mouth gaped as a trumpet player and a saxophonist came out of the woodwork and joined Blaine on the stage. "The song basically speaks for itself," Nick continued. "So I guess just sit back and enjoy, okay?"

Jeff laughed out loud, then plopped down in a chair and rested his chin on his hand, clearly prepared to be wooed.

The trumpet player counted them off, and the brass came in a couple measures before Blaine, and then instinct took over – his fingers flew on the ivory keys, banging out syncopated chord after syncopated chord, until Nick came in.

"Let me tell you 'bout a guy I know, he's my baby and he lives next door, every mornin' when the sun comes up, he brings me coffee in my favorite cup …"

Nick's nerves melted away as he began, and it was clear that Jeff was melting away with them, a grin bright enough to light a city block stretched across his face.

"Oh I know, yes I know, hallelujah I love him so," Blaine harmonized along with the rest of their makeshift band, happy to witness the ebullient joy radiating from Jeff. He couldn't wait until the actual proposal …

They ended on a high note, trumpet and sax and the clanging piano, and then Blaine immediately switched to something softer, improvised.

"Hallelujah," Nick said straight to Jeff, his voice soft above the swell of the piano, "I love you so.
Come here."

Jeff's eyes widened even more, and the joyous expression on his face faltered a little bit into what seemed like maybe shock to Blaine. He stood, the legs of his chair scraping loudly across the wood floor of the bar.

"For as long as I can remember, you've been my best friend," Nick said, grabbing Jeff's hand as he came closer. "Even though our timing was off for years, and there were stupid things that came between us, you have always been the one I've turned to, the one I want by my side. For as long as I can remember, I've loved you in one way or another. And if it's alright with you, I'd like to keep loving you in every way imaginable for the rest of our lives. So," he continued, dropping down to one knee, and Jeff gasped loudly.

"Oh my god," he breathed, his hand flying to cover his open mouth.

A sly smile came over Nick's face. "Am I doing okay? Is this sort of how you pictured it?"

Nick grinned up at him from the ground. "Well, good. I have nothing to live up to then," he quipped, and Jeff laughed through his tears. "Seriously though, I love you, more than anyone or anything – I didn't know what love was before I loved all of you with all of me. And it would make me the happiest, most honored, most privileged man in the world if you, my very best friend, would marry me."

Jeff broke at his words and, shaking, fell to his own knees in one of the sweetest displays Blaine had ever seen, throwing his arms around Nick's neck and nodding his head vigorously.

"Yes," he gasped, "yes, yes, yes, oh my god –"

Blaine saw Nick's eyes shining with tears as well when he took Jeff's hands and pulled them both to their feet, lifted Jeff's chin, kissed him soundly, and slid the ring onto his finger when they finally broke apart.

Cheers erupted throughout the bar, and Blaine jumped when a strong pair of arms flew around his
shoulders, hugging him tightly.

"That was perfect," Kurt said.

"It kind of was, wasn't it?" Blaine said, grinning and turning around to catch Kurt in a real hug.

"Mmmhmm," Kurt hummed low in his ear. "You were perfect too. Don't forget what I told you earlier."

"I'll hold you to it," Blaine breathed, and was just about to kiss him when …

"You!" Jeff cried, pointing at the both of them, and they darted apart like teenagers caught making out by their parents. "You guys knew about this the whole time, didn't you?"

"Wellllll…" Blaine drawled, hoping the flush on his face was quickly dissipating. "Kind of. Your ring was hiding at our place, actually …"

"In a houseplant," Kurt added drily.

"I – you can explain that later," Jeff said, smiling through teary eyes. "But seriously, thank you, so much, oh my gosh – the ring, and the piano, and –" He held up his hand, beaming over at Nick, who was beaming at him. "I cannot believe you."

"Believe it, baby," Nick said, striding over. "You and I are getting hitched!" He pulled Jeff into a searing kiss, and Blaine gasped as Kurt's hand, resting on the small of his back, drifted lower and lower until his fingers dipped just below his waistband.

* * *

Much, much later that night, after several celebratory drinks and a long, celebratory sing-along at the piano bar, Blaine was pressed against the wall directly inside and to the left of their front door, Kurt grappling with the buttons on his shirt, mouthing hungrily at his neck.
"Kurt," Blaine said, his voice thick in his own ears through the haze of his buzz, and held up his hands. "Kurt. Not that I say this very often —" His hips jogged forward as Kurt found the spot right next to his Adam's apple. "Actually, not that I even want to say it now — god, Kurt — but will you slow down a little? Just for a second."

Kurt's eyes were hurt when he looked up, but Blaine shook his head.

"Kurt, baby, it's not — I just have something I need to say. Just really fast, before we get too, um, involved …"

"What is it, then?"

"It's just — I love you," Blaine said, his words coming out soft and gentle, but so, so sure. He might have been a little tipsy, but he could be wasted off his ass and still know, without a shadow of a doubt, that his love for Kurt was the truest truth he'd ever understood. "Nothing's ever gonna be the same after Lil comes home. For the next eighteen years at least, everything will revolve around her. And I can't wait."

Kurt petted his hair — he always did get more handsy when he'd been drinking — and waited patiently for him to finish.

"But," Blaine continued, trying to pull the words he'd thought of earlier that day out of the fog of his dulled brain, "But. Tonight." Tonight. "I just want tonight to be about us. You and me. The kids that fell in love before they were really supposed to and worked out for good when they shouldn't have."

"Oh, Blaine …"

"I just — it's beautiful, Kurt. Our love. Our marriage. Do you know how much I love being married to you, oh my god — I love being married. I —"

Kurt pressed him against the wall again.

"I love being married to you, too," Kurt said between kisses, his mouth hot and hungry, tugging Blaine closer with his open palm cupping Blaine's ass. "Obviously. But talking like that? Not playing fair. Actually, picking As Long as You're Mine to sing in the piano bar wasn't playing fair,
either. You know *precisely* what that song does to me."

Blaine grinned as he manhandled control over the situation from Kurt long enough to shuffle them into the kitchen, where he hopped on the counter, wrapping his legs around Kurt's waist.

"My motives were purely innocent," he said, a little breathless as Kurt's fabric-covered cock pushed up against his.

"Liar," Kurt breathed, pulling Blaine into a searing kiss, thrusting his tongue into Blaine's mouth, and yep, it was a good thing he'd gotten what he wanted to say out, because he was *done for*.

They kissed and kissed, and the kisses turned dirtier and dirtier until Kurt was grasping at his fly and at Blaine's, yanking their pants out of the way.

A tug of fabric, and Blaine's briefs were tucked under his balls. "Kurt," he whimpered helplessly into his husband's mouth, wondering at how something so *filthy* could have so much love behind it at the same time.

"What do you want, Blaine?" Kurt rasped darkly in his ear. Blaine's cock jumped at the sound of it. "You said you wanted tonight to be about us, only us –" His hand trailed down, teased at Blaine's balls, making him gasp, " – but how, exactly, do you want me?"

"I –" Blaine stuttered. He could think of ten million ways that he wanted Kurt, would always want Kurt; he barely cared *how* as long as it was Kurt that he was getting. But this was pushy Kurt, this was sexually dominant Kurt, and in order to make the most of that …

"I want you to fuck me. *Hard,*" he whispered against Kurt's neck.

"Yeah?" Kurt murmured back.

"*Please.*"

"What else?" Kurt growled as he pulled Blaine's hips forward, flush with his own body.
"What do you mean what else?"

"I mean," Kurt said, licking a stripe up Blaine's throat and squeezing at his cock, and god, he hadn't had that much sexual abandon in a very long time, "I want you to spell out exactly how you want this night to look. Exactly what you want."

Blaine moaned. It was the only response his body could reasonably come up with, apparently, and Kurt sucked hard on a tendon protruding from his neck.

"Tell me, Blaine."

"I want …" Blaine closed his eyes, letting himself get a little lost. "Let's get out the toy box."

"Ooooh," Kurt said coyly. "I like where this is going …"

"Hopefully it's going to the bedroom," Blaine said, wiggling his hips against Kurt's body. "Please?"

Kurt hiked Blaine's legs up farther around his waist and lifted, surprising Blaine into a high-pitched squeal. "Kurt!" he laughed, trying to hang on. "Baby, you're going to hurt yourself –"

"Am not," Kurt said obstinately at the same time as he lost his balance and staggered into the side of the refrigerator. "Ow."

Blaine immediately slid down Kurt's body, planting his feet on the floor, and petted at Kurt's shoulder. "Are you okay sweetheart?"

Kurt smiled at him. "My shoulder's fine. It's only my pride that's wounded. The plan was to carry you to our bed and toss you on it and climb on top of you …"

"Even if I walk, you're still more than welcome to do the climbing on top part," Blaine grinned, pressing Kurt against the fridge. The fabric of Kurt's briefs was soft against Blaine's dick, and as he rubbed himself against Kurt's covered erection, sparks flew down his legs. "Now," he murmured,
"where were we?"

* * *

"God, we haven't used some of this stuff since college," Blaine said as Kurt dumped the contents of their toy box onto the bed.

"Mmmm, back in our wild, sex-crazed kinky days," Kurt chuckled, memories rolling like a slideshow of movie stills in his head.

"Something like that."

God, was he turned on, his nerves buzzing all the way down to his toes as Blaine pressed against his back, mouthing a sloppy kiss to his neck.

"Care to revisit them one last time before we become boring old dads?" Blaine asked, his arms slipping around Kurt's waist.

Kurt craned his neck, drawing the muscles in his face into a very serious expression. "Blaine," he said, "we will never be boring old dads."

"Fine," Blaine grinned, "then do you want to revisit the sexy olden days before we become fabulous, young, hip dads who unfortunately don't have much time for sex toys?"

"Now you're talking," Kurt said, smiling darkly, and turned around on his knees, meeting Blaine's lips in an open-mouthed kiss. He trailed his hand down Blaine's chest, popping the buttons on his shirt open as he went.

Blaine hummed into his mouth and Kurt grew harder, the want coiled in his belly like a snake ready to strike. He really hadn't had a chance after the first chords of their duet were played earlier that night – their combined voices on that song always did things to him, and Blaine knew it. But, making it even worse, Blaine had also torn up that piano during Nick's song, had thrown winks in Kurt's direction and one look that definitively said Come hither and fuck me into oblivion and obviously Kurt hadn't been able to do that then but damn if he didn't want to now.
"Kurt," Blaine whispered against his lips, hand trailing down to stroke at him through his underwear.

"Mmm, want you," he murmured, pulling back to pull his own shirt off and sift through their toy collection. "For both of us," he said, holding up the matching pair of snap-on cock rings they’d gotten for their move to their first New York apartment together.

"Fuck," Blaine said roughly.

"That's the plan."

"And for you?" Blaine said, digging deeper and pulling the black vibrating butt plug from the pile. "If it isn't too much?"

"Oh," Kurt breathed. The last time he'd used it had been years ago, just after they'd graduated from college, and he'd sworn it off after an embarrassing public spectacle of coming in his pants in the middle of a restaurant when Blaine had accidentally bumped the remote control in his pocket and turned the vibrations all the way up. But for tonight…

"You don't have to," Blaine said, his cheeks flushing. "I know it doesn't exactly carry fond memories for you, but I thought –"

"No," Kurt interrupted, picturing the agony-ecstasy painted on Blaine's face anytime he came with the toy in his ass. "I think – maybe it's time to make new memories with it …"

"Oh god, can I put it in you, then?"

Blaine's face was open, thirsty, and he was looking at Kurt like he was a very tall glass of water.

"Cock rings first."

Blaine practically pounced on him, peeling the few articles of clothing he was still wearing off and throwing them to the floor. Kurt barely had time to take a breath before Blaine's tongue was licking at his cock, pulling high-pitched sighs from his chest.
"Do you remember the first time we used these?" Blaine breathed against Kurt's sensitive skin as he fastened the thin leather strap around Kurt and under his balls, his mouth lightly sucking at the head of his cock once the ring was snapped in place.

"Oh," Kurt gasped, involuntarily thrusting forward. Oh, god that's what he wanted, to be taken into Blaine's body any way he could have it. "How could I forget that?" he managed to choke out. "Got them out five minutes after Dad left for the airport."

Blaine smiled, sliding his mouth off of Kurt. "I'd never come so hard in my life."

"Yeah?" Kurt murmured, spreading him out on the bed, licking at his inner thighs while he snapped Blaine in place. "I'm gonna make you come harder tonight."

The noise Blaine made in response was enough for Kurt to whimper, "Fuck," and he reached down to stroke himself, the need for friction far too strong to resist.

"God you're hungry for it," Blaine murmured with awe in his voice. "I love you like this, you know that?"

Kurt closed his eyes and squeezed his cock. His hole, still shut tight, was clenching down on itself and brazenly, he shoved his other hand behind him and began to play at it.

Blaine made another noise. "Oh god," he whimpered from the bed beneath Kurt, "let me watch?"

So turned on in that moment he could barely see straight, Kurt shifted his body so Blaine could get the best view, and gasped when he felt cold lube dribble down his crack. He wet his fingers with it, spread it around his hole, and pressed his finger in. He sighed and Blaine groaned as he began moving his finger in and out, in and out.

He knew exactly how he looked, eyes closed, head thrown back, stroking himself with one hand and fingering himself with the other, and he knew exactly what it was doing to Blaine. So he played it up, fucking himself on the one finger, body rising with it.

It felt good – Blaine wasn't the only one who could make him moan; he was well-acquainted with
his own body, knew exactly where to press and with how much pressure – and he got lost in the rhythm his hips were creating when a very low, very sexy groan came straight from Blaine.

Blaine was sitting, hands clasped in front of him, eyes wide, hips moving of their own volition, his cock hard and red and god, that cock ring.

"You don't have to only watch," Kurt said, pumping his finger intentionally. "I – ohhh – I don't want to be the only one having fun here. And …" He slipped another finger in beside the first and sighed. "Once you get that toy turned on, I'm going to want to fuck you. Hard and fast. So if you –"

Kurt couldn't finish before Blaine already had two lube-covered fingers shoved inside himself. "Fuck," he moaned, and Kurt let go of his own dick long enough to bend over and suck on Blaine's, his own fingers rubbing at his prostate.

"Kurt-Kurt-Kurt slow down, I don't want –"

"That," Kurt said definitively, slipping off, "is what the cock rings are for." Blaine whined.

Before long, they were sidled up to each other, frantically kissing, three fingers shoved up each of their asses.

"Blaine," Kurt gasped, "Blaine please, I need it, need –"

Blaine groaned out a loud "yes" and reached for the toy, pulling Kurt's fingers out of himself and rolling him over. Kurt clambered up to his hand and knees, hearing the telltale squelch of lube, and then cold hard silicone was pressed against his hole, stretched and begging to be filled again.

He thrust his body backwards, desperate for it, but Blaine held it away. "Shhh," Blaine soothed, "slow and steady, don't hurt yourself …"

A stretch. Then a bigger stretch, then an oh-my-god-it's-not-going-to-fit, then a how-the-hell-does-Blaine-get-this-inside-him, then a fuck that burns, then an oh-god-oh-god-oh-god-ohgodYES.

"Okay?" Blaine asked.
"Hah," said Kurt. "Ahhhhh …. Hah." Apparently something that big pressing on what felt like was every part of his insides took all of Kurt's words away from him.

"I know it's intense, but this will make it better," Blaine promised, holding up the remote.

Oh, oh, right, this was why he'd come in his pants so many years prior. He'd forgotten.

But he was remembering now. And he was really glad he was wearing the cock ring.

He must've been making noise because Blaine looked worried. "Are you okay Kurt?"

"Uh-huh," Kurt managed, then moaned. God, his prostate. God god god god …

"I'm gonna give you a little bit of vibration at a time," Blaine said, pressing the button, and Kurt fell forward, clutching at their headboard.

"Uhhhhhh," he gasped, his ass clenching – or, trying to clench, it still felt stretched too wide to do much of anything but try not to split apart, but god, the pleasure, it was like … nothing he knew how to describe.

"Okay, okay, maybe that's good for now. What do you want? If it's … if it's too much, I can take it out, or if you just want to sit here and wait for it to work that's fine too, or –"

Kurt might have lost his words, but he could still move, so he grabbed around Blaine's tiny waist and hauled him closer, shaking like a leaf all the while.

"Or you can fuck me," Blaine half-laughed, arranging himself so that he was bent over in front of Kurt.

