Remind Me to Forget

by peanutmeg

Summary

Blaine's moved on from Sadie Hawkins. He's fine; it was years ago.

But it seems that the past isn't done with Blaine.

Notes

This fic idea has been around for months, but I just recently got around to fully developing it. It's canon compliant (as best as I could manage, given that Glee's totally messed with my timelines) through 507 "Puppet Master" but mostly in that the events have happened. Many thanks to my betas dlanadhz, jessicamdawn, and slayerkitty for the edits and brainstorming sessions!

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I plan on updating once a week, every Tuesday between 7-9 EST :-}
Blaine exits the mall with a smile – he’d managed to find a cheaper version of a scarf Kurt had been drooling over and he’d gotten three new bowties on clearance. Maybe he’d use the money he saved to mail the scarf to Kurt, instead of waiting for his trip to New York next month; Kurt loved surprises.

He’s almost to his car when he hears a joking voice a few cars down. He glances over and sees a forest green Ford truck, its owner leaning against one of the too-big-to-be-practical tires, talking into his phone dressed in stained jeans, a grey t-shirt, and scuffed sneakers. It’s only after he’s catalogued the outfit that Blaine notices the guy’s face and freezes as he hears him say, “Yeah, lemme finish –

“---finished Anderson! What did you think? That just because you’re one of those homos now you can ruin this dance for us?” Blaine looks up from the pavement, the words are choppy, unevenly fading in and out, and Blaine absently notices that there’s something dark staining his shoe.

“Look at me! Think you’re too good to look me in the eye? Be a man, Anderson!” The shoe moves and a starburst of pain erupts in his side as he tries to curl away. But that takes him closer to Mitch, who lifts him enough to land a solid punch.

“Like the homo knows how to be a man, Steve. Looks like we have to teach ‘em.” Blaine closes his eyes.

“—parked?” Blaine blinks, taking in the thirty-something mother standing in front of him. “It’s so easy to forget, you know? But there’s this app now – I thought all you kids would have it.”

Blaine offers a polite smile. “I’ll have to see about getting it, thanks. I think I’m over,” Blaine gestures vaguely behind him, “that way though.”

Blaine hears a “good luck!” called as he turns away.

Once in his car, bags safely on the passenger seat, Blaine just stares at his shaking hands and tries to rationalize.

Breathe in. He’s miles away from that place.

Breathe out. There’s probably hundreds of forest green trucks in Ohio.

Breathe in. It’s just a coincidence.

Breathe out.

It’s just a coincidence.
Chapter 1

“Hey, you.”

“So,” Kurt’s voice was warm and teasing through the phone, “I couldn’t figure out why Santana came to the diner complaining about the mailman, of all people. Imagine my surprise when I get home and find a box addressed to me on the table.”

“Oh really,” Blaine’s glad for once that he’s alone in the house, so no one’s around to see his love-struck expression. “I wonder how that happened.”

“I wonder, too, especially since there’s only a copy of a lovely e.e. cummings poem rather than a note to go with this rather fashionable scarf. I have a fiancé, you know, I can’t be getting presents from strangers.”

Blaine felt a coil of warmth spread through him – fiancé. “I know you do. Maybe your fiancé just wanted to remind you that he’s thinking of you.”

“Well, I’m thinking of him too.” Kurt gives a small laugh, “I can’t believe you remembered that conversation, Blaine. Actually, I don’t even know how you managed to find it in Ohio of all places.”

“I remember everything with you, Kurt.” Blaine leans back against the arm of the sofa, “And I have been shopping with you, many times. I did learn some things.”

“Not all, I hope. I do need some shopping secrets.”

“Don’t worry. I mean, I was looking, but I wasn’t when I found it. I mean, there were bowties on clearance,” he ignores the soft laughter in response, “and I saw it as I was turning. It was really just a happy coincidence.”

Like seeing that truck. Seeing that face. It was coincidence. Nothing else. Just a coincidence.

“—aine. Blaine? Are you okay? Blaine?” Kurt’s voice was tight with worry, and loud enough that Blaine knew he’d repeated himself at least twice.

“Sorry! Sorry –,” For a moment, Blaine considered telling Kurt, about being in the parking lot, seeing the truck, the memories, all of it. But really, there was nothing to tell, and Kurt didn’t need reminders of Blaine’s past. “Really sorry, Kurt, I just spaced out for a minute. It’s been a long day.”

“And here I thought I always drew focus.”
“You did. You do, I mean. You brought me back after all. But how was your day, before the surprise, I mean.”

“Oh, it was pretty routine, actually, until my fiancé had me thinking he’d passed out or something while talking to me.”

“Not funny, Kurt.”

“No, it wasn’t.” There was a pause, and then Kurt continued, “But you did send me this wonderful scarf, so I suppose you’re forgiven.”

“Hey Kurt?”

“Yes?”

Blaine clenched his fingers around his phone, trying to hold on to the happiness in Kurt’s voice and sings, “You are perfect to me.”

“I love you.”

Blaine doesn’t even care that he’s smiling in an empty house. “I love you, too.”

“Good. So you’ll listen to me when I tell you that you need to sleep now. It’s a bit late, Blaine.”

It’s later, after they’ve said their goodnights (but not goodbye, never goodbye) and Blaine’s brushed his teeth and lying in bed that he types the message.

-_*_*_*_*-_ 

Text message from Blaine:

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in / my heart)

Photo message from Kurt:

[picture] it’s above my desk, see? Santana keeps questioning my sanity since I’m smiling while working on my computer.

Text message from Kurt:

For future reference, I am never opposed to surprise, romantic notes from my fiancé. Even if they are unsigned. ;)

Text message from Blaine:

;)

-_*_*_*_*-_ 

At school the next day Blaine doodles wedding rings and hearts in his Civics notebook. After he corrected the teacher on what the 20th amendment was – lame duck – he’d stopped calling on Blaine in class, and since they were starting a new unit in Calculus next period, Blaine couldn’t work on future homework, either. He sighed and turned to a blank page. Maybe he could use the time to work on possible ideas for the Student Council fund raiser. It was tradition for the seniors to donate something to the school, and while Blaine didn’t particularly care for McKinley High itself, he wasn’t going to let his class be the first to break tradition.
He’d text Kurt during lunch, see if he had any ideas. Kurt always had the best ideas, and not just because he knew the worst since Mr. Schue seemed to live for giving Glee the least helpful fund raisers possible.

Blaine gives a smile as the clock ticks down – one minute til the bell – and quickly writes the homework from the board in his agenda before he begins packing his bag. Tina and Unique are in his Calculus class, and he always sees Sam in the hallway. Plus, he has lunch in two hours, and the break is always welcome.

The bell rings, and Blaine joins the rush of students into the already crowded hallways.

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Lunch at McKinley is loud; that’s the first description Blaine had thought of when joining Kurt a year ago, and it holds true still. He is used to it of course, he’s adapted to the cacophony of sound – complete with irregular outbursts from the cheerleaders or hockey team or whatever social group that decides it needs ten seconds of the spotlight, with voices shrieking to carry over the din.

Blaine can ignore all of it, now.

He checks his phone for any missed texts from Kurt (inane comments about the weather, a description of the hideous sweater someone was wearing – you’d think people at a theatre school would have more sense! – complaints about boring classes. Small things that never fail to bring a smile to Blaine’s face, fondness stretching across state lines).

Before he can even get passed his lock screen his phone is taken from his hand by Unique, who ignores the (he’s sure) startled look on his face.

“Blaine, I’m thrilled you and Kurt have worked out your communication problems. You’re the poster couple for long distance relationships. But right now we,” Unique glances around the table, “I need you to focus. We have that fundraiser performance at the retirement center next month and you’re going to help me prepare an appropriately fabulous performance.”

Seeing the determined look on Unique’s face, Blaine knows better than to even attempt to reach for his phone. He grabs one of his tacos instead, hoping the change in movement isn’t noticeably awkward.

“It’s next month.” The stress Jake puts on the last word is audible. “We have time.”

“It will be good practice for Nationals.” Unique’s voice takes on a cutting lilt, “Unless you want to explain why McKinley is a one-time show choir champion.”

“So, this weekend?” Blaine glances at Unique before pointedly looking at Tina and Marley and Sam, “We can all meet up at The Lima Bean and discuss possible routines?”

Marley gives a nod while Sam looks to Ryder. Blaine feels a hollow ache and forces his breathing to remain steady at the subtle reminder that Sam no longer lived at Burt and Carole’s house – he’d moved in with the Lynn family after Finn.

After Finn.

Blaine pushes the thought away and focuses on Ryder in time to hear him answer, “– fine, as long as it’s Saturday. Sunday’s already swamped.”

“Artie and I can be there around 11,” Kitty turns to Blaine and her pony tail swings behind her,
“we’re dropping my mom’s dog off at the vet by 10 but we’ll be free after.”

“Not me,” Tina looks apologetic, “I have to be back here by 8 AM for the ACT.”

“Tina,” Blaine gives a small smile, “You already took the ACT. We took it months ago, remember? I kept worrying I was going to get sick because the thermostat was broken and the room went from 50 to 80 every hour.”

“I know we took the ACT Blaine, but I only got a 26. Mom and Dad want me to retake it so I can apply for direct admittance into some colleges. I already retook the SAT and got 40 points higher, though.”

Blaine blinks away his surprise, absently wondering what it’s like to have parents who keep track of ACT and SAT test dates. “Right. Well I’ll make sure to take notes and we can talk after.”

Having just taken a bite of her sandwich, Tina nods in response.

“Is that some Asian thing? Taking the test twice, I mean.” Sam looks genuinely interested, but Blaine ducks his head to hide his wince anyway.

Tina turns to face Sam, even though he’s two seats away. “It’s not an Asian thing. My parents expect me to do well of course, but not only Asians retake the test – a lot of seniors do, especially since colleges will only see the highest score.”

Sam nods. “Still seems harsh though. Taking those things more than once – ruining one weekend was more than enough for me.”

Tina’s eyes narrow, but thankfully Marley cuts in before anything can be said. “So 11 at The Lima Bean. I can sneak in some of Mom’s muffins so we only have to buy coffee too.”

Unique claps her hands together and gives a blinding smile. “That would be amazing. Your mom’s baking is sinful.”

Marley blushes and lowers her head, and Blaine understands. Just like his sexuality was accepted by this group, so was Marley’s mother – something that had caused embarrassment and occasional humiliation at their former schools was accepted here.

Blaine turns to Unique and puts on his most charming smile. “So now that that’s settled, can I have my phone back, please?”

“I’m only giving this to you because you got a message a few minutes ago,” Unique says as she hands over the phone, “and I know you’ll want to reply before class.”

Blaine absently nods and unlocks his phone.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Got an extra chapter added to my homework because some idiot in class decided to ask the stupidest questions known to man to try and distract the prof.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I’m going to need cheesecake to survive this.

Blaine laughs and begins to type out a reply, content.
After school, Blaine enters his silent house – his mother’s cruise lasts another two days, not counting travel back to Ohio, and his father has another three of work before he’s on break. He heads up the stairs to his room where he drops off his bag and wakes up his computer, checking his e-mail and going to Facebook.

He spends the next few hours online, procrastinating on homework while reading social media. He’s startled away from a YouTube video of a show choir’s mashup of Imagine Dragon’s hits when his phone chimes with a message.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I understand the importance of classic theatre, really. But I want to burn ancient Greek theatre and Antigone.

Blaine’s response is interrupted by the arrival of another text.

*Text message from Kurt:*

My brain hurts, Blaine. When you start in the fall be prepared for a new level of headaches. And we should buy stock in Tylenol.

Blaine taps Kurt’s name, absently smiling as the call connects. “If it makes you feel better I have to read three chapters of *Wuthering Heights* and be ready for a vocabulary quiz in the morning. Are you home already?”

“Almost,” Kurt sighs down the line, “Just two more stops, although the flickering light in here isn’t doing my head any favors.”

“The downside of riding the subway after class, I suppose.” Blaine paused and he stood and stepped away from his desk, “I still can’t wait til I can do that, though.”

“You must be crazy,” Blaine can hear the smile in Kurt’s voice, “wanting to share in headaches and questionable lighting.”

“It’s what I signed up for. But hey, can I put you on speaker? I was just about to start dinner.”

“No Blaine. I want my fiancé to starve because I can’t handle him setting down the phone.”

Blaine laughs as he makes his way downstairs, flipping on lights on his way to the kitchen. He set the phone to speaker and headed for the pantry, pulling out a box of pasta and a jar of generic sauce. “So I was thinking… Since you’re almost home – want to cook with me?”

“It’s a good thing Santana’s at the diner. She’d never let me live this down.”

“That’s a yes!” Blaine doesn’t attempt to hide his smile as he walks around the kitchen, pulling out pans and other ingredients as Kurt chatters away.

“ – but they’re just creepy! They restate lines and in the old productions their masks were hideous, Blaine. Hideous. I’d rather work on costumes than be given one of those parts.” A cabinet door closes, “Looks like it’s frozen pizza for me tonight. I don’t want to know what Rachel did to my rice, Blaine. It’s missing and the pot in the sink has black chunks in it. She’s washing that. Or replacing it.”

“Pizza’s good though. Usually.” Blaine smiles when Kurt hums in response.
And if Blaine dances around the kitchen while making dinner and talking to his fiancé, that’s just an added benefit of having no audience in an empty house.

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It’s later, after Blaine and Kurt have both agreed to be serious students and work on homework, that the house phone rings. He sets aside his book and post-its, sighing and pausing his music when he sees his dad’s cell phone number.

“Hello?”

“Blaine. How was school?” The connection is sketchy, but despite the background noise – wind? Exhaust from the planes? – his father’s voice still manages to convey disinterest.

“Fine – it was fine. We started a new unit in calc, and we got our Glee assignment. It’s “change” week which is pretty generic but I was thinking of doing *Chasing the Sun* because—”

“That’s nice, Blaine. Make sure you get tutoring for that calculus class if you need it; I know math isn’t your favorite subject.” It amazed Blaine, sometimes, how his father could attempt to be helpful while focusing on Blaine’s faults.

“I get it so far, it’s just another step with derivatives. And Tina gets math, so I’ll be fine.”

“Tina sounds like a nice girl. Smart, too.” Blaine can’t hold back the sigh at his father’s words, and absently straightens the packet of post-its lying on his desk.

“She’s a good friend.”

If his father hears the unconscious emphasis Blaine puts on friend he gives no indication in his response, “I’m sure she is.” Blaine stays silent, listening to the whirl of noise on the other end of the phone. “Well, be sure to say hello to your mother for me, if you speak to her. Make sure you finish up your homework, too. I know how easy it is to fall behind, especially with all your extracurriculars.”

Blaine rolls his eyes, wondering if Burt paid the same care to Kurt’s academics. “I’m almost done, actually. And if Mom calls I’ll let her know.”

“Right. Have a good evening, Blaine.” His father uses the superficial tone people use when etiquette demands a response, and Blaine knows his father is already preoccupied, far removed from the phone call.

“You too.” Blaine stares as his phone goes dark, before setting it to the side. Restarting his music he picks up his copy of *Wuthering Heights*, prepared to read – and add post-its where necessary – as much as possible.

Two and half chapters and a forgotten number of sticky notes later, Blaine starts at the chime from his phone.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Done for the night. Let me know when you are too! ;)

*Text message from Blaine:*

I can be done :) It’s late enough, and I’m already a chapter and a half ahead.
Seconds later Blaine’s phone blares the chorus of *Love, Love, Love*, with Kurt’s face (and ring) flashing up at him from the screen, “Hi.”

“Hi. A chapter and half ahead? Such an overachiever.” Kurt sounds tired but happy, and Blaine can’t help but compare the sound to the last voice on the other end of his phone.

“Mhm. I’m going to the garage tomorrow so I wanted to get ahead.”

“I’m sure Dad will appreciate the help.” Kurt’s voice goes gentle, “And…thanks, for checking in on him.”

“It’s not like it’s a hardship. Your dad,” Blaine takes a breath, “he’s amazing, Kurt, really. And it’s a nice place to work – it’s actually fun to work on the cars.” Blaine heads to his dresser and pulls out his pajamas.

Kurt laughs, “I’m glad you think so. But Blaine… is everything okay?”

Blaine smiles, and wonders what he did to have such a kind, wonderful fiancé who knows him so well. “Can’t hide anything from you, can I?”

“No. And you shouldn’t even try. So tell me what’s wrong.”

“Nothing really.” Blaine continues before Kurt and voice any objection, “Dad checked in earlier.”

“Oh?” Kurt’s voice is quiet, cautious.

“He wanted to make sure I knew to finish my homework.” Blaine let out a sigh as he sets his pajamas on his bed, “And to ensure that I won’t let my grades slip because I’m busy with other things. So he really didn’t do anything, Kurt, see?”

“No.” Blaine can tell Kurt’s measuring his words, forcibly keeping his tone even, “But he didn’t have to, I think.” There’s a pause, and then Kurt’s voice is back to its regular cheer, “At least he took the time to call, though. Anyway,” Blaine hears a quiet yawn, “It’s pretty late. Are you ready for bed?”

“Give me five minutes?”

“Of course. I’ll just go grab some water.”

Blaine sets his phone on his nightstand before picking up his pajamas and heading for his bathroom.

Minutes later, now changed and with freshly brushed teeth Blaine gets into bed and grabs his phone.

“Kurt?”

“I hope you weren’t expecting someone else.” Blaine hears the rustling sheets and mentally sees Kurt shifting, getting comfortable.

“Never.”

Blaine listens as Kurt quietly relays the latest drama between Santana and Rachel involving nail polish, the piano, and Rachel’s destiny as a Broadway star (even Kurt isn’t quite sure how the three are connected). His response is interrupted by a jaw cracking yawn, however, and Blaine feels his cheeks flush.
“Sorry.”

“Mm. It’s late. We should get some sleep.” Kurt’s words are slurred, hazy with sleep.

“Yeah. Sweet dreams Kurt. Love you.”

“Love you too, ‘night Blaine.” The fondness in the words is evident, despite them being slightly mumbled, “Sweet dreams.”

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Hours later, Blaine jerks up in his bed, covered in a cold sweat. The floodlight from the garage casts shadows in his room –

_The streetlight flickers, making spots dance in front of him and Blaine sees the shadow in front of him grow._

_A green truck speeds away, music blasting from open windows._

“Just a dream” Blaine’s voice seems impossibly loud in the silence of his room. He shakes his head, easing his clenched fists from his sheets and looking for his phone.

Breathe in. _It’s just a stupid dream._

Breathe out. His phone is on the floor, caught in the edge of his comforter.

Breathe in. The light from his phone is harsh, but the face and silver ring staring back mean safety.

Breathe out. _Just a stupid dream._
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to my betas (they truly are amazing people) slayerkitty, jessicamdawn, dlanahz! :-) All these kudos and reads are leaving me in awe, so thank you to all my readers, too!!!! Also, I embedded a link to the song Blaine's planning for Glee ;)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 2

Entering the library Kurt rubs his hands together to dispel the chill and heads for the elevators. New York may be the city he’s dreamed of since he was three, but the cold (especially in the morning) is just as troublesome as it was in Ohio. In his haste to leave the loft he hadn’t grabbed his gloves – they didn’t really match his outfit anyway – and he was paying for that oversight now.

Text message from Kurt:

For future reference, pockets do not make up for a lack of gloves... even if it is more fashionable.

Text message from Blaine:

Aren't you always telling me that the cold dries out your skin? I'm shocked Kurt, shocked!

Text message from Kurt:

You're not as funny as you think you are.

Text message from Kurt:

It wasn't intentional.

Making sure his phone is set to vibrate, he places it and his hands back in his jacket pockets – rubbing didn’t do anything, unfortunately – after pressing the ‘up’ arrow. According to the online catalogue, all the books on ancient Greek theatre were on the third floor, and he’s hoping to find some references for his mid-term paper. He doesn’t have a topic chosen yet, but he can just choose books that sound interesting; plus, this early in the term he doesn’t have to worry about the perfect reference being checked out, or worse, in the depository and needing a week for delivery.

A few students wait close by but none make an effort to say hello, even when the elevator doors finally open and they cram into the confined space. His fame due to the sing-off was short lived, and all the members of Adam’s Apples avoid him when at all possible. He isn’t sure if Adam had requested it or not, but the result is same.

Exiting the elevator and turning left, Kurt glances at the call number written on a post-it, comparing it to the sets on shelves. Like all libraries, it’s almost eerily silent, so even the rustle of the small chain on his vest seems unbearably loud. He’s tempted to put in his headphones and listen to Broadway masterpieces on his iPod, but he knows at least one ear bud will fall out while
he scours the shelves, so that’s better left for later, when he’s reading while enjoying a cup of coffee.

Turning down the aisle that matches his note, Kurt makes it three feet before he stops: Of course the Harold Smith Prince Library has four shelves of books on Greek theatre; Kurt’s not sure whether to be impressed or appalled.

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Blaine exits McKinley High and stretches the tension from his shoulders. He enjoys Glee Club, feels connected with the other members in a way he never had with the Warblers, but the drama.

Jake was still thoroughly embracing his newly single status – eerily similar to Puck when Blaine had first met him – and while Marley and Ryder appeared to be happy, there was a line that Jake was toeing with alarming frequency. There hadn’t been a public argument, luckily, but only because they tended to keep their arguments away from the choir room these days. Sarcasm and cutting remarks were fair game, however, and Jake and Ryder were experts at both.

Pushing away the thoughts along with the tension, Blaine pulls his phone from his bag as he walks to his car.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Just got done with Glee. On my way to the garage :)

*Text message from Kurt:*

Have fun! Make sure to change clothes – oil stains are evil! :)

*Text message from Blaine:*

It’s cute how you think you have to remind me.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I have an old t-shirt and jeans in your dad’s office. And Burt keeps a pair of coveralls for me.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Blaine Anderson, I *love* you.

Blaine can’t stop the smile from spreading across his face, and is immeasurably glad that he’s arrived at his car so no one can see him looking besotted over a text message.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Love you, too!!!!!!!!!!! I’ll tell Burt you say hi! <3

Getting into his car, Blaine connects his phone to his stereo and sets his music on shuffle before pulling on his seatbelt. The drive to Hummel Tires & Lube is relatively short and less than fifteen minutes later Blaine is entering the open door.

A few mechanics give Blaine a nod and wave in greeting as he heads for Burt’s office. The office is open but empty, so he grabs his clothes and heads for the employee restroom to quickly change.

Returning minutes later he finds the office still empty, and Blaine sets his school clothes on the
chair with his bag before exiting the room. Outside the doorway he scans the garage for Burt before one of the mechanics – he can’t tell who from the distance – nods toward a red Ford Taurus. Smiling his thanks Blaine heads for the car. Burt emerges from the opposite side when Blaine is steps away.

“Hey kid.” Burt rubs grease stained fingers over his overall covered leg before reaching up to straighten his cap. “You up for an oil change? This one still needs it since I found some other issues and need to talk to the owner to see what he wants to do.”

“Sure.” Blaine moves toward the open hood while stealing glances at Burt; he looks healthy enough, no circles under his eyes or stiffness in his walk.

“I’m fine, Anderson. I even had one of those low cal soup things for lunch. You can ask any of the guys.”

Blaine feels his cheeks heat with a blush and looks at the engine rather than the man standing a foot away. “Right. Sorry. An oil change – anything else I should know?”

The hand on his shoulder is unexpected, and Blaine’s arm twitches involuntarily. “You’re a good kid.” Blaine raises his eyes to the left and Burt offers a small smile, “You’re not exactly subtle, but Kurt isn’t either.” The hand on Blaine’s shoulder briefly tightens. “I plan on staying around, Blaine, got things I still want to see. So I’ll take my meds and pass on the burgers if I have to. And you can tell Kurt that.”

“I will.” Blaine gives a sheepish smile as Burt removes his hand and steps away.

“Alright. Well I’m gonna go talk to the man who didn’t realize his car was a jump away from dying.”

“Have fun!” Blaine laughs even as he turns back to the exposed engine, ready to work.

Blaine hums the chorus of *Teenage Dream* as he turns the wrench, working on the well-used gold minivan. Finished, he stands, heading toward the toolbox. A boisterous laugh catches his attention and he turns his head slightly –

and drops the wrench at the sight of a forest green truck.

Jim, an older mechanic working a few feet away glances up at the noise, “Tired today, Anderson?”

Blaine gives a smile as he bends to retrieve the wrench, “Not really. Just clumsy, I guess.”

“Not on the cars, I hope.” Jim laughs.

Blaine shakes his head and walks toward the truck. He has to check, just to make sure. Just in case –

Breathe in. *Forest green is a common car color.*

Breathe out. *This is Lima.*

Breathe in. *He’s probably changed cars by now.*

Breathe out. *It was years ago.*
Now feet away from the truck Blaine takes in the details and almost drops the wrench again when his muscles ache with the release of a death grip he hadn’t realized he’d had. This truck is newer, more subtle curves than angles, and he sees a pair of smiley faced dice hanging from the rear view mirror when he looks through the windshield.

*It’s a different truck.*

“You just gonna stand there?”

Blaine whips around at Burt’s voice, silently cursing himself for getting distracted.

“Of course not, Mr. Hummel. Just putting this,” Blaine slightly raises the wrench, “back where it belongs.”

“Uhuh. You got plans with your parents for dinner?” Burt takes the wrench from Blaine’s hand.

Blaine shakes his head. “I have some leftover pasta from yesterday though.” Blaine watches as Burt places the wrench in a bin with other tools before turning back to face him.

“C’mon kid, you’re joining me and Carole for dinner.” It’s a statement, like Burt sees it as fact, rather than invitation.

“Thanks for the offer Mr. Hummel, but I wouldn’t want to intrude –”

“You wouldn’t be intruding, Blaine,” Burt interrupts. Briefly Burt’s eyes tighten, “You’d be doing us a favor, actually. Carole doesn’t know how to cook for two.”

Blaine is nodding before Burt has finished his sentence. “Of course. Thanks Mr. Hummel. I’m sure it will be delicious.”

Burt nods. “Glad that’s settled. Now you go change and I’ll meet you at the house; that way you’ll have your car and can head home after dinner.”

Blaine smiles and walks toward Burt’s office to comply.

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Walking to the Hudson-Hummel front door, Blaine is struck by the stillness of the house: no yelling at a videogame, no shouting as he knocks on the door, no pounding steps seconds later.

Blaine shakes his head slightly to dispel his gloomy thoughts – he will not upset Carole, and has a smile on his face by the time Burt opens the door.

“You don’t still have to knock when we’re expecting you.” Burt steps back to allow Blaine to enter the house.

“Force of habit,” Blaine says with a smile and a shrug, “etiquette lessons aren’t easy to forget.”

Blaine follows Burt down the small hall and into the kitchen, where Carole is pulling a pan out the oven and setting it atop the stove.

“Oh Blaine! I was so glad when Burt said you’d be joining us.” Carole walks over and gives Blaine a light hug before stepping back, “I hope you don’t mind eating in the kitchen; the dining room is a bit big for three.”

“I don’t mind at all. I ate in my kitchen last night, actually.” Blaine glances around the kitchen.
“Do you need any help? I could set the table or get napkins.” Blaine’s voice rises at the end of the sentence, as if in question.

“Silverware’s already on the table.” From beside him Burt gestures to Carole who is carefully dishing out the contents of the pan, “Carole’s got the plates, just get yourself a drink – you know where everything is – and sit down.”

Heading for the fridge Blaine replies. “I can get yours too, if you’d like.” Opening the door Blaine pulls out a can of Coke Zero; he’ll need the caffeine for the drive home, especially given his lack of sleep.

“We’ve already gotten ours, Blaine, don’t worry about it.”

Blaine takes a seat at the empty place at the table, setting down his can as he does so. Seconds later he sees Burt carrying two plates over and starts to stand only to have Burt shake his head at him. “We can handle this, Blaine. Just sit.”

Blaine gives a slightly embarrassed smile as Burt slides one the plates in front of him before setting the other in front of himself, in the chair to Blaine’s right.

Carole joins them moments later, a glass of water in one hand and her plate in the other.

“It smells delicious, Mrs. Hudson-Hummel. Thanks again for having me over.”

Taking her seat she gives Blaine a smile, “You’re more than welcome Blaine. But really, it’s Carole; Hudson-Hummel is such a mouthful!”

Burt laughs, “I think he’s programmed to say Mr. and Mrs., Carole. It’s a lost cause,” Burt briefly pauses, “at least for now.”

Blaine feels himself blush at the subtle reminder that these people are his future in-laws. “Sorry.” Blaine takes a bite of baked chicken florentine to stall any further words on the subject. “This really is delicious, much better than my leftovers.”

Carole turns to Blaine, “No reason to be sorry Blaine, really. And I’m glad you like it; you’ll be taking some home.” Carole looks away and her voice is tightly controlled, “We certainly don’t need so many leftovers here.” Carole blinks and then looks back at Blaine with a smile, “Besides, it’s silly to cook for one, and you’re a teenaged boy – you’re perpetually hungry.”

“Well I certainly won’t say no to leftovers.”

“Good answer Blaine.” Burt tilts his glass slightly in acknowledgement. “Now, how was Glee? What are you workin’ on?”

Beside him, Carole nods. “Something you like, I hope.”

Blaine takes a sip of soda before smiling. They want to hear about Glee. They care that it’s ‘change’ week and he wants to sing *Chasing the Sun* by Sara Bareilles, even though they probably have never heard the song.

Blaine doesn’t even attempt to hide his joy as he begins to speak.

_-*_*-_*-_*

Kurt forcibly ignores the argument Rachel and Santana are having in the middle of the loft, and
futilely wishes for walls.

He walks around his room, rearranging his clothes and waking up his computer. He makes sure his Internet is working and then moves back to his bed, putting in his ear buds and picking up one of the five books he’d checked out from the library.

Four songs and seven pages later – the author must take delight in making sentences as highhanded as possible – he no longer hears discordant yelling. Cautiously he pulls out one ear bud and lets out a quiet sigh of relief; Rachel and Santana have settled their argument, based on the quiet murmur of the television and barely audible conversation. After putting his ear bud back in, he hums along to Oklahoma! and hopes its cheerful melody will prevent him from throwing this book off his bed.

Text message from Kurt:

Remind me that damaging library property is not worth the fees. The topic is right, but this author is trying too hard to make a name for himself.

Kurt manages another five pages – and really, who knew reading could be so exhausting – before his phone beeps with a text.

Text message from Blaine:

The joys of college!

Text message from Blaine:

...are you up for a break? I just got home and was thinking Skype? ;)

Text message from Kurt:

You're a horrible influence, truly.

Text message from Kurt:

I'm signing in now.

Computer in front of his crossed legs, Kurt leans back against his pillows. Moments later Blaine is smiling up at him, hair falling out of its gel.

“Hi.”

“Hi. And I’m not a terrible influence; I’m saving you from exorbitant library fees.”

Kurt lets out a short laugh, “Right. And four-syllables, congratulations on putting your AP English vocabulary to good use.” Kurt pauses. “Although I’m scared to think of what I’d have to do to the book for a fee to reach exorbitant levels.”

“It’s a college library book. I’m pretty sure the rule is that everything with ‘college’ in the title is automatically expensive.”

Blaine leans back and Kurt waits for the picture to catch up with real time. During the brief wait he takes note as the television turns off in the next room, followed by the sound of giggles and the front door sliding shut. “Hm. You do have a point. But enough about my very special library book.” Kurt looks at Blaine before catching his gaze. “Are you okay? You look a little tired.”

“I’m fine, Kurt.” A brief pause, “Promise. Just a bit of a long day. And Burt’s fine too. He told me
to let you know that he plans on staying fine for a while.” Blaine gives a sheepish smile before continuing. “Apparently I’m not subtle.”

“Blaine,” Kurt pauses to force down laughter, “you are many wonderful, wonderful things. But subtle has never been one of them.” Kurt lets a laugh escape before giving Blaine a small private smile. “Thanks, though. For looking in on him.”

“It’s no trouble, really. It’s…nice, to work at the shop. And Burt –” Blaine cuts himself off by bursting into laughter.

Kurt raises his eyebrows, “You okay over there? I didn’t know Dad was that funny.”

“It’s –” another laugh and then Blaine takes a breath, seemingly in control once again. “It’s not that, really. It’s just…I can call them Burt and Carole when talking to you, but to their faces it’s always Mr. Hummel and Mrs. Hudson-Hummel.”

“You’re a dork.”

“You love me anyway.” Blaine’s smile is confident. “Sorry I was late getting home, by the way. Your dad invited me over for dinner.”

Kurt shrugs. “I thought he might. I think,” Kurt lightly bites his lower lip, “I think they miss having people in the house, you know?”

“Well, I can’t say I mind visiting. Carole even made me take leftovers.” On screen, Blaine briefly moves out of sight before returning, sans sweater.

“Well, at least I don’t have to worry about you starving.”

Blaine gives a mock gasp of outrage. “I can cook!”

Kurt shakes his head, silently berating Skype when the movement appears on screen like a wall of moving hair. “I know you can, Blaine. But it’s never fun – or easy – to cook for one.” Kurt smiles when Blaine hums an agreement. “Besides, it’s a rule that you never turn down well made free food.”

Blaine laughs. “I said something similar to Carole, actually.” Blaine’s face then loses its humor. “So…my mom will be back tomorrow. I don’t think she’ll be here when I get home from school, but definitely before I go to bed.”

Kurt forces his face to remain open, and silently curses the universe for giving Blaine a mother whose mention is enough to take the happiness from Blaine’s expression. After all, she isn’t evil…just ignorant and almost pitifully naïve. Almost being the key word. Pushing away the thoughts – Blaine deserves his full attention, after all – Kurt meets Blaine’s slightly grainy gaze.

“Well. We’ll just have to take advantage of tonight then. What do you say?” Kurt straightens and undoes the first few buttons of his vest.

“No! I mean, just – you’re an evil, evil man, Kurt Hummel.”
“So I’ve been told.” Kurt undoes another button on his vest, offering a sly smile. “You love me anyway.”

Kurt wonders if Blaine’s answer of agreement will ever fail to make his heart flutter.

Watching as Blaine undoes his bow tie, Kurt doesn’t think so: Blaine Anderson is his soul mate, after all.

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At his desk Blaine moves his calculus book so the glare from his lamp is higher on the page. The headaches induced from the fancy looking glossy pages could easily be avoided if textbook editors did their job. Blaine wonders if they’ve all been out of school for so long that they’ve forgotten the practicalities of education.

Half an hour after ending his Skype call with Kurt – he has the best fiancé – Blaine is two and a half problems further than he was at the start of tonight. Math has never been his favorite subject, even if he understands it. Unfortunately, these derivative problems require all of his concentration, which is not at its peak after his restless sleep the night before.

Briefly Blaine considers abandoning the assignment because he’s already on the bottom half of his notebook paper despite the few number of completed problems; he’d messed up the first problem and had to rewrite it next to his first attempt. It really was too much work for one question, and if he checks the answer in the back and finds he’s wrong again – he may throw his textbook.

And then give up.

Especially since there’s a 50/50 chance his teacher won’t collect it. The man seems to delight in taking homework only randomly; leaving Blaine and his classmates with sheets of completed problems, and only their own knowledge to show for it. Of course, the last time he had debated not doing an assignment the homework had been collected the following day (and Blaine had silently thanked his studious nature for prevailing while Artie had looked close to tears).

Sighing, Blaine returns to the problem and manages a smile when Somewhere Only We Know streams from his docking station.

Text message from Blaine:

Thinking of you! ;) Much better than calc!

Blaine manages to finish the third problem and start on the forth before his phone chimes a response.

Text message from Kurt:

We’re being studious Blaine.

Text message from Blaine:

I am studious – I just think of you, too. <3

Text message from Kurt:

Study, Blaine.

Text message from Kurt:
You’re in my thoughts, too. Now study so you can graduate and come stay in NY <3

Text message from Blaine:

What a worthy incentive. Calculus it is!

With a sigh Blaine turns back to his studies (rearranging his book, notebook, and graphing calculator) with a smile. Trust Kurt to make him happy even when he’s doing the worst homework in world.

He really does have the best fiancé.
Chapter 3

Sorry I'm posting a bit late; work has been intense (first week of the term so I'm drowning in lesson planning and meetings). Anyway, thanks for all the kudos and likes - I'm in awe, honestly! Also, thanks to slayerkitty, jessicamdown, dlanadhz for the beta!

Chapter 3

With classes done for the day the halls are mostly empty, but there are a few students around as Blaine heads for the choir room. At the end of hall, Coach Sylvester scowls when she catches Blaine’s gaze. He looks away as Sam turns from a side hall and catches his attention with waving hands. Reaching Blaine’s side, Sam slows his steps and aims for casual. “So…what’re you doing for ‘change’ week?”

Blaine takes a moment to gather his thoughts. Another restless night and the knowledge of his mother’s impending arrival have left Blaine tired.

“I was thinking about *Chasing the Sun* because –” Blaine pauses and looks at Sam’s earnest face. “You don’t have a song, do you.” It isn’t phrased as a question; Blaine already knows the answer.

“No.” Sam shrugs. “I’ve got til Friday. I’ll think of something.”

Blaine laughs as they enter the choir room. They quickly take their seats as Mr. Schue claps his hands together in an attempt to get everyone’s attention.

“All right guys.” Mr Schue pauses, waiting until the rest of the room is silent. “The performances have been decent so far this week, but I want to remind those of you who haven’t performed yet to really reach. Change is about more than just a new school year or event.”

The Glee director steps closer to the chairs, moving his arms and gesturing around the room. “It’s about embracing the new – letting go of old troubles. Moving on. So don’t go the safe route, guys. Each of you is going to have to give one-hundred and ten percent. I expect you to work as much – if not more – in Glee as you would in your other classes –”

Blaine gives an internal sigh of relief when Mr. Schue’s speech is interrupted by Tins’s raised hand.

“Yes Tina?”

“I love Glee, Mr. Schue. But Glee isn’t a class. It doesn’t affect our GPA. It’s a club, just like cheerleading or yearbook committee or Student Council. And we’ll all work hard, Mr. Schue, but we’ve been working hard, every time we meet. I just don’t think it’s fair that you’re saying we should be doing more.

“I already put more time in Glee than I do for my other school clubs, and I don’t get the recognition here I do there. Add in ACT prep and volunteering and filling out college applications and there isn’t extra time for more effort, especially for us seniors.”
Hoping to forestall an argument Blaine adds, “I thought all the performances this week were great. I’m not sure what more you’re expecting us to give, Mr. Schue.” Blaine pauses and looks around the room before returning his gaze to the teacher. “And I’m in almost every club McKinley has, and I can say that Tina’s right: I spend more time preparing for or in Glee than I do for any other club.”

Blaine sees Artie straighten in his chair, about to speak, but Mr. Schue steps even closer, “Guys. Guys!” His voice is loud enough to startle Marley, who’s sitting in front. “I’m sorry you misunderstood. Your performances this week have been good. I’m just saying that everyone will need to work hard all year. Don’t get complacent and take a safe route – we’re preparing for Nationals.

“Now, with that said, who would like to go first?”

Blaine ducks his head as Mr. Schue looks around the room. He had considered performing today, but Mr. Schue’s speech has tension settling in his shoulders and wishing for another day to practice. Just when the silence is beginning to reach awkward status Marley stands.

“I’ll go.”

Blaine gives her an encouraging smile and a thumbs up when the he hears the opening chords of And So It Goes. Her voice is soulful; the lyrics coming to life. Of course.

She finishes the song to a round of applause, and then Ryder is joining her in the middle of the room as the band plays the beginning of Counting Stars. Blaine quickly snaps a picture.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] I miss our duets during Glee :(

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt exits the dance studio with aching muscles and an empty water bottle. He wants nothing more than to collapse into his bed, shower, and get some food – not necessarily in that order. Adjusting his bag he leaves the building, heading for the subway.

An hour later Kurt resists the urge to simply fall asleep, freshly showered and comfortably ensconced in the small mountain of blankets on his bed. With Rachel at rehearsal – he’s certain he’ll hear all about it when she’s home – and Santana visiting Dani, he has the loft to himself. The solitude is not helping him come up with the willpower to move.

He really should, though; having the loft to himself is an all too rare occurrence, and the opportunity should be taken like the gift it is. With a sigh he pushes the blankets away (leaving a pile he’s sure he’ll regret come time for bed) and with one last longing look he leaves his room. He heads for the piano in the living area to practice for his voice class.

Regardless of what the mainstream media and the average person believes, college arts classes are just as taxing as any other college course. At the beginning of the term Kurt had felt intimidated in Voice I, especially since Mr. Schue had woefully underprepared him for the course. After his initial assessment his professor had kindly told him that his inherent talent needed refinement, and that he believed Kurt could succeed if he put in the effort, but to succeed as a counter tenor practice was essential.

Kurt had learned the location and nuances of every freshman vocal practice room within the week.
Initially, Kurt had hoped that the addition of the piano – Blaine really was amazing – would mean he could practice more in the loft. The day after Blaine had returned to Ohio Kurt had woken to Rachel singing and playing the melody to *I’m the Greatest Star*. Within the first week he had realized it was far less stressful to practice on campus than to argue with Rachel over singing rights –

*Kurt, I’m taking classes, working at the diner, and rehearsing for Funny Girl. I don’t have time to stay on campus to practice.*

Now, Kurt smiles as he takes a seat on the worn bench. He is tired, but homework comes first.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Empty loft! The piano is mine! :)

*Text message from Blaine:*

:)

*Text message from Kurt:*

Voice homework…

*Text message from Blaine:*

You’re already amazing. Practice will just make a great thing even better :)

*Text message from Kurt:*

Smooth. Very smooth. I think I’ll keep you <3

*Text message from Blaine:*

Love you! <3/&t>

*Text message from Blaine:*

Now practice so all the NYADA boys can be jealous of your talent

Laughing, Kurt sets his phone on the bit of wood to the right of highest C key before flexing his fingers. Making sure to keep his hands arched he plays a scale to get into the right mindset. He’s not Blaine – his pianist abilities are limited to scales for warm-ups and picking out simple melodies for practice. Still, he manages to get through the entirety of the three songs he has to perform during his one-on-one conference next week.

Santana enters while he’s practicing a run of thirty-seconds for the third time. He finishes and takes a breath before turning around on the bench to face her.

“You know, it’s things like that that make me glad I’m not going to school for singing.”

Kurt shrugs. “It’ll be worth it, some day.”

“You keep telling yourself that, Hummel.” Santana gestures toward the piano. “You almost done? There’s a *Facts of Life* marathon on, and since you’re the genius that introduced me to it, you should share in the killing of brain cells.”
Kurt glances at the time on his phone. “Two episodes? I still have reading to do.” He feels the grimace on his face at the mention of the book.

“Sounds like a riot.”

Gathering his phone, Kurt stands. “That’s college.”

* * * * *

Blaine’s mother enters the house with a click of heels and a smile. “Blaine, I’m home!”

At the sound of his mother’s voice Blaine leaves the kitchen – and his dinner dishes – to see his mother standing in the entryway, hanging her jacket in the coat closet.

“Hi. How was your cruise?”

“Oh! It was just lovely. I found the cutest little shop in one of the ports.” Blaine’s mother steps forward to give him a quick hug. “Now,” she hands Blaine a set of keys, “Could you grab my bags from the car? Travelling is so tiring.”

Blaine gives his mom a smile before leaving to get the bags from her car. He shakes his head as he opens the car’s back door; he’ll have to make two trips.

Minutes later, with the bags piled in the entryway and the front door re-locked, Blaine finds his mother in the kitchen, sipping a glass of white wine.

“Thank you, Blaine. How have you been, sweetie?”

“Fine.” Blaine shrugs before taking a seat on the bar stool in front of the island where he had eaten dinner; his half-finished can of soda is sweating.

“I’m guessing you had dinner already.” Her gaze slides to the dishes in the sink. “I’m glad you’re not living off frozen dinners.”

“After I worked at the shop yesterday Mr. Hummel invited me to eat with them. Mrs. Hudson-Hummel gave me leftovers.” Blaine takes a sip of his drink. “I’ll give the Tupperware back to Mr. Hummel tomorrow when I see him at the garage.”

“Hm.” Blaine’s mother swirls the wine in her glass. “Such a long name; it’s quite a mouthful! Do you know why she didn’t take her husband’s name?”

For a moment Blaine sits, stunned. “I um –” Blaine hates floundering for words. “Kurt’s never said, but I know she was married before. And Finn…Finn’s last name was Hudson. Maybe she didn’t want him to feel left out.”

Blaine notices his mother’s wine glass is now almost empty. “Maybe so. It was kind of them to invite you to dinner, especially after what they’ve been through.” Her voice takes on a sympathetic quality, and Blaine tightens his grip on his soda can. “Make sure you thank them when you take back that Tupperware. Anyway, sweetheart, how’s school?”

“We’re reading *Wuthering Heights* in English – I have a vocabulary quiz tomorrow.” He smiles before continuing, “Glee’s been fun. We had Katy Perry and Lady Gaga not too long ago. We had to sing opposite our favorite, though.” Blaine’s mother lets out a quiet laugh. “Ryder did an awesome version of *Counting Stars* with Marley today. I might see if Kurt wants to sing it the next time I see him.”
Blaine watches his mother for her reaction to Kurt’s name. Her face is mostly blank, but she makes sure she catches his gaze as she replies.

“Sounds like you’ve been having fun in your Glee club, that’s nice. Just make sure you spend at least as much time working on your academics.” She flashes him a quick smile, “Now. I got you a few presents while I was gone; what do you say we go through my things to find your spoils?”

Blaine laughs as he jumps off the stool, pointedly ignoring his mother’s lack of mention about his fiancé. “Sounds like a plan.”

Halfway up the stairs fifteen minutes later with a bag in his left hand that contains a book on Haitian music, a pair of hand-made sandals, and a stuffed bear courtesy of the cruise line, Blaine pauses and turns his head when his mother calls his name.

“Yeah?”

“When you spoke to your father, did he happen to mention what time his plane was getting in? I was thinking we could all go out for dinner.”

“Oh.” Blaine pauses, remembering phone calls. “No, he didn’t. But he’s been calling almost every night so you can ask him later, probably.”

“Hm. Alright. If your father agrees, is there any place in particular where you’d like to go? Or something you’ve had recently? You mentioned you went to the mall not too long ago; I’m guessing you ate out then.”

Blaine’s hand tightens on the bag’s handles –

A forest green truck in a parking lot.

A coincidence.

“I just ate in the food court, so wherever is fine.”

“Alright then. I’m probably going to go to bed soon; between traffic and travel I’m exhausted. So sleep well when you’ve finished with your homework.”

Blaine sighs, wondering what it says about his parents that they both check on the status of his homework but leave him in an empty house for weeks at a time. “I will. ‘Night, Mom.”

In his room, Blaine sets the bag of gifts in front of his nightstand before continuing to his desk. He turns on his docking station and wakes up his computer as he sits in his desk chair.

Text message from Blaine:

Back to homework :( 

Blaine finishes the Civics assignment he’d started before dinner and reviews his AP English vocabulary before he decides it’s time for a break.

Text message from Blaine:

Mom’s home too. She bought me a book. And sandals…apparently they’re hand-made?

Text message from Blaine:
I couldn't tell her they're the wrong size. Plus...sandals. No.

Text message from Kurt:

At least she got you something?

Kurt answers on the second ring and Blaine wonders if Kurt’s voice over a phone line will ever cease to make him smile. He doubts it.

“Hi.” Blaine leans back in his chair. “The sandals are the wrong size. I didn’t tell her; is that wrong?”

Kurt’s laugh through the phone line is still one of the most beautiful things Blaine has ever heard.

“Not terribly. It’s not like she can exchange them, and you don’t wear sandals anyway.”

Blaine makes a hum of agreement before continuing in a quiet, absent voice. “Another impractical item to add to the pile in my closet.”

“Oh!” Kurt’s voice conveys excitement. “I meant to ask; how was Glee? Did you secure a solo for your next public performance with Chasing the Sun?”

Blaine’s hand tightened on his phone. “Um, no. Not exactly. I –” Blaine bites down on his lower lip. “I didn’t actually sing today.”

“Did something happen? I thought –” Kurt’s voice is patient, even in confusion. “I thought you planned on going today. You sounded brilliant yesterday.”

Blaine sighs and drums his free hand on his desk. “Thanks; I’m glad you thought so. It’s just…in Glee today Mr. Schue kept talking about how we should take risks. And that to make sure we don’t let anyone down we all have to give all that we can. He said we should put as much effort in as we do to our classes.

“I just –” Blaine leans back in his chair. “I could do better, you know? And extra practice can’t hurt; I’ll go over it some more once I finish this homework and maybe I’ll go tomorrow.”

“Blaine.” Kurt’s voice is warm but determined, and Blaine feels his spiraling thoughts come back to some semblance of control. “I’ve seen you sing for an audience. And practice. You have never given less than your best during a performance. Never.” Kurt’s voice takes on a teasing lilt. “Even when you’re serenading less than receptive Gap employees.”

Blaine can feel the blush hot on his face even as he laughs. “I thought we agreed never to mention that again.”

“I can’t seem to recall any such agreement.”

“Of course not.”

“Well, at least your choice of location improved. Your future serenades were better received.”

“I had more reason to impress.”

“Did you?” Kurt’s voice remains steady, if flirty, in spite of the question.

“Only the best for the love of my life. He’s amazing you know,” Blaine can practically see Kurt’s smile, “and I wanted the world to know it.”
“Well, all of McKinley is close enough, I suppose.”

“It was your world, at the time. Besides, your classmates needed to know that Kurt Hummel was off the market.”

“It’s not like there was much competition, Blaine.”

“Their loss. And the NYADA boys’ too – I put on a ring on it, after all.”


“She’s queen.”

“I can’t argue with you on that. But I can tell you to finish your homework so you can get some sleep.”

“Really? You’re cutting me off just like that?”

“Really. I’m terribly selfish, you know. And in order for you to come live here with me – which is what I want – you have to graduate. So homework, Blaine.” There’s a pause, and Blaine is just about to respond when Kurt continues. “And don’t worry about Mr. Schue; your song is perfect.”

“Homework it is. And Kurt?”

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too. Now go be productive.”

Blaine ends the call with a smile and the assurance that he’ll text when he goes to bed. He sets the phone aside and pulls his calculus work forward, rubbing his eyes as he takes in the small print.

He’s certain no one but Kurt would ever believe him, but sometimes Blaine really despises school. _*_*_*__

Rachel enters the loft with a frown on her face and Kurt can practically see the thundercloud hovering over her.

It’s going to be a long night.

Still, he has to ask. “How was rehearsal, Rachel?”

“What? Oh, it was fine.”

“It was?” Kurt’s voice betrays his confusion.

“Yes. Why wouldn’t it be?”

“Maybe because you just came in here looking like you’re on the verge of murder.” Santana’s voice cuts through the loft, and Kurt sees her looking over the back of the sofa, smirking.

“Oh! I’m not mad because of rehearsal,” Rachel sounds incredulous. “It’s Funny Girl.”

From his seat at the table Kurt just stares, and a quick glance at Santana proves she’s doing the same.
Rachel sighs, and then continues, “Some girl ran into me outside of Starbucks and made me drop my coffee. I hadn’t even taken a sip yet! And,” Rachel huffs, “she didn’t even apologize.”

On the sofa, Santana laughs, and Kurt covers his mouth with his hand to hide his smile. Rachel eyes both of them before crossing the loft and sitting in one of Kurt’s vintage dining chairs.

“I really wanted that coffee, Kurt. It’s been a long day.”

“Well, lucky for you I just finished brewing some.” Kurt nods toward his steaming cup before he stands and goes to the cabinet to grab a mug for Rachel.

Returning moments later, he slides the drink across the table and gives Rachel a small smile. “You’ll have to add your own extras.”

Rachel reaches for the sugar packets and jar of non-dairy creamer in the center of the table. “Thanks. I know it’s not the best for my voice, but I really do need the caffeine.” Rachel stirs her coffee. “We’re going off script soon and so I need to review everything. There’s just too much to do: work, classes, homework.”

Kurt hums in agreement as he takes a sip of his own coffee. “Seems like everyone is tired – stressed – these days.” Setting down his cup, Kurt stares at the swirls before speaking again. “I ended my call with Blaine early. I’m a little worried, actually. He’s stressed and –”

“Wait, the hobbit gets stressed? I thought the only time he was anything less than sickeningly happy was when you’d dumped him....you didn’t dump him, did you?”

“What?!” Kurt whips his head to the left, facing Santana. “No! I didn’t –” Kurt takes a deep breath and waves his left hand, making sure his ring catches the light. “Blaine and I are engaged Santana.” He tilts his head toward the television, “And I thought you were watching TV.”

“Hard to watch when you and Rachel keep gossiping like we’re still at McKinley.”

“We’re not gossiping, Santana.” Rachel’s voice is judging. “And you should really stop listening in on other people’s conversations.”

“It’s a loft, Berry. If you want privacy, go some place that has walls.”

“Now Kurt,” Rachel continues as if Santana hadn’t spoken, “What makes you think Blaine’s stressed?”

“He didn’t perform today.” He hears Santana groan on the sofa and looks up from his coffee to see Rachel looking less than convinced. “I just – he had planned to go today, but then Mr. Schue said one of his oh-so-helpful comments and Blaine decided he needed more practice. He sounded anxious, Rachel. Blaine doesn’t get anxious over Glee performances.”

“Damn, Hummel. You’re freaked because Tiny Tim put off singing for a day? You two really are the most boring couple. Cute, but boring.”

“Kurt,” Rachel pauses, seemingly searching for words, “I think Santana’s right.” She holds up a hand for forestall Kurt’s reply. “Just – they’re preparing for Nationals. It makes sense that Blaine would want to practice. It doesn’t sound like he’s stressed.” A pause. “At least, no more than any other high school senior.”

Kurt hums in response, remembering Blaine’s nervous, rambling voice; his hesitance with his performance; his slightly pale face and tired eyes; the mention of his parents, the accompanied
attempt at nonchalance.

“Maybe,” Kurt says in response.

But maybe not resounds in his thoughts.

_**_*_*_*_

Blaine startles awake, heart thundering in his chest.

_Pain! The dress shoe moves away, becomes a pair. Morphs into scuffed sneakers._

_“Be a man, Anderson!”_

_A green truck races past, music blaring._

His phone’s screen is harsh in the darkness of his room.

2:17 A.M.

Breathe in. _Just a nightmare._

Breathe out. _Just a stupid, stupid nightmare._

Blaine sets his phone back on his nightstand, closes his eyes, and thinks of Kurt.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to everyone for the reads and comments! :-) I'm still amazed. As always, thanks to my wonderful, amazing betas slayerkitty, dlanadhz, and jessicamadawn.

Chapter 4

As the band’s final note fades, Blaine takes a moment to catch his breath. He turns and gives Tina a small smile before heading for his chair and taking a drink of water.

Off to the side, Mr. Schue claps with a smile. “That was good, guys. Really good.”

Next to him, Tina leans to whisper in his ear. “I still think we could have sped up the tempo.”

Blaine suppresses the sigh that wants to escape, the argument having been discussed (and rediscussed) for hours at The Lima Bean, and again after the first run through. Unique had been just as opinioned and certain at the meeting as she had been at lunch when she’d stolen Blaine’s phone. Choosing the song alone had taken two hours.

He straightens in his chair as Mr. Schue’s voice raises, “– to keep up the practice. We’re going to need to bring everything we have for Nationals this year. But we’re out of time for today. Keep up your hard work and remember your songs for News are due by the end of the week.”

Blaine tosses his water bottle into his bag and stands as Sam comes to his side. “I still can’t believe News is our theme this is week. ‘I know most of you are getting feedback from colleges or making plans for after graduation. So I want you all to express that with music.’” The latter is spoken in an imitation of Schue, and Blaine lets out a small laugh.

“No one of your best impressions, Sam. And you,” Tina catches Blaine’s arm, causing him and Sam to stop, almost to the door of the choir room, “Are you tired or something? Since when are you quiet during Glee?”

“A little.” Blaine shrugs. “Enough to run out of time on that calc quiz earlier.”

“Oh.” Tina gives a sympathetic look. “At least it’s just a quiz; it won’t hurt your grade that much.”

Blaine hums in response, but Ryder’s call for Sam cuts in before he can add to his reply.

“Yeah!” Sam turns back from the doorway to face Blaine and Tina. “I’ll see you guys; don’t wanna miss my ride!” Quick hugs and two waves later, Blaine and Tina are alone in the choir room.

Blaine follows as Tina tugs his arm and they exit the room.

“Oh!” Blaine stops halfway down the hall. “I forgot my phone in the choir room.” He gives Tina a brief hug goodbye and waves when she reaches the door.

Alone in the hall after Tina heads for her car, Blaine slowly walks to the trophy case, remembering the day McKinley had welcomed Glee with open arms; the day he had held hands with Kurt
without fear of repercussion.

He then turns and heads back to the choir room, his slow steps echoing in the deserted hallway. In the choir room, Blaine’s phone sits on his chair, right where he’d left it.

Minutes later, Blaine slides into his car with a sigh.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Remind me that one unfinished calc quiz isn’t the end of my academic career.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I’m pretty sure it’s a rite of passage; everyone fails at least one ;)

*Text message from Blaine:*

You really are the best.>

*Text message from Blaine:*

…it’s still weird going home to people

*Text message from Kurt:*

I love you. And I’m only a call away <3

For the first time since his calculus class, an honest smile crosses Blaine’s face. Turning the keys in his ignition, Wicked comes through the speakers; Blaine keeps his smile as he pulls out of the parking lot.

_*-*-*_*

Kurt takes the piece of pie from the counter, stopping to fill a mug of coffee before taking both items to Elliott, who was sitting in one of the booths by a window. He drops off the items with a smile before turning back toward the kitchen.

The diner is fairly empty, despite its customers not adhering to the common meal times prevalent in Ohio. Only four customers currently sit at the scattered tables.

Santana exits the kitchen with a grimace, grabbing Kurt’s arm and leading him back to the main floor of the diner.

“Santana, do you always have to drag people around?”

“There’s a gay joke in there, but I’ll keep it to myself.”

Kurt side eyes her as he responds. “Everyone here thanks you for your restraint. Now,” Kurt flicks the fingers of his free hand toward the arm currently held hostage, “Why are you pulling me around the diner?”

“Gunther just got a phone call.” Santana sighs. “Director of some off off-Broadway show. Wanted to know if we could accommodate his cast and crew.”

Realization hits and Kurt forcibly reminds himself that more customers means more tips.
“Okay.” Kurt drags out the word. “But they’re not here yet, so…”

“Congratulations, Hummel: You get to be a man today. We’re combining tables.”

Releasing his arm, Santana eyes him with a smirk. Kurt shakes his head even as he reaches for the closest chair.

An hour later Kurt fixes the smile on his face as he sets the refilled glasses of Coke and Fanta on the crowded table, making sure the ring on his left hand catches the light as he holds the tray. A few of the customers – Kurt’s reasonably certain they’re not entirely sober – have some kind of competition involving Kurt and one-liners. At first, the outrageous pick-up lines had been amusing, but Kurt is more than over the joke/contest/game and really just wishes it would end.

“Yo Kurt! Can I get some extra onions?”

“Oh! If it’s not too much trouble, could I have some lemons, please?”

Kurt represses his sigh; half of those not taking part in the ‘I know the cheesiest pick up line’ game had a new request every five minutes.

Kurt’s “of course” isn’t acknowledged, but over the heads of the numerous cast and crew members he catches Santana’s gaze and rolls his eyes. Together they head back to the kitchen, and after requesting the desired items Kurt rolls his neck as he leans against the counter; the customers can wait a minute for their onions and lemons.

“Think they’ll give up soon?”

“Hm?” At Santana’s nod toward the table Kurt shrugs. “I hope so, but since I can’t figure out what their goal is I have no idea.” Kurt steps away from the counter as two small bowls are placed on the ledge separating the bar from the kitchen.

“Well it’s not to get an up close view of your ring. You’ve been waving your hand so much I’m pretty sure any one of them could draw a replica.”

Kurt can feel the blush staining his cheeks as Santana laughs. He had made sure to show his ring – especially within the past twenty minutes or so – but he hadn’t realized he’d been **zealous**.

“You’d think they’d stop, then,” Kurt mutters, a bowl in each hand.

“But they haven’t. So why not have a little fun?” The gleam in Santana’s eye is calculating.

“Fiancé, Santana.”

“Come on. Think of the upside, Hummel.” At Kurt’s raised eyebrow she continues, “Tips.”

“I’m not flirting with them, Santana.”

Kurt walks back to the table, ignoring Santana’s Spanish mumblings until she’s out of his hearing range. He sets the two small bowls on the table and is taking a step back when a voice cuts through the table’s chatter.

“Are you a fruit? Because Honeydew you know how **fine** you look right now?”

Two more hours.

**_.*_._..**
Blaine pushes the grains of rice around on his plate as his parents talk about work and future vacations – the same banal discussion as the past three days. He runs through songs in his head, trying to think of one for this week’s Glee assignment, and hopes his parents don’t notice the clink of his fork when his father’s voice startles him from his thoughts.

“Sorry?”

Blaine’s father sighs before looking at Blaine through narrowed eyes. “I was just asking how school’s been for you.”

“Oh.” Blaine glanced down at his plate before returning his father’s gaze. “It’s fine.”

“Just fine? Everything okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, everything’s fine. I’m just a bit tired; all my teachers decided to test us this week, so I have a little extra homework.”

“But there’s no trouble? I know you mentioned getting your girl friend – Tina, right? – to help if you needed it.”

“I’m sure Tina would help if I needed it; she’s a great friend.” Blaine’s forcibly loosens his grip on his fork and takes a controlled breath, not thinking about his failed calculus quiz.

“I’m glad you have such nice friends at McKinley.” Blaine’s mother adds, taking a sip of wine, “I was nervous when you decided to leave Dalton; public school doesn’t provide the best of reputations.”

“No,” Blaine’s father agrees, “but I’m sure Blaine enjoys having a more…diverse group to spend time with. Plus,” his father looks to Blaine, “You have more time for work now, right?”

“I – yes.” Blaine nods, ignoring the fact that for his father, ‘diverse’ refers to different genders rather than races. “I’ve been helping out at Mr. Hummel’s shop.”

Blaine’s father smiles. “I’m glad to hear it. It’s good for young men to get their hands dirty.”

“Of course it is.” Blaine says his bitter response quietly as he takes a sip of soda.

“What was that, Blaine? I thought with all that singing you’d know to project your voice.” The comment is made with a smirk, and the joking tone sets Blaine on edge.

“I said ‘of course’ – of course you like that I work on cars, sometimes.”

“It’s a useful skill, Blaine,” his father’s tone is conciliatory but sharp even as he continues, “It’s good to know how to check an engine – work with your hands.”

“A useful skill.” Usually Blaine stays quiet, accepting his father’s jibes, but the exhaustion from several nights of waking in terror and the guilt from Glee and his failed quiz have left him stretched too thin; his composure breaks and he snaps in response. “More useful than my singing and playing the piano, right? A manly skill; something that ‘gets my hands dirty’ and makes up for the fact that I’m in love with Kurt?”

“Blaine.” His father’s voice is controlled, but strong. “Watch your tone.”

“My tone? That’s what you focus on?”

“I believe you’re done with dinner, Blaine. I think you should go finish that homework you
Blaine pushes back his chair and stands, leaving his plate as his mother’s request. His eyes burn as he exits the kitchen, only to stop when his mother calls his name.

“I thought you might like your drink.” Blaine takes the can with a smile and turns for the stairs when she speaks again. “I wish you wouldn’t test your father, dear, especially when he’s only home for ten days. You know he’s tired after being away; you don’t have to question every little thing he says. He’s not the bad guy, Blaine.”

Breathe in. They’re not bad people.

Breathe out. They can’t be.

Blaine loosens his grip on the aluminum and nods before carefully walking up the stairs. In his room – after flipping the light switch with his free hand – he sets the drink on his desk and turns on the small lamp before dropping into his chair. He pulls his phone from his pocket and almost sends a text to Kurt.

Blaine knows a conversation is better than a text message, and Kurt is working anyway. He’ll call Kurt later, after he’s done some homework.

He sets his phone on his desk, pulls his notebook toward him and reopens his calculus book.

Kurt’s working, and they’ll talk later.

_.*_.*_.*_

Kurt releases a sigh of relief as he closes the book with a snap, having met his self-mandated quota. Sadly, the chapters haven’t improved since his conversation with Blaine days before; if anything, Kurt finds the author even more pretentious. Still, the book now has several pale blue post-its scattered throughout its pages, and Kurt’s notebook has additional comments as well.

Setting the book aside Kurt goes to his desk and wakes up his computer, smiling at the background image from the day of his engagement. He glances down at his ring – and the clock on his desktop – as he opens his browser to check his e-mail.

Halfway through deleting promotions from NYADA’s bookstore and alerts that files had been added to his class’s website, his phone buzzes across his desk, startling him even as he smiles at the ringtone.

“Hey. I was just about to call you; you had three more minutes before I started dialing nonstop. Usually we’ve already talked by now.”

Silence echoes down the line before he hears Blaine take a breath. “Sorry, Kurt. I – um, I knew you had work and I didn’t want to call in the middle of your shift. But I could have called earlier. I just – dinner was…and then I ended up doing homework. But you’re right; it’s later than usual.”

Kurt’s hand had tightened around his phone as Blaine rambled. Kurt knows Blaine: Blaine only rambles when nervous, or stressed.

“Blaine,” Kurt knows his voice betrays his worry, but he can’t help himself, “Blaine I didn’t mean it like that.” He pauses, briefly, unsure which part of Blaine’s comment he wants to talk about first. Making a decision, he takes a breath and continues. “You mentioned dinner; did something happen?”
“Yeah,” a breath through the line, “I um – I guess you could say that.

“I should have just ignored it, Kurt. Really. But I’m just tired and he kept…he kept making these little comments. He’s made them since he’s been home, but today after I failed that quiz I just snapped.”

“You’re allowed to snap sometimes, you know.” Kurt forces himself not to continue; to not give voice to his feelings at the moment - Blaine’s already upset.

“He’s glad I work at Burt’s shop. Apparently it’s good for me to get my hands dirty. He said it’s a ‘useful skill’ and I know – I know he said it because he prefers that to Glee. And tonight at dinner…tonight I told him as much.”

Kurt closes his eyes and wishes he was in Ohio; wishes he was close enough to give his fiancé a hug. No fairy godmother for Kurt, though. He opens his eyes and he’s still in New York, seated at his desk.

“I’m guessing that didn’t go over well.”

“No, it didn’t. But you know the worst part?” Blaine’s voice is thick, but tense as he continues. “He didn’t deny it. He just – he told me to watch my tone.” A bitter chuckle has Kurt’s free hand clenching on his jeans. “Apparently it doesn’t matter that I know he wishes I were straight, but how dare I comment on that fact with a tone.”

Through the phone, Kurt hears Blaine taking controlled breaths but doesn’t comment. He knows how important control is for Blaine, and Kurt can give him that.

“I’m so sorry, Blaine. You shouldn’t have to deal with that at home. No one should, really, but you especially don’t deserve that. You’re amazing just as you are; I wish they could see that.”

“My mom said she wishes I’d stop testing him. That he’s tired from work. And I know he’s tired; he has to be flying all over the world. But Kurt – he didn’t deny it. And she didn’t, either.”

Kurt silently curses Blaine’s parents, using words he’s certain would have his dad blushing. “I know they’re your parents, but they don’t get excuses for this, Blaine. They might not realize how it sounds; they might not have even meant it that way, but you’re allowed to be upset when your parents aren’t there for you.”

Blaine laughs sarcastically even as Kurt winces at his wording. “Most of the time they’re not even in the state, but they’re ‘not here for me’ when we’re in the same house.”

“You know,” Kurt pauses, his next words hesitant, “You know you’re always welcome at my house, right? Dad and Carole love you.”

“I know, Kurt. And it’s wonderful there. But what does it say about me, that I’d rather spend time with my future in-laws than my own parents, who aren’t even home that much? And…it’s not – they’re not evil people, Kurt, you know?”

Kurt hums in response, “It doesn’t say anything about you, Blaine. It just says everything about them.” Kurt sighs. “And they’re your parents, so I know it’s difficult, but you shouldn’t feel uncomfortable in your own house. If that means spending time with your future in-laws,” Kurt hears his voice become softer at the words, “then I want you to always do what is best for you. Regardless of your parents.”

“You always know what to say.” Blaine’s voice has lost its harshness, and the warmth makes Kurt
smile. “I love you.”

“Well, what a coincidence: I love you, too.” Kurt looks to the ceiling, not wanting to say his next words, even though he knows they need to be said. “But Blaine, why didn’t you call me earlier? I hate that you dealt with all that on your own and you don’t have to, now. It’s a perk of being engaged. I thought – I thought you knew I’ll always answer.”

“I do! I mean, I thought about calling or texting, Kurt. I really did. But I was upset after… everything and I just – I didn’t want it to touch you.”

“Blaine.” Kurt sighs. “I’ll admit that part of me finds it sweet that you want to protect me, or something, but Blaine we talked about this. Several times. Communication is important, and I’m glad you did call, and that means a lot – it does – but I wish you’d called earlier. I want – I want to be the one you talk to when you’re upset.”

“You are!” Kurt can hear the truth in Blaine’s voice, “You’re the only person I want to talk to when I am, actually. But I knew you were at work and I knew we needed to talk and so I convinced myself it was better to wait than text. And then the longer I waited the more I overthought it.” Blaine’s breath hitches before he releases a sigh. “I’m sorry, Kurt.”

“You don’t need to apologize, Blaine. Really. Just remember to call or text me the next time you’re upset, even if you know I’m in class or at work.”

“I will. Promise. And Kurt, you know it’s not that I don’t want to talk to you, right? I just – I love you so much and I don’t like when you’re upset, especially when it’s because of me.” That last of the sentence comes out rushed, as if Blaine hopes Kurt wouldn’t hear.

Kurt hears every word.

“I can’t say I enjoy being upset Blaine; I won’t lie to you. But I’d always rather know what’s happening, if you’re upset and why, than be left in the dark. Okay, Blaine? I’d always rather know.”

“I’ll tell you, I promise. I can’t promise I’ll call immediately – it’s a hard habit to break – but I’ll always let you know the same day. I always want to tell you, I just have to remind myself that I should.”

“Please do, Blaine, because if you don’t I’ll kill my phone battery.” Kurt forces a little humor in his tone, needing to lighten the conversation. “And we don’t want that to happen.”

“No, we don’t.” Kurt smiles to himself as he takes note of Blaine’s voice, lighter now. “Kurt Hummel without access to his cell phone; I feel like I should send a letter of warning to New York.”

“Just remember to talk to me and it won’t be problem. No letters needed.”

“I’ll call, Kurt, I will. But you will too, right? When – if you’re upset?”

“You know I already do. You’re my go to guy. And now, I’m hoping I’m yours, too?” Kurt knows he’s being repetitive even as the words leave his mouth, but he can’t stand the thought of Blaine staying silent in the future.

“Have been for years, Kurt. Never worry about that; I just have to work on my timing.” There’s a pause, and then Blaine’s voice through the phone brims with affection. “Thanks for making me talk, Kurt. I love you.”
Kurt smiles into his empty room. “I love you, too. I’m glad I could help.”

Blaine hums in response before adding, “You always do.”

“It’s one of my many talents. So,” Kurt draws out the word, “After working on homework for hours; does that mean you’re done for the night?”

“Almost. I’m just going to review calc some more…maybe do a few extra problems.”

“Sounds exhilarating.”

“The joys of high school. Don’t act like you don’t remember; you were here not too long ago.”

“Mm. Point, but I haven’t head to deal with calc in a while. It’s all theatre history, singing, dancing, and acting. And papers. Lots of papers.”

“Well, I know what to expect, at least.”

“Aren’t you lucky, having a fiancé to let you know what to expect in college.”

“The luckiest.”

Kurt laughs. “You’re a dork, Blaine Anderson.”

“You’ve known that for years. And you still agreed to marry me.”

“I don’t know what I was thinking, really.”

“Liar.”

“Maybe. Just a bit.” Kurt pauses, wishes he could suspend time. “But you said something about review?”

“Can we pretend I didn’t? It’s more fun to talk to you.”

“If only, but you have calc and I have to research journal articles.” Kurt glances at the time even as he yawns. “And sleep, at some point.”

“I dislike your logic.” The teasing tone takes away any sting from the words. “But you’re right; like usual.”

“Of course I am. Not that I want to do homework either. And Blaine?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m glad you’re okay now, but you promise to call if something happens? Even if you think it’s small?”