"Is that – do you –" Kurt gasped out.
"If you're asking if that's what I want," Blaine said, "what does this tell you?" He reached back and spread his ass apart, his stretched hole clenching at the air. "Please, Kurt, if that's what you want, I need you …"

Kurt groaned again, somehow fumbling around enough to grab the lube and drip it in a messy line down his swollen cock and between the globes of Blaine's ass. The simplest touch made him shudder, and he felt like he was going to shake out of his skin as he held his cock in his hand in order to guide it home. He pressed the tip inside and bit his lip to keep from shouting – between the cock ring and the vibrator buzzing right against his prostate, he was more stimulated than he’d been since he could remember.

"Fuck, Kurt," Blaine breathed as he slid inside the rest of the way, up to the hilt, letting out a high-pitched whine.

"Blaine," he gasped, unsure of which direction to rock his hips.

"Take me," Blaine said firmly, rolling his body over Kurt's cock, and oh god, he was going to die. "I'm yours, if you need to use me, use me, if you need to fuck me, fuck me, whatever you need, Kurt –"

Kurt pulled back and slammed into him, both of them grunting loudly. Then Blaine hit the button again and everything turned a bit hazy.

It registered at one point that he had a fistful of Blaine's hair, pulling his head back, and was thrusting so hard that Blaine's body jolted with it, but Blaine was also an endless babble of "Yes-Kurt-god-don't-stop-oh-jesus-fuck-god-fuck-me," so he kept going.

He lost track of time, the only thing real was the buzzing in his ass and the tight-wet-heat of Blaine around his cock.

At some point, he flipped Blaine over on his back and fucked him into the mattress. Blaine's legs were over his shoulders, his arms bracing against the headboard of their bed, and he was groaning loudly. All of Kurt's nerve endings felt funny, some combination of half-numb and hypersensitive, and in a moment, he wondered if he would ever come, or if he'd just hang right on the edge of almost there for the rest of eternity. In that same moment, Blaine sped up the vibrator one last time and popped the cock ring off.
Kurt yelled. He wasn't much of a screamer in bed, was more often a babbler, as was Blaine, but this – this was all the pleasure the world could hold encompassed in one buzzing spot inside him, this was *overwhelmingly* intense, so much so that it would've hurt had it not felt so fucking *incredible*. He kept yelling, pulsing hard into Blaine's body, over and over and over, until the wave finally abated, and he collapsed, gasping for breath, at Blaine's side, grappling for the remote control.

"Oh my god," he panted, eyes wide. "Turn it off, turn it off –"

Blaine took the remote from him, shut the vibrator off, and Kurt squirmed against it. "Can we get it out?"

"Kurt," Blaine said, and Kurt realized his voice sounded strained. He whipped his head in Blaine's direction.

"Honey, oh god, did I hurt you?"

"No, I mean – I'll be sore tomorrow probably, but – Kurt, I have to come. Like. Right *now*. I don't care how you do it or what you do it with, but you have *got* to get me off."

Kurt looked down at Blaine's cock, thick and red and dripping, then turned his eyes back to meet Blaine's.

"I'm almost there, just …" Blaine was nearly begging, and Kurt could have sworn he saw tears gathering in the corners of them. "Just … please," Blaine said, his voice thick. "I *have* to come."

"Okay," Kurt said, trying to sound soothing, and probably failing miserably because his heart was still pounding and *damn* he just wanted the thing out of his ass. "Shhh, I've got you." His arms shook as he turned over, scooting down in the bed, and he opened his mouth, licked a long line up the underside of Blaine's cock, gathering the precome glistening on his tip.

"Stop teasing," Blaine choked out.

So Kurt sank his mouth over the tip and kept going until his gag reflex responded, backed up half a centimeter, and sucked. Blaine's back arched; he was practically howling with it, thrusting up into
Kurt's mouth in short little bursts.

"Almost," he sobbed. "Come on …"

Kurt took his shaky hand and unsnapped the cock ring, then slid two shaky fingers into the cavern of Blaine's body, bent them just so, and hit home. One, two, three rubs over the little knot inside of Blaine, cheeks hollowed again, and Blaine was coming, his mouth open in a silent shout, his face drawn with the force of his orgasm. He emptied himself down Kurt's throat, shooting thick, hot come into his mouth and Kurt swallow, swallow, swallowed it all down.

"Uhhhhhhhhhhhhhh," Blaine finally moaned, falling limp on the bed. "Oh my god, Kurt …" He flopped over, tugging on Kurt's arm. "Cuddles first or butt plug out first?" he asked, a sleepy haze glazing his eyes.

"Butt plug," Kurt said, wincing.

"Okay baby, nice and easy …" Blaine murmured, dripping more lube around the plug. For a moment Kurt saw stars, and not in the good way. After it was gone, he felt impossibly empty, his hole clenching, spasming around nothing at all.

"Blaine …" he whined, curling up in his husband's waiting arms. Blaine's heart was still pounding in his chest like a jackrabbit's.

"Was that as good for you as it was for me?" Blaine murmured, tugging him closer.

"That was – Blaine, I couldn't speak. So, yes. It fucking blew my mind."

Blaine laughed softly. "Neither one of us will be able to walk in the morning."

"Then we'll stay in bed." The enormous rush of serotonin was beginning to take effect, and Kurt's eyes were growing heavy. "Actually, that sounds like a fabulous idea regardless of whether we can walk …"

"Do you have any idea how much I love you?" Blaine murmured, kissing his face, his neck, his
"I think I might can guess," Kurt replied, smiling softly.

Blaine smiled back at him. "Clean up now or clean up later?"

Kurt fished the hand towel he'd prepared for that very purpose from the bedpost. "Quick cleanup now, real cleanup later."

Blaine smiled, wiped himself off with the towel and balled it up, tossing it on the floor beside the bed.

"Now, time for sleeping," Kurt said, snuggling deep into Blaine's arms.

"Sweet dreams, my love," Blaine whispered, settling on their shared pillow and Kurt, his heart fluttering like birds' wings, drifted off to sleep.
Kurt squirmed and tapped his feet and nearly shook all over as he stood against the wall outside the NICU, the phone ringing in his ear.

Ring … ring … ring …

"Hello?" It was Carole who answered.

"Carole, hi! Is Dad around?"

"He's at the shop this afternoon, honey – one of his former campaign contributors broke down on the side of the road a couple hours ago, and you know your dad – he towed the guy himself. Can I do something? Is everything okay?"

"More than okay," Kurt said, unable to contain his excitement. "We got a discharge date today!"

"Oh, sweetie, that's wonderful!" Carole exclaimed. "How long?"

"Two more days. We're staying with her tomorrow overnight for sort of a practice run, and then we're supposed get some sleep Tuesday night and come back and take her home on Wednesday morning."

"Oh, I am so happy for you!" Kurt could hear her beaming.

"Thanks, Carole – we're pretty happy for us, too. You mind if I let you go and try to catch Dad at the shop?"

"Not at all – this will make his day. He can't wait to see her again. You just say the word, and we'll buy our plane tickets."

"I – about that." Nervous, Kurt fiddled with the bottom of his sleeve as he spoke. "I think – Blaine
and I talked, and we just – we want some time with her. It's not that we don't want you to come, and we don't want to cause any hurt feelings, it's just –"

"It's just that you've spent the only time you've ever known her in an intensive care unit," Carole said softly. "Believe me, Kurt, I understand. No hard feelings on this end."

Kurt let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding. "Thank you."

"You and Blaine take all the time you need," she said. "Us grandparents aren't going anywhere."

"And thank goodness for that," Kurt smiled. He paused, scuffed the faux wood floor with his shoe. "Hey, Carole?"

"Hmm?"

"I'm really glad Lily has a grandma."

Her voice was thick when she finally replied, "Oh, sweetie, so am I."

* * *

Blaine was singing when Kurt walked back into the pod after he got off the phone with Carole and then his dad, loud and silly enough for the nurses to be snickering behind their hands as they sat charting at their computers. Lily was watching him, eyes wide and mouth open, like he was the single most interesting thing in all of the universe.

Well, Kurt could understand the sentiment.

"Nice to see the NICU's gained a Court Jester, honey," he smiled, crossing his arms over his chest. Since college, he'd marveled at the strange splice that made up his husband – half of him the writer, sitting in coffee shops for hours while he poured out his heart in words on a computer screen, half of him the eternal performer, making people smile, then making friends out of them wherever he went.
But then again, there was a reason that Blaine could get free coffee anywhere within a ten-block radius of their home …

"…and the root in the hole, and the hole in the ground, and the green grass grew all around and around, the green grass grew all around," Blaine sang, waving for Kurt to come join him. "Come on, Kurt, I need an echo," he said, starting in on the next verse. "And on this branch …"

Kurt rolled his eyes, grinning, and humored him, crouching next to Blaine on the edge of Lily's play mat. "And on this branch…"

"There was a twig!"

"There was a twig …"

"The prettiest twig …"

"The prettiest twig …"

"That you ever did see!"

"That you ever did see …" Kurt sang, shaking his head at his husband. Oh, their lives were going to be so full when Lily came home …

"The twig on the branch, and the branch on the tree, and the tree on the root, and the root in the hole, and the hole in the ground, and the green grass grew all around and around, the green grass grew all around …"

"Is this one of those songs that doesn't have an ending?" one of the nurses chuckled, looking over at them.

"No – but I can sing that one if you want!" Blaine exclaimed, his face lighting up like a puppy who'd just discovered what ball meant. "This is the song that doesn't end, yes it goes on and on my
friends, some people started singing it not knowing what it was, and they'll continue singing it forever just because this is the song that doesn't end, yes it goes on and on my –"

"Blaine? Honey? All the babies are going to get nervous tics," Kurt interrupted, gently patting Blaine's arm. "And so am I."

"I … oh. Right. Um – maybe we should read a book instead?" Blaine asked. "Or, actually – I'm gonna take a quick bathroom break, now that you're back. Too much coffee this morning …"

"You can say that again," Kurt said, laughing. "You're like a wind-up toy that won't wind down."

Blaine just grinned at him, pushing himself up off the floor and striding out of the pod without another word.

One of the nurses turned around in her chair. "He," she said, "is about the cutest thing I've ever laid eyes on. You keep him around, you hear me?"

"Oh, don't worry," Kurt said softly, his eyes dancing with the fluorescent lights. "I plan to."

* * *

Monday, September 16th, 2024

"Overnight bag with pajamas for both of us."

"Check."

"Toothbrush, toothpaste."

"Check."

"Hair products."
"Check."

"Pillows."

"Check."

"Extra bedding."

"Check."

"Carseat for the carseat challenge test."

"Check."

Blaine looked over their little pile of belongings by the door. "I guess that's it, then."

"Oh! We can't forget Serena's letter – she said she doesn't work Tuesday night, remember? So tonight will be the last time we'll see her."

Blaine blinked at Kurt. "We – oh. You're right." A sad silence was cast over their entryway, and Kurt slowly walked over to his desk where a stack of thank you letters lay.

"This – might be harder than we think," Kurt said, picking up the letter on top and running his finger over the seal of the envelope. "I feel like …" His voice dropped off.

"They're as much a part of this as we are?" Blaine supplied. "That they know her as well or better than we do, that we won't quite know what to do when we don't have an army of nursing staff at our disposal?"

Kurt smiled a tight smile. "All of that."
"Yeah, me too." Blaine sighed, looking up toward the ceiling for a moment. "We just … have to know that we'll be okay."

"I know we will. It's not just that," Kurt said sadly. "It's just – I'm really going to miss them. As much as I've complained and begged for her to be ready to come home – I'll just miss them, is all."

"They feel like friends." Blaine said the words Kurt couldn't say and bent, just to have something to do with his hands, to pick up their overnight bag. "You ready to go?"

Kurt smiled and didn't answer his question. "I feel like the next time we're back here, we should be back here with her."

"It's just one more day."

"I know, but it's like a tease, what with the carseat and the overnight bag and everything."

"It's a test run, not a tease, Kurt."

Kurt cocked his head. "So if it's a test, what happens if we don't pass?"

"I – um – we –" Blaine sputtered, never having considered the possibility before.

"Blaine, I wasn't being serious. I mean, have you seen some of the people that take babies out of that place with them? Even if it is a test, no way in hell we won't pass if all those other people do."

Blaine managed a smirk. "That's kind of judgmental, don't you think?"

"Maybe, but it's also true." Kurt sighed, walking toward Blaine with the letter in his hand. "Come on. Let's go almost bring our baby home."

Blaine nodded, hooking the handle of the carseat over his forearm, and let Kurt lead him out the
"…And this band around her ankle is a security band – the alarms will go off if it's cut or if you move off the unit, and we'll all come out and jump on you so keep it on her and stay in here, okay?" Serena was explaining once they'd gotten situated in their room.

They laughed, and Kurt took a quick inventory of the space – ugly, muted colors, the paint chipping from the doorframe, a TV bolted to the ceiling, a double bed which looked sketchy at best dressed with a thin, white hospital blanket. Packing their own bedding was the best decision they could've made.

"So I think that's everything," Serena continued, and Kurt chided himself for not paying more attention. "Don't forget to write her feedings and diapers on the paper I gave you. I'll be in every four hours to get vitals, but I'll try not to wake you guys if you're asleep. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

Blaine smiled at her. "Actually," he said, "we have something for you." He unearthed her card from under the pile of blankets in Lily's carseat and handed it to her.

"Do you want me to open it now?" Serena asked.

"Please," Kurt said.

She did, and as she read, Kurt was a little surprised that tears came to her eyes. He'd never pegged her for an emotional person; she could be as prickly or pricklier than he was – but then again, he did his own share of crying, so who was he to judge?

"We mean every word," Blaine said once she’d closed the card. "You feel like family, Serena."

"You're making my mascara run, dammit," she said in reply, laughing as she pressed her forefingers under her eyes, and oh, Kurt thought, there she is. Eventually she gave up trying to catch her tears and just held out her arms to them. "I'm not supposed to say this," she whispered as they stepped into her hug, "but you're my favorite parents I've taken care of in years. You guys are like a breath of fresh air in my day. And it's been a joy, having Lily."
"It’s been a joy having you," Blaine murmured to her, squeezing both Kurt and her hard. "Thank you for taking such good care of our girl. And of us."

Serena beamed, then laughed again and rolled her eyes. "You guys should win some sort of award," she said. "This is the sappiest I’ve been in years. I'm glad we're not on the unit – the rest of the girls would never let me hear the end of it."

Blaine shrugged and Kurt grinned and Serena sighed. "Okay. Well, I'll leave you guys to it, then. Just call if you need anything, okay?"

"We will."

She nodded and walked to the door, then stopped and turned halfway back around. "Will you bring her back for a visit every now and then?"

"Of course we will," Kurt said softly, suddenly wondering maybe for the first time if the NICU nurses went through a weird sort of mourning when babies were sent home that they could never talk about. "Do you – would you like to tell her goodbye?"

"I'll say my goodbyes in the morning with her last set of vitals," Serena said, her eyes softening as she gazed at the baby sleeping in her crib. "But thank you. I hope you guys can get some rest tonight."

"I'm sure we will," Blaine said confidently, smiling, and with one last wave, Serena left the room.

* * *

Tuesday, September 17th, 2024

They got almost no rest that night.

Between Lily waking up, the monitor scaring the ever-loving shit out of them more than once, Serena's vital sign checks and the roar of the ice machine apparently living on the other side of the wall from them – "That was a significant oversight in design plans," Kurt grumbled the fourth time
they heard someone refill their cup – they slept fitfully, in thirty-minute spurts.

"I feel like I've been hit by a train," Blaine moaned at three-thirty AM, his head pounding, when Lily woke up screaming again. "Is this what our life is now?"

"Aside from the monitor and the goddamn ice machine, I think it is," Kurt said. He grunted and flung himself out of bed to rescue their screaming baby as Blaine flung a pillow over his head to try to muffle the noise.

At five-thirty, though, there was a moment that quieted the storminess their night seemed to have taken on. A thin slit of light roused Blaine from sleep, but he stilled as soon as his eyes cracked enough to see that it was Serena. He knew it was probably intrusive, maybe even a little creepy, but he was curious to see her with Lily when she thought no one else was watching. He wanted to witness the mystery of a nurse's tender love for her tiny patient.

And tender it was. Tiptoeing around, Serena glanced at them and somehow missed Blaine's cracked-open eyes. She smiled and, picking Lily up in a pile of blankets that looked nothing like the nurses' tidy swaddling jobs, settled into the wooden rocking chair by the crib. They began to rock back and forth, back and forth, and Serena's eyes slipped closed, her cheek rested against Lily's head, the same position which Blaine had found himself in so many times.

They rocked for about ten minutes, then Serena sighed softly, stood back up and placed Lily gently back in her crib. She pressed a kiss to two of her fingers, then brushed them lightly over Lily's forehead, covered her back up just like Kurt had left her at the last feeding, and slipped out the door.

She never whispered a word.

Blaine figured she hadn't needed to.