“I already promised, Kurt, but yes, I’ll call or text if I get upset; you’ll get sick of hearing my voice.”

“Never. But now we have to be good students.”

Blaine groans. “Fine, fine. Talk to you later?”

“Mm. Before bed, just like always.”
“Love you.”

“Love you, too.” Kurt ends the call with a touch of his finger, setting the warm phone on his desk.

The echo of Blaine’s voice rings in his mind, though; somehow louder than the soft music from his iPod in the corner.

Kurt still refuses to say goodbye, but alone in his room the absence of Blaine resonates.

He pulls up the library’s website and ignores the worry still surrounding all thoughts of Blaine.

Two hours of searching and three possibly helpful articles later, Kurt closes the tab with the library’s website with a snap of his wireless mouse. He sips his lukewarm coffee before setting the mug down and stretching, hoping it will alleviate the pinch he feels under his ribs. A quick burst of pain, and then the muscle relaxes and Kurt sighs and slumps in his chair.

His conversation with Blaine replays in his mind, and he absently bites his lower lip. The comments from Blaine’s parents aren’t a new development, but they are taxing; stress Blaine doesn’t need. Kurt isn’t sure what to do with the current situation, and wishes – again – that he’d known earlier, so he could have called his father for advice.

Now, it’s too late for a phone call; a ringing phone this late signals an emergency, and while Kurt’s worry for Blaine has basis, it’s not bad enough to warrant the heart pounding anxiety that accompanies such a call. Not at night.

Kurt will call in between classes tomorrow.

He trusts that Blaine will call when things get bad, that he won’t attempt to keep his pain to himself, but Kurt also knows how badly Blaine wishes to please everyone. How he simultaneously strives to be himself and keep those around him happy. Kurt knows how much energy it takes to wear a mask all the time; Blaine shouldn’t feel the need to wear one in his home.

Kurt knows his dad and Carole care for Blaine, knows that after his call Blaine will get even more invitations to dinner, more hours scheduled at Hummel Tire & Lube. And Kurt will have an ally in Ohio; someone else looking out for Blaine, while Blaine continues to look after Burt.

Kurt’s not a fan of manipulation – that doesn’t mean he’s not adept at using it, especially to look after the ones he loves.

Text message from Kurt:

I’m done for the night! My brain can’t handle any more articles

Text message from Kurt:

I hope you’re done soon, too! You need sleep to get through school and helping Dad tomorrow ;)

Text message from Blaine:

One and half more problems – then I’ll call and we can get ready for bed. ;) And I’ll get some coffee before heading to the shop tomorrow.

Text message from Kurt:
Perfect plan! :) 

Text message from Blaine:

I try :D

Kurt smiles and sets his phone on his bed before getting his pajamas. He wishes Blaine were already sharing the loft, there for hugs and whispers and soft kisses, but for now he has an adorable fiancé who sends flirty texts and talks with him every night.

Life isn’t perfect; Kurt’s mind still holds on to the worry from earlier, but Blaine will call soon.

Kurt smiles.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to everyone who has given feedback (through kudos, reviews, etc) - I'm in a constant state of shock! You're all amazing and wonderful people. Also, thanks as always to my betas, slayerkitty, dlanadhz, and jessicamdawn!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 5

Blaine dutifully copies the notes his calculus teacher puts on the board, shaking his head a little as he does so. The homework, once again, had not been collected for a grade, and the teacher’s voice is just a bit too happy; Blaine wonders how the man can be excited when discussing imaginary numbers and derivatives.

Twenty minutes later, Blaine repeatedly looks from his notes to the white board in his hands, making sure he completed the problem correctly. Tina sits behind him, but until his instructor confirms his answer (and has him flip the board) he’s not supposed to talk. Sighing as he glances one last time, Blaine bends his left elbow, raising his hand enough to be seen, but not attract everyone’s attention with its height. A minute later, Blaine’s heart rate slows, nervousness receding after he receives confirmation his answer is correct.

“So,” he stretches as he turns in his seat, seeing Tina doodling in her notebook, “Are you as glad as I am that there’s no Glee practice today? I don’t know if I could handle practicing that dance routine again.”

“It’s nice to have the afternoon off. Did you want to get some coffee or something after school?” Tina sets down her pencil and tilts her head toward where their teacher is helping another classmate. “We could work on homework…”

“Mm. Not today. I’m helping out Mr. Hummel.”

“So you’re too tired to do a dance routine but you can work on cars?” Blaine’s shoulders tighten at the sarcasm in Tina’s voice. “It’s different, Tina.”

It is.

Blaine always feels welcomed at Burt’s shop: the same can’t be said for the choir room. Glee is wonderful, and he knows he can count on Tina and Sam and Unique and everyone if he really needed them for something (his proposal had shown that); unfortunately, Mr. Schue, despite how he tries, isn’t as open and caring as Burt, and the day-to-day drama of Glee can cause occasional tension. Usually after working in the choir room Blaine leaves feeling tired and accomplished, but he can also leave feeling frustrated and nervous.

After working in Burt’s shop, Blaine always leaves feeling better than when he entered. Even if he’s been under cars or bent over engines or just organizing tools, Burt’s shop is a refuge, a comfortable space where he does what he can and is appreciated.
He’s not sure how to say that to Tina, however. Instead, Blaine shrugs, silently grateful when he’s forced to turn around since their teacher is moving to the white board.

His gratefulness leaves when the class is told to turn the page to start a new unit.

_**_*_*__*_

Kurt enters the coffee shop and smiles when he sees Elliott waiting at a table by the window. He moves through the line quickly, and moments later he’s sliding into a seat as he sets his cup on the table.

“Hey, thanks for meeting me here. I just didn’t feel like going back to the diner when I’m not on shift.”

“It’s fine, really.” Elliott pushes his book aside. “So, things are going well?”

Kurt remembers his conversation with Blaine – his worry. But Elliott hasn’t met Blaine, and Kurt isn’t in the habit of sharing his worry about Blaine’s home life.

“I’m too tired for things to be ‘well’ by any conventional definition.” Kurt shrugs. “I can’t really complain though – except about classic theatre. That class is worse than dance with Ms. July.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“Mm. You should.” Kurt takes a small sip of his mocha, hoping not to burn his tongue. “Anyway, how’re you?”

“Glad you invited me for coffee. I think if I’d stayed in my apartment another hour I could classify myself as a hermit.” At Kurt’s inquiring look he continues, gesturing between them. “Social interaction; let’s just say you’re the first person I’ve talked to in person in a while.”

“I’m not sure if I should feel flattered or sad on your behalf.”

Elliott chuckles and reaches for his coffee. “How about we forget I admitted that fact.”

“Not a chance.” Kurt drinks another mouthful of coffee. “I’ll be sure to remember this fact when we disagree about something for the band.”

“Of course you will.” Elliott leans back in his chair and smiles. “Speaking of, are we still practicing tomorrow?”

“Unless Santana and Rachel are refusing to speak to one another again we are – the loft at eight.”

“Will them not speaking be a common thing? I just – I don’t want the band to suffer because they can’t focus, you know?”

Kurt finishes his coffee and leans forward, resting his forearms on the table. “I wish I could say that short tempers and drama are rare occurrences, but I don’t think a week went by in Glee without some kind of argument.” Seeing Elliott’s raised brows and worried look Kurt hastens to continue. “We always managed to bring it together for performances though.” Kurt pauses, gathering his thoughts. “I think Santana and Rachel – all of us, really – are too competitive to let any argument get in the way of a performance.”

Elliott nods but continues to look skeptical. “I guess we’ll find out the more we practice.”

“Of course.” Kurt’s about to continue when his phone buzzes on the table, and he flashes Elliott a
slight smile even as he reaches for the phone.

*Text message from Blaine:*

I think Mr. Schue’s sweater vests are getting worse. I know you didn’t think it was possible, but it is.

*Text message from Blaine:*

It offends me, Kurt.

Kurt laughs before facing Elliott and nodding toward his phone. “It’s from Blaine. Apparently Mr. Schue – sorry my old Glee director – his fashion sense has gotten worse. And he regularly wears sweater vests and ill-fitting pants.”

*Text message from Kurt:*

At least you don't have to stare at it during Glee today. ;)

*Text message from Blaine:*

...that would be bad. I'd be kicked out for being distracted! ;)

Kurt smiles and shakes his head at Blaine’s response, and pushes away the worry that comes with Blaine’s self-deprecating remark of having to leave Glee. Blaine only puts himself down when he’s stressed. He’s lost in thought, only looking up from his phone when Elliott begins to speak.

“Sounds like your teacher has an interesting sense of fashion.”

“Mm. He does. That’s not necessarily a good thing.”

Elliott laughs. “I’ll take your word for it.”

“I’m sure he’s in the background in some of our performances on YouTube, should you ever get insanely bored.”

“I’ll be sure to remember that the next time I’m hit with a bout of insomnia. But,” Elliott gestures to his own phone – the screen lit – on the table, “I actually have to get going. I have work soon.”

“Oh!” Kurt watches as Elliott gathers his bag and empty cup before standing. “I hope it’s not too taxing.”

“Not terribly, no, but I need the check regardless.” Elliott gestures to Kurt’s empty cup. “Want me to throw that away for you?”

“No thanks – I’m going to get a refill; I have some time before my last class. Actually,” Kurt stands, “Do you mind waiting here a minute with my bag while I get another mocha?”

Elliott glances at short line before nodding. “Sure.”

“Let me take your cup then, since I’m going to the counter anyway.”

Two minutes later Kurt’s walking back to the table empty handed, answering before Elliott even asks the question. “The barista recognized me, said that she’d bring it out to me since things are slow.”

Elliott smirks. “And they say New Yorkers are always rude. Well, enjoy your coffee. I’ll see you
tomorrow.”

They hug, briefly, and then Kurt sits alone at the table by the window. Unlocking his phone, he sees the texts from Blaine – remembers his worry. He debates for a moment, and the sighs, pulling up his contacts. The call connects and Kurt fiddles with a napkin.

“Hey kid.”

“Hey Dad. I’m not interrupting anything, am I?”

“Wouldn’t have answered the phone if I was busy. So…you gonna tell me what’s up or are you gonna pretend you don’t have a reason for calling.”

“What?” Kurt pauses when the barista brings him his mocha, glad for the moment to gather his thoughts. “What makes you think something’s wrong?”

“Kurt.” There’s a sigh down the phone line. “Even you don’t call to check up on me in the middle of the day, so I’m guessin’ you want to talk.”

Kurt feels an unnoticed tension release at his father’s words. He does want to talk. And Burt has never dismissed Kurt’s worries.


Kurt takes a sip of his coffee and then begins to talk about Blaine.

*_*_*_*_ *

Blaine turns his keys and pulls them out before reaching for his seatbelt, the click of the release sounding unnaturally loud in the car without the engine running. Opening the car door, Blaine steps out, absently patting his pockets to make sure he has his wallet and phone. His keys jangle as he closes the door – it’s a quick stop, just picking up some soda before going to Burt’s shop – before he turns to head for the Meijer entrance.

A loud laugh catches his attention, and he turns his head to the right. In the next row of cars, on the side closest to Blaine, he sees two sandy-haired college-aged men, talking over a white four door car –

A hand grabs his shoulder, spinning him around. A punch pushes him back, further into the arms of his captor. “Sadie Hawkins isn’t for gays, Anderson! Hold ’em Mitch. Cover his mouth, too. Can’t have him crying, now.”

A punch. His breath is gone – lost to the hand over his face and the pain in his sides. A kick to his knee and he’s sagging, falling to the pavement when the arms holding him fall away. It’s cold –

A corn horn startles Blaine from the memory, and he jerks forward. He cuts across the aisle, walked toward where he’d heard the laughter because he has to check. It can’t be them, but like the truck in Burt’s shop, he has to check.

Breathe in. It was years ago.

Breathe out. There’s no reason for any of them to be in Lima.

He nears the opposite side of the aisle, closer now, and he sees –

A sandy haired stranger in an OSU hoodie, getting into a blue Kia Soul.
Blaine pushes his hands deeper in his pockets, shakes his head.

Breathe in. *It’s not Mitch and Blake.*

Breathe out. *It’s a stranger.*

Breathe in. *It was years ago.*

Breathe out. *It wasn’t them.*

Blaine slowly continues his walk to the entrance. With each step he tells himself he’s not going crazy.

Breathe in. *It was a stranger.*

Breathe out. *It wasn’t them.*

_**_ _*_* _*_*

Burt waves as Blaine enters the garage, gesturing with an arm for Blaine to join him by the engine of a Jeep Cherokee.

“Hey Blaine.”

“Hi Mr. Hummel.” Ducking his head to look at the engine, Blaine misses Burt’s scrutiny as he takes in the shadows under his eyes.

“So how’re things going, Blaine?”

“Oh, they’re fine.” Blaine sighs, “Just a little tired.” Blaine is tired; tired enough to see things in garages and parking lots because of recurring nightmares and common cars. Remembering the incident from earlier still weighs on his mind, but he does his best to ignore it. He's sleep deprived, and a stranger had gotten into a blue Kia. Even if there had been a white car, Ford Tauruses aren’t exactly rare. His nightmares simply pushed those memories to the forefront of his mind, leaving his brain to make connections at inconvenient times.

More than anything, Blaine just wants a night of uninterrupted sleep.

“Senior year will do that.” Burt pauses long enough that Blaine turns to face him. “You sleeping okay? Everything okay with your folks bein’ home?”

Blaine remains silent for a moment before slightly shrugging a shoulder. “It’s different.” When Burt doesn’t immediately reply Blaine continues. “Not used to having conversations in our dining room, I guess.” Blaine quirks his lips, “Dad leaves for Beijing on Tuesday, though, and Mom’s going to a festival in Virginia with some friends on Monday…”

For a moment, Burt seems shocked into silence. “Blaine, I know your dad travels, and I get that he has to go for work. But your mom’s only been home, what, a little over a week? And she’s leaving in four days?”

A shadow of a smile crosses Blaine’s face before he replies. “Mom likes to travel as much as Dad, I think.”

“Well,” Burt catches Blaine’s eyes, “I know you’re…used to it, but you’re always welcome here and at the house. If you need anything I expect you to be calling or showing up at the door, okay?”
Blaine briefly closes his eyes before opening them and forcing his hands to stay relaxed at his sides. “Thank you, Mr. Hummel.” Blaine’s voice steadies after the initial crack on his thanks, and he even manages a small smile, hoping it shows his gratitude. “I – Actually I was hoping I could help out again tomorrow? With the teacher workday I have all day free, and my parents are going to Cincinnati for something, so I could come by earlier than usual.”

“You know I never say no to some extra help, but are you sure you wanna spend your day off working around here?”

Blaine steps back, his hip leaning on the jeep. “I really don’t mind; it’s something to do.”

“I guess I’ll see you tomorrow, then. Don’t feel like you have to rush to get here – sleep in, if you can.”

Blaine nods his assent before motioning to the jeep. “So, want me to work on this one?”

Burt is quiet for a moment, considering. “We got a minivan coming in for an oil change. Why don’t you go take care of that and then you can come back and help me with this.”

Smiling, Blaine agrees and steps away moments later when the minivan arrives. Unnoticed, Burt’s furrowed brows and concerned gaze watch as Blaine crosses the garage.

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Kurt enters the loft, adjusting the strap of his bag and suppressing a groan at the sounds of Rachel and Santana arguing. He’s tired, and had been planning on relaxing for an hour or two before starting on his homework.

“– need to rehearse, Santana! As a rising Broadway star I can’t afford to skip a warm up just because a roommate doesn’t want to listen. I know it’s hard, and your jealousy in understandable, given –”

“You think I’m jealous?” Santana hisses, “I’m not jealous, Berry; I’m wishing I could not be woken up at 5 AM by your scales! It’s one show, Rachel – your first! So drop the diva act!”

Santana pauses but Kurt doesn’t move from where he’s leaning against the door, afraid to draw their attention. “This may be surprising news, but the world still does not revolve around you!”

“I’m on Broadway, Santana. This is my big break! So I’m sorry if my success is making you feel uncomfortable –”

Kurt winces at Rachel’s words as Santana moves further from the sofa and takes a step closer to Rachel. “You just can’t stop can you? No wonder Frankenteen left you while he had the chance!”

Rachel freezes at the mention of Finn, and Kurt resolutely pushes away the ache that accompanies the name. He takes a step forward, preparing to intervene, but Santana continues before he has the chance. “You might have the voice for the stage, but give ‘em time. Your personality’s going to ruin you.”

Santana turns, and heads for where Kurt still stands by the door. Giving a slight shake of his head Kurt steps away as Santana approaches and stops when she touches his arm. “Look – I’m sorry I mentioned Finn, alright? But I meant what I said; she needs to get over herself.” Releasing Kurt’s arm, Santana opens the door and leaves, her “Going to Dani’s” comment barely heard over the closing door.

The loft seems eerily quiet after her departure.
“Rachel…” Kurt walks toward the sofa as his voice trails off, unsure of how to continue.

At the sound of her name, Rachel spins to face him, face hard. “She has to go, Kurt.”

Kurt takes a breath, wondering how he ended up playing mediator in other people’s drama. “Rachel, Santana’s upset and –”

“You’re on her *side*?!”

Kurt winces at the screech of Rachel’s voice, “I’m not on anyone’s side.” Seeing the flash of anger-confusion-hurt on Rachel’s face, Kurt quickly continues. “I didn’t hear everything, Rachel, and I’m not getting in the middle of other people’s arguments. Santana snaps when she’s angry; it’s what she does.” Kurt takes a steadying breath, mentally preparing for his next sentence. “But Rachel, you have to remember that you’re not the only one who lives here; I am so happy that you got the part, but that doesn’t mean that your dreams are more important than ours – you just got a head start.”

Rachel remains silent for a moment, staring at Kurt. “I just – I can’t fail at this, Kurt. I can’t.”

“And you won’t. You’ll be brilliant.” Kurt gives a small smile. “But you can be brilliant *and* respectful of your roommates.”

At the added comment Rachel’s eyes had narrowed, but she stays silent, giving a stilted nod before turning and walking to her room.

Kurt slouches on the sofa, momentarily overcome with exhaustion.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I want cheesecake, Blaine

*Text message from Kurt:*

An entire cheesecake – The stress from Rachel and Santana is worse than school…

*Text message from Blaine:*

So…no different from Glee last year?

*Text message from Kurt:*

You’re still not as funny as you think you are

*Text message from Blaine:*

I love you! <3

*Text message from Blaine:*

…Do I need to call certain roommates and tell them to stop harassing my fiancé?

*Text message from Kurt:*

No. I got home in the middle of it. But they’re both upset, so…cheesecake

*Text message from Blaine:*


Eat all the cheesecake you want – you deserve it!

Text message from Kurt:

Sadly, man can't live off cheesecake alone. :( 

Text message from Blaine:

You can try! ;)

Text message from Kurt:

If I ate that much cheesecake I'd need a new wardrobe...and I love my clothes, Blaine.

Text message from Blaine:

I love them, too. You always look amazing. But you'll look amazing regardless of what you eat

Kurt breathes out a laugh, feeling some of the tension drain from his shoulders. He slowly rises to his feet and heads for the kitchen; he does deserve cheesecake.

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Blaine rinses his dishes before placing them in the dishwasher, their slight clink seeming to echo in the silent house. He’d come home to a note on the kitchen counter, telling him his parents had gone out for dinner. Now, hours later, he’s finished civics and calc, and with dinner done all that’s left is to read for English.

He’s halfway up the stairs when he hears the door open, followed by his parents’ murmurs. He briefly pauses and manages two more steps before his mother calls his name. Blaine carefully turns and moments later meets his father in the living room, sitting in one of the recliners.

“Your mom’s just putting the leftovers in the fridge.”

Blaine nods. “So dinner was good?”

“Once we got our food, yes. We had to wait a while for our drinks, at first.” Blaine’s father leans back in the chair, relaxing. “How was school?”

“It was fine.” Blaine shrugs. “Nothing new.”

“You regretting leaving Dalton?”

“What?!” Blaine takes a step forward in shock. “No – no, I like it at McKinley. It was just a regular day, nothing too exciting.”

“I see.” His father’s tone says he doesn’t.

Moments later Blaine’s mother enters the room, passing by him with a glass of wine in her right hand. “Oh, Blaine. You did hear me…I was hoping you would. I just wanted to remind you that your father and I are going down to Cincinnati tomorrow while you’re in school –”

“It’s a teacher work day tomorrow.” Blaine keeps his voice quiet. “I’m helping out at Mr. Hummel’s shop, though.”

“I’m glad you’re taking my advice, Blaine.” His father smiles, “I told you it was good to get your
hands dirty. Rebuilding that car together paid off after all.”

“I’m glad you have plans, dear.” Blaine’s mother breaks the silence. “Now, we might not be back til Saturday, so you might be on your own for dinner tomorrow.”

“I’m sure I’ll manage, Mom.” Seeing his father’s eyes narrow, Blaine quickly continues, “But I hope you have fun.”

Blaine’s mother takes a sip of wine before smiling. “I’m sure we will.”

“Well,” Blaine takes a step back, closer to the entrance of the room, “I have some homework to finish…”

“Calculus?” Blaine father leans forward in his chair. “If you do need a tutor Blaine, you can ask your friend Tina to come by any time.”

“It’s not calc.” Blaine keeps his tone even, ignores the fact that Tina received an open invitation to the house – something Kurt was never given – and meets his father’s eyes. “English. I have to do some reading, study vocab.”

Blaine’s parents nod, and he leaves the room after the requisite ‘goodnights’ and pats on the back.

In his room, Blaine turns on his music and flops on his bed with his copy of Wuthering Heights and assorted accessories. He manages five pages (complete with highlights and two post-its) before he reaches for his phone.

*Text message from Blaine:*

I need cheesecake, too :(
Chapter 6

Blaine sleeps in considering it’s a Friday, blinking awake and grabbing his phone just before eight in the morning, rather than being awoken by his usual alarm two hours earlier. He considers lying back down and attempting more sleep, but the early morning light filtering through his blinds has him sitting up, blankets falling to his waist. Grabbing clothes from his dresser and closet he then continues to the bathroom to prepare for his day.

Twenty minutes later Blaine’s buttering toast and sipping coffee in the kitchen, hoping the caffeine will alleviate the wall-like tiredness behind his eyes.

Text message from Blaine:

How did we get by before we drank coffee?

Text message from Kurt:

We had naps.

Text message from Kurt:

...everything okay? I thought you'd sleep in on your day off.

Text message from Blaine:

Usually I’m up at 6 on Fridays – this is sleeping in ;)

Text message from Blaine:

I just woke up…couldn't sleep any more :(.

Blaine sets his phone down, staring at his toast as he takes another sip of coffee. He will tell Kurt about his nightmares, but through a text at eight in the morning isn’t the way to go about it. He pushes down the slight guilt and startles when his phone buzzes loudly on the counter.

Text message from Kurt:

Don't let Dad work you too hard

Text message from Kurt:

Tell him I said to let you have a nap break this afternoon ;)

As always, thanks to my wonderful, lovely betas: slayerkitty, jessicamdawn, dlanadhz. You all are the best! As for you lovely readers, I'm continually amazed by the number of reads/kudos/comments - you all make my day!!! :) Hope you enjoy the chapter!
Blaine huffs a quiet laugh, standing and placing his dishes in the dishwasher, the butter back in the fridge. Filling his travel mug with more coffee, he then takes his phone from the counter.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Sadly, since naps stopped being mandatory after first grade I don't think that will happen. I'll take a break when I get tired, though! :)

*Text message from Blaine:*

But first I have to get there – have fun in class. Love you!

*Text message from Kurt:*

Blaine, fun isn't the adjective for class. But I love you, too. Say hello to Dad for me! <3

Smiling, Blaine assures Kurt he’ll do as asked, and grabs his keys, putting his phone in his pocket on his way out the door. Moments later, Blaine starts his car and pulls out of his driveway as *Blackbird* drifts from the speakers. The short drive is relaxing, the streets still mostly quiet, and Blaine pulls into the parking lot of *Hummel Tires & Lube* ready to start the day.

After ensuring that his keys and phone are safe in his pockets, Blaine walks into Burt’s shop, offering a small smile and nod to the mechanics who wave hello. Spotting Burt on the phone in his office, Blaine simply gives a quick wave before asking the nearest worker what he should do.

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Kurt enters the vocal practice room and sets his bag by the door before walking to stand in front of the slightly aged piano. Having the room to himself meant setting his alarm hours before his one-on-one with his professor, but if nothing else it made him fully awake by the time of the meeting, a feat since he wouldn’t drink coffee until after.

Water might be better for vocal cords, but Kurt still dreams of the coffee he’ll have later.

Sometimes, Kurt really hates his drive to do his best, even in practice; he misses his morning mocha.

Letting out a sigh, Kurt sits on the piano bench, playing a few scales to help him focus. At first, his mind wanders, thinking of ways he can help Blaine relax and reduce stress; how he will act in the loft where Rachel and Santana are coolly distant to one another; how many hours until he can get his coffee. Shaking his head, Kurt continues to play, and eventually the repetitive motions clear his mind.

Minutes later, he stands, straightening his posture and taking a deep breath before beginning his warm-up. He loses himself in the scales, voice rising higher as his right hand lightly presses the dulled ivory keys. Finishing, Kurt pulls photocopied sheet music from his bag and places it on the stand. He plays through the vocal portion once, smiling as he mentally puts in breath marks.

Feeling confident in his music, Kurt sings.

Kurt sings through his required pieces and spends time focusing on two measures of runs, stopping only for the occasional drink of water. He continues to sing, practicing and lost in breath control and projection until a blast of sound from his phone startles him.

Spinning, Kurt crosses the room and digs through his bag to unearth the device. He gives a *ha!* of
triumph when he pulls it from his bag, sliding off the alarm. Standing, Kurt goes back the piano, taking his sheet music and water bottle before walking back to his bag and placing the items inside.

**Text message from Kurt:**

Off to my Voice one-on-one. Wish me luck!

**Text message from Blaine:**

Your voice is amazing – you don't need luck. ;)

**Text message from Blaine**

Still, have all the luck in the world if you want it <3

_.*_.*_.*_

After a group lunch at Subway, Blaine’s settled into his routine for the afternoon, moving around the garage with ease. While most of the mechanics have their own toolbox Burt makes sure to have spares around just in case they’re needed; unfortunately, since the tools are communal, they’re frequently left lying around haphazardly, dirtied. Currently, Blaine’s slowly making his way around the shop, putting the grease-covered tools into a small box as he finds them, wondering how long it will take him to clean them later. He’ll probably end up texting Kurt for tips – Kurt knows every secret for getting grease off just about anything.

Blaine steps around an outdated Chevy and glances for anything he might have missed. To his left Burt is talking to a customer, pointing to the white Taurus a few feet away and nodding. Burt steps to the side to point to something in the car and Blaine catches sight of the customer.

The sound of the box of tools crashing to the concrete floor echoes in the garage, and Blaine feels every eye on him.

Blaine quickly follows, ignoring the jarring in his knees from the harsh floor. He places the box right side up, and begins reaching for the scattered tools –

The concrete is cold beneath him, dull and unforgiving. The blackness stretches like an abyss, broken only by the blurry outline of scattered petals of his boutonniere and the circle of shoes that surrounds him. “I think they’re down, Steve. Damn homos couldn’t even put up some fight to make it fun.” Blaine sees a shoe move, feels a pop as his arm is forced away from his body. “Yeah, they’re down alright, Mitch. Whaddaya say, Blake, think they’ve had enough?” There’s laughter and the shoes leave. The blackness is growing, briefly broken by brightness and streaks of green and white, but then all encompassing, taking Blaine, too.

Blaine shakes his head and methodically refills the box, keeping his eyes down. “Blaine.” Blaine jumps at the sound of his name, dropping the pliers back to the floor with a clang! and probably scuffing his shoes in the process.

“Blaine,” This time Blaine meets Mr. Hummel’s – Burt’s – gaze, “Why don’t you leave it, kid. Go have a seat in my office. Looks like you could use a break.”

Blaine opens his mouth to protest, but something in Mr. Hummel’s gaze stops him, so he simply nods his agreement before stepping away.

Burt keeps an eye on Blaine, ensuring he reaches the office, while quickly tossing the tools back in the box.
Finished minutes later, he stands, waving away the attempted questions from his employees. He makes sure they know to tell anyone waiting he’ll be back momentarily, and heads for his office.

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“You gonna tell what that was about, kid?” Burt’s leaning against the desk in his office, taking in Blaine’s pale face and clenched hands.

Blaine flinches at Burt’s voice, almost tripping over the chair when he steps backwards in his haste. “Oh! Um, sorry, Mr. Hummel. I thought –” Blaine’s voice trails off before he seemingly pulls his polished upbringing around him like a shield. “He reminded me of someone from a few years ago. But it’s nothing, Mr. Hummel, I’m sorry for the disruption.” Blaine even ends his words with a small smile, like that would make Burt forget the crash as Blaine had dropped a pile of tools earlier, forget the shocked-pale face of someone who had seen their worst nightmare, before Blaine had fallen to his knees to pick up the scattered pieces, dropping – momentarily – out of Burt’s sight.

“Blaine,” Burt keeps his voice calm, open. Trying to channel the kindness of Kurt’s mother; the honesty of Carole. “I don’t care about any ‘disruption’ and you should know that. We’re gonna be family and I wanna know what caused you to react like that, because I know you, Blaine, and you’re not prone to theatrics over something small.”

Blaine’s shoulders fall, as if he’s failed in some way before he meets Burt’s gaze. As he takes the two steps back to sit in the chair he’d almost tripped over earlier, Burt notices he’s trembling.

“I –” Blaine pauses and twists his hands, seemingly searching for words, “The customer earlier. The one you were talking to when I – when I messed up, what was his name?” The words are even, flat, spoken with a calmness Burt hadn’t known Blaine was capable of. The earnest young man he’s come to know as his future son-in-law carefully hidden beneath quiet words and perfect posture.

Burt reaches up and briefly palms the back of his neck, wondering where this is going, “First of all Blaine, you didn’t mess up, you got that?” Burt waits until he’s received a weary nod, “Okay. The customer? John Fields. Car broke down, broken alternator, on their way back to-“

“Marysville.” The word is a whisper and a scream all once, sounding as if it’s been punched out of Blaine.

Burt steps around the desk stooping to crouch before Blaine, silently taking in the short, panicked breaths and tightly crossed arms.

“Yeah Blaine,” Burt slowly reaches his hand forward, showing intent, but Blaine still flinches when it touches his shoulder. “You mind telling me how you know that? What’s going on, kid?”

Burt suppresses his frustration when Blaine closes his eyes, refusing to meet Burt’s gaze even as he begins to speak. “Do you remember Kurt’s Junior Prom? How – how you were worried about Kurt’s amazing kilt and how it might bring the wrong sort of attention?” Blaine lets out a quiet breath, “I know he told you about what happened to me. Before Dalton.” Burt feels his stomach sink with a coil of dread, “I um, I went to Marysville High, sir, and Mitch Fields was one of the guys who – who took offense to my going to Sadie Hawkins.” Burt wants to pull Blaine to him, to shush him as he would a small child, but it seems like the floodgates have opened, and the kid’s still talking, voicing nightmares Burt aches to forget. “And I’m sorry for dropping the tools earlier, and I probably wouldn’t have but I saw the truck at the mall last week and Steve – I mean, I thought I did. But then I thought I was going crazy, because Marysville isn’t even near here and
they would have graduated by now, anyway. But Mr. Fields is in your shop, and then yesterday at Meijer I thought – but what if he’s here? I should – I should go.”

Burt’s grip on Blaine’s shoulder tightens, “Stay right there, Blaine. If you think I’m going to let you out of this office, much less into your car right now, then you need to rethink your plans. You’re going to sit here while I go finish up – call Kurt, if you want – but you’re going to be here when I get back and then we’re going to have a talk over coffee and some cookies.”

Rising to his feet, Burt squeezes Blaine’s shoulder to show his support. He pauses on his way out the door, watching as Blaine impersonates a statue rather than reaching for his phone. With an inaudible sigh, Burt exits his office with clenched fists and determined steps.

John Fields gives a small wave as Burt approaches, “Everything okay there? Sounded like something fell.”

Burt would never understand why people felt the need to point out the obvious and yet still pose it as a question.

He gives a tight smile, “Yeah, he’s – everything’s fine. Now, like I was saying, only problem is the alternator, and I can have one of my guys install one today.”

John gives a loose smile, oblivious to the change in Burt’s demeanor, “That’d be great, thanks. My son’s gotta get back to OSU, you know? He’s a Sophomore down there, lovin’ the college life. Keeps talking about classes and some frat or another. Makes me feel old. But he got a scholarship – boy’s got a good head on his shoulders.”

Burt resolutely pushes down the urge to ask what kind of father could be proud of a son who beats up someone three years their junior. He’s a professional, and as a Congressman he couldn’t get arrested for assault – it would end more than just his career – especially when, technically, he couldn’t be certain this was the same Fields family. “Well, it shouldn’t take too long. You can wait in the lobby and we’ll get you when it’s done.”

“Sounds great, Mitch’ll be happy he can still head back tonight.”

Burt’s blunt nails dig into his palms.

“I’m sure.”

“You know how young men are. Need their freedom. You said you got a son, right?” He just keeps talking, and Burt wonders how someone could be so immune to body language.

“He’s in New York,” Burt says tersely, “doesn’t have much need of a car there.”

“Ran off to the big city, huh? Good luck with that. I worry enough about what Mitch could be learnin’ at OSU, don’t know what I’d do if he’d gone that far.”

Burt gives an absent grunt of acknowledgment, “Right. Well I’ll have one of the guys get started on this for you, and he can answer any questions you might have. I’ve got to head home myself, have some family issues to address.”

“Your boy’s not causing trouble, is he?” Burt pays no heed to the humor in John’s voice.

“No.” Burt says, turning away with eyes already seeking the stone form seated in his office.

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Seated at the table in the Hummel-Hudson kitchen, Blaine listens to the coffee dripping in the pot on the counter, watches as Burt happily unearths cookies from the back of a cabinet.

“Chocolate chip.” Burt smiles as he slides the cookies on the table, “They were on sale and I figured we could use some comfort food in this house. Besides,” Burt catches Blaine’s gaze, “Carole seems to enjoy them, even if she’d never buy them herself. And don’t worry; I never eat more than two, so you don’t have to go calling Kurt.”

Blaine manages a weak smile and Burt turns to pour the freshly brewed coffee. “Now,” he says, setting a steaming mug before Blaine and taking the seat next to him, “I’m not gonna force you to talk about it, kid, but you’re smart enough to know keeping all this inside isn’t healthy, and I’ve been told I’m a pretty good listener.”

For several moments, Blaine remains silent, entranced by the curling steam of his coffee and the pile of cookies before him. “How much did Kurt tell you?”

Burt chews a bite of cookie before answering, “Just the basics. I know three guys put you in the hospital after a Sadie Hawkins Dance. That you had months of recovery and PT. That afterwards you were transferred to Dalton, for your own protection.”

“I ran away, you mean.”

“No.” Burt pushes a few of the cookies closer to Blaine, “You didn’t ‘run away’, Blaine. You stayed safe. And I am so glad you did.” At Blaine’s incredulous look he continues, “What do you think Kurt would have been like if you hadn’t been at Dalton? If you weren’t there for him at that Prom? You got away from the situation and were there for Kurt, and I’ll always be grateful for that, kid.”

Blaine slowly sips his coffee, replaying Burt’s words in his mind. “They made me go to therapy, you know. But the whole time, when I had sessions with her, during recovery, even when they transferred me – they never once – my parents never once admitted that it happened because I was gay. They told their friends how horrible it was, that I was such a good patient when it came to doing my exercises. But the cause…it wasn’t discussed. It’s the thing we don’t talk about. Like if it’s not mentioned it’s not real.

“At least Steve – at least Steve and Mitch and Blake told me what was wrong. How dare the gay kid go to a dance, right? I mean, they got their point across with kicks and punches, but they talked too.” Blaine glances up to see Burt clutching the coffee mug, tendons standing out against the bend of his fingers. “I don’t remember everything, apparently that’s common with head injuries. But I – I know that Steve was angry, that Mitch and Blake added to it. I remember laying there as they joked about how I hadn’t even made the fight interesting – they pulled my shoulder out of socket then, I think.”

Burt stares at Blaine, wondering how someone who had gone through that much trauma had found the courage to stand up and ask the male Prom Queen to dance, how he managed to make it to the dance in the first place. These damned kids, Blaine and Kurt both, had more strength and bravery than men twice their age. And they didn’t even recognize it.

“Blaine,” Burt puts a comforting hand on Blaine’s shoulder, ignoring the slight flinch at his touch, “You ever talk about this before?”

Blaine gives a slight shrug, “The therapist, um, she was more focused on the recovery rather than ‘dwelling on the past’ or something. She taught me some exercises in case I ever felt panicked or had a flashback –
Breathe in. Think of one thing.

Breathe out. Rationalize.

Breathe in. Repeat

– But we didn’t talk about the dance, much. She never mentioned that I was gay, either.”

Burt’s hand tightens a bit, “What about your police statement?”

"Oh," Blaine’s eyes closed, “By the time I was awake enough to give one it had been a few days. There wasn’t any evidence. I mean, everyone who had gone to the dance had washed their clothes by then, and without it my words were just hearsay – and I had a concussion too, so I wasn’t the most reliable witness.”

Burt waits while Blaine blows out a breath and opens his eyes, “Are you tellin’ me that those guys weren’t punished?”

Blaine nods. “It was one of the reasons Detective Snyder suggested to my parents that I switch schools. Without evidence, it could have been any of a hundred kids that did it.” Blaine takes a sip of lukewarm coffee, “I started at Dalton the following fall.”

Burt sits in silence, piecing together the story Blaine’s shared, filling in the gaps where Blaine had trailed off.

“You are so brave. You know that, right?”

Blaine’s cheeks flush, but he doesn’t reply.

“Blaine.” Slowly, Blaine raises his eyes, meeting Burt’s gaze. “You are. Don’t let anyone ever tell you different.”

Blaine sits silently, taking in controlled breaths and blinking to hide shining eyes. “I – um, thank you.” A pause and then he continues, speaking in the same voice Burt had heard earlier in his office. “But I am sorry for dropping the box, earlier.”

“Nothing to apologize for, kid. But I have a question for you now. You don’t have to answer, but I’d like it if you did.” Blaine meets Burt’s gaze and nods so Burt continues. “Earlier in my office you mentioned something about Meijer and the mall. Something happen?”

Blaine slowly sips more coffee eyes focused on the table, and Burt forces himself to stay patient. To not force the conversation even as the seconds tick by in silence. “I don’t –” Blaine sighs before starting again. “I thought I saw his – um Steve’s – truck at the mall a couple of weeks ago. But I’m sure I didn’t. Green trucks are pretty common, and I didn’t see him directly.” Blaine pauses again, breaks a cookie in half and sets it back down, uneaten. “Yesterday, before – before I came to the shop I stopped by Meijer to get some soda. After I got out the car I thought I saw Mitch with his Ford, but when I got closer there wasn’t even a white car around, just some guy I don’t know. So really, I’m just seeing things that aren’t there.”

“Hey.” Burt leans forward in his chair, resting his arms on the table and waiting until Blaine looked up to continue. “Now I don’t know about what happened at the mall, but today in the shop, Mr. Fields mentioned his son,” Burt forces his hands to relax when Blaine hunches his shoulders at the mention. “Said he was helping a friend move, but he’s usually down in Columbus, going to OSU.” Burt watches as Blaine stays tense, hands curved around his coffee cup. “He could have been at Meijer yesterday, kid, but he was just passing through.”
Blaine visibly relaxes in the chair, even if only by a fraction and picks up half of the discarded cookie. “Oh.”

“Yeah.” Burt reaches up and briefly removes his cap before putting it back on, hoping to ease some of the tension thrumming in his body. “Blaine,” Burt’s voice carries across the table, sure and strong, “If this – if you ever want to talk about this, you know you’re always welcome here. Any time.”

Blaine swallows half of the broken cookie, eyes bright as he nods. “I haven’t told Kurt yet. I know I should; that I need to. I just –” Blaine lowers his head, his voice a quiet murmur, “I don’t want him to worry.”

“We have that in common, then.” Blaine raises his head, and Burt sees the surprise and confusion there. “I get it, Blaine. You don’t want your loved ones to worry about you. But you know what? Not sharing something isn’t going to make them not worry; it just makes them hurt and confused, too. And Kurt,” Burt sighs, “Kurt worries with the best of them, especially about the people he loves. And you know how much he loves you.”

Blaine finishes his coffee and stares inside the empty mug before looking to Burt. “I know he does. And I want to talk to him, I just…I don’t know how. Every time I think about it the words get messed up and he deserves to be happy in New York, not worrying about me because I’m suddenly upset about something that happened years ago.” Blaine averts his eyes and his words come out burdened, “I don’t know what to say.”

Burt stands and grabs the coffee pot, refilling his cup before turning to Blaine, filling his as he stands to Blaine’s left. “You know, I respect your relationship with Kurt. I trust you two and it’s not my business to interfere, but Blaine, I can tell him. If you’re not sure how to, I can give him the basics and then you can explain. But he needs to know, kid.

“That being said,” Burt pauses and waits for Blaine look up, “You should tell him yourself. You two are getting married, and no marriage works without communication. I know you two love each other; anyone with eyes can see that. But you two loved each other when Kurt first left for New York too. And you boys didn’t talk and look what happened. I don’t want a repeat of that – you two deserve to be happy, and you’re happiest with each other.” Burt takes a sip of coffee. “He deserves to know, Blaine, and it’s your right to tell him.”

Blaine closes his eyes, feels like he’s running away again when he considers Burt’s offer. “I know he needs to know. And I’ll tell him everything, but…I can’t start it. I don’t – I’m sorry.”

Burt pulls Blaine into a light hug before stepping back. “No need to apologize, kid. I can’t say I think it’s the best option, but you need to feel comfortable and I know this is difficult. Now, you eat some more cookies and I’ll bring you the phone once I’m done.”

“You’re calling him now?”

“No time like the present.” Burt gives Blaine’s shoulder one last squeeze on his way out of the kitchen, coffee cup in hand. Entering the living room, he sets the steaming mug on the end table before settling in his chair and burying his head in his hands.

Why is it always the kids?

Sighing, Burt lowers his hands and reaches for the phone, hating a phone call that hasn’t yet happened.
Only to be interrupted when Blaine steps into the living room.

“You need something?”

Blaine further enters the room and sits on the sofa. “No. I just…You’re right. I should tell him. I didn’t think I could — I still don’t know how I’ll say it — but I should. But maybe,” Blaine briefly meets Burt’s gaze before looking at his hands, “You could stay here while I call?”

Burt smiles and hands Blaine the phone. “I’m not goin’ anywhere, Blaine.”

Kurt sits at his desk, eyes switching between EBSCO and his Word document. His paper has a skeleton now, but he needs an electronic source, and finding a relevant journal article is proving to be difficult. He’s alone in the apartment, Rachel and Santana still avoiding one another as much as possible, so the only sound outside of his keyboard comes from his docking station in the corner. As the pdf downloads, Kurt leans back in his chair, stretching his arms in front of him.

And nearly falls out of his chair when his phone buzzes and plays \textit{Home} while slightly moving across his desk.

Quickly dropping his arms, Kurt reaches for the phone and answers the call.

“Hey Dad.”

“Not quite.”

“Blaine! Calling from the house; did you end up taking a nap?”

“No. Your dad invited me to the house for a snack. I’m not interrupting anything important, am I?”

Kurt glances at his computer and lets out a small laugh. “No, definitely not.”

“Good. That’s – that’s good.”

Kurt freezes. Blaine is hesitant, searching for words. Kurt’s grip tightened on his phone.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong, exactly. I just –”

“Don’t try to change the subject, Blaine.”

“I wasn’t. I –” Blaine sighs down the phone line. “You know me too well.”

“Hm.” Kurt minimizes the windows on his computer and stands, moving to sit on his bed. “I do. Now talk to me.”

“I want to. I’m trying.” Another sigh followed by a humorless chuckle. “This \textit{is} hard, but your dad –”

“My \textit{dad}?!?” Kurt sits up from his reclined position on his bed, heart racing in his chest. “Blaine what –”

“Kurt!” Blaine interrupts. “Kurt I’m trying to tell you. I \textit{will} but you have to promise me you’ll calm down. I need you to listen.”
Blaine’s brittle voice breaks through Kurt’s spiraling thoughts, and he takes a breath to steady himself. Blaine needs him to be calm.

“Of course. I’m sorry – I’ll listen, Blaine. It’s what I’m here for.”

“I know…Just, let me talk, please. I’ll tell you everything, I promise, but for now I just need you to listen.”

And Kurt does.

He bites his lips and clenches his phone but he stays silent. He doesn’t speak as Blaine’s tight, flat voice describes past events; he keeps his promise until Blaine’s voice catches and breaks, the next words a rush Kurt can’t understand.

“Blaine!” Kurt hears murmurings on the other end of the phone, and then his father’s voice comes through the line.

“Kurt. Kurt he’s fine…just needs a breather. So I’ll tell you what I know and then you two can talk all you want.”

Kurt listens as his father describes what happened earlier in the day and how Blaine came to be at the house. Kurt can feel his heart racing again, feels his short nails biting into the skin of his left hand, feels his right aching from its grip on his phone. As his father finishes Kurt briefly closes his eyes and takes a few calming breaths.

“Dad.” Kurt’s voice trembles and he swallows, starts again. “Dad. He’s gone, right? The customer from earlier?” Kurt can’t bring himself to say the name. “Blaine shouldn’t have to ever see them again. He’s gone, right? Tell me he’s gone.”

“Jim got him squared away about twenty minutes ago; he’s gone, Kurt. And like I told Blaine, seems like they were just passin’ through – he had no intention of staying in Lima.”

Kurt sags on his bed, hands relaxing as he lets out a breath. “That’s good.”

“It is. Now Blaine just walked back in, so I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

“Of course. Thanks, Dad…for everything. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

“Hey, Kurt.”

Kurt blinks back tears, feels the last of the tension he hadn’t realized he was carrying drain away at Blaine’s voice. “Hey, Blaine.”

“Sorry about earlier; I didn’t – I didn’t mean to leave.”

“Don’t even worry about it.” Kurt scoots back on his bed, settling against his pillows and mentally preparing for the rest of the conversation. “But Blaine…why didn’t you tell me? We talk every day. I thought – I thought we were beyond keeping secrets from each other.”

“We are!” Blaine’s voice is a cry and a promise. “I swear we are, Kurt. I just – I didn’t have any proof. Until today in your dad’s shop I never knew for certain that anything had happened. I thought my nightmares just had me seeing things, making connections between what I saw in my sleep and what I see when I’m awake.” Blaine takes a breath, and his next words are earnest,
heartfelt. “Things have been so perfect, Kurt. Amazing. And I didn’t want to ruin it.” Blaine pauses and his next words are quiet. “I didn’t want you to worry.”

“Blaine,” Kurt sighs, “I can’t imagine what you went through – what you’re going through, but I’m here for you. You supported me within minutes of our first meeting: it’s my turn. But I can’t if you don’t let me. And Blaine?” Kurt bites his lip as he waits for Blaine’s ‘hm’ in reply. “It hurts me, thinking about you going through this alone. We’re a team, at least we’re supposed to be.”

“I am so sorry. So sorry, Kurt.” Blaine’s wet voice cracks through the phone line. “I wanted to tell you. I really did. I just – telling you would have made it real for me. And Kurt…I’m seeing things because of nightmares. I didn’t want to make you worry because of a few bad dreams.”

“I already worried; I just didn’t know why. I could tell you were tired and stressed but I couldn’t figure out what had changed. I love you, Blaine. I’m going to worry about you anyway.”

“I know, and I’m sorry, Kurt. I’m really, really sorry.”

Despite the fear and uneasiness hovering in his mind, Kurt huffs a laugh. “I’m really starting to get sick of you saying ‘sorry’ Blaine.”

Blaine gives a weak laugh as well. “Sor– it’s hard habit to break!”

“How about instead you promise to talk to me. You have a nightmare, or see something, or you think you see something, call me. Or text. I’ll reply as soon as I can.”

“I promise, Kurt.” Blaine’s voice echoes with the beginnings of humor. “You’re going to get sick of me.”

Kurt smiles. “Never. And Blaine?” Kurt’s voice rings with concern, “If you’re worried, or things get worse, find someone to talk to… Miss Pillsberry, or a doctor, or therapist. If you think it will help, do it. I won’t think any less of you; I never could.”

“I hope it doesn’t get that bad.”

“Me too, but if it does,” Kurt pauses, the possibility hanging in the air, “Don’t hesitate, Blaine.”

“I won’t.” Blaine’s conviction is strong, even if tinged with tiredness.

“I’ll hold you to that. Now,” Kurt lightens his voice, “Why don’t you try and take that nap? I’ll make sure Dad wakes you in time for you to get home before dark.”

“Hm. I’m actually,” Blaine’s voice breaks on a yawn, “Your dad said I could stay here tonight; Mom and Dad are in Cinci.”

Kurt winces at the reminder of Blaine’s parents even as he smiles at the mention of his own. “Well then you’ve got it all covered. Get some sleep, Blaine. And Dad’ll tell me if you don’t.”

“Tattle-tale.”

Kurt laughs. “I’m marrying a five year old.”

“Mm. You love me, though.”

“Until my dying day.”

“Too tired to sing.”
“Go to sleep, Blaine.”

After instructing his father and giving him a more detailed description of his day, Kurt says goodbye and ends the call. He leans back, getting comfortable and thinking over all the information he’s received in the last hour and a half. He closes his eyes, letting the music from his iPod drift over him.

And I could write a song
A hundred miles long
Well, that's where I belong
And you belong with me
And I could write it down
Or spread it all around
Get lost and then get found
Or swallowed in the sea

Text message from Kurt:

Courage
First off, I am so sorry this is being posted late! I'm switching Internet companies and was without Internet for a bit (long story and be happy my temp roomie didn't kill me). Anyway, thanks for all the continued comments, kudos, and reads! All of you are amazing and make my day! Thanks so much (really, given RL at the moment your comments make my day!)

Also, thanks so much to my lovely, wonderful betas dlanadhz, slayerkitty, and jessicamdawn!

Chapter 7

Blaine wakes in Kurt’s old room, in borrowed clothes and surrounded by the smell of the Hudson-Hummel’s laundry detergent. Blinking to clear the sleep from his eyes, he sits up and checks the time on his phone – 9:02 A.M. Setting the phone back down on the end table Blaine takes in the space, smiling at the sight of Kurt’s prom scepter on the bookcase. The room holds a wealth of memories that make Blaine smile, but it still feels off – like rereading a childhood favorite and not finding the same joy.

Standing, Blaine crosses the room and grabs his clothes from where he’d left them the night before, and then heads for the shower.

Text message from Blaine:

Morning! :) I’m stealing your pajamas, btw

Text message from Kurt:

Thief! <3

Later, feeling refreshed if awkward in yesterday’s clothes, Blaine smiles and wishes good morning to Burt and Carole as he enters the kitchen.

“You sleep alright?” Burt’s voice is scratchy with sleep, his mug of coffee steaming in front of him on the table. Burt then stands, pouring another mug and setting it to the left of his seat, nodding to Blaine.

Blaine nods and reaches for the mug, taking a sip and hiding a wince at its temperature. “Thanks for the coffee.”

“Mm. Wasn’t sure what you’d want to eat.”

“I’m afraid we’re out of eggs,” Carole adds, standing by the counter where she’s unloading the dishwasher, “There’s cereal though, and I think there’s some oatmeal.”

Blaine turns to face her and gives a small smile, “Whatever’s easiest is fine – I can even just have coffee.” Blaine nods toward his cup, “I have to head back home soon anyway.”
“You barely touched your dinner last night.” Burt’s comment has Blaine turning back to face him, taking in the sympathetic but slightly stern gaze. “I understand why you weren’t that hungry, but you can’t go skipping meals.”

“Well then.” Carole’s smooth voice breaks the silence. “Come over here and pick something to eat, Blaine.”

Blaine ducks his head even as he pushes back his chair and stands, taking the bowl Carole presses into his hand. “Um. Cereal?” Carole points to the cabinet to his left before turning and getting the milk from the fridge.

Seated at the table minutes later, Carole meets Blaine’s gaze. “You said you have to leave soon – meeting up with your friends?”

Blaine swallows his spoonful of cereal. “No, I have to practice some songs on the piano for Glee, and it’s easier when the house is empty.”

Not a lie. But not the whole truth, either.

“I thought you kids loved an audience.”

Giving Burt a weak smile Blaine shakes his head. “Not always, and practicing the same four measures for twenty minutes can be…trying for an audience. Or so I’m told.”

“Music is music,” Carole says with a slight shrug, “And you play beautifully, Blaine.”

“Thanks.” Blaine ignores the blush he feels staining his cheeks.

“What’re you practicing?” Burt questions, as he refills everyone’s cup before retaking his seat, “Anything I know?”

Blaine thinks over the sheet music on his piano as he eats some more cereal. “You might, actually.”

Seeing the expectant look on Burt’s face Blaine continues, glad to talk about something he enjoys.

_*._*_.*_

“Rise and shine, Hummel!” Kurt starts at Santana’s voice, jolting forward from his relaxed position on his bed – and dropping his book – as drowsiness flees. In front of him, Santana stands at the foot of his bed, dressed and holding out a jacket.

“I – what?”

“C’mon Hummel. You’re buying me breakfast.”

“Excuse me?” Marking his place in his book, Kurt moves to the edge of his bed, feet resting on the floor.

“I know you talked to Little Diva the other night after I left; now it’s my turn to talk with the world’s best gay.” The smirk Santana wears makes Kurt wary.

“Santana…” Kurt stands anyway, taking the jacket from her outstretched arm. “I’m still not taking sides, but I’ll go with you to talk so it’s even.”

“And buy me breakfast.”
“You’re delusional.”

“Didn’t you know?” Santana winks. “The man always buys when out with a lady.”

“We’re both gay Santana; this isn’t a date.” Shrugging on his jacket Kurt narrows his eyes. “And you’re certainly not a lady.”

Half an hour later, they’re seated at one of the tables in a bagel shop, Kurt having paid when Santana gleefully told the cashier the orders were together.

“So,” Santana says after swallowing a bite of egg and cheese bagel, “What are we gonna do about Rachel?”

“I told you I’m not taking sides in this argu–”

“We could have her pay double in rent,” Santana interrupts, “Once for her and once for her ego. Some extra spending money would be nice.”

Kurt sighs and takes a sip of coffee, debating if he should comment or just let Santana vent. His hand jerks when Santana snaps her fingers inches away from his face, a few drops of coffee splashing onto the lid and over his fingers. “Santana!” Kurt sets his coffee down, grabbing a napkin to wipe his hands. “What?”

“You were quiet.”

“I am never buying you anything ever again.”

“It’s bad to tell lies, Hummel.” Santana smiles as she sets her half eaten bagel on her plate and takes a sip of coffee. “Besides, we’re talking about a certain roommate with an ego problem.”

“You were talking; I’m eating my breakfast.”

“Kurt.”

“What do you want me to say, Santana?” Kurt eyes his sandwich before sighing and continuing. “Rachel has an ego; she’s always had an ego – it’s not like this is anything new.”

“It’s different when she’s in the same living space, waking me up at all hours and being self-important because she can’t be bothered to care about anyone else.”

“That’s not fair.”

“I’m sorry,” Santana’s voice takes on a cutting edge. “Are you fine with her always getting first shower and singing at ungodly hours because she thinks it’s some right?!”

“I –” Kurt takes a bite of his bacon egg and cheese bagel, using the time to think of his response. “Rachel’s going through a lot right now, and…”

“We’re all going through a lot right now,” Santana’s voice is surprisingly soft. “She’s not the only one who lost someone; she doesn’t get to use that as an excuse to treat the rest of us like trash.”

Kurt offers a half smile and a nod before taking another bite of his breakfast. “Just…try to tell her again.” Kurt pauses and catches Santana’s gaze. “Preferably without yelling and condescension.”

Santana narrows her eyes. “Very funny. So,” She takes a sip of her coffee. “You gonna tell me why you look like hell?”
“I do not look like hell, Santana.”

She ignores his glare. “You’re about two layers short of normal and the circles under your eyes would make a panda jealous.”

“I don’t have the most hospitable of roommates.” Kurt finishes his bagel and grabs another napkin.

“Please, like we could stress you out that much. That’s – oh!” Santana claps leans forward and clasps her hands on the table. “What’d the hobbit do?”

“His name is Blaine – would you stop calling him that? – and he didn’t do anything.”

Santana stays silent, smirking.

Kurt sighs and slouches in his chair. He won’t tell her about Blaine’s past, about the flashbacks; he’d never betray Blaine’s trust in that way. But, it would be nice to share something, even if he is talking to Santana. “I’m just…worried about him. His parents are – they’re not home often, so it’s an adjustment for him when they are. And he’s waiting to hear back from NYADA and he’s stressed because –” Kurt catches himself, restarting, “He’s tired and upset and I love him, Santana, so I lost a little sleep.” Kurt shrugs. “I just worry.”

For a moment Santana stays silent, looking over Kurt. “You’re hiding something, Hummel, but obviously you don’t feel like sharing so this once I’ll let it slide.” Santana then finishes her sandwich. “But really: you’re ‘worried’ – that’s your reason?” Santana gives a disappointed sigh. “Damn you’ve gotten boring since you got that ring.”

Kurt glances at the ring in question, taking in the glinting light. “I think I got the better end of the deal.” Kurt smiles. “I love this ring.”

“Please stop with the cliché lines. You’re going to make me regret breakfast.”

“It would be fair,” Kurt muses, “Since you didn’t actually pay for it.”

Blaine focuses on the sheets in front of him, counting out beats as he focuses solely on the notes in the treble clef, and jerks his hands back in frustration when he once again misses hitting the correct chord on beat. Sighing, he leans back on the bench and closes his eyes, taking a breath to keep from yelling. Shaking his head and opening his eyes, Blaine reaches for his phone and snaps a picture.

Text message from Blaine:
[photo] Evil piano music! >:( Do you think I could convince Glee to change songs?

Text message from Kurt:
Posibly, but I can’t say it would be worth the stress from switching after preparing something else

Text message from Kurt:
Besides, you’re a genius on the piano! You can do it!!! :)

Text message from Blaine:
Reliving your cheerleader days?
Text message from Kurt:
…There was no jumping.

Text message from Kurt:
Just encouraging you because I can :)

Text message from Blaine:
:) Thanks!

Text message from Blaine:
…Okay, back to practice. Wish me luck!

Text message from Kurt:
You’ll get it! <3 I expect a recording later :)

Blaine gives a quiet laugh and sets his phone aside, focusing on the thirty-seconds followed by the chord and plays each note individually, idly wondering if there’s a way to make each note a whole rather than something so fast his fingers press the wrong keys. He continues to play with his right hand, concentrating only on the notes, the music before him. He loses track of time, only aware of the improvement as he plays the notes, hitting each correct key even if not as fast as they should be played.

Deciding to continue with the song Blaine moves on to the measure after the troubling chord, starting with both the bass and treble notes.

And then bangs both hands on the keys in frustration, the discordant mash of notes making his ears ring.

“I hope that wasn’t written on the page. I didn’t pay for you to go to piano lessons to play songs like that.”

Blaine jolts in surprise and quickly spins on the piano bench, sees his father standing with crossed arms by the entrance to the family room. He silently curses the hallway that kept him from hearing the front door.

Not meeting his father’s gaze Blaine ducks his head. “No…just some complicated patterns.”

“Mm. Well since you don’t seem to be making progress here, how about you use your muscles for something else and help me unload the car.”

Recognizing the order Blaine stands, shoving his phone in his pocket as he crosses the room. “Mom buy a lot?”

“Enough.” Blaine’s father shrugs as they walk down the hall. “Thought I’d take advantage of having a teenaged boy in the house and have you help carry it in, once I realized where you were.” Cutting a glance to Blaine, he smirks. “Realizing piano isn’t as fun as you make it out to be? Sounded a bit like a four-year old banging on those keys.”

Blaine bites the inside of his cheek and forces his hands to stay relaxed at his sides. “No,” Blaine’s controlled voice stays even, “I love music. Like I said,” Blaine says as he opens the front door, “Just some complicated measures.”
Guess you’ll have to keep practicing then.”

Blaine gathers several bags from the car and turns back toward the house. “Music is just like any other skill – you have to keep using it to continually do well.” Entering the house, Blaine sets the department store bags on the floor before heading out for a second trip. “Besides, I don’t mind practicing.”

“Seems like most of my coworkers’ boys are either playing video games or outside,” Blaine’s father comments as he locks the car. “I honestly thought you’d eventually get tired of piano, like Cooper did.”

Blaine sighs, balancing the three bags in his hands as his father waits for him to reopen the door. “Cooper always preferred acting to music.”

“Cooper was always focused.”

Blaine hears the implied ‘unlike you’ and holds his comment that Cooper focused on one thing for a period of time before changing and focusing on something else; instead he hums in acknowledgement and adds to the pile of bags in the entryway.

“Oh, thank you dear.” Blaine’s mother breaks the ensuing silence as she enters from the kitchen. “I could never have brought all those in on my own! And,” she glances at Blaine’s father, “I know your father appreciates it; we’d forgotten how much walking’s required at outlet malls.”

“It’s fine, mom.”

“Hm.” Blaine mother steps forward and pulls Blaine into a light hug. “Did you have a good day yesterday?”

Blaine flashes back to the shock in the garage, the discussion with Burt, the draining but needed conversation with Kurt, the comfortable dinner from the day before. “I guess. It was fine.”

“That’s good. Oh!” Blaine’s mother steps back from the collection of shopping bags, holding one in her left hand. “I almost forgot; I got the mail and there’s several college brochures for you, Blaine. I put them on the table in the kitchen.”

“Mm.” Blaine nods at his mother as she heads for the stairs, not caring about the brochures. Having already applied to NYADA and other universities in New York, brochures hold little appeal.

“Don’t be dismissive of your mother, Blaine.”

“What? I wasn’t –” Blaine cuts himself off, turning to face his father who’s leaning against the wall.

“It’s obvious you don’t care about any college brochure, Blaine. Are you even thinking about your future?”

“Of course I am!” Blaine’s voice rises, echoing off the tiled floor. “I can’t wait to get out of Ohio. I’ve already sent in applications to schools in New York, and I auditioned for NYADA when I was visiting Kurt last month!”

“You auditioned?” Blaine’s father barks as he walks toward Blaine. “You’re going to actually study something you have to audition for? On top of everything else you – I thought you had a good head on your shoulders, Blaine. You’re smart; I’ve seen your report cards. You could succeed
at anything, I’m sure. Or if you were tired of academics you could go to some tech school, I’m sure that Mr. Humler would hire you. But instead you’re trying to do something what – singing and dancing?” The condescension on the last three words is clear.

Blaine blinks at his father standing a foot in front of him. “His name is Mr. Hummel. And I’m sure he would hire me if it was something I wanted, but it’s not! I don’t want to study accounting or law or mechanics, Dad! I love music! I’m going to school to be a performer!”

Blaine’s father laughs. “That’s not a career, Blaine.” He sighs and catches Blaine’s gaze. “Music’s a great hobby, but you need to start thinking seriously about your future. Why don’t you go do that now.” Blaine’s father looks away and starts to gather a few of the shopping bags, finished.

Blaine opens his mouth to reply before sighing in resignation and turning, heading for his room. He makes it partway up the stairs before he hears his father’s murmurings.

“Studying music. Heaven forbid he pick a man’s profession.”

Normally, Blaine would continue to his room. But he’s already vibrating with anger and stress and so, today he snaps.

“That’s what it is, isn’t it?” Blaine projects his voice, the cold tone carrying as he turns and goes back down the stairs, meeting his father at the base. “It’s not that I want to study music…that I want to perform. It’s that I want to perform and I’m gay. You can’t even say it, can you? I thought – I thought after the shooting last month, when we stayed up all night and talked, I thought you actually were starting to accept me! But I should have known better, right? It was just the shock of the moment; of course you were happy your youngest son wasn’t shot in some random school shooting. I’m still here though, and I’m gay. I’m gay and I’m in love with Kurt and we’re going to get married and live together in New York!”

Blaine’s father grabs Blaine’s arm, pulling him a step closer as he replies. “Married? Have you lost your mind?! I thought you’d have grown up after that incident a few years ago –”

“Incident?! It was a gay bashing, Dad! Those three guys beat the crap out of me – put me in the hospital with months of recovery – because I’m gay!” Blaine’s harsh breaths seem just as loud as his yell.

“And it taught you nothing! I thought it would be a wake-up call for you – that you’d stop this nonsense and be the man your mother and I raised you to be!”

Blaine blinks, hearing echoes –

“Be a man, Anderson!”

“– and stop this fanciful talk!”

“It’s not some talk, Dad!” Blaine draws on his anger and hurt to focus on the present. “I’m gay! And I’m sorry if that embarrasses you when you’re talking to the other pilots, but it’s who I am: your gay son! And you,” Blaine meets his father’s burning glare, “You’re nothing more than some bigoted, cowardly –”

Blaine falls back, hitting the wall with a crack! that somehow seems quieter than the sound of flesh hitting flesh as he stares in shock at his father’s still raised hand and feels the building ache on the left side of his face.

“Get out.”
Blaine runs.

He follows the whispered order, ignoring his mother’s call from the stairs as he grabs his keys from the hook by the door.

Five minutes later Blaine pulls over and lets his head fall to his steering wheel. Moments later he sits up, fighting dizziness, and takes his phone from his pocket with shaking hands. It takes him two tries to unlock, and another thirty seconds to get to the name he wants.

“Hey, you! Going to let me hear that song? I told you you’d get it!”

Blaine breaks.

“Kurt.” Blaine hears Kurt’s frantic voice, rushed and high, but the sobs keep coming, preventing further words. He has to talk though, he has to tell him. “He actually – I can’t, Kurt.”

“Blaine.” Kurt’s voice has lost its frantic edge, instead coming through calm and sure, if a bit a strained. “Blaine, you have to breathe. Breathe with me, okay? In and out. Just like that.”

It takes a few minutes, but Blaine gradually calms. “Thank you, Kurt.”

“I – what happened, Blaine?”

Blaine feels the catch in his chest, but ignores the twinge. “He…he was mad. I usually let it go but today I didn’t and –” Blaine pauses, takes a steadying breath and continues in a monotone. “He hit me.” Blaine continues speaking through the sharp inhalation he hears. “He hit me and I fell into the wall and then I ran and I don’t know what to do and –”

“Blaine.” Kurt’s voice cracks. “Blaine, you have tell me who…who did this. I think I know, but I need you to tell me.”

Blaine closes his eyes. “Dad.” The left side of his face seems to throb harsher at the name. “My dad hit me, Kurt. And I don’t know where I am or where I’m going to go – I just ran.”

“You’re going to my parents’ house. I’m going to call Dad and he’s going to bring the tow truck and come pick you up because you are not attempting to drive right now.” Kurt’s voice rings with confidence and promise. “Now,” Kurt pauses and Blaine squeezes his phone. “You said you don’t know where you are?”

“I didn’t – I just drove.”

“That’s fine, Blaine. Just…put me on speaker and pull up Google maps.”

Blaine lowers his phone with shaking hands, but completes the request and reads off the location in a voice he barely recognizes as his own.

“Dad’s going to come get you, Blaine. Okay?”

Blaine sniffs and opens his eyes long enough to pull some napkins from his glove compartment. “Okay.”

“Okay…so I’m going to have to hang up to call him, alright? But I’ll be fast and then I’ll call right back. I’ll stay with you til he gets there. I promise.”

Blaine ignores his increasing heartbeat and the tears that threaten; Kurt has to call Burt.
“Okay.”

“I’ll call back as soon as I can, Blaine. I love you.”

In the ensuing silence Blaine raises the steering wheel and draws up his legs, resting his head on his knees.

He waits for Kurt’s call.

Kurt sits on his bed, phone clutched in his hand, his knees drawn up to his chest. His entire body remains tense, as it has been since he got Blaine’s call a little over an hour ago. He’d talked with Blaine until his dad had arrived with the tow truck, but then he’d ceded control to his dad, and been left with a maelstrom of emotions coursing through his veins, wanting nothing more than to buy the $300 ticket – he’d started checking ticket prices as soon as Blaine had started crying – and fly to Ohio.

But he knows he can’t drop everything and leave.

Even though at the moment New York feels like a vice.

So now he sits on his bed, holding himself still to keep from pressing the “Buy Now!” button and waits for his phone to ring.

The silence of the loft closes in on him, doing nothing to dispel the thrum of Blaine’s hurt cycling through his mind. He’s never cared for silence, but the thought of playing music holds no appeal either. He can’t move, can’t work on homework, can’t think of anything else until he knows more about what’s happening with Blaine.

Kurt glances at his phone again; three minutes since the last time he checked. He switches his phone to his right hand, stretching out the fingers of his left to ease the cramp that has taken up residence.

His phone starts to vibrate and he lurches forward, answering before the first chord comes through the speaker.

“Dad! How is he? Can I –”

“He’s okay, Kurt.” Burt interrupts Kurt’s hurried questions. “Carole’s getting him some ice and Tylenol right now though, so you’re stuck with me for a bit.”

“How,” Kurt swallows, starts again. “How bad is it?”

There’s a pause, only the sound of breathing coming through the phone line. “He’s…bruised.” Another pause. “Got a bump on the back of his head, his left cheek’s swollen. That’s all I saw, but Carole’s checking him over – you know she’ll make sure he’s treated.” Burt’s voice comes through in an even tone, but Kurt hears the anger thrumming below the surface, the worry only slightly hidden.

Kurt blinks back his tears, forces his voice steady. “I wasn’t sure when he called. He was so upset, Dad, I’ve never –” Kurt cuts himself off, hoping to quell the panic he feels rising in his chest. “He was crying and I just wanted to tell him everything would be okay…but it’s not, is it? I’m not even in Ohio right now and I thought –” Kurt’s voice drops. “I didn’t think I’d ever feel worse than when Blaine got hurt with that slushie…but this is so much worse because it was his family – I
can’t imagine what he’s feeling and I’m not there for him.”

“You don’t have to be in Ohio to be there for him, Kurt. And no one should ever be hurt by family, you’re right. But he’s got family here too, and us Hummels look after our own.”

Despite the worry he still feels anchored in his being, Kurt smiles at his father’s mention of Blaine being family. “Thanks, Dad.”

“Don’t have to thank me. Blaine’s a good guy – you’re good for each other. And we’ll look after him, don’t worry.”

On his bed, Kurt straightens, recognizing his father’s tone: it held the same edge before he confronted Karofsky in Principal Figgins office, before he ran for Congress, before he assured Kurt he’d beat cancer. “I’m gonna talk to the Andersons tomorrow, get somethin’ figured out; Blaine’ll have people to look after him. I’ll make sure of it.”

Kurt closes his eyes, grateful in a way he hadn’t considered before today. “Thank you, Dad. I – I still wish I was there too, but you’re pretty good at being there for people.”

“Of course I am; a congressman is always there for the people.”

“And so modest, too.” The smile on Kurt’s face is small, trembling, but a relief.

“Always.”

“Hm.” Kurt feels some of the tension release from his shoulders. “Even so, I lucked out in the parent department.”

“Well,” Burt’s voice radiates warmth even as it wavers. “I got some pretty fantastic boys.”

“I still say I got the better end of the deal, but thank you, I suppose.”

“Of course, Kurt.”

“You’ll text me about Blaine, right? After you talk to Carole?” Kurt briefly bites his lip. “I know he won’t outright lie to me, but he’s not above downplaying things to try and keep me from worrying.”

“I’ll go check on him as soon as I get off here, and I’ll have Carole text you.”

Kurt huffs, amused but still unable to laugh after the events of the day. “You really need to get over your aversion to texting, but thanks. I love you, Dad.”

“Love you too.”

.*.*.*.*.*

Burt enters the kitchen and sees Carole standing by the table, a statue in silence. Her hands clutch the back of one of the kitchen chairs, tendons in stark relief.

“He went upstairs to shower and put on some more comfortable clothes; hopefully Kurt left more than one pair of sweatpants here.” Carole’s voice trembles, the only inflection in the monotone words.

Burt crosses the room to stand by her side. “Alright.” Carefully, he reaches out a hand to touch her arm. “You okay?”
“Me? I’m fine. He was the perfect patient; didn’t complain once. Never mind that he has a sizable bump on his head from where he hit a wall, and bruises across his shoulder and back and cheek, and oh! let’s not forget the swelling on his face and the possible black eye.”