And for the first time that night, sleep came easy to him – all forty-five minutes of it, at least, before he stirred to the sounds of voices and feet tapping against the floor. The day shift had arrived.

* * *
"So, big plans for your last day of freedom?" Beth, Lily's nurse that day, asked them as she took Lily's blood pressure.

"I honestly don't think we thought that far ahead," Kurt said, yawning and rubbing his eyes. It had been a long night. "A nap, maybe?"

"Hey, any parent would agree that that's the best plan of all, ever," she laughed, smiling at them knowingly. "Believe me, I understand. I've got a seven-month-old and a three-year-old at home, and my stepdaughter just turned twelve."

"Ouch," Blaine winced. "And I thought we were going to have it rough."

"It's not so bad, most days."

Kurt just looked at her.

"Okay, maybe I lied a little – my life is insane and some days I honestly do not know what happens between the time I get up in the morning and get back in bed at night. But I don't know – there are these moments in between the crazy that make everything worth it."

"That's what we're hoping for," Blaine smiled, "because I know we're going to have some long nights with this little one."

"Maybe even some long days," Kurt added. "But we don't care, do we Lily-doll?" he cooed, holding her tiny hands as she looked up at him. "We're just so happy to be taking you home tomorrow!"

"You guys want to do her bottle, or are you going home?" Beth asked.

"Oh, we'll stay and feed her – all our chores can wait, can't they, baby?" Blaine said, stroking her cheek. "We've got all the time in the world for you."

* * *
"I have something for you," Blaine said as Kurt unlocked the door.

"Oh? Like a present?"

"Yeah, kind of like a present. But I didn't wrap it, so you'll have to close your eyes."

Kurt grinned – he loved all the ways that Blaine loved to surprise him. "Alright," he said, perched smug and prim on the couch, eyes closed, hands on his knees. "Bring it to me."

"I'll be right back," Blaine's gentle voice said, and he waited. "Hold out your hands," he heard a few minutes later.

He did so, and felt cold, hard corners, opening his eyes to see a book in his hands. *Where Lilies Come From*, by Blaine Anderson-Hummel, said the cover.

"Oh."

"It's the one I wrote in that coffee shop that night …"

"Blaine. The title."

Blaine squirmed a little. "Do you like it? It's not stupid, is it?"

Kurt shook his head. "It's perfect." He opened the book, gasped when he saw likenesses similar to their own. "Did you get Nick to illustrate it?"

"I did. He did a great job, don't you think?"

Kurt nodded silently, flipping past the title page. "Blaine? I think – I might need to read this alone." Blaine's eyes narrowed, and Kurt tried to make him understand. "It's just – I know I'm going to cry, but they aren't going to be tears that need to be comforted away."
Blaine still looked puzzled, but acquiesced.

"I'll be in the bedroom," Kurt told him. "I'll call for you if I need you, okay?"

* * *

"I feel like I'm six years old again, waiting for Christmas morning," Blaine murmured that night as they lay awake in bed, staring at the ceiling. "I'd accidentally found the bike my parents had gotten me for Christmas, so I knew what I was getting and I couldn't wait to open it, but – I had to wait anyway."

Kurt sighed next to him, rolling over for the tenth time. "We should be more tired than this. We should be tired enough to sleep. Blaine, we need the sleep –"

"Shhh," Blaine whispered, rolling over to spoon him. He rested his palm flat against Kurt's stomach, under his t-shirt, and Kurt sighed.

"I'm not wrong and you know it."

"Well, we can either complain and freak out about it, or do something about it."

"What's there to do?"

"Options: liquor –"

"Veto. I am not going to be hungover on the day we take our daughter home from the hospital."

"Well I didn't mean that much liquor, but okay. Veto. Options, continued: warm milk, orgasms of a varying variety and/or origin, movie marathon on the couch, Tylenol PM, hypnotism –"

"Oh, now you're just mocking me."
"Only with the hypnotism," Blaine grinned into the dark. "Seriously though – take your pick."

"Would you hate me if I said I'm just not in the mood for orgasms?"

"I would hate you never."

"Am I allowed to choose two? Warm milk and movie marathon on the couch?"

Blaine kissed the back of Kurt's neck. "You are, I think," he said, "allowed to choose anything you want."

* * *

"Should we feel guilty that we didn't spend any of today with our friends?" Kurt whispered into Blaine's shoulder, his voice thick with impending sleep. The TV was a bright beacon in front of them as they watched Joel and Clementine run through the snow, laughing.

"I thought about that," Blaine murmured, and Kurt was pulled closer when the arm around his shoulders tightened. "Like, maybe we should take them all out to dinner in advance appreciation of the babysitting they'll eventually do? But then I figured, screw it, because the only person I want to be with on our last day alone together is you."

Kurt smiled, turning fully into Blaine's side as the movie credits started to roll.

Blaine kissed his cheek. "Why this movie, tonight?"

"I know Eternal Sunshine doesn't exactly scream 'bringing home a baby tomorrow,'" Kurt said. "But is the fact that it's a little sad and a lot more lovely answer enough?"

Blaine shrugged. "That's plenty answer for me. Sleepy yet?"
"Yes. But I'm scared I won't be if we go back to bed."

"Is this you asking if we can sleep in a pile on the couch?"

"With lots of blankets," Kurt nodded.

* * *

**Wednesday, September 18th, 2024**

"I have the worst crick in my neck," Kurt moaned once he'd regained his bearings after waking up in a place that was not his and Blaine's bed.

"Not my idea," Blaine grinned from the kitchen, already making coffee. "Hey, sleepyhead."

"Hey yourself," Kurt grunted, sitting up and twisting his head from side to side, as if that would help.

"I'm doing breakfast. Do you want an omelet or pancakes? Or something else entirely?"

"Omelet," Kurt said, standing up and stretching his arms to the sky, "with that goat cheese I know is still good and maybe some red peppers? And some basil from your garden?"

Blaine laughed. "I think there are a few viable leaves still on there, but the basil's almost dead. Casualties of … well, you know what our life's been like."

"I'm sorry I didn't notice," Kurt said sincerely, then shrugged. "But I'd rather have Lily than a container garden any day. We can replant the basil if it dies completely. Need any help with breakfast?"

"Nah," Blaine smiled, "I want to make it for you. Go take a hot shower and get the crick out of your neck – everything will be ready by the time you're through."
Kurt, just because Blaine was being so sweet, stripped down to his underwear in the living room before trotting off happily to stand under water so hot it turned his skin red.

* * *

"Hey gu– my god," Sarah Grace gasped.

Blaine and Kurt teetered through the double doors, held open by another set of parents, barely able to see around stacks of cupcake boxes as high as their heads.

"Are y'all insane?"

Blaine grinned. "Some days, when I'm not paying attention, I forget where you're from. And then the y'all comes out."

"Oh, shut up," Sarah Grace said, rolling her eyes. "Let me take some of these from you." She sighed, stacking boxes in her arms. "This is a ridiculous amount of money to spend on cupcakes."

Kurt looked at her seriously. "There is not a calculable amount for how much we owe all of you. Eat the cupcakes, Sarah Grace."

She raised her eyebrows. "All of them?"

Blaine barked out a laugh. "Somebody's sassy today! But Kurt's right. What you've given us is so much more than anything we could ever repay you with – five dozen cupcakes are like, nothing. But we do want you to enjoy them."

"Well, you don't have to worry about that part," she sighed, smiling and rolling her eyes as she took her stack of boxes to the front desk. "You know by now that nurses flock to baked goods like cattle to a feed trough. Although – you might not know what that looks like, city boys."

"That … is actually entirely true." Blaine set his stack of cupcakes next to Sarah Grace's. "But cows and cities aside, I think there's a baby that's ready to bust out of this joint."
"Right you are," Sarah Grace grinned, and led them to Pod 6. "All your discharge paperwork is ready, and we've covered all the teaching topics already, unless you have questions. We passed our carseat challenge test yesterday, and I packed up all her stuff in the diaper bag and the little shoulder bag you guys left this morning, so she's pretty much good to go."

"I – like, right now?" Kurt said, and Blaine could see the beginnings of panic in his face.

"Um – is now a bad time?" Sarah Grace asked.

"Of course not," Blaine said. "It's just – I don't know that it's felt this real before."

"It hasn't." Kurt sank into a chair. "I think I might be drowning in reality, actually …"

Sarah Grace smiled gently. "You both know how to swim, Kurt. I've watched you for the past eight weeks. You're gonna be fine." She took a deep breath and turned to Lily. "I'll take her leads off for you guys."

She was quiet, quieter than normal, Blaine noticed, as she unfastened Lily's sleeper and peeled the sticky leads off her chest.

"Hey," he said, lightly touching her arm. "We have something for you."

When she turned around, the too-bright lights were reflecting in the tears welling in her eyes. "You already brought about a billion cupcakes."

"No, I mean for you specifically." He turned and unearthed the card they'd so carefully written from his bag. "It's not, like, a gift or anything …"

"Of course it's a gift," she said, and took it from his hand, turning to face away from them as she read it. Her shoulders were shaking before she ever finished, and Blaine reached for Kurt's hand.

"Sarah Grace –"
"I don't know why I'm crying," she said, wiping her eyes as she turned around. "I'm happy, I really am –"

"Sarah Grace, we're really, really going to miss you," Kurt said, rising from his chair and wrapping his arms around her. That alone nearly brought Blaine to tears – it was so seldom Kurt felt comfortable touching people he didn't know intimately, but then again, what could be more intimate than a nurse taking care of their child for the better part of eight weeks?

"We can't bring you home with us, can we?" Blaine asked, holding his arms out for her once she'd let go of Kurt.

"God, I wish," she sniffed. "But – don't tell my manager I'm doing this, okay?" She stepped back, scribbled on a post-it note. "This is my cell number. You can call or text me anytime, day or night, if you're worried or just have a question or need reassurance or whatever. And – really don't tell anybody this – but I'm a very qualified babysitter if you ever need one."

"Sarah Grace, the commute would be hell," Kurt said, but she scoffed at him.

"For this little one? I'd walk to your place." She sighed, her face turning very serious. "I hope you understand how lucky she is to have you. That – it's why I'm crying, I think, knowing what she could be going home to versus what she is –" She bit her lip. "It's just, we don't see very many happy endings with babies like Lily. Do you know how hard it is to find out that a baby you loved for two or three months has come through the ER with cigarette burns on him? Or brain damage from shaken baby syndrome? Or any of the other insane and horrible things that people can manage to do to children they either didn't want or can't handle?"

Neither one of them knew what to say.

"I'm sorry," she said, sounding weary. "I'm just – I don't know, angry and grateful and relieved all at the same time. Besides the fact that I'm going to miss her more than you'll ever know …"

"It never dawned on me until this week," Kurt said, quiet and withdrawn, "how hard all this must be on the nurses."

She smiled sadly. "It's strange. I don't even want to call it hard, not in most cases, not when we know the baby won't go home and get thrown against a wall. It's just – they're here, you bond with
them, you rock them to sleep when they're fussy and these guys actually smile at you, and then one day – poof. They're gone. And as ready as you think you'll be, the ones that really get to you? The ones you primary? They leave a hole. Not in a bad way, don't get me wrong. It's just complicated, I guess."

She chuckled, mostly at herself, Blaine thought.

"And on that optimistic note … we've got a baby to get in a carseat. Which one of you wants to do the honors?"

They ended up doing it together, Kurt holding her arms as Blaine fastened the buckle, and when she was secured, they stood back and stared.

"No more machines," Sarah Grace said softly, and Blaine grinned.

"I've got no leads to hold me down, to make me fret or make me frown," he sang, and Sarah Grace burst into surprised laughter. "I had leads but now I'm free – I've got no leads on me!"

"Leave it to your Daddy to lighten the mood," Kurt said, his voice fond. "Let's keep him around for sad days, shall we?"

"Okay," Sarah Grace said. "Do either of you have any other questions about her care or having her at home at all?"

Blaine looked at Kurt. "None that I can think of – you?"

"Nope."

"Well, you have my number if you think of any. Ready to go?"

Kurt walked forward and hooked the carrier over his arm and Blaine grabbed the bags. "Ready as we'll ever be, I guess," Kurt said. "This wasn't supposed to be hard. We've been waiting for this for weeks."
"Yes, well, the NICU is full of surprises, isn't it?" Sarah Grace smiled. "I've got to walk you out of the hospital, and from there, you're home free."

Blaine's heart pounded as they made the walk they thought they'd never make down the hall and out of the unit, doctors and secretaries and nurses bidding them congratulations and goodbyes as they went. The double doors shut behind them, and Blaine took a deep breath.

"This is so weird."

"Say, 'Bye, NICU;' Lily!" Kurt said, waving her little hand for her as they walked to the elevators for the last time.

"I always love to see their faces when we do this final walk outside," Sarah Grace said, smiling, each ding of the elevator bell indicating one floor closer to home. "It's easy to forget that they've never seen the sun before."

"God, I've never even thought about that," Blaine said, a little taken aback. "How sad, never knowing the feeling of the sun on your face …"

"She will now," Kurt promised the baby carrier fiercely, as if it wouldn't believe him.

The elevator doors opened into the lobby, and they walked, quiet, out onto the bustling sidewalk.

"Well …" Blaine said, scuffing his shoe on the ground.

"Congratulations," Sarah Grace said, beaming. She was clearly better at this, at goodbyes, than the both of them, but especially better than Blaine, who never liked to say goodbye at all. Blaine chalked it up to too much practice, and found it a little sad.

"Thank you," Kurt said, gracious and graceful at first, but then set the carrier down and pulled her into another bear hug. "We'll never forget what you've done for us."
She squeezed her arms tight around Blaine's waist after that, and he found that he couldn't speak for the large lump in his throat that he couldn't manage to swallow.

"Be good to her," she said, her last parting words, and then she blew a kiss to Lily and turned to walk back into the hospital. Her other patients still had to eat, after all.

Kurt stood blinking at the doors for a few seconds until a big gust of cold wind blew up and made Lily cry.

"Come on, honey," he said, picking up the carrier again and taking Blaine's hand. "Let's go home."
Chapter 19

Wednesday, September 18th, 2024

"So, how's it feel?" Finn asked through the phone that Kurt was holding on his shoulder while making Lily's evening bottle.

"I don't think I know yet," Kurt admitted, shaking the formula until tiny, fizzy bubbles formed at the top.

"Not enough time to process?"

"Something like that. Everything still feels like the twilight zone, like this eerie sense of déjà vu. It'll pass," he said, "but until it does …"

"I bet it's weird," Finn said. "I'm sorry that such a happy thing is turning out to be so hard."

"I've lived through worse," he said simply.

Finn made a noise.

"So tell me," Kurt said, eager to change the subject, "how's Emily doing?"

"She's on what they're calling modified bed rest. Basically, she can't work, she's not supposed to climb stairs, but she can shower and go to the bathroom and sit on the couch and stuff. The baby's good, and she's 28 weeks tomorrow, which they say is good."

"And how are you?"

"Um … hang on a second."

Kurt heard rustling, then what sounded like the wind. "Finn? Did you just go outside?"
"Yeah, I don't want to talk in front of her…"

"What's going on?"

Finn sighed into the phone. "I'm stressed as hell. Her paid illness bank is only gonna last so long, and I don't think she'll be able to go back to work until after she has the baby, so we'll basically be broke with a newborn. On top of that, she has gotten pissy to the point of being nearly unrecognizable sometimes. I mean, I get it, but we've still got hopefully ten more weeks to go and she's tolerable at best most days …"

Kurt smiled sadly. "I'm sorry that such a happy thing is turning out to be so hard," he parroted, not unkindly.

"Yeah. Life sucks, huh?"

"Sometimes."

"You know what else?"

"What's that, Finn?"

"I'm pissed as hell that I don't get to see my niece. I know it's not Em's fault that we're stuck here, but still – it's a big fucking deal that you brought her home, and …" he trailed off.

Kurt sighed, and realizing that Lily's bottle was still in his hand, walked to the nursery to give it to Blaine. "You know we would never hold a grudge about that, right?"

"I'm afraid I'm going to," Finn said.

"Have you talked to Dad or Carole about any of this?"
"No," he admitted. "I feel like it makes me sound like a bad person."

"Oh, Finn," Kurt sighed. "You're only human. You can't expect yourself to be anything more than that." He shrugged his shoulders at Blaine's incredulous look, then leaned against the doorframe, watching Lily eat. "Listen, with Emily – would it help if we Skyped with her during the day some, to give her something to do? I can't imagine being cooped up in the same place, day in, day out – she could show us the nursery, we could watch Netflix together? Just some kind of interaction?"