“Carole.” Burt steps closer with a sigh, gently wrapping his other arm around her.

“He’s his son! His son, Burt! And he just –” Carole takes a breath, leans back into Burt. “You’re supposed to cherish your children; they could be taken –” Carole’s voice breaks and cuts off with a gasp, her left hand leaving the chair to close over her mouth.

“We’ll help, Carole. Blaine’s here now, and I’ll take care of it; he’ll be looked after.”

Carole turns in Burt’s arms, catching his eye and widening her own. “You’ll take care of it?”

Burt huffs. “Not anything bad. I know better than that; even if I’d like to see him rot. Besides,” Burt continues, “Blaine doesn’t want the police involved, begged me not to call them when I picked him up.” Burt pauses, pushing away memories from when he’d first seen Blaine that afternoon. “Just some paperwork. That’s all.”

“You seem very certain of yourself.” Burt shrugs in response.

“He doesn’t know Blaine doesn’t want the police involved. Figure a man like that,” Burt winces at the description, “He’ll want to do the easiest thing to keep it private – I’m sure he’ll understand after I explain it to him tomorrow.”

“Well,” Carole rests her hands on Burt’s biceps. “Don’t let any explanation get you too upset; I can’t handle two injured family members, Burt Hummel.”

“Just a conversation. I don’t need you takin’ away my coffee as punishment.”

“I would, too.”

“You talk to Kurt too much. Speaking of, he wants you to text him about Blaine – figures he’ll get more information from you.”

“He’s a smart one.” Carole gives a weak smile. “And I figure I still owe him for that makeover.”

Burt shakes his head, offering a small smile in return. “He’s pretty good at fashion.” He glances toward the stairs, remembering some of Kurt’s outfits. “You sure he left something Blaine could use, though?”

“If not, the pajamas Blaine wore last night are in the washer; they’ll be ready soon enough.”

“That’s good. We’ll get him settled and I think we can afford to order in tonight.” At Carole’s expression he continues. “One night of pizza isn’t the end of the world, and no teenage boy turns down pizza.”

“Don’t think I don’t see what you’re doing, but,” Carole’s face tightens, “Blaine needs to relax tonight.”

In Kurt’s old bedroom for the second time that day, Blaine sits on the bed, staring at his hands. The closet seems impossibly far away, and even the bureau – which he’s fairly certain has at least one pair of pajama pants Kurt’s outgrown – seems like too much effort. Still, he knows Kurt’s parents
will worry if spends too long in the room, so he slowly stands and makes his way to the bureau. He pulls out the remembered pants and a worn, oversized sweatshirt advertising the garage. Grabbing his phone he snaps a picture.

Text message from Blaine:
[photo] Stealing your clothes again

Text message from Kurt:
I'm glad I left them. <3

In the bathroom later, Blaine winces as he dresses following his quick shower. After pulling on the sweatshirt he raises his sleeve covered hands to his face – ignoring the twinge as he does so – and takes in the comforting smell of the Hudson-Hummel’s detergent and a hint of Kurt’s favorite cologne. Seconds later, he turns and exits the room, flipping the switch as he walks past.

He doesn’t look in the mirror.

Picking up his phone from the bed, he puts it in his pocket and leaves the room. Downstairs, he pauses at the foot of the stairs, catching his breath and pushing away the slight dizziness brought on by walking down the steps.

The living room proves to be empty, and he finds Kurt’s parents sitting at the table in the kitchen, each with a glass of water. Carole’s standing before he’s two feet in the room, guiding him to a chair. “You go ahead and sit, Blaine. I’m going to get you the ice pack; it’s been long enough.”

Blaine has his mouth open to tell her not to bother, but the look she gives him on her way back from the freezer quells any protest.

“Thank you.” Blaine leans back in the chair, keeping the ice pack in position against his scapula. Standing beside him, Carole uses gentle hands to move his hair. An involuntary hiss escapes him when her fingers brush against the bump that had stung the most when he’d showered.

“Sorry, sweetie – just making sure it hasn’t gotten any bigger.”

“It’s fine.” Across the table, Blaine sees Burt sigh at his response.

Carole doesn’t comment, however, just turns Blaine’s face to look at his left cheek and eye. “No more pain meds til you’ve eaten – don’t worry, we ordered pizza – but I can get more ice, if you need it. Any more dizziness?”

Blaine stays silent for moment, debating as Carole steps away and returns, placing another glass of water on the table. “No.”

“You sure about that, kid? Sounded a bit like a question.” Burt’s voice is light, but he doesn’t look away from Blaine.

“Mm.” Burt takes a sip of water. “I’ll walk up with you when you’re ready for bed anyway.” Burt smiles at Blaine. “Can’t have you fallin’ down the stairs.”

Blaine feels the blush rising and ducks his head, gratefully sipping from his glass of water. “Thanks, Mr. Hummel.”
“Mm. You call Kurt yet?”

Blaine’s hand instinctively pats the phone in his pocket. “Not – not yet.”

“Burt and I were just going to watch some TV while we wait for the pizza,” Carole comments. “Why don’t you go ahead and call him?”

“Sounds like a great plan. Kurt’ll be happy to hear from you.” Burt is already pushing back his chair to stand. “Just yell if you need something, and,” Burt shakes his head, “Maybe leave out the bit about pizza tonight.”

Blaine nods, giving Burt a small smile. Soon he’s alone in the kitchen, remembering Carole’s admonishment to remove the ice after ten minutes, murmurs from the television barely audible over the hum of the refrigerator.

Closing his eyes to settle his thoughts, Blaine blindly pulls out his phone.

Breathe in. *It doesn't change anything.*

Breathe out. *Kurt loves me.*

Breathe in. *Kurt still loves me.*

Breathe out. *Kurt’s my family.*

Blaine opens his eyes and dials.
Chapter 8

Thanks again for all the kudos and likes! All of you are amazing, and your feedback always makes my day! :) I'm in awe and thankful for all of you! As always, thanks to my betas slayerkitty, jessicamdawn, and dlanadhz.

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 8

Kurt stands by the window, looking out at the grey drudge of Bushwick. He keeps his arms crossed, a small effort to stay warm while he waits for the coffee to finish brewing. Rachel’s voice rises above the sound of the shower, and if he wasn’t already awake rethinking about his conversation with Blaine he’d be pounding on the door. Santana had been right: Rachel did forget that others live in the loft.

Text message from Kurt:

I hope you're still dreaming! Rachel's singing banished mine…

“Tell me there’s coffee.”

Startled, Kurt spins and sees Santana walking toward the kitchen, still in pajamas, hair sleep-mussed. “I started some not too long ago. It’s brewing; should be done soon.”

Rachel hits the bridge of *Don’t Rain on my Parade* and Santana shoots a glare toward the bathroom. “You’d think if the little diva is going to wake us up before the flippin’ Sun she’d at least make us coffee.”

“Santana…” Kurt sighs as he drops into one of his vintage kitchen chairs, propping his head on his right hand. “Can you not?”

“Aww, did the resident gay not get his beauty sleep?”

“As a matter of fact Santana, no, I didn’t.” Kurt snaps. “So I’d really appreciate it if you could keep your comments to yourself this morning.”

“Damn Hummel. You’re grumpier than usual.” Santana squints from across the table. “You get in a fight with your hobbit?”

At the mention of Blaine Kurt closes his eyes, feels the worry descending at the memory. “No.” Kurt opens his eyes and glares at Santana. “We didn’t fight, Santana; I can lose sleep for other reasons.” Kurt’s coarse words carry across the small space even as he stands and heads for the coffee pot.

“You trying to take my spot as head bitch?”

Kurt sighs and ducks his head as he pours himself a cup of coffee before reaching for a second
mug. Moments later he sets the steaming coffee in front of Santana and reclaims his seat. “Sorry Santana. I’m just –” Kurt pauses as he reaches for the sugar. “I’m just a little stressed.”

“I noticed. Congratulations; you now have raccoon eyes.”

Kurt’s hands involuntarily go to his face, rubbing at his eyes even as he frowns at Santana’s amused expression. “I shouldn’t have brought you coffee.”

“And here I thought we bonded over breakfast yesterday.”

Kurt eyes Santana over the rim of his coffee cup. “Mm. At least you didn’t demand we go somewhere this morning.”

Santana gestures towards the window. “The Sun’s barely up, Hummel. No bagel is good enough to force me outside this early on a Sunday.”

“Good to know.” Kurt sips his coffee, swallowing quickly when he realizes it’s still a few degrees too hot.

“I need food though.” Santana adds as she sets her own mug down. “We still have eggs?”

“What?” Kurt’s coffee hasn’t fully kicked in yet and thoughts of Blaine have him unable to keep up with Santana’s changing topics.

“Eggs. Hummel.” Santana keeps her eyes on him as she quickly ties her hair into a pony tail. “We still have some?”

“Yes, last I checked.”

“Right.” Santana pushes back her chair. “Scrambled okay?”

“You’re cooking?”

Santana turns back to face Kurt on her way to the kitchen. “Yes. I can handle scrambling eggs and toast. Besides,” Santana smirks, “You look about ready to fall over. You’d burn the apartment down.”


“Don’t get used to it; I just don’t want to have a find a new place to live if you set this place on fire. And,” Santana turns to face him after closing the door of the fridge. “I expect to hear the story behind those bags under your eyes, when you’re up for it.”

Kurt thinks back about his fear from the day before, his continued worry for Blaine, his anger at Blaine’s parents; it would be nice to share at least some of it, and Santana is hard enough – unlike Rachel who still can stun him with her naiveté – to view the topic with a realistic outlook and not burst into tears.

Kurt nods.

_*_*_*_*_*_

Blaine jolts himself awake, breathing harsh as he takes in the sunlight sneaking in through the closed blinds. Shadows dance across the wall, creating shapes and discarding them just as quickly. The light shifts and –
The glint from his cufflink cuts through the shadows, a bright point of focus against the concrete. Dress shoes moving away.

“Be a man, Anderson!”

The dress shoes lengthen. His father stares down with cold eyes. “Why couldn’t you be the man we raised you to be?”

Blaine shakes his head, scattering the remnants of the nightmare, and pushes aside the blankets. Standing, he grabs his phone from the bedside table before turning and snapping a picture of the mussed bed.

Text message from Blaine:
[photo] Not quite as comfy as I remember it...

Text message from Kurt:
:( Mine’s missing something, too

Text message from Kurt:
Did you sleep okay?

Blaine thinks back over the times he’d woken gasping, breath harsh and heart pounding. Still, he’d slept longer than he had at his parent’s house.

Text message from Blaine:
Mostly. Woke up a few times...

Text message from Kurt:
:( I’m sending you hugs!

Text message from Blaine:
Your hugs are the best ;)

Text message from Kurt:
I’ll remember you said that!

Text message from Blaine:
Good!

Blaine smiles as he pockets his phone and exits the room, intent on coffee. In the kitchen minutes later Blaine hesitates before pulling the jar of coffee from the cabinet; he’s familiar with the Hudson-Hummel kitchen, but he’s never cooked there – or made coffee – while alone. It’s odd, working in someone else’s kitchen, but the mundane act of brewing coffee settles his nerves.

After pouring himself a steaming cup he turns and takes a seat at the table, wincing when his shoulder hits the wood of the chair. Sighing, he stares into his coffee cup, waits for the sharp burst of pain to subside. Moments later, Blaine raises his mug and lightly blows at the steam before cautiously taking a sip. His mind wanders, flashing to his nightmares – to his father’s shuttered
face as he’d ordered Blaine to leave.

Blaine knows it was smart to leave – to run – but a small, weary part of him is so *tired* of running.

He ran from Marysville High.

And now he’s run from his own house. Absently, he wonders what it says that he feels more at home in his fiancé’s parents’ kitchen than his own parents’ house; he wonders if it’s worse that it was true before what happened yesterday. Blaine closes his eyes.

**Breathe in. ** *It was yesterday.*

**Breathe out. ** *Move on; it’s a new day.*

“Oh, you made coffee.” Blaine opens his eyes as Carole enters the kitchen. “I always love the smell of coffee in the morning.”

Blaine smiles into his coffee cup and makes a show of inhaling the scent. “Mm. It was one thing I liked when Kurt was working at the Lima Bean, even though I knew he hated it there.”

“Mm,” Carole hums as she pours her own mug of coffee before turning to face Blaine, “He did hate it though; washed every shirt he wore twice.”

Blaine breathes a small laugh before freezing as the pain in his cheek returns. “I can see him doing that.” Blaine adds quickly, before turning away and briefly bringing a hand to his face.

“I had to buy laundry detergent twice as often.” Carole stands by the table, facing Blaine and putting an ice pack and two Tylenol in front of him with a smile.

Blaine stares for a moment, absently wondering how he missed the sound of Carole retrieving the items before taking in the expectant look on her face and swallowing the pills with a sip of coffee. Then, giving Carole a smile he dramatically raises the ice pack to his cheek, managing to only jerk a little when the cold touches his skin.

“Thanks.”

“Of course, Blaine. Any dizziness this morning?”

“Only when I came down the stairs. I’m fine now, though.”

“Hm.” Carole tilts Blaine’s head, carefully checking where the bump still stings. “Sorry; I know it’s tender. Doesn’t look any worse than yesterday, though.” Stepping back, she shakes her head, huffs a laugh and she takes a seat. “Only you would remember to brew coffee but not get pain killers.”

“Coffee’s important,” Burt adds as he enters the room and heads for the pot and grabs a mug from the cabinet. “Not as important as some things,” Burt pointedly looks at the ice pack Blaine’s still holding, “but still important.”

Blaine ducks his head in embarrassment, glad for the ice that hides the resulting blush. When he glances up again, Burt and Carole have joined him at the table. There’s silence before Burt sets his mug down with a sigh and catches Blaine’s gaze.

“So.” Burt’s voice carries a weight Blaine hasn’t heard before, and he leans forward in response. “I won’t do anything without your okay, but I went ahead and did some research last night. Now, I
Blaine nods and pulls his phone from his pocket, giving Burt and Carole a small smile as his phone dials.

“Please say you’re calling to provide a respite from Rachel and Santana’s feud.”

“Partly?” Blaine swallows and continues. “Your dad wanted to talk about – he wants to talk about what we’re going to do, but you have a say too, so you can be on speaker and hear what’s going on?”

“Of course.” Kurt’s voice takes on a serious edge, not even hinting at the dramatic emphasis from before.

Blaine pulls the phone away and turns on the speaker before placing it in the center of the table.

“Hi Kurt.” Carole takes a sip of her coffee as Burt adds his hello and questions Kurt about his weekend. Following a lull in the conversation, Burt clears his throat and Blaine looks up from where he’d been studying the swirls in his coffee.

“Okay. So Blaine after what happened,” Burt quickly glances at the ice pack Blaine’s still holding. “I looked into what we could do. I know you don’t want to involve the police or CPS,” Burt pauses and only continues after Blaine’s nod. “So I was thinking I could go see your parents and see about appointing a guardian. Now,” Burt holds Blaine’s gaze. “You got a couple of options with that. Since he’s over eighteen, your brother could be named; I know you’ve been talking to him again.”

“I am. But,” Blaine shrugs his shoulders. “Cooper is – he’s really focused on his work in California. I don’t –” Blaine pauses, searching for words. “We talk, but I don’t think he knows me that well. You said there were a couple options?”

Burt nods. “The other option. Well,” Burt glances at Carole, “If you felt comfortable, Carole and I could ask your parents to appoint us as guardians.”

“What does that mean, exactly?” Kurt’s question echoes the thoughts racing through Blaine’s mind.

“It’s been ten minutes.” Carole’s voice breaks through Blaine’s contemplation. She nods towards his ice pack at Blaine’s confused look, and he gives her a sheepish smile as he sets the compress on the table.

“I’d do the same thing I’m doing now; be there for Blaine,” Burt states, answering Kurt’s question, “But it would be official in the eyes of the law.”

Blaine glances between the Hudson-Hummels and tightens his grip on his coffee mug. “Please don’t think I’m not grateful; you’ve been wonderful. But Mom flies out some time tomorrow, and Dad leaves Tuesday, so I’m not sure this is really necessary – I know you’re both busy.”

“Blaine –”

“Kurt,” Burt interrupts Kurt, his voice carrying over the phone’s speaker as he focuses on Blaine. “Blaine…I don’t want to pressure you. And we wouldn’t,” Burt rubs his right hand over his face before continuing. “We wouldn’t be trying to replace your parents, and you’ve done an amazing job on your own while your parents have been away, but Blaine no one should have to deal with what you went through yesterday. You’re a great kid, but you’re still a kid at least for a little while
longer. Let us be there for you.”

Silence blankets the kitchen as Blaine thinks over the comment.

“It’s your decision,” Kurt breaks Blaine’s reverie. “But for what it’s worth, Dad and Carole are great at support.”

Blaine smiles. “I already knew that.” He looks to the Hudson-Hummels and finishes his coffee. “If – if you’re sure you don’t mind.”

“ Wouldn’t have offered if we didn’t mean it, kid.” Burt smiles and Carole nods.

Blaine ducks his head as he smiles. “Thank you.”

“You’re family, Blaine.” Kurt’s response has heat rushing to Blaine’s cheeks, and his smile grows.

“Well,” Blaine raises his head at Burt’s comment. “Sounds like we’ve got this settled.” He nods to Blaine. “I’m gonna go see your parents since they’re not in town for much longer. Why don’t you grab some breakfast –” Burt holds up a hand to forestall Carole’s comment. “I’ll grab something on the way back; one late lunch won’t kill me.”

“Something healthy!” The admonishment, slightly crackly through the phone’s speaker, has Burt shaking his head even as he smiles.

“ Talk to your fiancé, Kurt.”

Beneath his fingers, the pillow flattens, the stuffing forced to spread and balloon around Kurt’s hand. “ Really?! That’s barely even a dress! It looks like a five-year-old got bored in art class and instead of putting the tissue paper on the piñata decided to tie it around a person! No one wants to see that much of someone in public! And she cheated!”

“Embrace the stereotype some more, Hummel; I’ll post this to YouTube and be rich within the hour.”

Kurt shoots Santana a glare. “She cheated, Santana. And the judges are obviously blind because that is not a dress by any definition.”

Santana smirks as she glances at the screen. “Not a fan of the female form?”

“This show is supposed to be about fashion! That,” Kurt waves his free hand toward the screen, “isn’t fashion.” He narrows his eyes at Santana when she continues to smirk. “I don’t even know how that made it past the censors.”

“I really should be filming this.”

Kurt just continues to glare.

“You’ve been twitchy all day, and while I’m enjoying your cliché reaction to bad reality TV, this is a bit much. Even for you.”

“ Fashion had no role in the creation of that dress.”

“You’re more gay than I thought.” Seeing Kurt’s incredulous look she continues as she takes a seat beside him. “You’re snapping and strangling pillows.”
Kurt releases the pillow with a sigh, absently running his fingers over it to smooth out the creases and lumps. “It was a bad episode.”

Santana stares, undeterred.

“I just wanted to relax and get lost in some mindless television, but apparently even the T.V. is against me today.”

“The real world not good enough for you?”

Kurt turns to face Santana. “I’m sure you’ve had days you wanted to ignore the world, Santana.”

“Hm.” Santana leans back on the sofa, and catches Kurt’s gaze. “Maybe I have, but I thought everything was perfect,” a quick glance to the ring shining on Kurt’s finger, “in the life of Kurt Hummel.”

Kurt twists the ring with his right hand, looking away from Santana. “It should be, right?”

“Starting to regret promising to spend your life with a hobbit?”

Kurt turns so quickly he almost falls on the couch. “No! Why do you always say things like that? I can’t wait to marry Blaine!”

Santana shrugs. “You’re the one ticked off at a television show and looking like you haven’t slept in days.”

“Thanks, Santana. You always know how to make me feel better.”

Santana rolls her eyes. “You gonna talk now or keep making me wait while you avoid the topic?”

“I don’t –” Kurt cuts himself off and sighs. “I don’t want to betray Blaine’s trust, but this is... difficult. If I – If I tell you, you can’t interrupt me. And please, Santana, just this once, I need you to not – I need you to just listen.”

“I may be a bitch, but I do have some social skills.”

Kurt gives her a small smile and takes a steadying breath. “You know Blaine’s parents aren’t really around. They didn’t come and see West Side Story and never came to any concerts. They’re just... not involved. But they’ve never really...accepted Blaine.” Kurt shares a glance with Santana. “They’d never really said anything outright, at least not that he shared. But it was the thing no one really talked about. Anyway,” Kurt looks at his ring, considering. “They’ve both been home this past week, and things...things changed.”

Santana’s eyes narrow and she leans forward. “You’re being annoyingly vague, Hummel.”

“This isn’t the most fun conversation. Sorry if I’m not immediately jumping in.”

Santana manages to look confused, worried, and annoyed all at once. Kurt sighs and closes his eyes; opening them, he takes a breath and begins to speak.

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Burt turns off the car’s engine and sits for a moment, releasing a breath. Grabbing his keys he exits the car and locks it after retrieving the bag from the back seat. Moments later he’s entered the house, dropped the bag in the living room, and finds Carole in the kitchen, chopping celery.
“How’d it go? You were gone a while!” Carole’s voice catches, and Burt hears the worry beneath the lines. “Blaine’s upstairs, so you don’t have to sugar coat it.”

“They didn’t fight me on it. They just –” Burt rubs his hands over his face and takes a seat at the table. “Part of me’s glad; I didn’t have to fight them on it. But, I showed them the papers I got from Greg – that’s partly what took so long, had to go by his office – and they just signed on the dotted line.”

“Well, it’s not like after yesterday they could think they’re in the right.”

“His mother had a bag for me; said she was glad Blaine felt comfortable here. Stood up for her husband too; apparently he’s going back to anger management classes.”

Carole turns from the counter to face her husband. “That’s something, at least.”

Burt huffs and rolls his eyes. “Sure. After asking if I wanted coffee he admitted his temper got control yesterday, and he went too far but he didn’t actually admit that he had no reason to be that ticked in the first place. I knew from Blaine that they weren’t the most accepting of people, but to see it…” Burt shakes his head. “I just don’t see how parents can be so indifferent to their kid.”

“Not every kid’s lucky enough to have a Burt Hummel for a father.”

Burt gives a small smile. “Not that special; just common decency, really.”

Carole hums in reply and turns back to the counter.

“You know they thanked me? After – I was gettin’ ready to leave and they thanked me! People are always saying politicians are the polite ones hiding something but those two – I didn’t know it was possible for a conversation to be that formal and polite.”

“Now you know where Blaine got his manners.”

“Thought it was an act at first, but he genuinely means it.”

“He’s a good kid; Kurt’s lucky to have found him.”

“Mm.” Burt leans back in his chair, relaxing. “They’re good for each other. I don’t know what Kurt would’ve done his Junior year without him.”

Carole turns and opens a cabinet, pulling out a frying pan. “Kurt’s a survivor; he’d have been okay, but Blaine helped more than we know, I’m sure. And Kurt’s helped Blaine too – he’s much more open than the boy we met at the football game.”

Carole opens her mouth to continue but Blaine enters the kitchen, ear buds in and humming along to whatever song must be playing. It takes a moment for the scene to click, but then Blaine startles to a stop, jerking out his headphones and shoving them in the front pocket of his hoodie.

“Sorry!” Blaine faces Burt and bites his lip. “I didn’t mean to interrupt; I didn’t realize you were back.”

Burt gives Blaine a smile. “You didn’t; I was actually just about to go find you.”

“Oh?” Blaine’s voice is quiet, cautious.

“Nothing bad, kid. Everything worked out – paperwork’s being processed. Now,” Burt pauses and reaches into his pocket; pulls out a key. “I got this made on the way back. You can use it whenever
you want; you can stay at your parents’ house if you’d like, but consider here home, too.”

Blaine takes the key and if Burt sees the slight tremble in his fingers or the sheen in his eyes there’s no comment. “Thank-you. I know that doesn’t even begin to cover all that you’ve done, but thank-you, so much.”

Burt shares a look with Carole over Blainé’s head. “No need for that, Blaine. You’re family.”

Blaine smiles and ducks his head before turning to face Carole and gesturing to the counter. “Anything I can do to help?”

“No much left to do, actually. Dinner should be ready in about an hour.” She then glances at Blaine’s shoulder. “You can sit down and ice your shoulder, though. There’s some Tylenol in the drawer, too.”

“I don’t –” Blaine stops when Carole just raises her eyebrows.

“Best to just sit, Blaine. Carole’s a taskmaster when it comes to looking after people.”

Lying across his bed, Kurt grimaces when his iPod starts to play another upbeat song; for once his eclectic taste is music is bothering him. Still, the conversation with Santana had drained him, and despite his annoyance at the song he can’t be bothered to search for his remote.

He glances at his phone: 7:08 P.M. Two minutes since he last checked, and still no call from Blaine.

Despite feeling anxious and jittery, Kurt can’t bring himself to move from the bed; he’s still mentally exhausted and while his body wants to move, his brain has other ideas. The song continues to play and Kurt is blindly, weakly, pushing at his blankets for the small – why are docking stationremotes always so tiny? – item when Love, Love, Love cuts through the room. Kurt jolts up, getting tangled in his blankets and sheets and inadvertently pushing the phone further away. Muttering a curse he pushes the offending blankets away and grabs the phone.

“Hey.”

“Did I interrupt something? You sound out of breath.”

Kurt looks at the mess of covers on his bed. “No…I just got into a fight with my blankets.”

“Oh? How did that work out for you?”

Kurt sighs. “They didn’t fight back, so I’m taking this as a win.”

“Hm.” Blaine stays quiet, and Kurt replays the conversation and winces, shaking his head at his own insensitivity.

“So,” Kurt pauses and takes a breath, refocusing. “How are you?”

“Carole’s been making sure I take Tylenol every four hours, and I think she has some kind of psychic ability because she’s always showing up with ice or to check my head, too.”

“I taught her well.”

“Your dad never stood a chance.”
“Not really, no.” Kurt holds the phone between his cheek and shoulder, rearranging his pillows before sitting, relaxing against them. “But I’m glad Carole’s there.”

“Carole – your dad, too – they’ve both been amazing.”

“Mm. So I’m guessing Dad got everything worked out?”

There’s a sigh down the line. “Yeah. The paperwork’s been filed, at least. He gave me a bag mom had packed too.” A pause, rustling through the line before Blaine continues. “I didn’t – the clothes she packed. I don’t even remember buying them. I’ll send you a picture; the pants aren’t too bad, but the shirts. There’s plaid, Kurt.”

“Plaid can work.”

“Not this plaid.”

Kurt gives a tight laugh. “I’ll take your word for it. But other than not having fashionable clothes, things are okay?”

Blaine sighs, and then begins to speak, his voice catching. “Your dad. He um – he gave me a key. Said I can stay where whenever.”

“You always could, you know. It’s just official, now. Although,” Kurt straightens, takes a moment to organize his next words, “As much as I love the thought of you being with Dad and Carole, I hate the reason why you’re there. You deserve better.”

“You make up for it. I never,” there’s a pause, “I couldn’t even have dreamed someone as amazing as you. And your parents – they’re just a wonderful bonus.”

“I love you.” Kurt tightens his grip on his phone. “And I’m so glad Dad – I don’t know what I would have done…”

“You don’t have to worry, though. I’m safe and sound in your old room. Promise.”

Kurt smiles and relaxes his grip. “I like this image. Did you steal pajamas again, too?”

“They’re comfy.”

“Mm. Did your mother happen to pack your laptop along with those clothes?”

“No,” Blaine draws out the word before continuing, “I’ll go to get it later; why?”

“I really want to see you.” Kurt’s voice takes on a persuasive edge. “I’m sure Dad will let you use his computer so we can Skype.”

“I’m not sure, Kurt.” Blaine’s voice has become soft, hesitant. “I’m not – I’m not exactly looking my best.”

Kurt swallows, hating everything about the current situation. “You have to know that doesn’t matter, right Blaine? I could never –” Kurt briefly closes his eyes. “Nothing that ever happens to you could change how I feel for you. You’re still my brave, handsome, bushy-haired fiancé.”

“Kurt…”

“Please, Blaine? I just – I just really want to see you. And I know Dad will let you borrow his laptop.”
“You seem very certain.” Blaine pauses and when he speaks again his voice has lost some of its tension. “So I’m guessing I should go find your dad?”

Kurt lets out a small laugh of relief at Blaine’s response. “Mm. Consider it a step in keeping your fiancé happy.”

Blaine’s laugh is short, but warm. “Something I always strive to do.”

Kurt pushes himself off his bed and heads for his desk. “I’ll just wait for your Skype call, then.”

Blaine laughs. “I hope your dad isn’t already using his computer; it’s never good to keep Kurt Hummel waiting.”

“You better hurry, then.” Kurt opens Skype and absently straightens his hair. “Just...I really want to see you.”

“Leaving your room now; I’ll see you soon.”

Kurt smiles and ends the call, stares at his computer. Ten minutes later he accepts Blaine’s call, and then forces himself not to react to the sight of the bruise marring Blaine’s face.

“Hi.” Blaine sounds a bit hesitant, but his face stays open.

“Hey, you.”

“Sorry.” Blaine motions to his face. “Not my best day, I know.”

Kurt’s shaking his head before Blaine even finishes his sentence. “You’re perfect.”

Blaine quirks a half smile. “You’re biased.”

“Never said I wasn’t. And my opinion is the only important one anyway.”

“Mm. Still, did I tell you your dad said I could stay home tomorrow? Carole said I need another day to rest.” Blaine’s hand moves toward his hair, and Kurt remembers his dad mentioning a bump on Blaine’s head. It’s not visible in the camera, but Kurt strains his eyes anyway.

“You certainly deserve it.” Then Kurt gives a warm smile, knows his eyes soften visibly.

“What?”

“You said home.”

“Oh.” Blaine smiles and ducks his head, and Kurt sees a wall of black before the camera catches up. “I guess I did.”

“Mm. So...” Kurt leans forward in his seat. “Ready for Nationals?”

Blaine rubs a hand over his eyes and Kurt gives a smile, ready to listen.
Hey everyone! Thanks again for all the kudos and reads! :-) I hope all of you continue to enjoy the story (and I'm still in awe at the sheer number of you!) and thanks in advance for your feedback. As always, thanks to my wonderful betas jessicamadawn, dlanadhz, and slayerkitty for checking for typos and calming my frazzled nerves ;-)
Blaine shakes his head and forces himself to not bring his hand to his face to check the makeup Kurt had hesitantly suggested he apply to cover the bruise. His drama classes have given him practice, but he still worries. Having to explain the bruise was not on his to-do list for the day.

“I’m fine; just a little tired.” Technically not a lie; Blaine’s becoming an expert at skirting the truth, even if he’s not proud of the skill. “Anyway, Tina…I think having Artie and me not have a partner might look nicer, and it wouldn’t change the whole routine; we can keep the same steps, just have small groups of three, rather than two.”

Tina scowls and mumbles something under her breath as Marley speaks up. “So are we practicing the change today? I mean, I don’t mind, really, we still have a few weeks before any performances, and a month before Nationals, but if we change it we should add it to rehearsal, instead of just focusing on vocals like we planned.”

“Good thing I brought tennis shoes.” Unique nods and reaches to steal a fry from Sam’s plate. “I can practice in heels, but first rehearsals are better done in comfortable shoes.”

Blaine smiles and nods. “Blisters are nobody’s friend.”

“Mm. I used to think cheerleading practice was the most painful thing I could do to my feet.” Kitty winces and continues, “Jumping in tennis shoes is tiring, but twirling around on stage in heels for ten minutes is worse.”

“Better not let Coach Sylvester hear you saying that,” Ryder adds with a shrug, “I’m pretty sure she’d add extra practices just to spite you.”

Kitty ducks her head and sighs. “You’re probably right.”

Blaine smiles and then jolts, dropping his fork when his phone buzzes in his pocket.

**Text message from Kurt:**

Lunch is for eating, Blaine

**Text message from Blaine:**

I should have known you have spies

**Text message from Kurt:**

Never underestimate my level of power, Blaine

**Text message from Kurt:**

And if you really wanted a salad, the salad bar is better than any prepackaged one ;)

**Text message from Blaine:**

This would be creepy if I didn’t know you loved me

**Text message from Kurt:**

I do love you, which is why you’re going to go get something edible. Get a pudding cup or some ice cream

**Text message from Blaine:**
I do love pudding :)

Text message from Blaine:
...dessert for lunch?

Text message from Kurt:
It’s not like it’s a regular thing. Besides, you’re getting a healthy dinner ;)

Blaine huffs a laugh even as he looks around the lunch table. “I know Kurt can be terrifying, but spying guys? Really?” His friends look back with varying levels of embarrassment and confusion.

“I don’t know about spying, but Kurt can be scary, man.”

“Sure Sam.” Blaine shakes his head as he stands from the table, still holding his phone.

Text message from Blaine:
You trained your spies well.

Text message from Kurt:
;

Text message from Kurt:

Kurt’s sick of the library.

Sighing, Kurt closes his bag and stands, slowly making his way out of the now empty room. He absently rubs his eyes, hoping the pressure will relieve some of the ache brought on by tiredness. He wants to call Blaine, but there’s Glee practice right now, so Kurt has to wait. In the hallway Kurt pauses: the exit to the right is closer to the subway, heading for home; to the left leads him back toward the city. Kurt puts in his ear buds and presses play on his iPod as he turns left – he’ll stop by his favorite coffee shop, read there rather than at the loft.

He hums along to You and Me as he makes his way out of the building and onto the crowded sidewalk. Two songs later Kurt pulls out his ear buds and puts them in his pocket with his iPod as he enters the coffee shop, taking in the smell of coffee, different enough to not bring back traumatizing memories of his time as a barista.

He stands in line and then orders a mocha, idly gazing at the other customers while he waits. The couple in the corner is having some sort of argument – Kurt decides it’s playful, based on their body language; the hipster on his laptop, pretending to type; Kurt’s halfway through forming a story about the girl sitting alone by the window when his name is called.

Moments later he’s seated at an empty table, steam rising from the mug in front of him. He pulls out some of his books and his notebook before digging through his bag for a pen. Finally finding one, he adds it to the collection of items on the table and pulls out his phone.
[photo] Coffee and homework. At least the coffee is delicious – I can't wait to bring you here!

Setting his phone aside, Kurt sighs and picks up his book. Since Blaine hadn’t gone to school the day before, Kurt had taken advantage of the fact and they had Skyped for hours. Unfortunately, now Kurt had to catch up on the reading he hadn’t done the day before. He takes a sip of his coffee before pulling out his iPod; time to focus.

Hands land on his shoulders, and Kurt jumps, almost falling out of his chair with a sound he’ll deny later.

“Sorry! I couldn’t resist!” Kurt spins at Dani’s voice, shooting her a glare, blinks when Elliott waves from where he’s standing next to her. “We were walking by and saw you through the window.”

Kurt turns to look out the window and notes the darkened sky; he’d been reading for longer than he thought – no wonder his stomach was pleading with him.

“You don’t mind if we join you?” Elliott gestures to the covered table, “We met for dinner to talk about the band. We were heading to the Guitar Emporium to look at music but Dani saw you and we thought we’d say hi.”

Kurt’s already piling his books and papers, clearing space on the table. “It’s no problem; a break would be awesome.” Kurt pauses and looks toward the counter. “But unlike you, I haven’t had dinner, so I’m going to grab a sandwich.”

“Oh! Here!” Dani hands him a few crumpled bills. “Can you get me a muffin? Any flavor’s fine.”

Kurt takes the money with a nod, moving to get in line as Elliott and Dani sit at the table. Minutes later he returns. “To match your hair,” Kurt comments with a smile as he slides a blueberry muffin and some change across to her.

Dani accepts the muffin with a laugh. “Nice, Kurt. Thanks.”

“So you two were talking about the band?” Kurt forcibly keeps his voice even, hiding his unease about the fact that two of his bandmates – the two ‘rockstar’ members – had met to discuss the band without him.

“Mm.” Elliott nods and turns to Dani. “After we did I Believe in a Thing Called Love I was really feeling rock songs, so I asked Dani to meet up to brainstorm since next to me she has the most free time.”

“I was thinking some AC/DC or Bon Jovi –”

“Runaway would be so amazing!” Elliott cuts into Dani’s comment and continues, leaning forward in his excitement.

Kurt takes a bite of his sandwich.

Dani and Elliott continue to excitedly talk over songs that Kurt wouldn’t choose for himself and his thoughts turn to Blaine. Despite their hours of conversation the day before, Kurt still has trouble wrapping his head around the events. He’s known, logically, that he lucked out with his dad and Carole. It’s a fact. But even when he’s unnecessarily worried about his dad’s reaction to his sexuality – he’d worried about his dad’s thoughts, being judged, but it never even crossed his mind
that his dad could *hurt* him.

“– not even listening.” A snap, and Kurt startles in his chair, meeting the gazes of Elliott and Dani.

“Sorry.” Kurt gives an apologetic smile. “Been a long day, you know?”

“Thinking about your fiancé?” At Kurt’s questioning looking Dani continues with a shrug. “Santana said he’s going through some things.”

Kurt feels his shoulders slump, sighs and quickly rubs his hands over eyes. Part of him is irritated at Santana, but it’s a smaller part of him than he would have believed a year ago. Outside opinions and ideas help a person grow; college has taught him that if nothing else, and Elliott and Dani haven’t met Blaine – they have their own histories, and no bias.

“Can I ask you guys a personal question? There’s a reason I’m asking, and you don’t have to answer, but…”

“I’m game.” Dani leans forward before Kurt has even finish his question. “Personal questions always have the best conversations.”

"How,” Kurt pauses, takes a sip of his drink, “How did your families react when you came out?”

Dani speaks first, breaking the brief silence. “There was yelling. Lots of yelling, actually. I’m surprised the neighbors didn’t call in a noise complaint since I’m pretty sure a Hellmouth formed in the basement that night.” Dani shrugs, so nonchalantly that Kurt can’t tell if it’s a practiced motion or an honest one. “I grabbed my guitar and some clothes and never looked back. I’m not a fan of yelling.”

“Never?” Kurt can’t keep the shock out of his voice; he can’t imagine just leaving his dad and Carole.

“Nope.” Dani pops to ‘p’ of the word, seemingly at ease. “For all I know they could have had some kind of revelation and are now members of PFLAG. But I doubt it, and I can’t say I’m worse off by having cut those ties.”

Kurt thinks over Dani’s words, pushing away the initial shock and horror brought on by her story, despite its short description, and twists his ring. “Blaine’s parents never – they never really accepted him, you know? It was mostly just little comments, small things. But they both travel a lot, so it was just the elephant in the room for the few days they were home.” Kurt sees Elliott and Dani nod and calms his thoughts, forcing his voice to stay even when he continues. “He called me on Saturday. He – he could barely get a word out. His dad –” Kurt stops, slowly lets out a breath, focuses on the twist of the ring on his finger. “His dad hit him; Blaine fell back and hit a wall.”

“He’s okay?” Elliott’s voice rings with sincerity and Kurt offers him a small smile.

“He’s got some bruises. He’s actually staying with my parents right now; Dad and Carole already see him as family. But Blaine – he bottles things up, doesn’t want to risk letting anyone down or worrying me. And I want to help him – more than anything, really – but I’ve never dealt with something like this. We Skyped all day yesterday, and the whole time I was afraid I’d say the wrong thing.”

“I’m sure you said all the right things.” Elliott’s comment has Kurt meeting his gaze across the table. “It’s obvious you love him; that’s the best thing he can hear right now.”

“Yeah,” Dani agrees, snagging a chip from Kurt’s plate. “After I left, things were hard for a while,
but I used to dream about meeting that perfect girl who I’d know was always in my corner, you know?”

Kurt nods, remembering Blaine’s heart-felt ‘thank-yous’ and the gratitude expressed in every conversation. “He does know that. I just can’t help but feel like I’m not doing enough, especially since I couldn’t get on a plane…”

“You were still there for him. You said he called you, right?” Kurt nods at Elliott’s question. “Then just focus on that; he called you. And you answered. That says a lot.”

Kurt gives Elliott a half-smile. “Any other words of wisdom? I don’t want to monopolize your time, but you both have been so helpful and it’s…a relief, getting decent advice in the city.”

“No problem,” Elliott says with a smile and a glance at Dani, “this is important.”

Kurt relaxes slightly in his chair and smiles, ready to listen.

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Blaine sits cross-legged on Kurt’s old bed, papers and books spread out around him like debris from an impact as he works on his homework. Burt had taken him back to his parents’ house the day before so he could grab the stuff he needed for school along with some clothes (not pajamas, because why fill his bag when Kurt’s were more comfortable anyway?) and his much missed laptop.

Now, Blaine glares at his calculus book as he absently taps a rhythm with his pencil on his borrowed pajamas pants. Tina’s notes helped some but the current homework assignment seemed to be making his headache worse, despite the Tylenol he’d taken earlier. He had completed his other homework first, hoping that putting off the calc problems would give his headache time to recede.

Of course, even after an hour and a half, the headache still pulses behind his eyes.

Blaine sighs and glances at his phone.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Calculus and headaches don’t mix well :(

*Text message from Kurt:*

I’m sorry :(  

*Text message from Kurt:*

I’m guessing you already took some meds…take a break?

*Text message from Blaine:*

Yeah – and only 4 problems left. If I take a break I just won’t finish them

*Text message from Kurt:*

You have 45 minutes and then I’m calling – you’re more important than calc! :)  

Blaine shakes his head with a smile and turns back to his book with a sigh, picking up his graphing
calculator. An empty eraser and forty minutes later Blaine snaps the book shut, gathering the various papers and throwing it all in his bag. Moments later he’s back on the bed, snatching his phone and dialing.

“Three minutes to spare; I’m impressed.” Kurt’s teasing voice has Blaine smiling, unable to hold it in.

“You always give me the best incentives.”

“Well, I certainly try.” Blaine shuffles on the bed, leaning back against the pillows when Kurt continues. “So, school was okay?”

“Mm.” Blaine sighs. “It wasn’t horrible, but Glee was exhausting. We’re changing the choreography a bit – which made Tina…irritated – and it wasn’t too much, but we danced for most of rehearsal.”

“Did,” Kurt pauses, “Did that go okay? You didn’t push yourself too hard, right? You have to look after yourself, Blaine.”

“I’m okay, promise!” Blaine can hear the earnestness in his voice. “Just tired.”

“Well,” Kurt draws out the word, “Why don’t we go to bed soon – we both need our sleep.”

“Soon, sure, but how are you?”

“I’m –” Kurt sighs. “I’m okay – it was just a long day. Dani and Elliott found me at the coffee shop earlier; we talked for a bit, but…”

“But what?” Blaine leans forward a bit, even though Kurt can’t see him.

“They met up without me to talk about songs for the band.” Kurt’s voice has an edge to it, a touch of stress. “Rock songs…that they thought about without me.”

“They met with you later though, Kurt. That has to count for something, right?”

“Not on purpose.” Kurt’s voice has gone quiet. “Dani saw me through the window; if I hadn’t been sitting there I wouldn’t have known. They would have had their rock song planning session and I’d be none the wiser.”

“Kurt,” Blaine pauses, searching for words of comfort, “I think the point is that they did find you. I’m not –” Blaine cuts himself off, takes a breath. “I’m not saying that you shouldn’t be upset that they talked without you, but they didn’t hide it. And…maybe it’s a good thing? They’re so invested in the band that they’re taking the time to think about songs for you guys to perform.”

“Maybe.” Kurt sighs. “Sorry. I don’t mean to sound so paranoid; I’m just nervous, I guess.”

“You’re not paranoid, Kurt.” At Kurt’s slight laugh Blaine reconsiders. “Okay, maybe just a little, but it’s nothing you have to apologize for; I like that you’re so focused on your band. And it is your band, so it makes sense that you’d be…concerned, when people talk about it without you. Still,” Blaine pauses and runs the fingers of his left hand over the comforter. “I don’t think they meant anything malicious by it – they did include you, after all.”

“Mm. You’re right, I know you are – I just don’t like being excluded.”
“I know.” Blaine pauses, thinking back to the times in Glee when Kurt had been left out of gatherings simply because of his sexuality; he lets out a steady breath to release the residual anger from the past events. “Maybe…maybe you could talk to them about it? Try and set up band meetings outside of rehearsal?”

“Yes Blaine, because the first thing I want to do is show the new members the band my neurosis.” The teasing lilt takes any sting out of Kurt’s words, and Blaine laughs.

“Okay, okay. Well then, I guess you’ll just have to keep listening, then. And from what I’ve heard, Elliott and Dani seem like decent people, so I’m sure things will work out. Besides,” Blaine smiles and hopes Kurt can hear the truth of his next words. “You’re amazing Kurt – they’d have to be idiots to not take full advantage of your talent.”

“And that’s your completely unbiased opinion, of course.”

“Oh, I’m totally biased, but that doesn’t make it any less true.”

“I’m going to ignore the fallacies in that statement and accept it as it was intended.”

Blaine lets out a small laugh. “You should. I meant it, you know.”

“I did get that impression.” Blaine can picture the smile on Kurt’s face.

“Good.”

A brief pause of comfortable silence and then Blaine tries to hide his yawn. “I heard that, Blaine. It’s late; we should be getting ready for bed.”

Blaine pushes down the irrational spike of apprehension at the thought of hanging up the phone. “Hm. I just need to brush my teeth.”

“Me too. So…five minutes?”

Blaine agrees and heads to the bathroom, quickly brushing his teeth while focusing on the joy he feels from seeing his hair gel and toothpaste in Kurt’s bathroom. Finishing, Blaine exits the room, turning off the overhead light and settles in Kurt’s bed, moving the blankets and lying on his side before getting his phone from the nightstand.

“Kurt?”

There’s rustling for a moment, “Hey. Sorry, just had to fix these blankets.”

Blaine laughs. “I did, too. Your comforter decided to be tricky.”

“Hm…sounds like they’re out to get us.”

“I think we’ll win.”

Kurt laughs and then proceeds to ask Blaine more about his day, pulling out Blaine’s concerns about the rest of Glee seeing the make-up, his worry about the troublesome accompaniment to their second song for Nationals, his concern over Tina’s increasing complaints about Glee – until he yawned.

“I think the day is catching up with us; we should sleep.” Kurt gives a tired laugh. “And yes, I know I said that earlier, but I mean it this time. We’ll talk tomorrow, after all.”
“Mm,” Blaine agrees. “Night Kurt; sleep well.”

“You too – sweet dreams. I love you.”

“Love you too.” Blaine ends the call with a press of his finger, smiling until the picture fades.

-_*_*_*_*_

Blaine wakens with a jolt; blankets twisting and his eyes searching for light in the dark grey of the silent room –

Laughter fades. Streaks of color and blaring sound before there’s nothing. Blaine lays in silence, everything dark outside the radius of the streetlamp.

The house echoes in silence; in front of him, his father stares back with cold eyes. Blaine aches, needs to run, but he’s trapped –

Hands hold him captive. Pain floods his body and he’s falling –

His phone’s harsh light stings his eyes, casts the room in a kaleidoscope of shadows.

Breathe in. It’s in the past.

Breathe out. Just another nightmare.

Two tries to unlock his phone – 2:48 A.M. – and then his heartbeat calms at the sight of Kurt, happiness shining as brightly as the ring on his finger.

Text message from Blaine:

Is it too late (early?) for NyQuil?

Blaine straightens the mess of blankets, pulls the comforter back from where it’s half off the bed. The vibration of his phone has him scrambling to grab it even as he forces himself to calm.

Text message from Kurt:

Probably, and it might not help :(

Text message from Kurt:

Do you have your iPod?

Text message from Blaine:

Yes?

Text message from Kurt:

Get it. Put on our playlist, okay?

Ensconced back in the blankets moments later, iPod beside him and headphones softly playing, Blaine reaches again for his phone.

Text message from Kurt:

I’m right here.
Text message from Blaine:

I love you <3

Text message from Kurt:

Love you too – forever. Sleep well

Text message from Kurt:

Courage. <3

Blaine closes his eyes with a smile: he has the best fiancé who has the best ideas.

Carole finishes pouring her cup of coffee and turns when Burt enters the kitchen, smiling when he joins her at the counter.

“Good morning.”

“Hm.” Burt takes a sip of steaming coffee. “Morning.”

“If only your constituents knew that Congressman Burt Hummel isn’t a morning person.”

Burt gives Carole a playful glare as he moves around the kitchen. “At least they would agree with me, I’m sure. I represent the people, after all.”

“Mm.” Carole smiles over the rim of her coffee cup. “And for those that are shocked?”

Burt half-heartedly shrugs while grabbing his toast. “Their choice; not like I agree with everyone.”

Burt grimaces. “Some more than others.”

“Burt –” Carole takes a step forward and rests a hand on his shoulder.

“His mother left. I get that she’s a bit clueless, but going on vacation after what happened? Not even a note.” Burt shakes his head. “I get his father,” Burt winces at the word, a bad taste in his mouth, “I get why he made himself scarce two days ago. But I just can’t understand it, Carole.”

“I think,” Carole takes a breath, forces her voice steady. “This is something we can’t understand.”

“The day I do you better sign me up for therapy.”

Carole sighs. “You start relating to those people and I’ll worry for your mental health.” Carole steps back, takes a seat at the table in front of her oatmeal and Burt joins her moments later.

Blaine enters the kitchen with a slight smile and wave, and Carole holds in a sigh as she takes in the paleness of his skin (despite the slight sheen of makeup) and the shadows under his eyes.

“Good morning.” Blaine nods as he heads for the coffee pot. Moments later he’s joined them at the table, copying Burt’s breakfast of coffee and toast. This early in the morning, conversation is limited, generic questions about plans for the day and Burt’s short trip to Washington in two weeks.

Still, Blaine manages to evade Burt’s question about his sleep the night before, and Burt and Carole share a glance as Blaine pours coffee into a travel mug behind them. Moments later Blaine
exits the kitchen with a wave, promising Burt he’ll see him in the shop that afternoon.

“Kid doesn’t know how to take it easy,” Burt’s comments as the front door closes. “Don’t worry,” Burt adds at Carole’s look, “He’s getting breaks whether he wants them or not.”

_.*.*.*._

Blaine balances his coffee cup in his left hand as he straightens with his bag on his shoulder and attempts to shut his car door and lock it one handed. Shoving his keys in his pocket moments later, Blaine turns to find Sam walking toward him.

“Oh man.” Sam nods toward Blaine’s mug. “I left my Monster at Ryder’s house.”

Blaine scrunches his nose. “I still don’t know how you drink that stuff.”

“I don’t know how you drink that.” Sam shudders and points to the coffee. “That is disgusting. Monster though, it’s amazing and –”

Blaine jumps, spilling some of his coffee (despite the lid) and not hearing the rest of Sam’s comment as the screech of a car echoes throughout the lot.

“Whoa!” Sam’s exclamation has Blaine turning, cheeks flushing in embarrassment as Sam continues to talk. “– okay? I guess someone had their caffeine.”

Blaine forces a laugh. “Fine, I’m fine. Just startled.” He smiles continues to nod as Sam starts recounting Ryder’s disastrous attempt at dinner the night before. Minutes later they enter the school, the discordant sound of voices echoing in the hallway.

“You just let them get that goal! You didn’t even fight the –”

Blaine jolts, lost in nightmares –

“*Hemos couldn’t even put up a fight and make it fun!”*

“– lost the game!”

“Blaine, you okay?” Blaine blinks, quickly turning his head to face Sam, seeing two jocks down the hall as he does so. “You’re getting clumsy.”

Blaine bites back a sigh at the splash of coffee on his hand, the small puddle on the tile floor. “Apparently Wednesdays aren’t my day.” Blaine gives a distracted smile. “I’m gonna head to the bathroom,” Blaine nods toward his hand, “wash this off.”

Entering the bathroom, Blaine hides his grimace at the sight of its occupants, the unknown underclassmen with limited fashion sense laughing with the occasional jock proudly wearing the unshapely letterman jacket. Sighing at the lack of privacy, he makes his way to the sink, carefully setting his cup (lines of spilt coffee visible down the side) on the rim before grabbing some paper towels.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] Clumsiness isn’t good for coffee

Text message from Blaine:

And don’t worry – I have no plans to drink any remnants after the cup’s been in the bathroom
Text message from Kurt:

Oh no! :(

Blaine sighs and rinses off his hand before emptying the cup.

Text message from Blaine:

I really needed that coffee, too

Text message from Kurt:

:( I'm sorry.

Text message from Kurt

I love you. <3

In spite of his now empty coffee cup and the tiredness biding in the back of his mind, Blaine smiles.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to everyone for all the kudos and reads! :) I'm still in awe of you lovely people. As always, thanks to my wonderful betas slayerkitty, jessicamadawn, and dlanadhz; you girls are the best!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 10

Kurt looks up from his computer when he hears the door to the loft open, winces when he hears the shouting seconds later. The shouting was a continuation of small arguments that had occurred over the weekend; not even the holiday had given Kurt a reprieve. Sighing, Kurt pushes back his chair and briefly closes his eyes before he leaves his room.

“– and boss me around?” Kurt enters the living area and finds Santana walking after Rachel, following her around the kitchen.

“I’m not bosses you, Santana! I’m the lead in a Broadway musical! I can’t tell them I can’t make a rehearsal because I tripped trying to carry groceries up the stairs!”

Kurt stops by the sofa, wary to interfere, but close enough to speak up if needed. Still, when Santana turns to face him with a glare and a look of exasperation, he briefly wishes he’d stayed at his desk.

“Do you hear her?” Santana spins back to face Rachel. “Seriously? We’re not the help, Berry; you can carry some groceries up the stairs. Or,” Santana smirks but keeps her glare, “Should I be calling your director? Someone clumsy enough to trip while carrying a bag of food really shouldn’t be attempting to dance on stage.”

Rachel lets out a screech of annoyance and stomps forward as Kurt winces.

“You need to grow up, Santana! I got the lead in a Broadway musical, and you just can’t accept that I’m better than you. That I’m succeeding in New York while you’ve got one commercial to your name. Maybe you’ll get somewhere some day, but for now I’m the whose name is on lights, and I thought that as a roommate you’d be more supportive. But you just can’t see past your jealousy, can you?”

Kurt makes an abortive movement toward where Rachel and Santana are standing, but Santana’s already closed the space, snapping at Rachel. “We’re back to this? God, Berry, how many times do I have to say it?! So you got your dream role – newsflash, it’s not mine! I never wanted it, so for the last time, Rachel Berry, I am not jealous of you! If I’d wanted to be in Funny Girl I would’ve auditioned, and you can bet I would’ve gotten whatever role I wanted! What you need to get through your head is that getting your dream role doesn’t make you queen of the universe! Stop bossing us around; you’re not any better than us,” Santana gestures toward Kurt and Kurt mentally curses himself for leaving his room, “so you can stop the diva act, and carry the groceries and remember that most people sleep at five in the morning!”
“I have to practice! I’m sorry if my singing interferes with your sleep schedule.” Rachel’s voice drips with derision, and Kurt takes a breath, preparing to interrupt.

“Look, why don’t we just take a break –”

“Are you intentionally ignoring what I’m saying?!” Santana snaps, cutting Kurt off mid-word. “You’re not the pretty princess living with your two dads anymore. You’re sharing a loft with two roommates and you need to stop, Rachel! You’re going to be alone anyway, but the way you’re acting? You’re going to lose any friend you’ve ever had, too!”

“I’m not going to be alone!” Rachel steps back, away from Santana, shock and hurt evident as she turns to face Kurt. “Kurt, you want to be a Broadway star, maybe she’ll listen if you, as my best gay, explain it?”

Kurt takes in Rachel’s hopeful face and crosses his arms. “I’m not getting involved in this. I’m just –”

“Not taking sides?!” Rachel’s screech interrupts Kurt – apparently he won’t be able to finish a sentence today – and he takes a step forward as she continues. “I thought we were best friends, Kurt, but you’re not on my side?” Rachel spins around, her face a mix of hurt and anger and she heads to her room.

After the echoes of the argument, the silence is unnerving.

“And people say I’m the bitch.”

“Santana…” Kurt sighs and heads for the kitchen. He needs coffee.

“What? I know she’s your friend – I still don’t know how that happened – but even you have to admit she’s taking this too far.”

“I’m not getting involved, Santana. I’m Switzerland.” Kurt carefully measures out the coffee, makes sure it’s evenly spread in the filter.

“So now you’ve decided to not have an opinion?”

After pressing the button to start the coffee maker Kurt turns to face Santana. “No. I’m not getting involved.”

“Hm.” Santana picks up a bag from where it lay sideways on the floor, and starts putting away pasta and bread. “I give it a week.” Moments later, Santana closes the cabinet with a tap and breezes past Kurt on her way toward her room. “You better talk to the diva, Hummel; I’m getting tired of staying nice.”

Kurt feels his shoulders drop as Santana leaves, and drops into a chair at the table, pulling out his phone.

Text message from Kurt:

I should just invest stock in cheesecake and always buy one when I go out

Text message from Blaine:

???

Text message from Kurt:
Roommates :(  

*Text message from Blaine:*  
I love you! <3

In spite of the residual tension in the air, Kurt smiles.

*Text message from Blaine:*  
...should I be calling certain roommates? I can't have my fiancé getting upset

*Text message from Kurt:*  
My knight in shining armor, right?

*Text message from Blaine:*  
Always! ;)

-_*-*-*-*-

“Alright guys. So you all know to help all of you get ready for our first performance in two weeks I decided to bring back a Glee tradition.” Blaine shares a glance with Sam, wary of the enthusiasm Mr. Schue’s voice, wondering if Schue is going to change the lesson. “Well we’ve got our first duet today – Jake and Ryder!”

Blaine relaxes a bit in his chair; no changes, then. Sam had filled him in on the topic yesterday along with the fact that he was his partner. Although Blaine’s first choice of duet partner is currently stunning the populace of New York, he’s still looking forward to this week’s performances – and he’d already talked about song ideas with Kurt’s input.

“– can sing something tomorrow?” Blaine turns at Sam’s question, feels his eyebrows draw together in confusion.

“What?”

“Zoning out again? I just said that we could go tomorrow.”

“Oh.” Blaine smiles. “Maybe not tomorrow…Friday? I talked with Kurt; he had some ideas for us. I emailed you a couple videos.”

“You don’t trust me to come up with something on my own?”

“What? No I just – Kurt –”

Sam laughs and leans forward. “I was just kidding! I figured you’d talk to Kurt anyway, but um… no musicals? They’re fine for you and Kurt, but they’re not really part of our style, you know?”

“Yeah.” Blaine pauses for a moment, and wonders what gave Sam the idea that they’d sing something from a musical anyway; there are literally thousands of songs in other genres, and Blaine (and Kurt) know a fair amount of them. “Let me know what you think of what I sent though – they’re both easy enough for us to have done in two days.”

“We got this!”
Blaine smiles and then turns as the music starts for Jake and Ryder’s song. He shakes his head slightly as he listens to the lyrics.

Text message from Blaine:

First duet! Jake and Ryder ;)

Text message from Kurt:

Of course there’s more same sex duets after I’ve graduated…

Text message from Blaine:

Don’t worry – you’re always my first choice for a duet partner! <3

The song ends to applause and then murmurs as Jake and Ryder take their seats. Mr. Schue claps his hands in an effort to get everyone’s attention. “Okay! Any other volunteers?” When no one moves Mr. Schue continues. “Alright – the rest of you remember you’ve got two more days. But, now why don’t we head to the auditorium and get back to rehearsal for Nationals!”

“He’s only smiling because he doesn’t have to practice dancing.” Unique’s quiet comment has Blaine huffing a laugh as he stands, then turning and offering her his arm.

“Probably, but the practice can’t hurt – especially since we changed the first routine a little.”

“Oh, I knew that – I just wish he didn’t look so joyful at our pain.”

“Mm.” Blaine agrees and awkwardly shrugs one shoulder: he’s never understood Mr. Schue. “We have a goal, though, so if nothing else, just focus on that.”

“You really are a regular Prince Charming, aren’t you?”

Blaine ducks his head to hide his blush as they enter the auditorium.

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Blaine exits the auditorium with Sam, Jake, and Ryder, heading for the locker room showers. After dancing for the past hour they’re all a bit sweaty (Blaine’s secretly grateful for Kurt’s knowledge; his bruise remained hidden underneath carefully applied makeup) and Blaine wants to clean off before heading to Mr. Hummel’s shop.

“I’m going to be thinking about those moves in my sleep.” Jake’s exasperated comment has Ryder laughing.

“Your life must be pretty boring if you’re dreaming about dance moves.”

Jake shoots Ryder a glare and playfully punches him in the arm as they enter the locker room. “Not cool –”

“– like a girl! Whining all the time! Man up – this was just practice!” The jock’s mocking yell cuts off Jake’s comment, and Blaine jumps at the noise.

Sam and Jake laugh before Jake nods toward the group. “Surprised?”

“I guess they are kinda loud.” Blaine silently thanks Sam for his support, even though he had been laughing moments before.
“A bit.” Blaine shrugs and ducks his head. “I forgot other people would still be here.”

“Looks like we get to share the locker room; hopefully they’ll all be too tired to start anything.”

Ryder’s comment has Blaine tensing before he forcibly relaxes his shoulders. “Well, we won’t be in here long.”

Blaine quickly grabs his bag and heads for the shower, glad when he’s first in the room. He swiftly washes the sweat from his body – Kurt would surely critique him on his efficiency – and ducks out of the shower, grabbing his bag and an extra towel.

“Whoa dude – what happened to your back?”

Blaine tenses at Sam’s comment but keeps his head down, turned away. “Oh!” Blaine laughs, forces himself to stay still. “Was practicing at home and misjudged a jump; hit a wall.” Blaine laughs again, hopes Sam doesn’t hear the catch in his voice.

“I knew you were doing extra stuff! That’s the only way you could’ve been so awesome at rehearsal!”

“You caught me.” Blaine steps away, closer to the stalls. “I’ve gotta fix my hair, though.”

“I’m gonna tell Kurt about your obsession with your hair! It’s not normal, Blaine.” Sam’s half shout carries even over the rush of water and conversations from the other guys in the room.

Quickly entering a stall, Blaine bites back his comment that Kurt loves that Blaine cares about his appearance, and sags in relief as he pulls the makeup and hand mirror out of his bag.

Ten minutes later Blaine exits McKinley High, hair still damp from his hurried shower. In his car moments later, he sighs and loosens his grip on the steering wheel before pulling out of the lot.

By the time Blaine pulls into the parking lot of Hummel Tire & Lube he’s singing along to Pink and wondering if Burt will have him work on cars or keep him doing paperwork and miscellaneous tasks.

Text message from Blaine:

You’re a genius!

Text message from Kurt:

I know…but remind me why, again?

Briefly, Blaine considers telling a white-lie. Kurt is a genius, and Blaine hesitates at reminding his fiancé of the bruise he’s hiding. But… he had promised Kurt honesty.

Text message from Blaine:

Your recommended makeup survived dance rehearsal – I was worried I’d sweat it off!

Blaine exits the car and greets a few mechanics on his way to Burt’s office before his phone chimes in a return text.

Text message from Kurt:

You shouldn’t doubt my skills ;)
Text message from Kurt:
Although I’m sorry you still have to wear it

Blaine frowns at the message, debates his reply.

Text message from Blaine:
Not for much longer – it’s fading ;)

Text message from Blaine:
And I *never* doubt your skills – you’re my amazing, wonderful fiancé! <3

Satisfied, Blaine pockets his phone and knocks on Burt’s office doorframe.

“Hey kid.” Burt greets as he steps away from his desk. “I was just finishing up some orders. You up for helpin’ me replace a carburetor?” Burt gestures to a box on his desk. “Part just came in.”

“Sure.” Blaine steps back as Burt picks up the package and exits the office, following him to a minivan that has seen better days, given its dents.

“So,” Burt flashes Blaine a smile as he raises the hood. “How was school?”

Blaine ducks his head, warmed by the sincerity of the question. “Not too bad. No slushies, anyway.” Blaine pauses, thinking back to Ryder’s comment and his own apprehension after hearing the jocks.

“Blaine? You still here?”

Blaine shakes his head at Burt’s comment. “Sorry! Got lost in thought for a moment.” Blaine shrugs before continuing. “Jake and Ryder did their duet in Glee – I think Kurt’s jealous that there’s more segregated duets.”

Burt laughs. “I’m sure he is – he always liked singing with you the most.”

Blaine smiles. “He’s a great duet partner. He’s actually helping me think of songs for me and Sam. It’s down to two, right now.”

“I’m sure you’ll get it figured out.”

“Hm.” Blaine nods as he focuses on pulling the mailing tape off the box in his hands. “Sam’s supposed to narrow it down tonight, so then we’ll just have to practice tomorrow.”

“Make sure you sing some at the house.”

Blaine glances up in surprise at Burt’s comment, lets the half box hang lax in his hands. “I’m sorry?”

“You heard me, Blaine. It’s been too quiet – Sam’s welcome to come over. It would be nice to hear some music again.”

“I’ll text him after dinner.”

Burt takes a step closer. “Good plan. Now, you got that thing open?” At Blaine’s nod he continues. “Alright then – let’s get this finished so Carole isn’t waiting on us for dinner.”
Kurt absently wipes down the counter while he waits for the order he just placed. The diner is moderately busy, enough customers seated at the tables that he, Dani, and Santana each have at least two, and he’s sure Rachel won’t be left out when she arrives in half an hour.

“Who orders toast for dinner? Seriously.”

Kurt startles at Dani’s comment, dropping the rag so it piles in on itself. “What?”

“That’s twice this week; I’m going to start keeping a tally of all the times I make you jump.”

“Not funny.” Kurt gives Dani an unimpressed look. “Anyway, you were saying?”

“That woman.” Dani gestures to the left. “She ordered toast. That’s it. Just toast. Who does that?”

“Maybe she’s sick?” Kurt picks up the rag and places it back under the counter.

“She didn’t sound sick, and if she is, why is she out in public? But really – toast? You can make toast at home!” Dani sighs and slouches against the counter. “I’m not going to get any tip out of this.”

“At least you have an easy customer. Earlier a guy wanted a salad, but without half the ingredients that come on the salad, and two dressings on the side.”

Dani laughs and pats Kurt’s shoulder. “Welcome to New York: home of people who have ridiculous orders because it makes them feel important.”

“Ha.” Kurt turns and begins straightening some salt and pepper shakers.

“What’s up with you, anyway?”

“What?”

“You jumped again, Kurt. Something on your mind?” Dani pauses and then leans forward, catches Kurt’s gaze. “Your fiancé’s okay, right? Nothing else –”

“No! No – he’s fine.” Kurt quickly interrupts. “I just – he messaged me earlier…nothing bad, but it reminded me about what happened last week. It’s not like I forgot, really, but I…” Kurt trails off, unsure of how to voice the rest.

“You focused on other things.” Dani’s voice is soft, but confident.

“Mm.” Dani nods and then grabs the plate with two slices of toast that’s been placed on the ledge. “Oh! Remind me when we catch another break – I was talking with Elliott and we ended up running through some AC/DC. It was awesome! Anyway, we can up with some modifications for doing it with the whole band and I brought the music to show you.”

Kurt gives a tense smile. “Great. I can’t wait to see it.”

Dani smiles and then steps away. Moments later one of Kurt’s customers catches his eye and he heads over, hoping the man just wants some extra dipping sauce or other inane item.

Minutes later, Kurt returns to the counter (having successfully gotten the man some honey
mustard) and begins pulling out cups to preemptively make refills.

“If one more person asks me if I’m from Mexico I’m going to start cursing in Spanish.”

“I don’t think that will help with the misconception.” Kurt grabs the full cup of Diet Coke and places it on a tray, moving to fill another with Sprite.

“Not the point, Hummel.” Santana leans against the counter and stretches her arms in front of her.

Kurt grabs the now filled glass before glancing out at the tables and grabbing one more, filling with the Coke. “I don’t think I want to know what the point is.”

“Probably not.” Santana shrugs. “But I figure if they’re gonna assume I’m not an American I might as well curse them in a language they don’t understand.”

“And if they speak Spanish?” Kurt places the last cup on the tray and lifts it, turning to fully face Santana.

Santana smirks. “Then they’ll fully appreciate my creativity.”

Kurt steps around Santana and pauses before heading for his tables. “They might, but I don’t think Gunther would.” Kurt takes the time to appreciate the glare Santana gives him before he leaves.

An hour later, Kurt slouches against the window to the kitchen, tired but waiting for the three orders he placed minutes ago. With the diner so full Kurt can’t take a break, so he settles for leaning; still, he pulls out his phone after ensuring no one is looking in his direction.

Text message from Kurt:

Apparently I missed the memo where everyone decided to eat out on Wednesdays

Text message from Blaine:

That busy?

Text message from Kurt:

I haven’t had a break yet :(

Text message from Blaine:

Don’t work too hard, Kurt – you need rest too!

Kurt smiles at Blaine’s concern, even as he shakes his head in amusement.

Text message from Kurt:

I’ve only got 30 min left. Besides, it’s a good tip night ;)

Text message from Blaine:

You should treat yourself, then. It would make your fiancé happy :)”

Kurt laughs, glad Blaine has cheered up despite everything that’s happened. He’d worried; even earlier, Kurt had read the forced levity in Blaine’s messages. Now, though, it’s obvious Blaine’s evening has improved.
“Someone’s happy.”

Kurt gives an aborted lurch and Rachel’s comment, hastily shoving his phone in his pocket. “Do all of you practice sneaking up on me?”

Beside him, hands on her hips, Rachel smiles and shakes her head. “I know I don’t. Maybe you’re just easily scared.”

“Or maybe you need louder shoes.”

Rachel just raises her eyebrows. “Anyway – I’m guessing a certain someone sent a romantic note?”

Kurt’s face briefly scrunches in confusion before he shakes his head with a smile. “Oh, not really. Blaine just said I should treat myself with the extra tips tonight.”

“He’s certainly sweet.” Rachel turns slightly as Santana’s laugh rings from by the register. “Unlike some people.”

“Rachel…”

“What, Kurt? You heard what she said! She needs to understand that as the lead in a Broadway production I can’t –”

“Rachel, please.” Kurt interrupts the rant. “Just, not tonight, okay? I’m tired and not taking sides.”

“Oh. That’s right.” Rachel’s voice takes on a cutting edge. “I’d forgotten that my best friend decided not to support me.”

Rachel moves to step away but Kurt steps forward, catching her attention. “It doesn’t mean I don’t support you Rachel; I’m still planning our movie night. I just – I’m just not getting in between this thing with you and Santana.”

Rachel’s eyes remain narrowed but she nods before walking away from the counter. Kurt closes his eyes for moment, remembers Blaine’s text.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I think I’ll do that :)

*Text message from Kurt:*

You have the best ideas – I love you! <3

Kurt pockets his phone and turns, sees the orders he placed sitting on the ledge. He steps back from the counter with a sigh, grabbing a tray.

Twenty more minutes.

_*_*_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt enters his room and flops onto his bed, an ungraceful movement he’ll forever deny. The shower helped ease the strain from his muscles, but he still feels heavy with exhaustion. He’s grateful the diner’s schedule allowed him to get home before Rachel or Santana’s shifts ended; the silence is calming, easy without the thread of anticipation he feels whenever the girls are present – one will always snap.
Sitting up, Kurt leans over and picks up his phone from the bedside table. He smiles, unbidden, at his lock screen before entering the four numbers and hitting his speed dial.

“You’re early.” Blaine’s teasing voice is warm.

“I didn’t think you’d mind.”

“Never.” A rustle and then Blaine’s voice comes back through the line. “Sorry. Oh! I meant to tell you earlier but I forgot. Sam loved your idea! We’re going to sing Friday, I think.”

“I have impeccable taste.” Kurt sighs and leans back against his pillows, holding his phone between his chin and shoulder as he straightens the mess of blankets. “You’ll get someone to record it, right?”

“Of course. You deserve to see your idea in action.”

Kurt laughs and stretches out his legs. “I can’t wait. But that’s Friday; how was today?”

“Ordinary.” A pause, and when he next speaks Blaine’s voice has taken a soft edge, a quiet hesitance that has Kurt’s hand tightening on his phone. “Well, mostly. I’ve been jumpy lately, I guess. And Sam thinks I have an unhealthy obsession with my hair. After Glee I had to shower and um – afterwards I said I had to fix my hair and that’s why I was hurrying…I needed to reapply the makeup.”