"I'll run it by her," Finn said. "At this point, anything's worth a shot. I don't –" His voice cracked a little. "I'm trying not to let it get to me. This is different from any other relationship I've ever had; you know that Kurt. But being yelled at all the time – I just –"

"I know," he murmured, thinking of all the ways he and Blaine had poisoned each other in the wake of losing Violet.

"I just don't want to lose her over this," Finn said, sounding rather broken himself, and Kurt's heart went out to him.

"Hang in there. There's an end to this," he promised, "and in the meantime, let me see what I can do to help. Okay?"

"Yeah, okay," Finn sighed. "I'll let you get back to Lily – Emily's calling for me anyway."

"One piece of advice?"

"Sure."

"Just remember that the person you fell in love with is still in there, and probably dying to make an appearance again."

"Thanks, little bro."

"Anytime, Finn."
"That sounded heavy," Blaine said from the glider as Kurt hung up the phone.

"Life is hard," Kurt announced, as if it were something that Blaine didn't already know.

* * *

Thursday, September 19th, 2024

Night one with Lily, and they understood why the nurses encouraged sleeping as much as possible the night before they brought her home.

"God, did she cry like this on the unit?" Kurt asked, bouncing her on his hip as she screamed.

"I don't know," Blaine said, tempted to text Sarah Grace and ask her, but he didn't want to abuse the privilege with something so trivial. He watched the shadow that Kurt cast on the gray nursery wall, sighing with relief when she finally drifted off.

"I kind of don't want to put her down now," Kurt said, making a face at the clock. It was 1:53 a.m.

"Well, you can't fall asleep with her, either," Blaine countered. "Maybe rock her for a few more minutes and then try?"

Two unsuccessful attempts later, and it was three in the morning. Blaine felt sick to his stomach he was so tired. He paced around the room with her in a stupor, nearly tripping over her swing, and – wait.

"Her swing," he hissed to Kurt. "Can she sleep in that?"

"If she will, she sure as hell's going to," Kurt mumbled back, eyes blinking open where he'd fallen asleep in the glider. He wiped some drool off the corner of his mouth with his sleeve. "This has to get better, right?"
"It will," Blaine said, trying not to fall over as he bent to fasten her in the swing. "She's just adjusting." She stirred, but didn't wake up as they turned it on, rocking her in a gentle swaying motion.

"Bed. Now," Kurt said, desperate in an entirely different way than he typically meant when he said it.

* * *

"The days are gonna be better than the nights, even if we haven't slept," Blaine decided, managing to eat a frozen waffle for breakfast at ten in the morning while Kurt fed their daughter.

"I'm not sure if we'll even know the difference between them pretty soon," Kurt sighed. "I don't know how they kept her on such a strict schedule in the NICU."

"Clearly, NICU nurses are more badass than we are," Blaine said around a mouthful of food.

"I feel like that might say something about our masculinity."

"I don't think so," Blaine said thoughtfully, swallowing. "For one, there were three guys working there at least. But really, I think they're just more practiced in the art of saying no to babies."

Kurt raised his eyebrows. "Is that even possible?"

"Obviously it is. And obviously we suck at it."

"Huh," Kurt said, contemplating this. "I wouldn't even know what that looks like."

Lily whimpered in his arms and he immediately curled around her, cooing and clucking at her.

"Obviously not," Blaine laughed, and licked the syrup off his fork.
Night two with Lily, and the exhaustion-induced giddiness began to take over.

The laughter started when, at midnight, Blaine poured formula into his coffee rather than creamer and drank almost half of it before he realized something was amiss.

"I thought it tasted funny," he wheezed, clutching his belly, abs sore from cackling so hard.

"You – I can't believe –" Kurt gasped. "I can't stop laughing, oh my god."

"I think I might have pulled something," Blaine howled, his cheeks cramping up.

"None of this is even remotely funny, is it?" Kurt asked, still giggling.

"Well, maybe a little," Blaine said, taking a deep breath, but then lost it again when Kurt snorted.

Lily watched them from her bouncer, her eyes big as owls'.

An hour later, she was screaming again after her bottle, and they felt like crying with her, the laughter long gone.

"Do you think something's actually wrong?" Blaine wondered as he cradled her on his shoulder, his right ear ringing with her wails. "Or do you think she's just mad, or fighting sleep, or –"

"I don't know," Kurt said helplessly. "She was in a good mood this morning …"

Blaine heaved a sigh and sank into the glider with her, begging her to sleep.
"Please, baby girl. Please, Daddy's so tired. I know you've got to be tired too, just give it up already …"

"Maybe we should read to her," Kurt suggested, plucking a copy of Goodnight, Moon off the bookshelf.

Blaine looked up at Kurt as he held it out, grinning in spite of his exhaustion. "Is this supposed to be inspiration for her or something?"

"Whatever works."

Blaine shrugged, willing to give it a shot. Amazingly enough, she drifted off, but only for an hour and a half, and after she woke up that time, she fussed until five in the morning.

* * *

"I feel hungover," Kurt groaned, gulping down two tablespoons of Pepto Bismol at eight o'clock that morning.

"On a scale of one to ten," Blaine grunted from Burt's easy chair, holding her as she grinned at him, "how terrible are we if we slip some Benadryl into her milk?"

"Blaine, we can't give her Benadryl."

"Kurt, I wasn't being serious," Blaine said, and Kurt bristled at how snippy he sounded. "God, how can she be smiling right now?"

Kurt sighed and walked over, bending over the back of the chair. "You think that's funny, huh? Torturing your dads?" They both smiled in spite of themselves.

"Tell me it's the exhaustion," Blaine said, leaning back and closing his eyes.

"What?"
"The thing that's making me feel like we're totally in over our heads here."

"Blaine?"

"Yeah?"

"Go take a nap."

Blaine's eyes popped open. "But you –"

"Nap. Now. That's the new rule, when either of us start feeling even remotely like this was a mistake."

"Not what I said," and the glare Kurt got with that felt like a laser beam.

"But you were thinking it," Kurt said, taking Lily from his arms. "I can tell, honey. Now, go and sleep."

* * *

Blaine gave up on sleeping after half an hour of rubbing his fingers over their textured blanket, worrying over whether being too tired to be happy that his daughter was home was a sign of inadequate parenting. The dark felt nice, though – his head was pounding – so he stayed for a bit longer, listening to Kurt cooing and singing to their baby, wondering what went wrong that he couldn't be as good.

"That was a short nap," Kurt mused when Blaine emerged, circles under his eyes as dark as they'd ever been. "Feel better?"

"Fantastic," Blaine lied, his head throbbing again as soon as the light hit his eyes. "How's your stomach?"
"It was better, then I drank coffee and now I feel like shit again," Kurt sighed. "I think she's hungry – do you want to make her bottle for me?"

* * *

"It's like she's two different babies," Kurt marveled, feeling a bit like a zombie as he watched her play on the mat they'd gotten her. "Where were all these smiles last night?"

"I don't know," Blaine said, chuckling as she startled after catching a glimpse of her reflection in the flimsy mirror. "But I'll definitely take what I can get."

Kurt sighed and dropped to the floor, shaking the rattle hanging over her head in hopes that she'd swat at it. She did. "Hey Lil," he said, stroking her baby-soft cheek, "how's about giving your dads a break tonight, hmm? Maybe go a couple solid hours with no crying?"

She grinned at him and he automatically grinned back, unable to help himself.

"It's the moments like this that are going to keep us from smothering her at night, isn't it?" Blaine mused.

"Get out your phone," Kurt told him. "Maybe if we had video evidence that we can see, it'll help us remember that she isn't demon spawn when she won't stop screaming at three in the morning."

Blaine smiled. "I don't know, Kurt, she's awfully cute for demon spawn."

"Tell me that in the middle of a crying fit."

* * *

They lasted until four-thirty that afternoon before the tears started. And that night, they only got reprieve in twenty-minute increments.

"You think she's too cute for demon spawn now?" Kurt asked over the volume of her wails at four
in the morning, he and Blaine both at the end of their ropes.

"Don't make me answer that," Blaine said wearily.

* * *

Saturday, September 21st, 2024

"I think it's time to call in the reinforcements," Kurt moaned, waiting for the leftover, out-of-date Zofran from the summer after Violet to dissolve under his tongue. He'd just thrown up the cup of coffee he downed, his fifth since six o'clock that morning.

"I think that's maybe a good plan," Blaine said, rubbing his back as Lily's coos came over the monitor from her crib. "You okay?"

"I hopefully will be in a minute."

"Slow, deep breaths," Blaine soothed, helping him sit back against the bathroom wall. "You're going to bed, and I'm calling your dad."

"Blaine—"

"You just said we needed help, and you were right," Blaine interrupted. "Now, do you want some water to sip on?"

"Maybe in a minute," Kurt said, grunting as Blaine helped him up off the floor. "I don't understand why I'm so sick – I stay up late for work all the time and this never happens."

"You still get at least five solid hours of sleep when you do that," Blaine said gently. "This is a different kind of tired. And you've been downing coffee like they're going to stop making it tomorrow and what have we actually eaten today?"

"I … I'm not sure, actually."
"Exactly. Now, come on, into bed."

Blaine pulled back the covers and Kurt flopped on the mattress with a groan. Feeling guilty – Lily was awake and happy in her crib, and he hated to miss her smiles – Blaine crawled in after him.

"This is harder than I thought it'd be," he admitted, spooning himself around Kurt, who was still shaking a bit.

"No shit. I don't understand – I don't remember her being like this in the NICU …"

Blaine's eyes narrowed. "She was awfully fussy when we roomed in with her."

"Oh god, is it us?" Kurt said, his eyes huge as he turned around to face Blaine. "Maybe she misses the nurses. Maybe she's just not comfortable here."

"No," Blaine tried to reassure him, but the thought had entered his head, too. "She's perfectly fine in the morning." He sighed. "I'm gonna call your dad, okay?"

"Talk to Carole, too – maybe she'll have some answers."

"Okay," Blaine sighed, trying to remember where he put his cell phone that morning.

* * *

"Blaine! How's my grandbaby?" The first words out of Burt's mouth were excited, and Blaine almost felt guilty to tell him why he was calling.

"Um – good, mostly. Fussy."

"You sound beat, kid."
"I – well, suffice it to say that it took me twenty minutes to call you because my phone was in the fridge next to the coffee creamer, and Kurt's sick in bed because his body rejected his fifth cup of coffee today."

"You calling in your second string?"

"I think you could say that."

"We'll be on a plane as soon as we can find a ticket."

"Thank you," Blaine breathed. "And … um, can I also talk to Carole?"

"Uh oh," Burt said, "what's wrong? Is this an 'I need to talk to a woman' situation, or an 'I need to talk to a nurse' problem?"

"Maybe both?"

Blaine's father-in-law sighed at him. "Okay, let me get her."

A few seconds later, and Carole's voice came through, the most comforting sound Blaine had heard in days. "Honey."

"Hey."

"Tell me what's wrong."

In moments like this, Blaine's emotions churned, because it should've been his mom he was going to for advice. He ached for her more than he'd ever admit, in a way that Kurt could never understand, for they'd both been abandoned by their mothers, but in entirely different ways and at entirely different times. At the same time, it made him feel terribly guilty, because Carole had been nothing but good to him, more of a mother even in high school and college than his own had been, and his want felt like a betrayal.
He sighed. "It's just – it's harder, this time around."

"How so?"

"Lily – not that we didn't already know this, but – she cries a lot. It's different than the withdrawal cry, though, and she's not having any other symptoms of that at all. She starts in the late afternoons and the crying lasts all night, and she hasn't really slept …"

"Does she draw her legs up to her chest?" Carole asked.

"Sometimes?" Blaine said, yawning.

"Mmmm," she clucked, "it sounds like she might have colic."

"What exactly is colic?"

"Well," Carole hedged, sounding a little hesitant.

"Carole, what is it? Is it dangerous?"

She chuckled a little. "Dangerous to whom, exactly? It's not bad for the baby – it's just really bad fussiness. They don't know what causes it, although sometimes people say it's a sort of stomachache. A lot of times, it's worse in the afternoons and evenings. Finn had it, started when he was two weeks. It was awful."

"So it won't hurt her?"

"Well, the colic won't hurt her, but you might."

Blaine was stunned, struck speechless.
"Oh, sweetie, you know I don't mean that. There were days, though, with Finn, when I felt like I was losing my mind – on more than one occasion, I had to put him in his playpen and just walk outside and sit for a while."

"So, like," Blaine said, trying to stay calm, "how long is this going to last?"

"Well, I don't know for sure that's what it is, because she's kind of old to get it. I don't know if there's any correlation between colic and infant drug withdrawal or not, but if that's what it is …"

"Carole?"

"It can last a couple months all the way up to a year. Finn's crying finally stopped at five months."

Blaine blanched. Five months? A year? "So, um," he said, blinking fast, trying to force the tears prickling at the backs of his eyes away, "what do you do for it?"

"I walked with Finn. I had to replace the carpet before he was a year old because I literally wore the hallway down pacing back and forth with him."

"So there's no medicine for it?"

"Not really, sweetie, unless they've come up with something new since Finn was born, which is entirely possible since it's been over thirty years. Ask your pediatrician, okay? When's Lily's first appointment?"

"Not till Thursday – they said take her back a week after she got discharged unless something was wrong."

"Have either of you slept?"

"Not much," he said, trying to keep his voice from breaking, embarrassed and ashamed when it did anyway.
"Oh, honey," Carole sighed, "we'll be there soon. Burt's buying plane tickets right now."

Blaine took a deep breath in, let it out slowly. "I just –"

Carole waited for him to continue, and when he didn't, wanting to stave off his breakdown until after he got off the phone with her, said, "Sweetheart, it's okay. Nobody talks about the hard parts, what a hard time so many people have with their babies. But nothing about colic is easy – I speak from experience, believe me – and it's okay to ask for help."

"I know," he gasped, gulping down a sob at the same time. He'd never wanted his own mother more.

"Okay, honey," Carole said softly. "I've got to go pack, because Burt just told me that our plane leaves tonight. We'll get a cab so you don't have to worry about picking us up, and we'll be in really late, but we'll be there. Hang in there, okay?"

He managed to choke out some semblance of a goodbye before he hung up. He broke down then, sobbing open-mouthed into a throw pillow in hopes that he wouldn't wake Kurt or the baby. Panicked and afraid, he cried, not knowing how any of them would survive another week of this, let alone five months, let alone a year.

* * *

Sometime that afternoon, Kurt stirred in their bed, wakened by Lily's cries. He blinked his eyes open and tried to take stock – no nausea, still felt a little like he'd been hit by a train. He grunted and started to sit up, then gasped, jumping when Blaine squeezed his arm. He hadn't even realized when Blaine got back into bed with him.

"I'll get her," Blaine said. "You keep sleeping."

"You sure?" Kurt yawned, then narrowed his eyes – something about Blaine's face looked off. "Are you okay? Have you been crying, honey?"

"I'm fine," Blaine said unconvincingly. "You can get her next time."
"If you're sure …" Kurt said, and when Blaine nodded, rolled back over, ready to drift off again. He was nearly asleep when he heard Blaine over the baby monitor, and opened his eyes again. He could see Blaine's arms, fuzzy and blue on the video, reach into the crib and pick their squirming baby up, leaving an empty sheet as the monitor's background.


Kurt smiled to himself, soothed by the cadence of Blaine's voice. He listened as Blaine rustled around on the monitor and apparently settled into the glider, soft creaking noises coming through as Blaine rocked.

And then, ever so softly, voice cracking with unshed tears, Blaine began to sing.

"When you try your best but you don't succeed …"

Kurt sighed and turned over once more, wishing he could see Blaine on the video. Lily's cries slowly calmed, but Blaine didn't stop singing.

"Lights will guide you home and ignite your bones, and I will try to fix you …"

One more break in his voice, and Kurt shook his head, slipping out from under the covers.

"What's wrong, honey?" he asked, walking into the nursery to see Blaine blinking tears onto Lily's sleeper.

"If you never try, then you'll never know just what you're worth …" Blaine finished the phrase, then looked up at Kurt. "Carole says she thinks it's colic."

"Is colic bad?"

Blaine shrugged. "Not really for her – it won't hurt her, apparently. But it can last for up to a year." His face twisted. "We can't not sleep like this for a year, Kurt, we'll go crazy."
"Hey," Kurt said softly, rushing over to Blaine. "Hey, it's okay, we'll figure it out." He dropped to his knees and put his arms around Blaine and Lily, hugging them close. "It'll be okay. I promise."

"I'm just so tired," Blaine said desperately.

"I know. Did you tell Carole that we need some help when you talked to her?"

Blaine nodded. "They're flying in tonight."

"Oh, that's fantastic." It was like the whole world had been lifted from his shoulders – he felt lighter than he'd felt in days, knowing that his dad was on the way. "Blaine, honey, why don't you go back to bed? I feel better, and since Dad and Carole will be here tonight – at least go take a nap. I've got her for a while, at least. Okay?"

Blaine let Kurt take Lily from him and, as soon as his arms were empty, hugged them both fiercely. "We'll get through this, right?"

"We've gotten through everything else," Kurt said, kissing his temple. "This is just another bump in the road. I love you, honey."

Blaine sniffled. "Love you, too. I'm sorry …"

Kurt smiled. "I'm the one who puked this morning, remember? Stop apologizing and go take a nap." He took Blaine's place in the glider as Blaine padded back to their bedroom, shifting Lily to his shoulder. "You sure are putting your daddies through the wringer, lovebug. And I bet you'll be just perfect when Grandma and Grandpa get here, won't you?"

* * *

"Well there's one of your problems," Burt said as Kurt let them in at ten to midnight, Blaine holding a screaming Lily. "You're not taking shifts."
"Shifts?" Kurt asked.

"One of you takes the first half of the night, the other takes the second half, and you both get to sleep."

Kurt blinked at him. "Oh. Hi, Dad."

"Hi, Kurt." Stepping into his dad's arms was the same relief Kurt got from drifting off to sleep in the dark earlier that morning, and for a moment he could breathe again.

"Go to bed, boys," Carole said with a firmness they didn't hear from her very often.

He looked up to see Blaine protesting as Carole took Lily from them. "But –"

"I know we just got here, but both of you look like the walking dead. We slept on the plane, honey. We're prepared for this. Go to bed."

"But Carole –"

"Blaine," Kurt interrupted, his voice tight, "don't be a hero. Stop arguing with them. Bed. Now."

Blaine stopped in mid-word, his mouth hanging slightly ajar.

"Thanks for coming," Kurt said quickly, pecking a kiss on his dad's cheek, "we love you," he continued, pecking a kiss on Carole's cheek, "and goodnight."

He grabbed Blaine's hand and pulled him to their room, kicking his shoes off and falling onto the bed with all his clothes still on.

* * *
Sunday, September 22nd, 2024

Waking came slow for Kurt, who slipped into awareness as one would slip into very thick honey. Heavy eyelids, opening one by one, then light, impossible light, and oh. Right. He was staring out the window.

He groaned unintentionally, body moving like a sloth as he tried to move to see the clock.

9:15 AM.

He could've cried with joy.

Blaine was still sleeping beside him, his throat letting out soft snuffles every so often. Kurt didn't have the heart to wake him up.

There were clatters in the kitchen, soft murmurs from his dad and Carole, a coo from Lily. He smiled – sleep made the world better, sleep made impossible things possible again – and slipped from under their duvet.

"Hi." He hung on the doorframe in the kitchen, body stretching outward from his arms. Which was, he nearly groaned at the realization, still covered in the same shirt he'd put on at 5 AM the day before. "Somebody looks happy this morning."

Burt raised his eyebrows. "More than one somebody. Good to see you looking human again, son."

"Good to feel human again," Kurt grinned. "It's amazing what nine hours of sleep will do for you." He walked over to Carole, who was cooing at Lily while feeding her. "Morning, baby girl."

She grinned at him around the nipple.

"Oh, my darling, you know your papa," Carole sighed sweetly. "Kurt, honey, do you want her?"

"If you don't mind," he smiled, running the pad of his finger across her cheek. "Did you guys sleep at all? She never woke me up crying..."
Carole handed Lily over to him. "We slept some," she said. "She's definitely colicky – that's exactly how Finn acted when he was a baby. We turned the baby monitor off and just took turns sleeping in the glider in the nursery."

"Thanks," he said, giving her a wan smile. "I hate that–"

"Nope," Burt interrupted, "you don't get to hate anything right now. You asked for the cavalry, and the cavalry came. It's what we're here for, being up half the night and rocking her. You know we don't mind."

"I know," Kurt said softly, gazing down at her, trying to ignore the fact that he felt sticky all over. He needed a shower desperately, needed a new set of clothes, but missing Lily in the mornings, all smiles and sunshine, wasn't an option.

He jumped when Blaine walked in, voice croaky, and announced, "I feel like I slept a hundred years."

"That's good, right?" Burt asked, digging around in their fridge for something to eat for breakfast.

"Incredible. You're my heroes," he said. Yawning, he plopped next to Kurt on the couch. "Morning, Lil."

She burped in reply, and they both laughed.

"She's happy this morning," Blaine said.

"She is. And so am I."

"Yeah, me too." Blaine tucked his legs under him, resting his head on Kurt's shoulder, and reached out to place his finger in her tiny palm. She grasped it the entire time it took for her to finish her bottle.
"Dad?" Kurt called from the couch. "Why don't you and Carole go take a nap? I can change the sheets in our bed if you want –"

"Don’t bother," Burt said, walking in the living room drying his hands on a dish towel. "I'm pretty sure nothing went down in that bed last night that involved body fluids other than maybe some drool, am I right?"

"Dad – god, no, okay?" Kurt groaned, turning bright red in spite of his efforts not to blush.

"No reason to change the sheets then," Burt said, winking. "Come on, honey," he called to Carole, "let's go get a little shut-eye."

"You know he only does it for the reaction," Blaine smiled after they left. "I know you haven't forgotten how mortified he was when he actually walked in on us that time …"

"Let's not relive that experience, please," Kurt said. "Lily doesn't need to hear anything about that, do you sweetheart?" Her wide, blue eyes blinked at him, and he smiled at her. "That was definitely a 'no' in baby-speak."

"You speak baby now, huh?"

"I'm fluent in the language, yes," Kurt said, turning up his nose.

"Well then, oh wise one," Blaine teased, "maybe tonight you can have a conversation with her about why she won't go to sleep."

* * *

Monday, September 23rd, 2024

"I can't thank you enough for coming," Blaine said, setting a steaming cup of coffee in front of Carole.

Kurt and Burt had gone out early that morning for what was becoming their traditional father-son
chat at Bean Me Up, and Blaine was happy to get a few minutes with his mother-in-law.

"Oh, sweetie, it's not like it's a hardship. I'm just happy to get to see her."

Blaine sat down with his own mug. "Well, either way, we really appreciate it." He looked over to where she was sitting in her swing, eyes bright. "At least she's happy in the mornings."

"It'll get easier, I promise," Carole said, patting his hand. "You'll find a rhythm, get into a routine, and these hard first couple weeks will be just a memory before you know it."

"I hope so," Blaine said, taking a slow drink of coffee. "Hey, how's Finn lately? Kurt talked to him after Lily came home last week, but … well, you know how it's been."

Carole looked at the table, played with the handle on her coffee mug.

"You're worried about him."

"It's never easy, watching your children go through something you can't fix," she said slowly. "Not that – I love you and Kurt like you're my sons, but Finn –"

"Finn was your baby."

She smiled. "Finn is my baby. Always will be." She dropped into silence again.

Blaine fiddled with his coffee cup nervously. "I'm sorry – if it feels like a betrayal, talking about this –"

"No, honey, it's not that," Carole said sadly. "I just don't know what to say." Blaine didn't really, either, and patted her hand instead.

"It's just that we've already had one NICU stay in this family. I don't want another," Carole sighed after a long pause. "I can't tell you how much we hated being so far away from you guys and Lily …"
"And now you're here, and I promise you, we appreciate it more than you could ever know."

"I know you do, sweetie, both of you. It's just – when I'm here, I can't be there. And when I'm there, I can't be here. It's the constant dilemma of having children in two different places – who do you go to? I don't know. I don't think there's a right answer."

"If I may be so bold," Blaine said gently, "I think the answer is that you're doing the very best you can to be where you're needed at the time. I think that's all we can ask for, and I think all your children understand that."

Carole smiled, eyes glinting with the light reflected in her tears. "Thank you sweetie," she said, twisting in her chair to give him a hug. "God, I'm so glad you and Kurt found each other. You're the best son-in-law an old lady could ask for."

"You," he said, smirking, "are not old."

"You might think differently had you heard my bones creaking when I got up with Lily last night."

He grinned. "Alright, Grandma, whatever you say. I guess we should start scoping out the nice nursing homes around here for you and Burt, then, huh?"

"Watch it. I might be old, but I'll throw Lily in bed with you at three in the morning when she's screaming her head off," she teased.

"Duly noted," Blaine said, getting up, their conversation derailed as Lily began to fuss in her swing. "What's wrong, baby girl?" he cooed. "Are you bored?" He unbuckled her, lifted her warm little body into his arms. "You know what? I bet your grandma would love to be my backup singer."

"Oh, I don't know about that…" Carole chuckled.

"Come on, please?" he begged, turning on the charm that he knew Carole never could resist. "Lily just loves sing-a-longs!"
"Well … maybe just one song …"

And, just as Blaine predicted, one song turned into two, then three, and by the time Kurt and Burt returned, he was sitting at the piano, singing and playing while Carole danced around the living room with Lily, the coffee table kicked out of the way.

Kurt let out a delighted laugh as he came through the door, took Lily from Carole before he ever took off his coat, and Burt grabbed Carole's hand and spun her around under his arm. Blaine sang and played and played and sang, his throat tightening around the words from the joy bursting from his heart. It was the family he'd always dreamed of having, and as he glanced behind him, saw Carole and Burt laughing delightedly with each other, Kurt beaming at their baby, he knew that no bout of colic or stint in the NICU could ever dull the thrill of what their life was going to be from here on out.

* * *

**Wednesday, September 25th, 2024**

"Happy birthday to you …"

Kurt's smiling face came into focus as Blaine opened his eyes.

"Happy birthday to you …"

He was holding a very awake and wide-eyed Lily in one arm and a muffin with an unlit candle stuck in it in the other.

"Happy birthday, dear Daddy …"

The grin nearly split Blaine's face open, and he scooted up in the bed and held his arms out for the baby.

"Happy birthday to you." Kurt perched on the bed and awkwardly handed Lily over, still holding the muffin. "It's a little different than last year."
Blaine chuckled. "A little? Kurt, we were just getting comfortable with each other again."

"I gave you a kiss for your birthday."

"It wasn't just a kiss," Blaine said, smiling softly. "It was so much more than that."

"Well, I hope this will seem like a hell of a lot more than just a muffin," Kurt grinned, fishing a lighter out of the waistband of his pants, "because I haven't really had a lot of time to shop."

Blaine laughed. "It is so much more than a muffin," he said as Kurt lit the candle.

* * *

"So I think," Burt said later that afternoon, "that you boys should leave this sweet little thing with her grandma and me and go out and celebrate Blaine's birthday tonight."

Kurt and Blaine looked at each other.

"I don't know, Dad …"

"What don't you know, Kurt? You not think we can take her for a night by ourselves?"

"No, of course it's not that," Kurt sighed. "It's just …"

"It feels wrong, leaving her," Blaine finished for him.

"I know, honey," Carole said. "But you guys have had a long, hard week, and we're leaving tomorrow. It's not very likely that you'll get another opportunity for time for yourselves for a long time. I think dinner and a movie would probably be good for you."

"Can we think about it?" Kurt asked. "Not that we don't appreciate the offer, but —"
"Course you can," Burt said.

* * *

The Thai restaurant was dark and filled with fragrant scents wafting from the kitchen. A lit candle sat in the middle of the table, casting shadows over the contours of Blaine's face that made Kurt's heart go all aflutter. Soft music replaced Lily's cries and they each had a glass of wine to get through. And yet …

"Honey?" Kurt said hesitantly.

"Hmm?"

"I know they just brought our plates out, but … I kind of miss her."

"Oh god, I'm so glad it's not just me."

Kurt's hand was in the air the second after Blaine had said it, flagging their waiter down for the check and boxes for their food.

Twenty minutes later, Blaine was unlocking the door of their condo.

"Blaine? What happened? You haven't even been gone an hour, sweetie," Carole said, getting up from the couch.

"Nothing good at the movies?" Burt asked from the recliner, Lily fussing in his arms. "I thought you guys wanted to see that new action flick. The one with what's-his-face?"

"We bailed," Kurt confessed, walking in and hanging up his coat. "Lily was all we talked about while we were gone, and both of us missed her too much to stay out any longer."
"We didn't even finish eating," Blaine said, smiling sheepishly.

"Mmm, welcome to parenthood," Carole smiled. "They can drive you completely insane, but at the end of the day, the only place you want to be is with your kids."

"That's right," Blaine sang, holding out his arms for her, and Burt reluctantly gave her up. "We couldn't even finish our dinner we wanted to see you so badly!" He kissed her forehead, cuddled her close, and her tears slowed a little.

"It's not like we can't watch a movie here, either," Burt said. "What do you say? Want to finish eating, then cut that cake Kurt made earlier and watch something?"

"Blaine? Your call," Kurt said, a smile spreading across his face as he watched his husband with their daughter. "It's your birthday."

"That sounds perfect," he said, nuzzling his cheek against Lily's fuzzy head. "And Carole, Burt? I think we'll take tonight, if you don't mind. You guys can get up with her in the morning when she's happy, but I just really want to spend some time with her tonight."

"Not gonna argue with that," Burt grinned. "Here, give her back to me and you guys finish your dinner."

* * *

Thursday, September 26th, 2024

A few minutes before seven AM and the sun was just beginning its rise in the sky as Kurt padded to the bathroom, sleep-drunken after only a few hours of shut-eye. Lily had been a little easier to console that night, but he'd still been awake more than he'd slept.

He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror – dark circles under his eyes, hair sticking up every which way, the lines in his forehead and beside his eyes more pronounced than usual. He was wearing one of Blaine's oversized hoodies from NYU and a pair of black sweatpants – not exactly his typical ensemble.

So much for being hip, cool dads – he was too busy trying to find time for sleeping and eating to
worry about hygiene and wardrobe.

He laughed to himself as the water running from the faucet echoed in the bathroom – ten years ago, he'd never in a million years imagined himself here.

And yet, sleep-deprived as he was, he couldn't have been happier.

On his way back to bed – warm, Blaine, cuddles, sleep – he thought he heard something coming from the nursery, and made a detour.

"Once there was a way to get back home – sleep, pretty darling, do not cry, and I will sing a lullabye," came his dad's husky voice, soft and muffled through the door.

He felt his heart flip-flop in his chest.

"Dad?" he whispered, cracking the door open.

Burt was still in his pajamas, flannel pants and a worn t-shirt, cradling his granddaughter in the charcoal glider. "Hey, kiddo," he said.

"That song –"

"Your mom used to sing it to you when you were little."

"I remember," Kurt breathed, and he did remember, hadn't even thought of that song in years. He walked over, leaned against the changing table. "Will you keep singing it?"

Burt flushed. "Geez, Kurt, no pressure or anything …"

"Pretend I'm not here. Pretend I can't carry a tune in a bucket. Just – please finish it? For me?"
Burt flashed a look at him, but sighed and turned back to Lily. "Golden slumbers fill your eyes, smiles await you when you rise…" Lily smiled through the song, and when he finished, Burt shook his head. "I can't believe you're grinning like that after hearing your grandpa sing," he chuckled. "Most people run away."

"I wouldn't," Kurt said softly, the hole in his chest that would never close up completely aching worse than it had in a long, long time. He looked up and sighed. "I still wish she was here, sometimes."

"I know. She'd be real proud of you, son."

"I hope so."

"She would." Burt looked up at him, nodded seriously. "Well, Miss Lily, now that that order of business is out of the way – how 'bout we talk about some breakfast? You ready for your bottle?"

He took her hands, kissed one tiny palm, then the other, and to Kurt's astonishment, she let out a tiny, adorable little coo.

"Oh my god," Kurt breathed, his hand flying to his mouth. "Oh god, I've got to get Blaine –" He ran over to the door. "Blaine!" he called, trying to keep the emotion out of his voice. "Blaine, come in here!"

It was maybe not the best way to have woken him up, considering the absolute terror in Blaine's eyes as he stumbled in the nursery, flyaway hair and one pant leg ridden all the way up above his knee.

"What? What's wrong? What happened? Oh god, is she –"

"Blaine, she cooed!"

"She – what? She what?"

"She cooed! Do it again, Dad!"
Carole rounded the corner into the nursery as well as Burt kissed Lily's palms again, going in for her belly for good measure. And, once again, a little louder that time, a high-pitched, happy-sounding noise escaped her mouth.

"Oh my god, Kurt –" Blaine said, his voice coming out thick, and Kurt wasn't sure if it was from emotion or sleep.

"Well, I think we all know what this means," Burt grinned, kissing Lily on the forehead. "Grandpa's obviously your favorite."

"I still can't believe – Kurt," Blaine repeated, folding Kurt up in his arms in a tight hug. "She's happy."