Kurt releases his lower lip from where he’d been biting it, anxious throughout Blaine’s words. “I’ve been jumpy too; I think all the girls I know have unnaturally quiet shoes.” Kurt lets out a small breath before he continues. “I’m glad you told me, though. And don’t worry about Sam; you’ve always been picky about your hair – it’s one of the many things I love about you.”

“I love you, too.” Silence for a moment, and Kurt stares at his ring, bright in spite of the dim glow from his bedside lamp.

“But other than that, things were okay?”

“Mm.” A shift, and Kurt pictures Blaine turning, settling on his side. “Rehearsal went well, although that might be because we only focused on our first song.”

“Well, that one’s the most complicated, right? It makes sense.”

“Yeah.” Blaine yawns before continuing. “Mr. Schue seemed extra happy though – I thought Kitty was going to snap at him.”

Kurt lets out a small laugh and turns as well, resting his head on his pillow. “Mr. Schue does that; he’s annoyingly happy when you just want to be done. And don’t think I didn’t hear that yawn; I know you have to be tired after everything, and you haven’t gotten much rest lately.” Kurt flashes back to the text he’d gotten in the middle of the night, the knowledge that Blaine’s sleep wasn’t peaceful. “We should sleep.”

“Mm. We will, but you have to tell me about your day first.”

“I have to?” Kurt smiles, knows Blaine can hear it.

“Mhm. It’s only fair.”

“Well, I suppose since my fiancé asked…” Kurt lets the sentence trail off, listens for Blaine’s
answering chuckle before he continues. “There’s not much to tell, really. Classes were classes, although Ms. July made another freshman cry again – you’d think they’d learn that it’s not the best decision to question a former Broadway darling. Rachel and Santana are still snipping at each other –”

“You’re not getting dragged in, right?”

“I’m completely neutral, even though I’d have half the stress if I chose a side. I can’t though.” Kurt pauses. “I won’t – it’s not my fight.”

“That’s right. And they need to sort it out for themselves anyway.”

“Hm. They do.” Kurt agrees. “So now you’re all caught up on the life and times of Kurt Hummel.”

“Mm.” Blaine’s mumble is barely audible through the phone.

“You still there, Blaine?”

“Mm. Yeah, sorry. It’s just been a long day.”

Kurt frowns. “I thought you were fine.”

“Just a headache and some soreness. Carole gave me ice and Tylenol – I’m fine Kurt. Promise.”

“Right.” Kurt’s skepticism is clear. “But now I’ve kept my end of the deal, so we should sleep, Blaine.”

“Sweet dreams. Love you.”

“I love you too. Sleep well, okay? Sweet dreams.”

Kurt pulls his phone away from his ear, watches as the screen darkens since Blaine ended the call. He hopes Blaine’s dreams are pleasant; he deserves them to be. Still, Kurt knows he won’t be surprised if his phone beeps at some odd hour.

Blaine’s nightmares haunt them both.
Chapter 11

Thanks again for all the kind reviews, kudos, and number of reads! I'm flattered!!!
Also, thanks to my wonderful betas slayerkitty, dlanadhz, and jessicamadawn for helping me through writer's block and putting up with my unending fear of being OOC or unrealistic and therefore scrapping everything ;)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 11

Blaine enters the choir room next to Sam, covering a yawn as they take their seats and hoping no one catches him. At the front of the room, Mr. Schue and Tina seem involved in a heated discussion, and Blaine hopes he won’t see Tina stomping to the door. He lets out a small sigh moments later as Tina turns triumphantly and takes a seat next to Kitty, leaving Mr. Schue looking slightly exasperated by the board.

“Okay!” Mr. Schue’s voice carries over the chatter, but it lacks his usual energy. “I’ll admit that I was a bit hesitant when I first heard about our first performance today,” Blaine shares a confused look with Sam (and hides another yawn) before glancing at a smug Tina. “But,” Mr. Shue’s emphasis draws Blaine’s gaze back to the front of the room, “Glee Club is about pushing boundaries. So, let’s hear it for Tina and Kitty!”

Blaine watches Tina and Kitty move to the front, sharing somewhat unnerving smiles. He leans to his left to question Sam.

“Do you know what they’re singing?”

“Nope.” Sam answers, his voice a bit too loud to count as a whisper. “Tina’s refused to talk about it – said she wanted to surprise everyone.”

Blaine nods and leans back, feels his eyes widen as the music starts to play.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] Tina and Kitty – deadly combination!

Blaine stands as the song ends, clapping and whistling as Tina bows from next to Jake and Kitty ducks her head in appreciation, staying in Artie’s lap.

“Well!” Mr. Schue shakes his head, clapping as he moves back to the front of the room. “That was certainly a performance! Any volunteers to follow that act?”

There’s silence for a moment, but then Unique stands. “Never let it be said that we,” she nods to Marley, “didn’t rise to the occasion.”

Moments later Blaine sits, frozen in his seat by the blend of Unique and Marley’s soulful voices. It’s a sharp contrast to the previous upbeat, risqué song, but beautiful and moving nonetheless. His
tiredness fades as he focuses on the song, remembering lounging with Kurt, singing along to Adele, collapsing in laughter when they’d pulled theatrical faces.

Blaine’s smiling as the song ends, clapping next to Sam. Unique and Marley bow, looking proud.

Mr. Schue returns to the front of the room, and Blaine leans back in his chair, thinking over his day and only half listening to the speech about merging talents and focus and effort. He startles when a hand lands on his shoulder, spins to see Sam at his side, laughing.

“Dude! You’re so jumpy lately – I should have Artie keep his camera out in case I ever need blackmail.”

Blaine blinks.

“You…want blackmail?”

Sam smiles and keeps the arm around Blaine’s shoulder as Blaine stands. “You never know.”

“Right.” Blaine grabs his bag and follows Sam out of the room, agreeing to practice after dinner.

Ten minutes later Blaine hums along to *Come What May* as he waits at the light to turn into the gas station, absently eyeing the traffic speeding by on the other side of the divider. He looks over the cars at the gas pumps, sighing when he realizes all of them are currently in use. A middle-aged woman leans against a black jeep, seemingly impatient; an elderly farmer jabs at the pump, his battered Ford behind him; a young blonde woman enthusiastically speaks on her phone while leaning against a mint green beetle with fake eyelashes on the headlights; a dark haired student leans against a dark truck –

“Couldn’t even put up a fight?” Biting laughter follows, and Blaine stays still – watches as a puddle grows and the shoe moves.

“Pretty sure they’re down, Steve.”

As the shoe disappears there’s a pop from his shoulder, pain eclipses him and laughter registers over the roaring in his ears.

Blackness closed in, briefly broken –

A blast from a car horn has Blaine jerking in his seat, and a quick glance shows that the light is green. Blaine quickly moves forward, turning and pulling into the gas station.

There’s no truck.

Blaine pulls up to a pump and turns off the engine, before leaning forward and resting his head on the steering wheel.

Breathe in. There’s no truck.

Breathe out. It couldn’t be his truck.

Breathe in. Lima isn’t Marysville.

Breathe out. He’s not here.

He closes his eyes and releases a sigh before releasing his seatbelt and opening the door with slightly shaking hands. Moments later he’s leaning against his car, wincing at the blast of
questionable music from the too-loud speakers and absently watching as the numbers increase as he waits.

He pulls out his phone, wanting to push aside memories of trucks and shadows and honking horns and embarrassment.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Why do gas stations have the worst music?

*Text message from Kurt:*

They want you to escape inside and end up buying candy and soda ;)

Despite the echoes of fear and worry, Blaine smiles.

*Text message from Blaine:*

It's twangy country, Kurt. There's twang. I keep hearing the Warbler Council telling people to watch their vowels.

*Text message from Kurt:*

The joys of small town Ohio ;)

*Text message from Blaine:*

You're reveling in New York's culture, aren't you…

*Text message from Blaine:*

Done! Heading to your dad's

*Text message from Kurt:*

;) Maybe he'll let you choose the music ;)

Blaine lets out a small laugh as he replaces his gas cap. Moments later he smiles as *Somewhere Only We Know* fills his car, calming him as he pulls into traffic.

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Carrying the plates over to the table, Kurt holds in his wince as he waits for the couple to acknowledge him so he can set down the food. He can’t wait for Blaine to move to New York, for them to be able to hold hands as they walk down the street and maybe even share the occasional affectionate peck.

He loves Blaine, he does, and he doesn’t mind if the world knows.

Still, the world will never know because they can’t be bothered to keep their hands to themselves in a very public diner booth.

Next to a window.

Kurt takes a breath. “Here you go!” His voice is overly bright; false. Still, it serves its purpose and the couple – somewhat reluctantly – separates, eyeing the food Kurt quickly sets on the table.
The girl smiles. “Sorry. He’s just amazing, you know?”

“I’m sure.” Kurt forces the smile to stay on his face. “Is there anything else I can get for you?”

After receiving a distracted ‘no’ from each of them, Kurt turns and heads back to the kitchen, leans against the counter once he’s there.

“You always get the interesting tables.”

Kurt briefly closes his eyes, opening them to see Santana’s smirk.

“That’s not the word I’d use.”

“Well, I did say you were boring.”

“Hm. And yet the couple attacking each other’s faces is interesting.” Kurt gives Santana a side-long look. “There wasn’t even any technique; hardly interesting.” Then, with a shrug, Kurt steps away from the counter as Santana’s laughter follows.

Half an hour later, Kurt sighs as he exits the diner’s bathroom, tired from a long shift but glad to be back in his own clothes. His feet ache and his tips for the day aren’t extraordinary, but still he’s finally done.

He heads for the door, torn between wanting to leave the diner and trepidation about meeting Rachel at the loft. Her and Santana’s snipping seems to be unending, and she has no qualms about sharing every detail with Kurt.

Kurt turns from the door of the diner at Dani’s shout, adjusting the straps of his bags as she rushes over.

“Sorry! Just wanted to catch you before you left.” She continues before Kurt can respond. “Anyway, I was hanging out with Elliott and we came up with an awesome cover of I Love Rock and Roll. I just wanted to give you a heads up before practice tomorrow. But I’m excited – once we add in all the voices it’s gonna be perfect!”

Kurt gives a tight smile. “I can’t wait to hear it.”

“Great! So –” Dani cuts off midsentence, turning as an enthusiastic patron waves from their left. “Duty calls, I guess. But I’ll see you tomorrow! It’s gonna rock!”

Shaking his head, Kurt finally leaves, pulling out his phone as he heads for the subway.

Text message from Kurt:

Finally heading home!

Kurt’s hand jerks when his phone starts to ring a moment later, the Beatles filling the air.

“Texting not enough?”

“Oh my God, Kurt.” Blaine’s voice rings with excitement and happiness. “I can’t believe you!”

“What? Blaine –”

“The flowers, Kurt.” Blaine cuts off Kurt’s question. “You sent me flowers.”
“Oh.” Kurt smiles, and relishes in the bubble of happiness building in his chest. “I did.”

“Your dad kept glancing at me while I was at the garage and I thought…well, I guess it doesn’t matter. But then we got back to the house and Carole was smiling – more than usual, I mean. But I went to put my bag in your room and they were just sitting on the dresser. They’re gorgeous, Kurt.”

“Well,” Kurt sidesteps a woman juggling one too many shopping bags, waits at the crosswalk. “I just thought you deserved something special.” Kurt thinks back to the initial stress in Blaine’s voice weeks ago; the culmination when he’d called, unable to speak for the tears, the fear when he’d described nightmares and flashbacks. “I’m glad you like them.”

“Red and yellow roses, Kurt. Our flowers. How could I possibly not like them?”

Kurt smiles, knows it’s conveyed when he speaks. “I know, I know. And you deserve them, really. Besides,” Kurt holds the phone a bit tighter, “It’s tradition.”

“Tradition?” Blaine’s voice is questioning but light.

“Mm. We always give each other flowers when the other person has done something that makes us proud.”

“Kurt.” Blaine’s voice has gone soft, filled with too many emotions to name. “I haven’t –”

“Nope. No arguing. I can send roses to my fiancé if I want to. And I wanted to, so really there’s nothing you can say against that. If I happen to be extremely proud of him as well, it’s because he deserves it.”

“I can’t win against you.”

“No. I thought you knew better than to try?”


“I love you.” Kurt stands at the subway entrance indecisive: entering means ending the call, but it also means being that much closer to home. “And I’m glad you like the flowers.”

“I have the best fiancé in the world.”

Kurt huffs a laugh. “I think we’re tied, actually. But,” Kurt looks to the entrance again, “I’m actually at the subway, now. So I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

“You need to find a cell phone that gets signal on the subway.” Blaine’s pout is audible, even through the phone line.

“Our first purchase once we’re rich Broadway stars, I promise.”

“Hmm. I’ll remember that.”

“Of course you will.”

There’s a pause, and Kurt hears Blaine’s muffled voice before his voice returns, clear. “Sorry. Carole just let me know dinner’s ready.”

“Guess that’s a sign for us to finally hang up.”
“Hm. I’ll talk to you later, then. This evening? Maybe around nine? Sam’s coming by after dinner so we can work on our duet for Glee tomorrow, and then I have to finish my homework.”

“That’s fine, Blaine. I have some work to do too – we can just text when we’re done – see who’s finished, okay?”

“Mm. Have safe ride home.” Blaine’s voice takes on a joking edge, “And treat yourself for dinner; you deserve it.”

“I’ll stop by the sub shop on the way home. I love you and we’ll talk later, okay?”

“Of course. Love you, too.”

Kurt ends the call before rummaging in his bag for his headphones. Blaine’s call certainly lightened his mood, and he doesn’t want it ruined by hearing angry New Yorkers on the subway.

It’s not until Kurt’s waiting for the subway doors to close that he realizes Blaine never explained why he thought Burt had been glancing at him at the shop.

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Kurt enters the loft to Rachel singing a capella by the piano. She stops as he enters, clapping her hands in excitement. “Oh good, you’re home! I really need an accompanist to practice – I can’t play piano and dance at the same time – so you’re just in time!”

For a moment Kurt simply stands, steps inside the doorway. Then, shaking his head, he crosses the apartment, heading for his room and ignoring Rachel’s comments as he goes.

“– thinking I could add a crescendo, you know?” Rachel’s followed him, stands at the curtain while he sets his bags by his desk before pulling out his diner uniform and adding it to his laundry basket. “Are you even listening, Kurt?”

“Yes, Rachel.” Kurt turns and faces her. “I am listening, but I just got home. Do I get time to eat my dinner,” he waves the bag containing his sub, “before you require my basic piano skills?”

“There’s no need for you to be rude, Kurt. Of course you can eat your non-Vegan dinner.”

Kurt sighs and heads back toward the kitchen, a “thanks” hastily added as he passes her.

Moments later he’s seated in one of his vintage flea market chairs, a soda and his sub before him. He takes a bite and suppresses a groan of appreciation as the flavor bursts on his tongue. He’ll have to thank Blaine for his suggestion later. By the time he’s swallowed Rachel’s joined him at the table.

“I’m going to assume that you had a frustrating day and that’s why you’ve been snippy since you came in the door.” Her voice conveys her superior attitude, and Kurt wonders how Rachel can believe that her words are kind.

“As a matter of fact,” Kurt takes a sip of soda before continuing. “My day was perfectly fine. Just long.”

Rachel narrows her eyes. “Then why were you so harsh when you got home?”

Kurt sets his sub down with a sigh, closes his eyes for a moment to regret the passing of a nice evening. Opening his eyes he takes in Rachel’s crossed arms and stare. “I wasn’t harsh Rachel. I
just –” Kurt gestures toward the door. “I’d just walked in the door. Did it even occur to you that I
might not want to immediately be your accompanist?”

“You’re my best friend, Kurt. And we promised each other that we’d help each other achieve our
dreams. We promised Kurt, the first day we were both in New York. Forgive me for thinking that
you meant to keep it.”

“I meant it, Rachel! I still do! It would just be nice if you asked once in a while, instead of just
assuming that I would be at your beck and call as soon as I got home!” Kurt immediately regrets
raising his voice, wishes he’d chosen different words even as Rachel leans across the table.

“I’m not asking you to be my servant, Kurt. But you know how much getting this part means to
me. You know that better than anyone. And I thought that as my best friend I could count on your
help and support as I work on my role.”

“I support you, Rachel! I share my notes with you because you’re too tired from rehearsal to write
your own, I run lines with you and critique your dance. How supportive do I have to be to meet
your standards?”

“Standards? This isn’t about some mythical standard of support Kurt. This is about my best friend
being there for me during one of the most trying times in my life!”

“I –”

“Being in a Broadway show takes work, Kurt.” Rachel cuts off Kurt’s comment. “I have to go to
rehearsal and classes and work at the diner and I do it all because it’s how I’m going to achieve my
dream. And it’s hard, and trying and I thought that you would appreciate what I’m going through
and be there for me!”

For a moment, Kurt sits in silence, replays Rachel’s words in his mind and feels his anger growing.
Rachel’s complaining about how trying her life is, how Kurt isn’t there for her even though he sees
her every day while states away Blaine isn’t safe in his own home, is wearing makeup to hide his
pain, has daily nightmares from an event that has crippled others and yet still continues to thank
Kurt for sending him something as small as a bouquet of flowers.

“I am here for you Rachel! Every day I am here for you, cheering in your corner and ignoring
every truthful comment Santana makes because you’re my best friend. But I’m not there enough
during the ‘most trying time’ in your life? And really, Rachel, having your dreams come true meets
that requirement? Other people –” Kurt pauses, takes a breath and hopes his voice won’t catch.
“Other people have problems, real honest-to-God trials that they’re suffering through. But what,
because I hoped to have a breather after a thirteen hour day I’m a bad friend for not immediately
sitting at the piano? I want you to succeed, Rachel, you deserve to, but you need to wake up!”

Rachel pushes back the chair and stands, turning to head for her room before stopping and heading
back to the table, hands on her hips. “I can’t believe you, Kurt. Like you know about trials? What
could possibly be hard in your life right now? It’s all nice and easy: Your dad’s cancer is in
remission! You met the love of your life at sixteen – you’re engaged and going to the school of
your dreams! But you always were a star at hurting others, breaking promises, right Kurt? What’s a
broken promise to your former best friend in the grand scheme of things? You always get what you
want, even if it comes to you by accident.”

In his lap, Kurt’s hands clench into fists. “Rachel, I say this as your friend. You need to stop
talking.”
“No, Kurt. I will not! You said – you promised to help me achieve my dreams, just like I promised to help you with yours. I even joined your band when you were worried about not having something! But now, when it’s time for actually fulfill your end of the promise you can’t be bothered to keep your word. You know how important rehearsal is! But you can’t be bothered to take twenty minutes to play for me? Is it too hard for you to watch me succeed? I thought this was settled when we talked months ago, when my best friend was thrilled that I’ve gotten my dream role! But you haven’t been, have you? Enjoy your dinner, Kurt. I’ll be sure to send you a signed copy of the playbill from opening night. I don’t need your kind of support in my life!”

Rachel turns and stomps away as Kurt blinks at his dinner. Absently, Kurt notes the banging of the loft door.

“Damn, Hummel. If I’d known there was a show I would’ve gotten home earlier.”

“Santana.” Kurt raises his head, prays for patience as Santana crosses into the kitchen. “When did you get home?”

Santana returns and sets a glass of water on the table as she slides into a chair. “Around the time Little Miss Diva was whining about how hard her life is. I’ve got to hand it to you – you don’t hold back.”

Kurt spares Santana a quick glance before he takes a bite of his sandwich, not responding to her comments.

“No come back for me?”

Kurt eyes Santana’s smirk. “It’s been a long day, Santana. Can I please just eat my dinner?”

“Hey, I’m not criticizing. In fact, hang on.” Santana slips from her seat and heads for her room, returning moments later with her hands behind her back. At Kurt’s questioning gaze she places a take-out box from the diner on the table.

Slightly suspicious, Kurt stares for a moment before cautiously opening the box.

Part of a chocolate cake rests inside.

“Is it poisoned?”

“Harsh, Kurt. I thought you knew by now that you’re not the roommate I’d poison.” Santana smiles and takes a sip of water. “It’s been in the case for two days – Gunther was just gonna throw it out.” Santana shrugs. “I figured there was no need to waste some perfectly good cake.”

“Right.”

“Besides,” Santana smirks, “you earned it. Think of it as a reward for finally leaving Switzerland and telling off Rachel.”

“Santana –”

“Hey, I’m being nice, Hummel. Take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime event.”

Kurt gives Santana a half-hearted smile. “Thanks.”

“I’ll get the forks.”

_**_*__*_
“Are you sure you boys don’t need anything?”

Blaine shakes his head at Carole’s question, but offers her a small smile. “We’re good, I think. Thanks for letting us practice in here.” Blaine pauses and catches her gaze. “Are you sure, though? If you want to watch T.V. or something we can move the keyboard to Kurt’s room and –”

Carole cuts Blaine off with a small laugh. “It’s fine, Blaine. It’ll be good to hear some music again.” She turns to Sam. “But if you boys get hungry or thirsty you help yourself to anything in the kitchen, okay?”

“Sure thing!” Sam’s enthusiastic response has Carole laughing again even as she moves to sit on the sofa, joining Burt.

“I hope you two don’t mind an audience.”

“Nope!” Sam smiles before turning toward the keyboard.

“I don’t mind.” Blaine quietly adds with a slight shake of his head. “Although you might – the first few run-throughs might be a little rough.”

“Go play the piano, Blaine.”

Offering Carole a mock salute before turning to follow orders, Blaine mentally runs through the problem spots he’d noticed earlier. Moments later he’s running scales to warm up and then he’s losing himself in the music, Sam standing beside him.

Blaine raises his hands from the keyboard, accepts the high-five offered by Sam with a smile, absently noticing that at some point during their rehearsal Burt and Carole had left the room.

“I think we’re good, yeah?”

“Hm.” Blaine looks back at the music before returning his gaze to Sam. “Maybe after another run-through – two at most. I just think that this section,” Blaine gestures to a series of measures on the page, “could use a bit more work.”

“How do you practice this much every week?”

“What?” Blaine turns on the foldable bench so he’s facing Sam.

“Just – this is a lot of work for a weekly assignment; do you practice this much all the time?”

“Oh.” Blaine flashes Sam an embarrassed smile and shrugs his shoulders. “I guess? If I’m going to perform a song I want it to be as good as it can be, you know? But if you’re tired or something we don’t have to. We’ve already practiced for,” Blaine glances at his watch, “about an hour.”

“Nah. It’s fine.” Sam smiles. “We’re gonna win this thing!”

“I don’t think it’s a competition, Sam.”

Sam shrugs. “Whatever. We’re still gonna win.”

Blaine turns back to the keyboard with a smile and slight shake of his head; Sam would certainly keep this interesting.

Some time later, they finish to a round of clapping, and Blaine turns to see Burt standing by the sofa. “Sounded real good, boys. Blaine,” Burt nods toward the phone that’s standing on the end
table. “Hope you don’t mind – Kurt wanted to talk to you and I figured he could listen in til you were finished.”

“Oh –”

“Dude,” Sam interrupts Blaine’s response. “Why’s Kurt callin’ you at his parents’ house?”

Blaine freezes, shooting Burt a panicked glance.

Thankfully, Burt answers Sam’s question, casually mentioning how Kurt had called to check-in, and Burt figured he could talk to Blaine, too. Blaine feels his shoulders drop in relief.

“Right, well I guess I’ll go then.” Sam stands and Blaine joins him, giving him a brief hug goodbye. Burt follows Sam out of the room, and Blaine turns, picking up the phone from the end table.

“Kurt?”

“Hey, Blaine. I didn’t mean to interrupt your practice.”

“Oh.” Blaine turns and moves to sit on the sofa. “No need to worry; we were done. I think if I’d asked Sam for one more run through he’d have lost it.”

“In that case, I’m glad to serve as an interruption.” There’s a pause and Blaine hears the rustling of blankets. “So, I’m guessing this means Dad was able to get your keyboard?”

“Yeah.” Blaine leans back further, sinking into the sofa’s cushions. “He stopped by the house earlier this week. He said he had to go out there for a tow anyway, so he got it while I was at school. I’ll still go to the house to play the piano to prep for nationals, but it’s nice to have the keyboard here, too.”

“Well, I’m glad things worked out.”

“Mm.” Blaine pauses and then releases a breath. “Kurt?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you okay? I don’t – I mean, you just seem kinda quiet tonight, and you weren’t when I called earlier.”

“Oh.” Kurt’s silent for a moment, and Blaine simply listens to his breathing. “Yeah. Sorry. I guess I’m not as over it as I thought. I just – I got into a fight with Rachel. It’s been building for a while, now that I think about it. But I got home tonight and she immediately assumed I’d be free to play piano for her and then it just escalated.” Kurt gives a small, humorless laugh. “She stormed out. And Santana brought me cake. How’s that for role reversal?”

“That sucks. I’m sorry, Kurt.”

“Don’t be. It’s certainly not your fault. And it was going to happen at some point. That’s actually why I called Dad. I wanted his opinion on events; I thought that talking to him would mean I’d be over it before our call. I just,” Kurt pauses. “I wanted to calm down before talking to you.”

“You don’t have to always be happy when you talk to me, Kurt.” Blaine’s grip tightens on the phone.

“I know. I know. I want to be, though. You shouldn’t have to put up with my second-hand
frustration.”

Blaine lets out a breath. “Hm. Maybe not, but I’ll know it’s not because of me, and we’re supposed to tell each other things, right?”

“Using my words against me – you’re learning.”

“I’m a quick learner, remember? Besides,” Blaine relaxes, “I’ve had the best teacher.”

Kurt laughs. “I can’t argue with you there.” Silence reigns for a moment. “Your duet sounded wonderful though, even if I only heard half through a crappy speaker phone.”

Blaine smiles. “I’m glad you like it.”

“Mm. It fits…Hey Blaine?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you okay?” Kurt’s question has Blaine sitting up straighter on the sofa, even as Kurt continues in a rush of words. “It’s just that Dad said you looked a little shaky when you got to the shop, and he said there was something with a car? And earlier when you called to thank me for the flowers you said you thought Dad kept looking at you because of something but you didn’t say what that was. I might be overthinking things and I don’t mean to nag, but I had to ask.”

For a moment, Blaine simply sits on the sofa, mentally replaying Kurt’s words. It’s only when he hears multiple repetitions of his name from Kurt’s increasingly worried voice that he replies.

“Sorry! I’m fine, Kurt. I just…” Blaine sighs and shakes his head. “I didn’t realize it was noticeable. It wasn’t even – you’re going to think I’m going crazy.”

“You’re not crazy, Blaine.” Kurt’s voice rings with assurance. “What happened?”

“Nothing happened. Not really.” Blaine releases a breath. “I had to get gas on the way to your dad’s shop. And while I was waiting at the intersection I was checking the pumps to see which ones were free and then I saw this truck and some guy. And I know – I know it wasn’t that truck. But it startled me for a moment. That’s all. Promise. Just some bad memories from nightmares.”

“I’m sorry, Blaine.” There’s a pause and then Kurt lets out a small huff. “I’m really beginning to hate these nightmares of yours, Blaine.”

Blaine chuckles. “Me too.”

“Mm.” Kurt hums in agreement. “Okay, so that explains his afternoon. What about at the shop?”

“Oh.” Blaine briefly closes his eyes. “An older white four-door was brought in and I guess you could say there was a repeat performance?” Even as he says the tasteless joke Blaine remembers seeing the white car enter the garage –

“Damn homos couldn’t even put up a fight.”

*Surrounded by nothing but pain, all-encompassing blackness only broken by two streaks of green and white –*

Blaine shakes his head, pushing the memories aside as Kurt’s voice comes through the line. “I’m so sorry, Blaine.”
“Hey. Don’t be sorry. At least I didn’t drop anything this time.”

“Not funny, Blaine.”

“You never appreciate my jokes.”

“Blaine.” Kurt’s voice is still quiet, but it’s lost the tense, worrying edge it had moments before.

“Sorry.”

Kurt sighs, but it holds a hint of laughter. “Didn’t we talk about your use of that word?”

“Sor – oh.” Blaine laughs. “It really is a hard habit to break.”

“I never would have guessed.” When he continues, Kurt’s voice has lost its sarcastic edge. “But I should probably go soon; I still have some reading to do, and I wanted to look up covers of Joan Jett before our goodnight call.”

“Joan Jett?”

“Mm. Dani caught me as I leaving the diner. Apparently she and Elliott came up with a ‘completely awesome’ – her words – version of *I Love Rock and Roll* for the band to practice tomorrow.”

“Well it is an awesome song, but you don’t sound excited.”

There’s a pause before Kurt speaks again. “This is the second time – that I know of, anyway – that they’ve worked on something for the band without me. I’m just not fond of it, I guess.”

“Well, I’ve never met them, but they both sound like nice people and talented musicians.” Blaine keeps his voice calm, soft as he continues. “I don’t think they’re trying to exclude you, Kurt.”

“You’re right. I know you’re right. It’s just – this band is mine, you know? And now, after today I’m not even sure if Rachel will show for rehearsal tomorrow.”

Blaine winces at the reminder of the argument and possible – probable if Rachel’s past actions are anything to go by – repercussions. “It is your band Kurt. And it’s a great band. It’ll continue to be a great band even if Rachel doesn’t show. I’ve seen the YouTube videos, remember? You’re the heart of the band, Kurt. Not Rachel.”

“You give the best pep talks.”

Blaine smiles, hears the fondness in his voice. “Only to the most deserving.”

“Flatterer.” Kurt sighs. “Guess we should stop procrastinating, though.”

Blaine sighs in agreement, and moments later he’s left sitting on the sofa in a silent living room. Stretching, Blaine stands from the sofa and grabs the phone, intent on returning it to its charger in the Hudson-Hummel kitchen.

Entering the room Blaine sees Carole silently unloading the dishwasher. He crosses to her after hanging up the phone.

“Need any help?”

“Oh!” Carole straightens and gives Blaine a small smile. “No, it’s fine. I’m almost done actually.”
“Okay.” Blaine watches as she turns back to the racks, pulling out mugs and cereal bowls. “I’m just going to go finish some homework then.”

“Burt keeps some cookies in the cabinet; take some if you need a study snack.”

Blaine smiles and shakes his head. “Thanks, but I’m good for now.” When Carole offers no response Blaine murmurs a quick ‘see you later’ before turning and heading for Kurt’s room.

Seated at the desk minutes later, Blaine breathes in the rose scented air, carefully placing the note that came with the flowers in the corner of the picture frame.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] I love you!

Text message from Kurt:

<3 I love you too.

Blaine sets his phone down with smile and reluctantly pulls his Calculus book closer.

Homework it is.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine jerks upright, Kurt’s designer sheets tangling his legs, and he can’t get free –

A hand grabs his shoulder, spinning him around. A punch takes his breath and pushes him back, further into the arms of his captor. “Sadie Hawkins isn’t for gays, Anderson! Hold ‘em Mitch. Cover his mouth, too. Can’t have him crying, now.”

The streetlight flickers, making spots dance in front of him and Blaine sees the shadow in front of him grow.

A green truck speeds away, music blasting from open windows. Tires squeal and a white car follows.

His phone clatters on the end table, dropped by clumsy hands. Moments later its bright, harsh light casts shadows.

3:18 A.M.

Blaine winces at the time, but unlocks the phone anyway, opening his texts without thought.

Text message from Blaine:

Think the playlist will work again?

Text message from Blaine:

Sorry for waking you up :(

Blaine’s untangled the sheets, flipped the pillow, and grabbed his iPod before his phone buzzes with a response.

Text message from Kurt:
Maybe – and I want to be woken up

*Text message from Kurt:*

love is a place / & through this place of / love move / (with brightness of peace)

*Text message from Blaine:*

<3

*Text message from Kurt:*

Sweet dreams!

Blaine replies in kind before placing the phone back on the table. He carefully puts the earbuds in, closes his eyes, and thinks of Kurt as love songs fill his mind.

Kurt loves him.

Kurt is safety.
Kurt enters the café with a smile, taking in the rich scent of coffee mingled with the sweetness of sugar; done with classes for the day, he has a couple of hours before his shift at the diner and staying in the city makes more sense than returning to the loft. If staying away meant avoiding a certain Broadway starlet too, well, that was Kurt's prerogative.

He gets in line, eyeing the menu. He’d missed lunch earlier, using the time in-between classes to get some work done in the library. Smiling at the worker he orders a salad and then gets a mocha as well; the chocolate certainly will be appreciated. Minutes later he slides into a chair with a sigh, breathing in the steam from his cup. Pushing his bowl of salad to the side (within reach but not centered) he pulls his notebook from his bag, opening it to his notes; he has a test on Friday and medieval theatre isn’t his favorite thing in the world. Sighing he takes out his phone.

Text message from Kurt:
[photo] Study time!

Text message from Blaine:
Complete with food and coffee! :)

Text message from Kurt:
Anything to make it bearable.

Text message from Blaine:
Good luck! I'm off to Glee – prep for our performance again ;)

Text message from Kurt:
Don't let Mr. Schue push you too hard!

Text message from Blaine:
I'll be sure to take breaks ;) Good luck studying!!

Kurt closes his messages with a slight shake of his head, switches to his music and puts in his headphones, done with procrastination. With a sigh he pulls his notecards and pencil case from his bag – time to focus.
Beeps interrupt the piano cover of *You Found Me*, and Kurt stretches his arms before hitting cancel on the alarm. Moments later the scattered mess of his study session is cleared from the table, packed in his bag, and he returns his now empty bowl and tray before getting one last iced mocha to go.

Kurt walks briskly, humming along to his music as he carefully avoids harried businessman and stressed students. The song changes, and Kurt smiles as the piano plays through his earbuds, even as the melody has him thinking of Elliott and Dani, of the band rehearsal they have in four hours. Two of his band members get together and create songs from AC/DC and other standard rock anthems; Kurt studies to striking piano covers of America’s Top 40.

Kurt sips at his mocha as he waits at a crosswalk, wonders at the difference between his music choices and those of his bandmates. He appreciates music’s diversity, rationally he knows that not all of his friends will choose the same favorite artists has him – Blaine’s adoration of Katie Perry and disco certainly helped him come to terms with that fact – but for his genres to differ so greatly still has him worried. Kurt can perform a rock song, has done so more times than he can count, but Dani and Elliott are wonderful friends, especially in their support after he told them about Blaine. Still, a small part of Kurt still worries that one day they’ll tire of “Pamela Lansbury” and choose to start their own rock band. Kurt shakes his head in an attempt to rid the thought as he walks, remembers Blaine’s reassurances.

Arriving at the diner, Kurt enters and Dani waves hello with an honest smile; Kurt waves back before heading to the restroom to change, silently cursing his insecurities. Dani and Elliott have been nothing but kind; he needs to focus on that, not some irrational worry.

Minutes later Kurt’s changed into his red and black uniform, bag and clothes carefully stored behind the counter.

“Can I give you the nitpicky guy?”

“What?” Kurt turns from the cash register at Dani’s question, sees her leaning against the counter.

“Nitpicky guy,” Dani nods toward where a thirty-something balding man is seated by a window, “has some request every two minutes. I’ll trade you: you take him and I’ll cover two of your tables.”

Kurt laughs. “Not a chance, Dani. You need to work on your sales pitch – next time start with what you’ll take, rather than describing the crazy customer.”

Dani pouts before shaking her head. “And that’s why I get paid in tips and not commission.”

Kurt smiles before gesturing toward the dining area. “Looks like your favorite customer needs something.”

Dani turns and Kurt holds in his laugh when she sighs at the sight of the balding man looking back and forth, obviously trying to get her attention. She steps away from the counter with a roll of her eyes. “Laugh it up, Kurt. I’ll just make sure the Thursday cast and crew are seated in your section.” She’s gone before Kurt can think of a response and he leans back against the counter with a sigh. Thursdays always get hectic as it gets later in the day, stressed casts and crews coming in droves after the last rehearsals before weekend shows.

At least there’s tips.

_*_*_*_*_
“We got this.” Sam smiles and claps Blaine on the shoulder, leaning in his seat. Blaine nods before turning his attention back to the front of the choir room where Mr. Schue is attempting to get everyone’s attention.

“Okay. Guys – I have news for all you! I’m pleased to say that the Lima Hospital Volunteers have their yearly luncheon this weekend and asked me if Glee Club would provide entertainment. I told them yes and –”

Immediately the choir room is filled with murmurs before Jake’s voice rises over the rest. “It’s Friday, Mr. Schue. You want us to perform tomorrow!?”