"Of course she's happy," Carole clucked, stealing the baby from Burt's lap. "How could you not be happy here?" she asked, holding Lily up in the air. "You have the best daddies in the whole wide world, and your grandparents are pretty fabulous too, if I do say so myself …"

Kurt was still snug in Blaine's embrace. It's going to be okay, he thought definitively. The colic will end and the smiles will stay and she'll eventually start laughing and we are all going to be fine.

"I love you," he whispered to Blaine, just because he felt like it.

Blaine was still so excited that he lifted Kurt right off his feet. "I love you too."
Chapter 20

Saturday, September 28th, 2024

Eleven o'clock at night, and there was silence.

Kurt was tucked in the bed, warm with Blaine curled up next to him. He kept glancing at the baby monitor every few seconds, watching for signs of movement, but it was becoming pretty clear that Lily was down for the count this time. Thank god.

"So," Blaine sighed, squirming in the sheets until he got comfortable, "you wanted to talk Halloween. Tell me these grand costume plans of yours."

"I was thinking Pinocchio," Kurt smiled, thinking back to their earlier conversation, interrupted by Lily. "You would look adorable in that red lederhosen –"

"Wait, I'm Pinocchio? What does that make you? Gepetto?" Blaine asked, blinking sleepily.

"No, silly, I'll be Jiminy Cricket."

Blaine smiled. "You're kind of tall for a cricket."

"Okay, fine. You be Jiminy Cricket, my darling short one, and I'll wear the lederhosen."

"As long as I get an umbrella." A huge yawn nearly overtook Blaine's last word, and Kurt petted his hair gently.

"You get an umbrella and a top hat."

"So what's that leave for Lily?"

"She's the Blue Fairy, of course."
"I think," Blaine said, nuzzling his face into Kurt's shoulder, "that it's brilliant. And I think you will be adorable in the red lederhosen …"

His voice dropped off, and Kurt couldn't tell if he was thinking or what until a quiet snore escaped his lips.

"Blaine? Did you just fall asleep on me?"

Blaine's eyes flew open. "Huh? What? What happened?"


"I'm sorry – it's just, I can barely keep my eyes open …"

"It's fine," Kurt said gently, picking his hand up and kissing it. "I think you had the right idea, anyway – we can talk more about lederhosen later."

"I'll be *dreaming* of you in lederhosen," Blaine grinned, stretching, then squirming back to comfortable again. "All rosy-cheeked and innocent –"

"Are you turning my costume idea into a sex fantasy?"

Blaine rolled over on his belly, clearly close to sleep. "I guess you'll never know, will you?"

* * *

**Friday, October 4th, 2024**

A week had passed, and Kurt, Blaine and Lily were slowly falling into a routine. Two terrible days full of constant vaccine-induced crying had come and gone, and after starting a pediatrician-recommended regimen of simethicone drops and probiotics – "It may or may not work," he'd told them, "but it won't hurt her, and at least you feel like you're doing something" – they were
beginning to see the slightest of improvements in her nighttime fussiness.

Kurt was in the kitchen, whipping together a quick pasta salad for their lunch as Blaine sat at the table feeding Lily her bottle, a newspaper spread out in front of him. They hadn't turned on the news in weeks, and he was feeling rather isolated from the rest of the world.

"Give me the lowdown," Kurt called from the kitchen, apparently feeling isolated as well. "What's happening in our country?"

"Well, Brewer's up in the polls, for one – Kurt, we cannot forget about Election Day come November. I don't care if Lily's been up all night, it looks like this will be a really close race and dammit, Cafferty cannot win."

"It's already marked on the calendar, honey, in red sharpie. We won't forget. What else is happening?"

"The usual with tension in Egypt, cost of oil is still rising, let's see …" Blaine paused, skimming through the paper. "There seems to be another battle over Hong Kong brewing …"

"Anything good?"

"I just read a really great review of that new ballet. We should go see it sometime." Lily squirmed in his lap and knocked her bottle out of her mouth and onto the floor. He sighed, picking it up. "Actually – scratch that. We'll go see something again when she's older. Can you bring me another nipple?"

"Sure." Kurt walked in, bent and kissed Lily on the top of her head. "Are you being bad for Daddy?"

"She's just stretching her wings a little early I think," Blaine said. "We have quite the personality, don't we, Lil?"

"So I was thinking," Kurt said as he swapped out the dirty nipple for the clean one, "it's a gorgeous day today, not too cold – would you be terribly opposed to an outing today?"
"What kind of outing?"

"I was thinking we might run by the studio, show her off." Kurt handed Blaine the bottle and he popped it back in her mouth. "Would that be okay with you?"

Blaine grinned. "Go pick her out something fabulous to wear. We've got to make a good first impression, right?"

* * *

"Oh my god, Kurt, give me that baby!" Kurt had actually never heard his boss squeal before, but he was squealing now. He kissed her cheek and handed her over, grabbing Blaine's hand, delighted to be one half of the proud and beaming set of parents.

It was amazing enough just watching her at home, but showing her off to other people? An entire world of wonder had just opened up to them.

It became clear very quickly that Lily was going to be a people person, gregarious like Blaine, because as soon as Marc had her in his arms, she turned on the charm, smiling wide as he cooed at her.

"Oh my god, you guys, her cheeks!" he cried. "I cannot get over her. She is the most adorable thing I've ever seen. Please tell me I can have her measurements."

Blaine laughed. "If you can get her to hold still long enough to take them, sure."

Marc's squealing had attracted the attention of every designer in the studio, and soon, a throng of people was surrounding them. The noise and attention was a little overwhelming, though, and Lily's smile soon turned into a pout that then turned into a loud cry.

"Oh no," Marc said, frowning. "Oh, sweetie, here – go back to your dads, please don't cry …"

Blaine stepped forward to take her, and she soon quieted, comfortable in the safe cocoon of his arms. Kurt put a finger in her palm and she squeezed it and held on.
He felt a hand come to rest on his shoulder. "So? What's it like?" He turned around to see Tori, the tattooed designer with the bad-ass reputation who'd lost a baby once and held him while he cried in her arms the year before. He eased his finger out of Lily's hand.

"It's so much harder and so much better than I ever imagined it to be," he said, smiling softly. "I don't think it's something you can imagine, actually."

He reached for her hand, and she quickly hugged him instead. "I'm so happy for you," she said, pulling back and squeezing his shoulders.

He grinned. "I thought you had a rep to keep up, Tori."

"Fuck my rep," she said, shrugging.

"I hope one day you get to have this too."

"Yeah, well," she said, scuffing the floor with her shoe. "Anyway, congratulations."

"Who was that?" Blaine murmured as she walked away.

"Someone who understands," he murmured back, smiling wide and opening his arms to Martha, who was filling in for him during his paternity leave.

"Kurt, she is just the sweetest little baby …"

** * * *

**Monday, October 7th, 2024**

"Good mornin', good mornin', we've talked the whole night through, good mornin', good mornin' to you," Kurt sang, shuffling through Lily's closet to find an outfit as she kicked her feet in her crib.
"When the band began to play, the sun was shining bright, now the milkman's on his way and it's too late say goodnight ..."

He laid everything down on her changing table and leaned over the side of the crib. "So good mornin', good mornin', sunbeams will soon smile through, good mornin', good mornin' to you!" She grinned up at him, making a happy little noise. "Hey Lil – you like it when Papa sings?"

"Seeing how Papa's got the voice of an angel, I can't see how she wouldn't."

Kurt looked up to see Blaine leaning on the doorframe, a lovestruck smile on his face. "Well aren't you adorable this morning, Mr. Sleepyhead?"

"I couldn't stay in bed when the two of you were in here singing," Blaine smiled, walking over to the glider and curling up in it. "I just can't stand to miss any of her smiles."

"Well, you're in luck," Kurt said, lifting Lily from her crib, "because we're all smiles this morning, aren't we, sweetie?" He kissed her cheek. "Ready to get dressed? It's a big day today – we're seeing Aunt Rachel after her matinee today!" Lily stretched in his arms, yawning wide, and his heart melted just a little bit more.

"Oh," Blaine said, his voice suddenly sounding flat. "I forgot about that."

"I thought I reminded you yesterday." Kurt placed Lily on her changing table, made quick work of her diaper.

"Oh, I'm sure you did."

"What's *that* supposed to mean?"

Blaine sighed. "Nothing, I'm just tired. I just don't see why she can't come here."

"Honey, I hate to tell you, but tired is just going to be a constant around here. You're going to have to learn to push through it. I'm not telling Rachel that we won't meet her somewhere after everything she's done for us." He tossed the dirty diaper in the diaper genie, and when he looked
up, Blaine had left the room. Briefly, he closed his eyes, then picked Lily up. "Lil? I think it might be a long day."

* * *

Blaine, out of breath from his run, wiped his face as he walked up to the condo. They'd started their usual workout routines back that weekend after a conversation about a study Blaine had read about long-term effects of sleep deprivation. "I want to be around for her sixteenth birthday," he'd told Kurt, "and all her graduations, and her wedding if she gets married and her kids, if she has them." They couldn't help the lack of sleep, he'd reasoned, but they could do things to make the sleep they did get more restful, and to keep their hearts, bodies and minds strong.

So Kurt had started yoga back, which made Blaine sort of ache in the nether-regions because yoga meant Kurt's ass in the air and Blaine was getting no action as of late. And Blaine had started back running, which sort of helped with the nether-region issue. A little. If he didn't think about it too hard.

It also helped with the short fuse that came with the complete exhaustion of having a colicky baby, the same fuse that burned out earlier that morning and made him surly with Kurt.

He opened the door quietly, just in case Lily was napping, and stepped inside, tugging off his shoes. There was no sign of Kurt, no cries coming from Lily, and for a moment he was concerned until he wandered down the hall and peered into the nursery.

Lily was sleeping soundly in her crib, for once, and Kurt was in the glider, head lolled back on the cushion, mouth open in a silent snore. A line of drool ran from the corner of Kurt's mouth down his jawline, and Blaine smiled. They hadn't known what tired was before Lily.

He moved to leave the room, wanting the both of them to sleep in peace, but the floor creaked and Kurt's eyes flew open. "Blaine!" he said, the name coming out slurred on his tongue.

"Hey," Blaine said softly. "I just got back. You've got some …" He motioned to his cheek, and Kurt quickly wiped his face with the back of his hand, cheeks flushing with embarrassment. "Listen," Blaine continued, stepping lightly into the room in hopes not to wake Lily, "I'm sorry for this morning. Of course I'm excited to see Rachel it's just –"

"It's okay," Kurt said, reaching out his clean hand for Blaine to help him out of the glider. "No
sleep, I know, it does crazy things to me too." Blaine took his hand and tugged. "Care if I go wash off the drool?"

"Not at all. I'll just be in here, watching her – she's so beautiful when she sleeps."

Kurt smiled. "She really is," he said, and walked away, leaving Blaine to gaze at his daughter.

* * *

Wednesday, October 9th, 2024

"Hey stranger – long time, no see!" Dr. Jacobson exclaimed as Blaine walked into her office. "Or should I say Dad? How are you?"

Blaine beamed at her, stepping forward to give her a hug. "Hey Dr. J – I'm fantastic," he said, and meant it. "I mean, you know, I'm exhausted and totally stressed and pretty much question every new decision we make with her, but other than that…"

She laughed. "Welcome to parenthood."

"For real. But in all seriousness, she's amazing. She's the best thing that's ever happened to me, besides Kurt."

"Just wait till she gets older – all those different stages they go through, it's incredible to watch," she smiled.

"So – I was kind of thinking," Blaine said, running his hands down the front of his jeans as he sat down. "Um – I've been doing really well the past several weeks. And I was wondering – just because we're so busy with her and everything – what do you think about me backing off the once-a-week sessions? Going to once a month or once every two weeks or something?"

Dr. Jacobson smiled. "I think only you can know if you're ready for that."

"I think I am," he said. "I mean, I don't want to stop my meds or anything, but the routine of having
her – I just feel so stable right now. Even though she's colicky and cries half the night and – I don't know. I'm just … good.

"I think that's wonderful, Blaine."

"It was hard, redecorating the nursery and all those memories of Lily and everything, and I was kind of in a funk for a day or two, but we got through it and – I don't know. I just feel good."

"I think I'm sensing a trend here."

Blaine shrugged. "Yeah, well … just wait till you meet her. Kurt's bringing her by at the end of my appointment so you can meet her."

Her face lit up. "Oh, that's wonderful! I can't wait!"

Blaine couldn't help but grin back at her. "Yeah, she's pretty awesome."

"I hope you know how proud of you I am, Blaine," Dr. Jacobson said, smiling softly. "You've come so far from when we first met."

"I've got you to thank for it."

She shook her head. "I might have facilitated the process, but you did all the work. Therapy is only successful when you're an active participant in it, and you've worked so hard – Kurt, too."

"I guess I was just tired of feeling like I was drowning," he shrugged.

"Well, if I do say so myself, you're swimming beautifully now. But for today – before Kurt gets here with Lily, is there anything you feel like you need to talk about?"

"Umm …" Blaine chuckled. "Just a general question – I know you've got kids; will Kurt and I ever have sex again?"
Dr. Jacobson laughed. "Short answer: yes. You get very … creative, I suppose, with your time when you have a baby. Expect to get interrupted. Be gentle with each other – I fell asleep on my husband more than once."

"No way."

"He was highly offended whenever it happened, but I was just so tired –" She laughed again. "God, I haven't thought of that in years."

"But there's hope?"

"Listen, Blaine, I'll be honest with you – it'll sometimes be different from before. At times, you'll be just a little out of the moment, listening for the baby, worrying that she'll wake up, and then as she gets older, worrying that she'll walk in on you. She probably will walk in on you at some point – and let me tell you, if she does, she'll only do it once."

Blaine laughed, blushing a little at the thought. He was not ready to think about that possibility.

"But it'll happen. Just carve out some time during a nap – put her in a safe place in case she does wake up and you're – shall we say, a little unavailable? Or, if she just won't nap because of the colic, call a friend. I'm sure your friend Rachel wouldn't mind taking her for an hour here and there – she's Lily's godmother after all, right?"

"Yeah, we just don't like leaving her …" Blaine said.

"Well, I do understand that, but the most important thing here is keeping Kurt's and your relationship at the forefront. Don't let it fall to the wayside. And I know you're at home together, but you need time alone as well, even if Lily's just asleep in the other room."

Blaine nodded. "My in-laws came a couple weeks ago – they made us go out on a date, and we ended up coming home early because we missed her so much."

Dr. Jacobson smiled. "That's sweet, Blaine. And there's nothing wrong with that. What's important is that you got away long enough to miss her."
"I never really thought about it like that …"

"Mmm, absence makes the heart grow fonder, even of a colicky baby," she smiled. "I had one of those myself – I love her so much, she's my heart, but those first several months were not easy. I needed time away from her sometimes to remember that I didn't actually want to drown myself in the river."

Blaine chuckled. "Our first week at home with her was a little like that."

"How'd you handle it?"

"Well, we nearly died from sleep deprivation and then we called the grandparents."

"Very good," she smiled. "Only next time, maybe call for help before you nearly die."

"Yeah …" Blaine said sheepishly, rubbing his neck. "I guess we were trying too hard to be those parents, the people who have it all together with no help …"

"Oh, Blaine," Dr. Jacobson said, "those parents? Are just an illusion. Everybody needs help, and I promise, nobody has it all together, especially during that hard newborn phase. The two of you are doing just fine."

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**Thursday, October 10th, 2024**

A long afternoon with a very fussy Lily seemed to be turning into a long night. Eight o'clock, and she'd stopped crying for fifteen minutes since four that afternoon. Kurt was holding her, trying to bounce her as he ate a sandwich with his one free hand.

"Come on, Lil, please calm down. Please," he begged her through a mouth full of peanut butter and bananas.
Across the table, Blaine shook his head. "I can't take it," he said. "My nerves are totally shot. I know it'll just be more noise, but I've got to go play something or I think I'm going to spontaneously combust …"

Kurt waved his sandwich in the air. "Go ahead," he said. "Can't be any worse than it already is."

Blaine practically ran over to the piano bench, sat down, and played a few scales, then played the opening notes of Schumann's "Traumerei," a song he'd learned in high school and played for Kurt when he was stressed.

Several measures in, Kurt realized that Lily was paying attention, her head lifted from his shoulder.

Several measures later, she'd stopped crying.

"Oh my god, keep playing," Kurt breathed to Blaine as he walked her into the living room and sat on the couch. "I think she likes it."

He did, and several measures after that, she was asleep. "Oh my god. Blaine. Oh my god, my hero."

Blaine laughed, taking his fingers off the keys to turn around. "I was just –"

Before he could finish, Lily's eyes had popped open, her face turning downward into a grimace.

"Shhhht!" Kurt hissed at him. "Don't talk, play!"

"Okay, okay," Blaine chuckled, turning back around, and before the song was over, Lily was sleeping peacefully.

"I think you just hypnotized our child," said Kurt.

"I think I'm going to have to brush up on my classical pieces," said Blaine. His hands continued to move over the keys, slow and steady, and Lily kept sleeping. "Give me another song, quick – this one's almost done."
"Uhhh … Chopin. The Nocturne I used to love so much."

Blaine transitioned beautifully into the piece, and Kurt leaned back against the couch to listen – if this was what it took to calm Lily down, well, it was no hardship for him.

"I have never been more thankful for piano lessons in my entire life," Blaine said, wincing as he plunked out a few wrong notes. "But I'm going to have to practice, or this is all going to sound awful."

"I think it's lovely," Kurt said. "Our home will be full of music all the time. I kind of love that."

Blaine turned his head away from the keys just long enough to shoot Kurt a smile. "I kind of love it, too. But I foresee a trip to the music store in our future. I can't play all of this from memory …"

"Oh, come on, you're doing fine," Kurt said. "And I don't think Lily cares if it's perfect – I think she just likes the music. She's *drooling* on me." He paused. "Blaine – you realize that you just, like, *cured* our daughter's colic. When I said you were my hero, I wasn't kidding."

"Aww," Blaine grinned from the piano bench. "Well, I'm happy to oblige. Blaine Anderson-Hummel, here to save the world from the screaming baby with naught for a piano."

Kurt got up from the couch, walked slowly to the piano and kissed Blaine on the cheek. "Keep playing – I'm going to try to put her down, okay?"

"Aye-aye, Captain."

Kurt smiled and shook his head, walking his sleeping baby back to her nursery. Miraculously, she didn't wake when he laid her in her crib, just shifted a bit, sighed, and kept sleeping.

"Blaine," he whispered reverently once he'd pulled the door closed and walked back to the living room. "Honey. She's still sleeping."
"Well, I know our new routine for the evenings," Blaine smiled. "Who knew it'd take something I like so much to make her happy?"

"Who knew …" Kurt repeated, slipping down beside Blaine on the bench. "I love to watch you play."

"Mmm … you know what I love to do?" Blaine asked, taking his fingers off the keys.

Kurt's heart sped up as Blaine's palm came up to cup his cheek, and he closed his eyes as Blaine's face moved closer and closer, his lips closing the gap between them in a sensuous kiss. Kurt inhaled sharply through his nose – they'd been too tired for any sort of extended intimacy ever since Lily came home, rushed handjobs few and far between the only thing holding them over, and the kiss was slow, burning embers, but his heart was aflame. Blaine held careful control over it, drawing out gasp after gasp, never letting up but not letting it get away from him, either.

When he finally pulled away with a gentle smacking noise, Kurt's heart was galloping in his chest, his limbs tingly and his insides feeling like they'd inverted. "Oh my god," he breathed, "I want you so bad."

Blaine dove back in, abandoning control this time for sheer passion, and Kurt had just slipped his hand under Blaine's shirt when Lily's cries rang out over the baby monitor.

"Shit," Blaine cursed, sighing heavily and pulling back, a scowl falling over his face. Wordlessly, he turned and started playing again, his skin flushed where it emerged from the neck of his shirt.

"Blaine — I'm sorry."

"What?"

"I guess … I'll take a raincheck?" he said, his stomach sinking. God, he missed his husband, the physicality of Blaine, his gorgeous body, all tanned skin and wiry hair and strong, lean muscles, and – stop, he thought to himself, you'll just make it worse. Some day. Some day, they'd have time to themselves again…

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* * *
Monday, October 14th, 2024

"Kurt? Are you nervous?"

They were waiting for Karen to arrive for their first monthly post-adoption home visit, and they'd spent the weekend cleaning and organizing and convincing themselves that everything would be fine.

"Surprisingly, no," he said, smiling as he looked around. "The condo's spotless, Lily is in a miraculously good mood and – I don't know, Blaine, I just don't feel like we have anything to hide. Things are actually this good."

Even so, waiting was still waiting, and they paced around the room like caged animals, glancing at the door every few seconds. Kurt kept finding miniscule spots of dust, and Blaine suddenly decided that all the piano music had to be straightened for the tenth time. They both jumped a mile when Karen's knock finally came at the door.

"Hi, guys!" she exclaimed, coming in and giving them both hugs, cooing over Lily, who was sitting in her swing. "She's looking so good! Oh, I can tell you're are doing such a great job with her."

"Thank you," Blaine said with a soft smile directed at their baby. "She's pretty incredible."

"So, this will be a lot like your first home study back when we were doing your application – I'm just going to look around a little, and then we'll talk about how things are going, alright?"

"Sounds perfect," Kurt said.

They showed Karen the nursery, which she oohed and ahhed over, and where they kept the formula and all the locks on their cabinets and all the plugs in their electrical outlets. Halfway through the "tour," Lily started getting fussy, and Kurt pulled her from her swing and into his arms.

"Well," Karen said when she'd seen everything, making the final checks on her clipboard, "looks like you have a nice, safe place for her. So tell me – how are things? Are you encountering any issues?"
"Colic," Blaine groaned. "I didn't even know it existed before, and now …"

"It's kind of taken over our lives," Kurt finished for him.

"Oh," Karen clucked at Lily, "are you making life hard for your daddies, sweetie?"

Lily answered by spitting up all over Kurt's shirt. "Lil!" Kurt exclaimed, holding her out in front of him. "I'm so sorry," he apologized to Karen while Blaine ran to get a towel.

Karen just chuckled. "Welcome to parenthood – looks like she's put you through the full initiation – colic and spit-up."

Kurt shrugged. "When you get past the wetness of it all, it's really not that big of a deal …"

"This doesn't mean we fail the home visit, does it?" Blaine asked, returning to the room with a handful of clothes for Lily and Kurt, a wet washcloth and a large towel.

"Because your baby spit up on you? Not hardly," Karen said, smiling as Blaine took her from Kurt and laid her on top of the towel on the couch, pulling the soiled clothes off of her. "Let me just take second and explain the difference between normal and worrisome. Some dishes in the sink? Normal. Dishes piled on the counter with caked, moldy food and flies everywhere? Worrisome. Laundry not all done? Normal. The floor covered with so much dirty laundry we can't see the carpet and the smell is overpowering? Worrisome. Baby spits up, parents rush to take care of her? Expected. Baby spits up, parents get angry, parents don't make a move to clean baby up? Worrisome. See the pattern here?"

"People actually do that stuff?" Blaine asked, incredulous.

"You would be amazed at what some people will do," she said. "You guys aren't even close to being on my radar."

"Good to know," Kurt said. "If you'll excuse me for a moment …" He gestured to the clean shirt in his hand and headed back to the bedroom to change.
When he came back, Lily was in Blaine's lap cooing at Karen, a fresh set of clothes on, looking happy as a little clam.

"Aside from the colic, she's an amazingly good baby," Blaine was telling Karen as he bounced her on his knee. "I can't believe she's almost three months old."

Karen smiled. "She'll be walking around and talking before you know it."

"Let's hope it's not too soon," Kurt said, bending to kiss the top of her head. "I don't want her to grow up too fast. But if we could get to the sleeping through the night stage a little quicker …"

"Good luck with that," Karen laughed, glancing down at her clipboard. "Well, unless you guys need anything from me, that's all for today. I'll see you in a month?"

Blaine cast his eyes to the ground. "Any word on a court date?" he asked hesitantly.

Karen smiled, her face full of sympathy. "Not yet, but I'll let you know as soon as I hear something. The courts do tend to take a long time …"

"I know. I'm just ready for her to really be ours, you know?"

"What part of all this," Karen said, gesturing around their condo, "says that she isn't?"

Kurt grinned. "Listen to the woman," he said, squeezing Blaine's shoulders. "She's totally ours."

* * *

Wednesday, October 16th, 2024

"Okay, Lil, I think you're camera-ready," Kurt said, straightening the headband on her still-hairless head. "Do you think she's ever gonna grow anything but peach fuzz?"
Blaine grinned, picking her up from the changing table. "Maybe eventually. But you're beautiful just the way you are, sweetheart," he said, kissing her cheek. "You don't need hair to be gorgeous."

"Excellent motivational speech for our nearly-three-month-old, honey," Kurt said drily.

"You can't ever start too early, can you?" Blaine kissed her again. "Ready to wave to Uncle Finn and Aunt Emily?"

The three of them piled on the couch in front of the computer screen and waited for the Skype call to come through. Soon, Finn and Emily's faces appeared on screen.

"Ahhhhhh!" Emily squealed as soon as she saw Lily. "That baby! Oh my god, I wish I could visit you guys …"

"No way, Em," Finn said. "We're being careful, remember?"

She grinned into the camera. "The doctors finally released me from bed rest."

"Which doesn't mean that we're going to just gallivant off to New York …"

"Oh my god, Finn, you sound like Dad," Kurt laughed. "And congratulations, Em – what's the first thing you did when you flew the coop?"

"Actually, I finished the nursery. Want to see?"

Finn rolled his eyes. "I told her not to –"

"And I told you I'm not a china doll, remember? Stop being such a worry wart," she said, scooting off the couch. The picture on Kurt and Blaine's screen turned half sideways as she picked up their laptop.

"Wait, wait, wait," Blaine said, "have Finn hold the computer for a second – I want to see your baby bump!"
"Oh god, I'm such a cow – please remember that I've been lying in bed for weeks on end – they haven't even let me walk up until this last week ..."

"You are not a cow," Kurt, Blaine and Finn said in perfect synchrony.

Finn chuckled as he took the computer from her. "Thanks for the backup – I've been telling her that for weeks, and she won't listen to me. Here, look how great she looks ..." He turned the computer so they could see, and a full-length shot of Emily came into view. Her belly jutted out from her body and her face was a bit rounder than Blaine remembered, but she had a glow about her and didn't look a bit like she'd barely moved for weeks.

"Okay, you've seen it – can I show you the nursery now?"

"Be our guest. Oh, I'm so excited," Kurt said, clapping his hands, then reaching over and clapping Lily's together too.

She gave them the virtual tour, Finn proudly pointing out his contributions, and Blaine smiled as he watched them. The ease they had with each other was refreshing, such a far cry from the tension that Kurt had described after talking with Finn the month before. It warmed his heart to think about Christmas, when they'd all be back together in Lima, Finn and Emily's baby newly born and Lily seeing her grandparents' house for the first time. He couldn't wait.

"So how are things going with Miss Lily?" Emily asked as they settled back on the couch.

"One word: colic," Kurt frowned.

"Oh no," Emily moaned sympathetically. "I'm so sorry …"

"It's not that bad," Blaine said. "She's happy as she can be in the mornings, and we've finally figured out a system that lets us both get at least a little bit of sleep. We're managing just fine, aren't we, Lil?" She grinned into the camera and Emily sighed.

"Seeing her makes me want to meet him so much, you have no idea …"
"Well, keep him in there to cook a little longer," Kurt said. "We don't want another NICU veteran in the family …"

"No way," Finn said, placing his hand on Emily's belly. "You stay in there, buddy, hear me? No coming out till it's time."

"I know, I don't actually want him to come yet," Emily said. "I just can't wait to know him, you know? This little tiny thing I'm growing inside me, I get to know for the rest of my life – it's the most incredible thing."

Blaine looked down at Lily, beginning to wiggle in Kurt's arms, and thought about what Emily had just said. He and Kurt would get to know Lily, get to be part of her life, for the rest of their days on this earth. They would know her and love her completely and intimately and unconditionally, and tears stung his eyes at the thought. Over the past two years, he thought he'd grasped how miraculous and overwhelming parenting would be, but his expectations had nothing on his reality.

"We get to call you with all the questions, right?" Finn asked. "Like – you're the guinea pigs with this kid thing – you figure it out first and then tell us. Isn't that how it's gonna go?"

Kurt laughed. "First, a disclaimer. Things we know nothing about: having a newborn at home for the first two months, the ins and outs of breastfeeding, circumcisions if he's getting one, how often to go to the doctor the first couple months … what else, Blaine?"

"How to keep baby boys from peeing everywhere," Blaine supplied helpfully. "I do think it'll be fun to sort of be in this thing together, though. We can share horror stories. Especially if he has colic."

"Oh god, I hope he doesn't have colic," Emily groaned. She looked down at her belly. "Please, baby, don't have colic. Please."

On cue, Lily began to fuss. "I think she's hungry," Kurt said apologetically. "I've got to go make her bottle."

"Hey, no big deal – we can let you guys go take care of her. But we'll have to do this again soon – I miss you guys!" Finn said as Kurt got up from the couch.
"We miss you too, Finn," Blaine smiled. "I can't wait till Christmas."

Finn grinned. "Yeah – it's gonna be a good year. As long as he'll just stay inside for a while longer…"

"You guys will be fine," Blaine said firmly. "You take care of yourself, Em. Don't push yourself too hard, okay?"

"How could I, with this one calling the shots?" she asked fondly, kissing Finn's cheek. "But I'll be good, I promise."

They said their goodbyes and Blaine smiled, hearing Kurt humming in the kitchen as he finished making Lily's bottle. "Papa's almost got it," he whispered, rocking her gently back and forth as she squirmed, her cries ringing out through their condo. "You're okay, you're okay…"

* * *

Friday, October 19th, 2024

"Unnngghh.""Unnnggghhh."

Kurt cracked his eyes open, smiling down through hooded lids at his husband groaning beneath him. "Yeah?"

"God, yeah …"

Kurt rolled his hips down again, the whole of him shivering as his body took Blaine in. He'd woken up early to Lily's gentle breathing on the baby monitor and an ache in his balls, and had taken full advantage of the former, easing Blaine from sleep with a slow, teasing blowjob.

Twenty minutes later, Lily was still sleeping and Kurt was riding Blaine's cock.
"Feels so good – Kurt –"

Kurt let out a high-pitched sigh as he shifted and – oh, yes, there. Bracing a hand on the headboard, he rose up, thighs flexing, then crept back down, nerves sparking with each centimeter. Blaine moaned softly, and Kurt rose and fell again, picking up speed, and again, a little harder, and again, over and over, getting lost in the motion.

"This isn’t – I’m sorry – not gonna last long –" Blaine sputtered, hips following Kurt's every movement.

"It's okay," Kurt grunted, eyes rolling back in his head as his legs burned. "Me neither – I –"

Blaine's warm, strong hands cupped his hips and his cock drove up into Kurt's body, sharp and quick.

Kurt gasped and closed his eyes, took himself in hand and smeared the precome already pooling at his tip down to the base. One stroke and he was quivering.

"Oh god – oh god keep doing that, fuck," Blaine breathed, and Kurt managed a coy smile.

"Yes, sir." He dialed it up, moaning a bit, drawing it out. He opened his eyes to see Blaine keening underneath him, muscles taut, mouth open in a constant groan. Kurt jerked himself faster.

"Oh – Kurt – oh!" Blaine choked, pelvis jolting upward as he spilled into Kurt's body, eyes wide and then squeezed shut.

Kurt moaned, milking the last of Blaine's come out with his own body. He felt a hand swatting his own out of the way, and trembled as Blaine pushed his tight fist over Kurt's leaking cock.

"Ohhh," he groaned loudly, closing his eyes again, fucking into Blaine's hand. "Yeah, honey, yeah …" The heat built and built and finally, with a buck of his hips and a shout from his throat, he came all over Blaine's hand, his chest, and a bubble of giddy laughter rose up from within him.

He fell forward into a heady, giggly kiss, and Blaine caught him, arms tucking tight around his
back. They kissed and kissed, having had neither the multitasking abilities or the correct angle while they were fucking. Kurt's come smearing between their naked skin.

"Oh my god," Kurt finally breathed, still floating in a state of post-orgasmic bliss, tangled with Blaine in rumpled bedsheets, their duvet in a messy pile on the floor. "Blaine, god, I love you so much …"

Blaine let out a happy little moan and snuggled closer against Kurt's side, his arms tightening around Kurt's ribs.

"That was the best –"

"Shhhh," Blaine whispered against his skin, interrupting. "Just be.

Kurt let out a little giggle; Blaine sounded so serious, like a serious hippie. Just be. What was that? He giggled harder, the laughter spilling from his throat like champagne bubbles when Blaine looked up, trying to frown but smiling anyway.

"What's so funny?" Blaine asked.

Eyes bright and crinkly, Kurt kissed his nose. "You. Just be. God, I love you."

"What? I was enjoying the moment. And here you are, killing my zen."

"You get zen from coming so hard your back arches?" Kurt asked, arching an eyebrow up.

"Well. Okay. Maybe bad word choice," Blaine grinned, pulling Kurt closer again. "Maybe Nirvana is more apt …"

Kurt giggled again, playfully went in for a kiss that deepened almost instantly. It was miraculous, how late Lily was sleeping that morning, how they'd finally been able to take their time.

"I've missed this so much," Blaine whispered against Kurt's lips, tickling softly. "Just being with
you like this…"

"Mmm, I've missed it too," Kurt breathed, cupping Blaine's face in the palm of his hand. "Your body, god, it's like I was craving it and didn't even know."

"I like my body when it is with your body," Blaine grinned. "And I mean, it's not like you can help it – I'd want a piece of this too."

Kurt laughed and lightly smacked his arm. "Ass."

Blaine grinned darkly. "I like yours."

"Smart-ass." Kurt pinned him to the bed and kissed him, arms bracketing Blaine's shoulders. He gasped when Blaine's legs came up to wrap around his waist.

"Sexy smartass," Blaine countered, bringing his finger up to trace a circle around Kurt's brown nipple.

"Yes, well …"

Blaine's finger was halfway around its slow, teasing quest to make Kurt's nipple peak when Lily's cries rang out over the monitor.

Kurt sighed. "I shouldn't complain. She's given us more time this morning than she ever has. But …"

Blaine smiled. "I'll get her. Put on some pants, take deep breaths and think un-sexy thoughts and I'll be back with her in a minute."

He hopped out of bed, ass jiggling a little as he pulled on a pair of sleep pants, and oh, Kurt could watch that all day. He stretched and flopped the sheets back, getting out of bed to find something to pull on, smiling warmly as he heard Blaine sing-song his good morning to Lily.
A few minutes later, Blaine reappeared in the doorframe of their bedroom, Lily in tow.

"Good morning, Lilypad!" Kurt sang, kissing her on both cheeks. "Did you sleep well last night, sweetie?"

She grinned at him and let out a little squeal – her face was getting brighter and more expressive as she grew, and Kurt just wanted to squeeze her.

"So, we were talking while she was getting dressed," Blaine said, "and Lily has decided that we should have pancakes for breakfast. She said that Daddy looked a little tired, like he could use something in his tummy."

Kurt laughed. "Did she now … and did Daddy divulge why he looked so tired?"

"Daddy did not," Blaine said. "Wait – what was that, Lil?" He put his head down close to her mouth. "You – you think that Papa looks tired, too? Like he could also use some pancakes?" He raised his eyebrows, pretended to take a survey of Kurt. "Yeah, I think you're right."

"You are ridiculous," Kurt grinned as their baby squealed again in Blaine's arms. "But you've won me over – we can have pancakes."

"Yay!" Blaine exclaimed. "High-five, Lil!" He held her hand up, clapped it to his, then held it out for Kurt. "Lil, don't you want Papa to give you a high-five?"

Kurt rolled his eyes, but obliged. "Your powers of persuasion are quite the force to be reckoned with, Lily. Whatever shall we do when you get older?"

"Hey," Blaine said, "be nice to our baby. She is persuasive. I mean, just look at that face …"

"That's a face that says 'We should have pancakes even though I can't eat them,' Blaine?"

"That face absolutely says that."
"Well, pancakes it is, then," Kurt said, grinning. He put his arm around Blaine's shoulders, kissed his temple, kissed Lily's soft forehead. "I love you guys."

"Love you too, Kurt," Blaine smiled, tucking his face into Kurt's shoulder for a moment. Then they walked to the kitchen, Blaine humming as he went. He bounced Lily around in a circle while Kurt turned on the griddle and retrieved the pancake mix from the cupboard and eggs and milk from the fridge.

He stood for a moment, the refrigerator light shining on him and the cold whooshing out into the room, and marveled at the depth his and Blaine's lives had gained, just having Lily at home with them.

"Kurt? You still with us?" Blaine asked, smiling fondly.

"Yeah, sorry," he said, closing the door. "I was just thinking about how amazing our life is."

"I mean, it is pretty awesome," Blaine agreed. "But you know what would make it awesome-er?"

"What's that?"

Blaine grinned, plopped Lily into her bouncer, and bounced over to the piano. "Oh, this has gotta be the good life," he sang, accompanying himself with some simple chords, "this has gotta be the good life, this could really be a good life, good life …"

Kurt turned, keeping an eye on Lily swatting at the toys hanging down in front of her on the bouncer. Blaine kept playing as Kurt dumped all the ingredients in a bowl. As he stirred together the beginnings of breakfast for his family, he couldn't help but think about how they were like the ingredients, separate pieces blending together to make something entirely new, something better.

"This could really be a good life, good, good life," Blaine sang, and Lily cooed on the counter.

Kurt smiled. Good life, indeed.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Notes on the fic are at the end, in case anybody's curious :)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wednesday, December 2nd, 2026

"Leave your hat on, Lily, sweetheart, Papa doesn't want you to catch cold," Kurt said gently, bending down to readjust it as she sat in her stroller.

They'd lost their minds, having decided to brave the crowds for the Tree Lighting at the Rockefeller Center that year. Lily was obsessed with Christmas trees and Santa Claus, saw a picture of the tree on a billboard, and begged to go, and neither Kurt nor Blaine could bring themselves to refuse. Which is why they were outside in 28-degree temperatures, noses frozen, at eight o'clock at night. With a two-and-a-half-year-old. Among thousands of people.

"See the Chwistmas twee, Papa," she said knowingly.

"Yes," Kurt replied, "we're going to see the Christmas tree."

"You don't care about the cold as long as you get to see those pretty lights, isn't that right Lil?" Blaine grinned, huddling further down into his scarf.

"Pwetty lights," she repeated. "Twinkle, twinkle."

"That's right, pretty twinkly lights," Blaine said, patting her on the head, trying not to fall into the stroller when someone bumped his shoulder hard than he was expecting. "It's almost time. You've been so patient."

"Lily is patient," she said. "Too many people."
"I know it's crowded, honey," Kurt said. "We'll pick you up as soon as it starts so you can see better."

"Daddy! Hold you!"

Blaine chuckled. "Not just yet, sweetheart. In a minute okay?"

She frowned. "Okay."

Kurt craned his neck, and frowned with her. "Do you want to try to find somewhere closer to stand, or are you good right here?" he asked Blaine.

"I don't think there is an open place that's closer. And really, we don't have a bad view …"

"I know, I just want this to be magical for her," Kurt said, sighing, looking around for another potential spot to stand in. "It's her first big New York Christmas--" He cut himself off. "Blaine," he gasped, grabbing onto his husband's arm, "oh my god."

"What? What happened?"

"Don't be too obvious, but look over to our right, about five or six people down," he hissed.

Blaine narrowed his eyes and looked, then froze under Kurt's hand. "Oh my god," he breathed, "is that --"

"Abby. And Violet."

Kurt swallowed hard, his heart thumping against the back of his sternum like it was knocking on a door as he stared at what would've looked exactly like a child born of Blaine's DNA. She had tanned skin, dark fly-away ringlets sticking out of the bottom of a green and purple striped beanie, a wide grin spread across her face as her mom held her.

"Holy shit," Blaine said, letting go of the stroller handle to walk in their direction, but Kurt stopped
"No," he said, gripping Blaine's arm hard, trying to remember how to breathe. "Blaine, it would just be completely awkward at this point – we have no claim on her, we don't know her."

"But –" Blaine gulped down a swallow. "Kurt – she could be mine," he said, his voice pained. "Look at her –"

Kurt couldn't even reply, aching at the sight of her, wondering at a life unlived. If Abby hadn't changed her mind, if they'd never had to give her up at all, where would they be? What would they be doing? If they'd never experienced the trauma of losing her –

And from below them, in the stroller, came Lily's precious voice.

"Daddy! Hold you!" she insisted.

If they'd never experienced the trauma of losing her, they'd never have experienced the joy of having Lily, of knowing their precious little girl.

Kurt watched Blaine break a little as he was pulled back to reality, obviously thinking the same thing Kurt was. Without hesitation, he bent and undid the straps holding her in her stroller, picked her up and held her tight to his chest.

"Oh, Daddy," Lily said sweetly, hugging around his neck. "Thank you. I see now."

Yes, Kurt thought, so do we.

Suddenly the mayor was announced over the sound system, replacing the Christmas music that had been playing, and Kurt turned away from Violet and the life they'd never had toward Lily and the life they loved so much.

"Are you ready, Lil?" Kurt asked closely to her ear so she could hear him. "They're about to light the tree!"
"Chwistmas twee!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands together as Blaine patted at his eyes with his gloves and hoisted her up on his shoulders.

The countdown began, and as soon as the tree was lit, Kurt could hear her happy squeals above his head mixed in with the throng of voices surrounding them and the music that had resumed.

"So pwetty, Daddy!" she cried from Blaine's shoulders. "Twinkle twinkle lights!"

"That's right, Lil," Blaine said, carefully shifting her into his arms. "Twinkle twinkle."

"Daddy?"

"Yeah, Lil?"

"I love you. Kiss kiss!" she said, grabbing his face in her little mittened hands, placing a loud kiss on his cheek.

"Daddy loves you, too," he told her, hugging her tight. "So very, very much." He held her until Kurt turned and tapped her on the shoulder.

"Um, Lily?" he said. "You're kind of forgetting about somebody, here, don't you think?"

She grinned. "Oh, Papa, you've so silly. I not fowget you."

"Can Papa have a kiss just like Daddy's?"

She scrunched up her face in the sassy look she'd been making lately, the one that made their hearts absolutely melt and freeze with fear at the same time, because on one hand, adorable, but on the other – if she was this sassy at two, what would she be like at fourteen?

"Mmmm … You have a kiss, too," she finally decided, and threw herself forward out of Blaine's
arms into Kurt's, promptly licking the side of his face.

"Lily!" he cried. "What have we said about licking people?"

She grinned coyishly, and shrugged. "You asked fow kiss …"

Blaine was snickering behind his hand, and Kurt rolled his eyes.

"Okay Miss Sassy-Pants, time to get out of this crowd and go home for bedtime, what do you think?"

"Lily get hot choc-o-late fiwst?"

"Lily can have hot chocolate in the morning," Blaine said, grabbing her from Kurt and whooshing her up in the air, holding her at arms' length. "It's too late to have that much sugar tonight."

Her face started to screw up into a crying fit but Blaine shook his head. "Uh-uh, baby girl, Daddy's just doing what's best for you." He brought her back down into a hug, and Kurt sighed. *God*, that man was adorable with their daughter. "Hey, you wanna know a secret?"

She smiled again. "Uh-huh."

Blaine leaned in close and whispered in her ear. Kurt walked over, smiling conspiratorially. "Hey Lil – you think Daddy will let Papa in on the secret too? Will you tell me?"

She looked back at Blaine. "It's okay, Lil, you can tell him."

She leaned over, reaching her arms out to Kurt, and he took her. "What's the secret?"

"*Daddy said he loved me and you mowe than anything in the whole wide wowld!*" she whispered in his ear, yelling the last word and nearly bursting his eardrum.
"Well, I love you and Daddy even more," he said, laughing and rubbing his ear.

"You were kind of asking for that," Blaine said as they loaded her back into the stroller.

"Yeah, well …"

"It's true, you know," Blaine said, catching Kurt's arm as he started to walk down the sidewalk with Lily.

"What?"

"The secret."

Kurt smiled. "It shook me up, too, seeing her," he said, reading further into what Blaine meant than he was saying out loud.

"Kurt, I'm fine. It was just unexpected. Especially – god, she looks so much like me."

"I know," Kurt said. "But then I realized – yeah, she might look like you, but all she is to us is a memory. Five days' worth. Do you know how many days of memories we have with Lily?"

Blaine scrunched up his face. "Umm … 365 plus 365 plus – what's 7 months – 210? Uhhhhhh … eight-hundred – wait, nine-hundred –"

Kurt laughed. "Don't hurt yourself, honey, I wasn't being literal. I'm just saying it's a lot of days. It was a shock, but – I don't know. I had my moment, and then it was done, and I don't even feel a little sad anymore. I haven't felt sad about her in a really long time, actually. Do I wonder what it would be like to have had her? Sure. But do I wish it hadn't happened to us? Not really, not anymore."

"We wouldn't have Lily," Blaine said, smiling down at their child playing with her mittens in the stroller. "And god, I love her."
"We wouldn't have her, we wouldn't have met Dr. J, you wouldn't have gotten the meds you needed, we wouldn't have ended up better than we were before. I'd rather have had that one awful year get us to where we are now."

"Where we are now is pretty good …" Blaine agreed. "But where we're standing right now is pretty freaking cold. Can we head home?"

"Go home!" piped Lily from the stroller.

Kurt smiled. "Of course we can. But Blaine, I told you that you needed a warmer coat –"

"You also told me that this jacket makes you want to do things to me that we can't talk about in front of Lily," Blaine interrupted with a grin, "and I was hoping that we might make some Christmas magic of our own tonight, if you catch my drift."

"We won't be making any kind of magic if you get hypothermia," Kurt said with a laugh. "Come on, Frosty." He held out his hand for Blaine to take. "Let's go."

And with Christmas music still playing from the Square in the background, Blaine's gloved hand clutched in his own, Kurt pushed their child down the sidewalk toward home.

Chapter End Notes

I can't believe it's done.

First off, I want to thank my betas, Judearaya and wowbright, for the time and effort and love they put into this 'verse. They talked me through scenes, they cut off my long-windedness in the nicest way possible, they cried, they laughed, they held my hand through this entire thing. I am forever indebted to them - THANK YOU. From the bottom of my heart.

A lot of you, after all this time, after all these words, are wondering where this story came from. If you want the truth, I wrote it for a baby.

Back at the very beginning in the original version which I hope none of you ever read, I was just getting into fandom. I'd been watching Glee since the pilot episode, but I stumbled on the kurt_blaine LJ community, and fell headfirst into fanfiction. At the time, I was struggling with a situation at work - I was in love with a baby very much like Lily. Unfortunately for her, her mother wasn't quite so selfless as to give up custody. In all honesty, she was terrible, and the "safety plan" wasn't safe at all. We
cared for her for three months solid with little to no parent/family contact. We were her moms. We held her, consoled her, loved her, bought her things, played with her, read to her. And they sent her home to a terrible situation, and I was heartbroken and ANGRY. So I wrote her. I wrote her, and all the babies I've ever taken care of LIKE her, and I gave them all to a set of parents who WANTED them, who would love them. I poured out my soul into that first version. That's why it was so sub-par - it wasn't beta'd, I'd churn out a chapter and post it with little to no editing, I had not much of a plan, except that Lily would go to Kurt and Blaine. It unfolded by itself, of its own volition, it was like a runaway train. I got it out, on paper, and it was like a catharsis.

Fast-forward. Every time I read it, I was unhappy with the quality. So I decided to rewrite it. During the time of my rewrite of the part that would become Too in Love, I took care of a little boy, also like Lily, who was lucky like her as well. His mom had placed him with literally the NICEST PEOPLE I HAVE EVER MET. I took some of their experiences and used it here, as well.

So this fic is near and dear to my heart because it is about babies I have loved, babies I have had the privilege of taking care of and cuddling and singing to. It is about them and for them and if I could give every last one of them a home like Lily has, or like that little boy who I love so dearly, I would. But I can't. So I'm doing it here.

And finally, a PSA: I appreciate the response this has gotten, more than any of you will probably ever realize. Neonatal abstinence syndrome (infant drug withdrawal) is becoming somewhat of an epidemic in the US, as for-profit methadone clinics are popping up all over the nation. They do not provide proper education about what this does to babies, how long they have to be treated. So I'm begging you here, if you are on methadone, if you are on any other type of drug - prescription opiate, heroine, cocaine, benzodiazepine, whatever - there's no judgement from this side of the table. But please, PLEASE use effective birth control methods, because what withdrawal does to these babies is torturous and terrible. I witness it firsthand all the time. I came home CRYING the other day because of it. The clinics, your doctors, will say it is safe. Will it kill your baby? Well, cocaine very easily could, but the others, no, probably not. Methadone? No, probably not. But it will land your baby in the NICU for at LEAST 6 weeks (and out of all the babies I've cared for, I've seen ONE stay for that period of time, all the rest have been longer than that) and your baby will suffer, and your baby will potentially have longterm issues that we really haven't even been able to study. So be responsible, or at the very least, be aware of the consequences. 
/endPSA

Thank you, thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart for taking this journey with me. I'm currently working on a follow-up fic that I've wanted to write, but I'll also be taking prompts for one-shots on Tumblr soon (my handle's gingerandfair over there), so shoot me a message if there's something you want to see. Thank you SO MUCH.