Blaine watches as Mr. Schue shakes his head and runs his hand through his hair. “Guys. Guys! I know –” Mr. Schue pauses and looks around the room. “I know it’s short notice – the luncheon is Sunday – but it’s a paid performance, and getting to LA for Nationals is expensive. We need all the donations we can get.”

The sound dies down, and Blaine can see the logic in Mr. Schue’s agreement, even if he’s already dreading the rehearsals and extra practice that will be coming.

Text message from Blaine:
Surprise performance this weekend...

Text message from Blaine:
Jake looks ready to revolt

Text message from Kurt:
I’m sure you will perform wonderfully…even with the short notice :)

Blaine is in the process of replying when Sam nudges his shoulder and nods toward where Mr. Schue is continuing to speak.

“–after today’s duets. So, Blaine and Sam – the floor is yours!”

Blaine quickly slips his phone into his pocket, standing at the same time as Sam. He smiles as they pass Mr. Schue on their way and to the front and stretches his arms before taking a seat at the piano, Sam standing to his left.

He begins to play and loses himself in the music, pushing away memories and tiredness and tension. From his peripheral vision he sees Sam step away, but he pays it little mind, focusing on the chords and progression of the music, both on the piano and in his vocals. Blaine and Sam finish to a round of clapping, and Blaine ducks his head as Sam claps him on the back.

“Told you we’d win.” Blaine shakes his head at Sam’s comment and takes his seat as Mr. Schue returns to the front of the room.

“Alright – thank you Sam and Blaine for such a thought out piece! Now, let’s give a round of applause for our last group Artie and Kitty! And Kitty, thank you for your willingness to put in the extra time for two performances this week.”

“I wasn’t about to leave my guy without a duet partner.” Kitty glances toward Tina before she offers Mr. Schue a small smile and shrug in response, joining Artie in front of the piano.
Blaine leans back in his chair as the two perform, enjoying the song even as his mind wanders back to the morning after Mr. Schue’s non-wedding. He absently shakes his head, focusing instead on the morning after Kurt accepted his proposal – the happiness that had surrounded them.

Kitty and Artie end the song with a flourish, and Blaine stands, clapping all the while. Moments later Mr. Schue again moves to the front of the room, and Blaine suppresses as sigh as the teacher informs them that they’ll now go to the auditorium to rehearse for Saturday’s performance. Blaine quickly retrieves his phone from his pocket, intending to send a message to Mr. Hummel to say he’ll be a bit late getting to the shop, but smiles when he sees two unread messages.

Text message from Kurt:

Don't let Mr. Schue work you too hard though – if he tries I'll have Dad give him a lecture ;)

Text message from Kurt:

Your duet was beautiful! :) I love you!

Text message from Blaine:

I'll be sure to take breaks if I need them!

Text message from Blaine:

Thank you. Your spies are as competent as ever ;)

Blaine looks up from his phone (and only jumps a little) when he feels a tap on his shoulder and a whisper in his ear. “I know texts from your fiancé make you happy, but do you have to smile when we’re getting ready to go rehearse for another hour?”

Blaine turns his head and meets Unique’s unimpressed look with an unashamed smile. “Sorry,” Blaine whispers with a shrug, “he’s just amazing.” When Unique’s expression doesn’t change Blaine quickly continues. “I’m not looking forward to the rehearsal though,” Blaine grimaces even as he sees everyone else starting to stand. He quickly shoves his phone in his bag and gathers his items. “Shall we?”

Unique stands and takes Blaine’s proffered arm, following him until they reach the hallway, where they separate to head for the locker rooms.

“Once more unto the breach.” Unique murmurs and Blaine smiles before he turns away.

*-_*-_*-*-

Blaine smiles in relief when Mr. Schue calls an end to rehearsal, thanking everyone for all of their effort. He takes a moment to catch his breath, ignoring the slight stitch in his side and Mr. Schue’s continued words. He stretches, relaxing his muscles and turning when Unique steps beside him.

“Those hospital volunteers better appreciate this.”

Blaine laughs and shakes his head. “I’m sure they will. They’re getting live music, if nothing else.”

“After dancing and singing in heels I’m worth more than a ‘nothing else’ – they’re getting a performance and they better be appreciative.”

“I’m sure they will be.” Blaine smiles as Unique shakes her head before walking away with an eye roll. Moments later Marley takes his arm as Mr. Schue dismisses them for the day.
“Sorry,” Marley flashes Blaine a small smile. “Jake’s still mad about the extra practice and so he’s giving Ryder a hard time.” Marley shakes her head. “I figured I’d escape with Glee’s gentleman before I get dragged in. Besides,” Marley adds with a grin, “We haven’t had the chance to talk in a while.” They exit the auditorium, entering the hallway and, unfortunately, joining a crowd of uniformed jocks on their way to the locker room.

Blaine stumbles.

“You okay?” Marley’s voice stays open, curious with a hint of humor, but a hint of worry underlies the words.

“Just tired, I think.” Blaine tilts his head back toward the group. “I mean, I wasn’t expecting them to be so loud, but I’m fine.”

Marley gives Blaine a small smile before nodding toward the group. “No shower for you today?”

“No,” Blaine shakes his head, remembers Burt’s raised eyebrows the day before. “I’m heading to Mr. Hummel’s shop, so I’d just get dirty again.”

“Endearing yourself to your future in-laws?” Marley smiles.

“What? No,” Blaine shrugs. “Just helping out…Mr. Hummel’s shop is busy since the weather changed.”

Marley raises her brows, shooting Blaine an overly dramatic look. “Right.” Marley’s next words are softened, a contrast to the theatrics from before. “It’s just…Are you sure you’re okay? Your duet was amazing, but you usually pick things a bit more upbeat,” she shoots him a questioning look, “and it seems like you’re living at the garage.”

Blaine hides a wince at Marley’s phrasing, ducking his head. “It’s been a long week, and now we have that performance Sunday…” Blaine trails off before managing to gather his thoughts, “Only Mr. Schue would schedule a paid performance with forty-eight hours notice.”

Marley laughs. “It’s a good thing we’ve been practicing.”

Blaine joins in her laughter as they head down the hallway. “Yeah.” Blaine shakes his head. “Two days.”

“Cheer up.” Marley leans her head on Blaine’s shoulder. “It’s not like we’re not prepared…and Glee has performed with less rehearsal.”

“Don’t remind me, please. Anyway,” Blaine stops in the middle of the hallway, pulls Marley in for a quick, light hug. “I’ve got to get to the shop and I believe you were off to shower. I’ll see you tomorrow at practice, okay?”

Marley shoots him a concerned look but nods regardless before turning away to head for the girls’ locker room. Blaine takes a moment to gather his thoughts before he releases a sigh and heads down the hall, exiting the school.

_text message from Blaine:

Done! :) Headed to the garage

_text message from Kurt:
Congrats on surviving impromptu rehearsal ;)

Text message from Kurt:

And Dad will be happy to see you – apparently everyone came in for an oil change

Text message from Blaine:

Good to know! ;)

Text message from Kurt:

I thought you'd appreciate the heads up

Text message from Blaine:

Of course – It's a perk, having an attentive fiancé <3

Text message from Kurt:

It is…You're still a dork, though

Text message from Kurt:

<3

Blaine huffs a laugh and shakes his head as he puts his keys in the ignition; Kurt really is the best. _*_*_*_ _

“So Rachel really quit the band?” Dani’s question has Kurt turning from where he’s pouring glasses of water in the kitchen.

“I…” Kurt pauses, starts again. “Maybe. I don’t know, actually. She hasn’t mentioned it, but obviously,” Kurt gestures to the rest of the loft, “she’s not here for practice.”

“Well,” Dani takes two of the glasses from the counter and Kurt takes the other two before following her back to the living area. “As talented as she is, it’s not like we’re lost without her.”

“Damn right.” Santana smiles and takes a glass from Dani.

Kurt rolls his eyes as he takes a seat next to Santana on the sofa, only to get up moments later when there’s a knock at the door.

“Sorry I’m late,” Elliott says in a rush after Kurt’s rolled open the door. “I got off work a few minutes late, so I hit the rush on the subway.”

“No problem,” Kurt replies as they head to join Santana and Dani. “It’s not like we’re set on a schedule.”

“Elliott!” Dani shouts as they get closer, quickly standing and pulling Elliott in to a hug. “You ready for this?”

“Would I be here if I wasn’t?” Elliott smirks. “I was thinking we could start with *I Love Rock and Roll* to set the tone.”

“If we weren’t both gay I’d ask you to be my boyfriend.”
Elliott laughs as they all move to the open space of the room, Elliott and Dani grabbing their guitars from where they’d left them by the piano.

Kurt stands next to Santana as Dani and Elliott run through a few chords, warming up before playing increasingly fast runs, ending in Dani throwing her hands up and stomping the floor even as she shouts “showoff” mixed with laughter.

Shaking his head even as he laughs, Kurt pointedly ignores Santana’s suggestive comment to Dani before he calms down and does a few upper body stretches, relaxing his muscles.

“Ready?” Kurt nods at Elliott’s question before he takes a breath and straightens his posture. Elliott and Dani play the opening chords and Kurt shares a look with Santana before they both step forward and start to sing.

Kurt turns as Santana spins with a triumphant shout, even as exhaustion slows his steps and has him stumbling when Elliott claps him on the shoulder. “That,” Santana continues as she heads for the table where their glasses of water rest, sweating on their coasters, “is how it’s done, my lady and fellow gays. Broadway bitch divas need not apply.”

Kurt shakes his head in response, forces himself not to wince at the mention of Rachel even as he realizes the truth of Santana’s statement. He takes his glass of water, glad for the cool liquid after the demanding but enjoyable rehearsal.

“I wasn’t sure of that bridge when you suggested it the other day,” Elliott comments with a nod to Dani, “but you were right; it was perfect for our cover.”

Dani beams in response as Kurt carefully sets his now half-empty glass back on its coaster.

“It was a good addition,” Kurt adds, keeping his voice even. “How did you think of it? I mean, it was awesome, but obviously it had to take a lot of practice to sound that good today.”

“Oh my God, yes,” Dani says with a sigh as she leans back against Santana. “I argued about it with him,” Dani half-heartedly points to Elliott, “for at least an hour before I left, and I’ve practiced like two hours a day since.” She smiles, and Kurt is reminded of Santana’s grins right before she would deliver a parting shot.

Dani doesn’t disappoint.

“It was worth it though. He might have won that warm-up earlier but I smoked him in the end.”

“You are very good with your hands.” Santana adds with a smirk that has Kurt ducking his head in exasperation as he feels his cheeks flush.

“I did not need to know that, Santana.”

“What,” Santana challenges when Kurt looks up meets her gaze, “it’s not like you and the hobbit are monks.”

“So!” Kurt turns to face Elliott and ignores his smirk. “I think if we mix the rock with some of the more modern pieces we practiced last week we’ll have enough of a mix for our next performance.”

“We will.” Elliott’s raised brows show his amusement at the change in conversation, even if his comments focus on the music. “We need to rehearse a bit more though, since last week we had Rachel. We can handle it with the four of us,” Elliott hurry’s to explain, “we covered that earlier. But the music will change with four voices instead of five. So...maybe at least two rehearsals next
week? And one last run through tonight?”

Behind him, Kurt hears Santana huff and Dani laugh before they both agree in somewhat tired voices.

“We don’t have our schedules for next week yet,” Kurt adds. “But we’ll find out tomorrow, so we can figure out rehearsal times then. And we can do another run through today, but just as a warning I’m ordering pizza first.”

“I figured we’d order something,” Elliott replies, “but we’re getting cheese sticks too; I’m starving.”

Kurt’s about to reply when his phone vibrates from its place on the table.

Text message from Blaine:
You were amazing!!!

Text message from Blaine:
Don’t forget about your fiancé when you’re a famous performer, please ;-) 

“The hobbit making inappropriate comments about you yet?”

“Santana!” Kurt fights his smile as he turns. “I – you recorded our practice?”

“Yes.” Santana’s voice stays dry as she shrugs. “I figured with how boring you two are he’d appreciate the view. Besides,” She nods and Kurt follows her gaze, spies her previously unnoticed phone sitting on a music stand, “this way I can judge your dancing.”

Kurt sends her a half-hearted glare before he picks up his phone without comment.

Text message from Kurt:
Flatterer

Text message from Kurt:
I could never forget you <3

“So are you ordering the pizza?”

Kurt startles at Dani’s question as he finishing typing out his response to Blaine.

“I’ll do it,” Santana cuts in before Kurt can form a reply. “He’s talking to lover boy; we’d all starve before the order was placed.”

Kurt frowns as Dani and Santana stand, holding hands as they head for the music stand with Santana’s phone.

“He okay?”

At Elliott’s question Kurt turns. “What?”

“Blaine.” Elliott gestures to the phone still in Kurt’s hand. “He okay? I know he’s dealing with a lot. And…he’s still with your parents, right?”
“Oh.” Kurt feels his hand tighten on the phone. “Yeah – I mean, yes. He’s fine. As much as he can be, anyway. He doesn’t talk about it much,” Kurt remembers Blaine’s hesitance at Skyping the other night, how he quickly changes the topic after his parents are mentioned, the self-deprecation in the texts after a nightmare. “But he’s dealing with it. No one at school knows,” Kurt adds, “I’m not sure if that’s helpful or not. I mean, I’m worried that he’ll try to hold it in – push it all aside and pretend that he’s fine. But sometimes that helps him – he doesn’t focus on it if there’s no one to bring it up so he concentrates on other things.” Kurt lets out a breath. “He’s talked about it some with Dad though. And with me, although I know he keeps some to himself – he’s afraid I’ll worry too much.”

Kurt gives Elliott a humorless smile. “Sorry; that was probably more than you wanted to know.”

“No.” Elliott’s reply is quick, certain. “I’m glad you told me. He is talking about it though, right? Even if it is just a little? It’s a lot to deal with, and no matter how much someone says they’re ‘fine’ – something that big needs to be discussed.”

Kurt’s eyes tighten in confusion at the strength of Elliott’s words, at odds with the soft spoken tone. “You sound like you’re speaking from experience.”

Elliott’s mouth quirks in the shadow of a smile. “I had a friend.”

The weight of Elliott’s words registers (the soft spoken words, the resilient tone, the lack of a smile) and Kurt takes an unconscious step back in response.

Elliott had a friend.

“I’m so sorry.” Kurt’s words are punched out of him, tripping on his tongue in his haste to get them out. “I can’t –”

“It was years ago.” Elliott comments with a slight shrug. “We were both kids. I just didn’t know until it was too late.”

“Blaine wouldn’t –” Kurt cuts himself off, doesn’t – can’t – finish the thought. “He’s talking about it. And,” Kurt meets Elliott’s gaze, “we’ve already talked about him maybe finding a doctor. It wasn’t because of – well, it was because of something else, but it’s been discussed. He knows – he knows he has help, and Dad and Carole are there too.”

“He –”

“You each owe me eight bucks.” Santana comments as she stops beside Kurt, interrupting Elliott’s reply before she takes in Kurt’s concerned and Elliott’s confused expressions. “What’d we miss?”

“Nothing.” Elliott smoothly replies. “Just getting caught up on the lovebird’s life.”

“Right.” Santana’s tone conveys her disbelief, but she doesn’t call him on it. “You guys got cash?”

“You don’t mind getting paid in ones, right?” Elliott’s teasing voice causes Kurt to laugh, quickly ducking his head when Santana shoots him a half-hearted glare.


“We’re roommates, Santana. I’ll pay later.”
“You better.”

Kurt sighs before walking back to the sofa, grabbing the remote off the end table as he goes. Dani joins him a moment later, falling in to step beside him before throwing herself on the sofa.

“Don’t judge me; your furniture is comfy. So, what are we watching?”

Kurt gives her a small smile before turning on the TV. “I don’t know yet. Any preference?”

“Anything but Facts of Life.” Seeing Kurt’s questioning glace she continues. “I’ve watched it with Santana every day this week. I need a change.”

Kurt laughs and hands over the remote. “Just don’t pick anything scary. And if there’s nothing on there’s always Netflix.”

Santana and Elliott join moments later, the former sliding in beside Dani while Elliott sprawls out in the chair. Kurt lets their voices drift over him as he relaxes into the cushions, tired but content.

Text message from Kurt:

[photo] The empty space beside me is your spot – wish you were here <3

-.*-.*-. *

“Think they’re down, Steve. Damn homos couldn’t even put up some fight to make it fun.” A shoe moves, there’s a pop as his arm is forced away from his body. “Yeah, they’re down alright, Mitch. Whaddaya say, Blake, think they’ve had enough?”

Darkness closes in, the laughter fading. A squeal and flashes of color; green and white. Brief echoes of laughter before silence returns.

“He turns, ready to run, but someone is holding him back –

Blaine jolts up, sees Mr. Hummel standing above him, arm outstretched. Blaine flinches.

“Whoa, kid. I just came to get you; Carole says dinner’s finally done.”

“Sorry.” Blaine feels his cheeks flush and ducks his head. “Sorry, Mr. Hummel.” Blaine forces a small laugh. “You just startled me. Bad dream.”

Blaine pushes back the blankets, runs a nervous hand through hair that’s still damp from the shower he took after getting back from Burt’s shop.

“Yeah. I gathered that.” Burt pauses. “You want to tell me about it?”

“Oh.” Blaine studies Kurt’s comforter, gathering his thoughts. “Not…not right now? You said dinner’s ready? I don’t want to keep Mrs. Hudson-Hummel waiting; she seemed excited about this recipe.”

Burt nods, but stays focused on Blaine. “She is.” Burt takes a step back as Blaine pushes the comforter all the way down and stands from the bed. “And don’t worry; if it’s too bad there’s leftovers in the fridge.” Burt exaggerates a wink and Blaine smiles.

“I’m sure it will be good.”
“Blaine.” Burt’s call has Blaine halting in front of the doorway.

“Yes?”

“If you still want to talk later…I’ve got no plans, okay?”

A lump forms in Blaine’s throat and he pushes back the tears that gather in his eyes. “I – Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Hummel.”

Burt nods and claps Blaine on the shoulder as they leave the room.

“Anytime. And I was serious about the leftovers, too.”

The leftovers remain in the fridge; Carole’s new meal certainly worth the wait. Dinner passes uneventfully, with Burt asking about Glee and Carole commenting on a sale she’s been waiting for. It’s only after, when Burt and Blaine convince Carole to relax after making such a delicious dinner, and they’re gathering up dirtied dishes that Blaine remembers Burt’s earlier comment.

“Did you –” Blaine takes a breath, sets the plates in the sink. “They’re memories, partly. The nightmares.” After, Blaine briefly closes his eyes, silently curses his bluntness and inability to articulate his thoughts.

Burt looks up from where he’s placing the newly rinsed pots in the dishwasher. “You’ve been through a lot lately, Blaine. These types of things – they stick around.”

“It was years ago though.” Blaine’s voice is quiet, barely audible over the running water. “So why am I having nightmares about it now? I just – I just want to sleep.”

Silence reigns for a moment, broken only by the running faucet as Blaine carefully rinses each plate.

“You havin’ nightmares every night, Blaine?”

Blaine nods, unable to meet Burt’s gaze. “Well, almost every night. Sometimes about my – about my dad. But usually about the dance. And I keep –” Blaine hesitates, debating. “I keep seeing the cars. And I know…I know that it’s not them, there’s tons of green trucks and white Fords in Ohio and they have no reason to be Lima. But I keep seeing the cars, Mr. Hummel.”

Blaine startles when he’s pulled in a hug, the plate he’d been rinsing falling in the sink with a clank! and his arms rising of their own accord.

Moments later Burt steps back, catches Blaine’s eyes. “You know we’re here for you, Blaine. But…if you want to talk to someone who deals with things like this. Well,” Burt pauses, runs a hand over his bald head. “Carole and I have some names. We got them, well, after Finn. Went a couple of times. She was nice. Helpful, even if I didn’t want to hear it. But we can call her, see if she can see you; or if she knows someone.”

Blaine’s struck silent for a moment.

“She – she was helpful?”

“Yes, Blaine. She knew her stuff.”

Blaine bites his lip, forces his hands to relax at his sides. “I think that could help. Maybe – maybe we could call Monday?” Blaine offers a small smile and is about to turn back to the dishes when
he remembers. “I don’t have my parents’ insurance information. Should I try to call –”

“Don’t worry about it, Blaine.” At Blaine’s nervous look Burt continues. “I had to file paperwork, remember? And you might be turning eighteen in a week, but that doesn’t affect your insurance.”

“Oh.” Blaine nods and then turns back to the dishes, resuming rinsing each item before handing it over to be put in the dishwasher. Minutes later the task is done, the sink empty and the dishwasher humming in the otherwise silent kitchen.

“You goin’ out with your friends?” Burt’s question has Blaine stopping just outside the kitchen, turning to face the older man.

“No. I figured I’d get some homework done. I have to read a few chapters of *Billy Budd.*” Blaine doesn’t attempt to hide his grimace.

“Reading on a Friday night?” Burt’s tone is teasing, and Blaine smiles in response.

“With practice tomorrow and the performance on Sunday I won’t have much time later. Plus,” Blaine shrugs, “it’s better to just get it done.”

Burt laughs. “Well good luck. I’m pretty sure Kurt hated that novel too.”

“Thanks.” Blaine huffs a laugh and heads for the stairs, Burt’s quiet laughter echoing behind him.

Moments later Blaine enters Kurt’s room and heads for the desk. He drops into the chair with a soft sigh before straightening and pulling items from his lopsided bag, still on the floor from where he’d discarded it hours earlier.

*Text message from Blaine:*

[photo] Homework on a Friday night!

*Text message from Kurt:*

How exciting! You’re such a rebel ;)

Blaine chuckles at Kurt’s reply, and then nearly drops the phone when it buzzes with another message.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Don’t forget caffeine too; you’ll need it to get through that hellish book

*Text message from Blaine:*

We just finished dinner – I’ll be sure to get caffeine when I take my break ;)

*Text message from Blaine:*

And I was hoping your dad was wrong about you hating this book too. Now I know it’s evil

*Text message from Kurt:*

No one likes Billy Budd, Blaine. NO ONE

*Text message from Kurt:
But now go – be a good student. I shouldn’t enable your procrastination

Text message from Blaine:

I see how it is. Skype later?

Text message from Kurt:

Of course! Ten at the latest. I might not enable your procrastination but I can’t have my fiancé spending all of his Friday night ensconced in a trying novel ;)

Blaine laughs at Kurt’s message, sends a heart in reply before turning on his iPod from where it’s sitting on Kurt’s outdated docking station. Then, with King of Anything flowing through the speakers, Blaine picks up the book from where it’s lying amid highlighters, notebooks, and post-its.

Saturday is an all-day rehearsal; Sunday is their first Nationals song performance for an audience. Blaine can’t afford to be lost in memories.

He has work to do.
Thanks to everyone (again) for all the kudos and reviews! :-) I’m constantly amazed and awed by the feedback. As always, thanks to my betas slayerkitty and dlanadhz (truly wonderful people!)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 13

Kurt adjusts his jacket as he joins the rush of people headed for the subway; the brisk morning air at odds with the high for the day according to the weather app on his phone. Shaking his head, Kurt pushes his hands deeper into his pockets and ignores blaring horns from impatient drivers and the murmurs of pedestrians on their cell phones.

Text message from Kurt:

It's too early for this

Text message from Kurt:

I hope this paper doesn't reflect my dislike of mornings

Text message from Blaine:

I was wondering why you were up early...

Text message from Kurt:

Rewrite is due Tues – I’d forgotten because of the new paper being due next week

Text message from Blaine:

Joys of college! ;)

Kurt laughs softly at Blaine’s response, smiling as he types a reply.

Text message from Kurt:

Yet another reason I can't wait for you to join me: shared misery

Text message from Kurt:

But why are you up at 8 on a Sunday?

Text message from Blaine:

Misery? I thought you loved me…
Text message from Blaine:
I couldn’t sleep…nervous for the performance later, I think

Text message from Kurt:
I’m wearing a certain ring – we share everything, even misery ;)

Text message from Kurt:
Don’t be nervous! You’ll be amazing! <3

Text message from Kurt:
I’m at the subway :( Text me distractions once I’m at the library?

Text message from Blaine:
Of course!

Text message from Blaine:
Be sure to grab a coffee, too ;)

Smiling, Kurt puts his phone back in his pocket, joining the crowd – each new person he passed looking less enthused to leave the platform than the last – and entering.

Half an hour later, Kurt enters the library, cup of coffee from his favorite café in hand. After scanning the mostly empty space – and absently wondering why college students felt the need to be in public in pajamas – he chooses a table by the window near the closed café; the quiet is calming, and the plethora of outlets gives him space to charge his computer and phone while he works. With a sigh, he empties his bag, covering the table.

Moments later, computer open to EBSCO and copies of various PDFs surrounding it, Kurt starts his music and smiles when All in All fills his ears. He rolls his neck, takes a breath, and then starts to work.

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before our performance later.” Blaine pauses, stretches his fingers. “I didn’t disturb you, did I? I know it’s early –” Blaine glances at his phone, resting beside him on the bench. “Well, it was.” Blaine shrugs and offers a somewhat sheepish smile. “I lost track of time, I guess.”

“Don’t worry about it; I wouldn’t have got your keyboard if it was an issue. You’ve been at it a while though. I thought you could do with a break.” Burt steps further into the room, gestures to where Blaine’s sitting, “It’s been nice to have music in the house again though.”

“Most people prefer to only hear the end result.”

“They’re missin’ out.” Burt shakes his head. “Practice is part of the process – just like watchin’ your kid throw a ball in the yard. Kurt was always singing around the house, and Finn –” Burt sighs, runs his hands over his head. “Finn didn’t sing so much, but he had his drums…and guitar.” Burt huffs a laugh. “He didn’t even need his drum set half the time; I lost count of the times I walked in on him tapping on his desk, or a door frame. One time I walked by and he was tapping his toothbrush.”

Blaine offers a slightly pained smile, searches for words. “Finn would do that.”

“Like I said,” Burt tilts his head toward the keyboard, “it’s nice to hear music around the house again.”

“Doesn’t it hurt, though?” The words slip out unbidden, and Blaine clenches his hands, wishing he could draw them back. Seeing Burt’s questioning look Blaine takes a fortifying breath before continuing. “I just – We can’t forget him, but doesn’t it hurt to remember? Wouldn’t it be easier to…avoid reminders?”

“Sure it would.” Burt’s words catch Blaine by surprise, and he leans forward without thought. “It would be easier, and at first I couldn’t even be in the same room as a drum set. But that’s not healthy, Blaine. Not for anyone. And Finn – Finn wouldn’t want me ignoring something so important. It took a while, but it’s better now.” Burt pauses and when he speaks again his voice has gone quieter. “You still okay with me callin’ the doctor tomorrow?”


Burt opens his mouth to respond, but Carole chooses that moment to enter the room, two glasses of water in her hands.

“I thought you were taking a break.” Carole comments with a small smile. “You were in here a while; I thought you could use a drink, at least.”

“Thanks.” Blaine stands and takes the glass. “I lost track of time.”

“Hm.” Carole takes a sip from her glass. “You can’t forget to take breaks, Blaine.”

Blaine ducks his head as his left hand nervously taps a rhythm on his jeans. “Yeah. Sorry. I just – It’s easy to get into the zone, you know?”

Carole gives a small laugh. “I’ll take your word for that; I’m not a musician. But,” she turns to face Burt. “I actually wanted to ask you boys if you wanted to go out for lunch before we head to the reception hall.”

Blaine jerks his head up, his water sloshing a bit in his glass at his haste. “You’re coming to the concert?”
Carole and Burt both turn, looking to Blaine. “Did you think we were going to miss a preview of your Nationals performance?” Burt’s voice is light, but it’s obvious the question is rhetorical.

“Oh.” Blaine holds the emotion in his voice, ignores the fleeting thought of how his own parents never even came to promoted concerts. “Are you sure you want to come? I just – you’re going to hear it in few weeks.”

“Been hearin’ half the performance all morning,” Burt gives Blaine smile. “We’re not the most patient people; no sense in waiting a week to hear something I can hear today. Besides,” Burt meets Blaine’s eyes, “We’ve never missed a concert. Not about to start now.”

“We’ll be there, Blaine,” Carole adds and takes a sip of water before she continues. “But before that. Lunch? I was thinking we could grab something together…” Carole lets the sentence trail off, gives Burt a narrowed look.

“I’m not about to turn down a meal where we can all relax.” Burt smiles at the end of his comment, winks at Blaine. “And don’t you think about offering to pay, kid.”

Blaine swallows back the comment he’d been about to make, ducking his head to hide his flush. “Well…thank you.”

“That’s settled then. And I’ll have to remember to preemptively tell you,” Carole shoots Blaine a look, “no in the future; this is the fastest we’ve ever settled this discussion.” Burt laughs at Carole’s comment, and Blaine shakes his head.

“Little early for lunch though,” Burt adds.

“I was actually hoping to practice a bit more,” Blaine comments with a slight shrug. “You can’t over practice for nationals.”

“Well,” Carole takes another sip of water. “I was hoping to get to the store, check out that sale. I could go ahead now and you can practice some more; we could all just meet at the restaurant?”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Just because we’re eating out, don’t think you can skip on your diet. I’ll be watching you.” Carole’s reply has Burt shaking his head.

“I didn’t expect anything less.”

Carole nods to both of them before leaving the room. “I’ll see you boys in a couple hours.”

Blaine waits a moment before turning and heading back for the bench, setting his glass of water on the end table as he goes.

“Don’t mind an audience, do you?” Burt’s comment has Blaine turning back, pulling his thoughts away from chord progressions and crescendos.

“Oh. No…but it’ll be repetitive, so I won’t judge you if you leave.”

“Don’t worry about that, Blaine. I’m just here to listen.”

Blaine turns back and takes his seat with a smile. He rolls his neck, stretches his fingers, and then takes a breath.

Music fills the room moments later; unnoticed, Burt smiles and leans back, relaxing into the sofa
with a smile.

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“Rachel say anything when she got back to the loft last night? Or is she actually done with band?”

Kurt turns when Dani joins him at the bar, meets her inquisitive look with a raised brow before slightly shaking his head in response to the first question.

“No. She got back late and immediately went to her room. She was warming up when I left this morning.” Kurt gives a forcibly casual shrug. “Didn’t look up from the piano as I walked by.”

“Sorry your morning sucked. Mine was wonderful.” Dani gives a small wave to Santana who’s taking orders on the opposite side of the restaurant. “Very –”

“I do not want to know,” Kurt interrupts, meets Dani’s amused look with an unimpressed stare. “You’ve been hanging out with Santana too much.”

“I wouldn’t say too much,” Dani replies, happiness replacing the humor in her tone.

Absently, Kurt wonders if he sounds the same when he talks about Blaine, and resolutely pushes aside how badly he misses his fiancé.

“That’s a matter of opinion. Anyway, back to your question…I think for now we should just assume Rachel’s done with the band.”

Dani takes her time before responding. “She’s talented, but we’re just as good without her. I mean,” Dani pulls out her phone and brings up a picture from the previous night’s practice. “We’ve already proven that.”

“Hm.” Kurt nods. “We got our schedules, so I’m thinking rehearsal Tuesday night and Thursday afternoon? We’re all free then, at least.”

“Works for me – should work for Santana, too.”

“Planning things without checking with your girlfriend? I didn’t realize you two were that serious.”

Dani carelessly punches Kurt’s shoulder. “The way I hear it you were planning things with Blaine since before you two were even official.”

“Blaine and I have always been close.” Kurt blushes and ducks his head. “We just…clicked.”

“Right –” The clatter of plates interrupts Dani’s reply and she eyes them with a sigh. “I thought college students were supposed to sleep late on weekends, not go out for brunch.” Dani shakes her head before gathering the plates. “Anyway, break’s over, I guess. You’ll have to tell me some of those stories later; according to Santana you and Blaine have always been nauseatingly in love – I need your side to get the full picture and we both have long shifts today so you can keep me entertained.” Dani winks and walks away before Kurt has a chance to reply.

Text message from Kurt:

Have we always been ‘nauseatingly in love’ ??

Text message from Blaine:

Is this a trick question?
Kurt holds in his laugh at Blaine’s reply, only allowing a small smile and quickly glancing at his tables before swiftly typing a response.

**Text message from Kurt:**

Santana’s been telling stories

**Text message from Blaine:**

…I should have known.

**Text message from Blaine**

And we have never been nauseating – I’m actually pretty sure that from Santana that’s somehow a compliment :)

The arrival of Kurt’s orders has him placing his phone in his pocket without a reply, and Kurt gathers the plates from the counter, hiding his grimace at the sight – and smell – of the ‘extra, extra, extra’ onions currently residing on the burger. The other plate is just as questionable, the club sandwich having enough meat that Kurt’s worried about his cholesterol just from proximity. Arriving at the customer’s table moments later, he sets the plates down with a strained smile.

“There you go. Now, anything else I can get you?”

“Mm.” The customer to his left – a college student attempting to pull off the cliché frat boy look – doesn’t even swallow before speaking again. “You got vinegar for the fries?”

Kurt suppresses the urge to look away or remind him to not speak with his mouth full. “Of course. I’ll just go grab it for you.”

Kurt spins away from the table, heads for the counter. Santana hip checks him when he’s halfway there, smirking when he shoots her a half-hearted glare.

“Did you need something, Santana?”

“You look like those guys personally offended you. I’m curious.”


Reaching the counter, Kurt pulls away. Grabbing a bottle of vinegar from the collection, he turns to head back to the table, shaking the bottle at Santana’s confused look. “The latest request.”

Santana’s laugh carries across the diner.

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“That piano’s in tune, right?” Tina’s question has Blaine turning to his left, pulling his attention from his mental run through of the performance.

“What?”

“The piano.” Tina tilts her head toward the upright piano in the corner. “It’s tuned right? This is our first performance of our Nationals set…I don’t want it to be cursed by using an out-of-tune piano.”
“Cursed.” Blaine seems to be struck with one-word answers in response to Tina.

“Like we have a chance of winning Nationals if our first public performance includes a less than perfect piano.”

“We’ll be fine, Tina.” Blaine smiles and ignores her sarcasm as he nods toward the piano. “I’m sure it’ll be fine, but even if the piano isn’t perfectly in tune, we’ve been practicing so much – we got this.”

“Of course we do!” Sam’s comment is loud as he steps between them, throwing his arms across Blaine and Tina’s shoulders. “Anyway, Mr. Schue said we start in five.”

“Guess we’d better head over there, then.” Blaine smiles and turns with his friends, Sam keeping his arms around them as they head toward the back of the room, where they’ll perform while facing the crowd. Despite being on the left, Blaine leads them through the tables, steering them between laughing volunteers and bored-looking caterers.

They join the rest of Glee club moments later, Unique spinning with Kitty as Ryder jokingly dances beside them. Mr. Schue steps forward then, and the Glee members circle him, Ryder, Kitty, and Unique coming to a stop with slightly breathless laughter.

“All right guys.” Mr. Schue moves slightly, ensuring everyone can see – and hear – him. “I know this was last minute, but I believe in you; now let’s give the people a show!”

A group hug and enthusiastic pre-show circle later, Blaine takes a fortifying breath and he takes his place on the floor. He flashes Artie a smile as the music starts, and then he begins to sing.

He dances across the space, mirroring Artie. He spins and looks out at the crowd, sees Burt and Carole leaning against the right wall. A dark haired caterer crosses the room, and Blaine blinks away déjà vu; Blaine turns back, quickly looks out the window so he faces the crowd but doesn’t single one member out. Sees a truck parked outside the window –

_Steve’s dark hair blends in with the night, his face a pale shock in the parking lot as Blaine falls._

_The streetlight flickers, making spots dance in front of him and Blaine sees the shadow in front of him grow._

_A green truck speeds away, music blasting from open windows –_

The music changes and Blaine steps back, blinking away memories. He looks again to Burt and Carole while enthusiastically sidestepping Artie, hopes the audience doesn’t see the confusion in his friend’s eyes.

Breathe in. _No more mistakes._

Breathe out. _Just focus on the music._

The song ends and Blaine hurriedly takes his seat at the piano with a sigh of relief, puts on a smile as he places his trembling hands on the keys. He glances up and waits for Sam and Unique’s nods.

He takes a breath after he receives them.

Breathe in. _Perform._

Breathe out. _Focus on the music._
He begins to play.

All too soon the song is finished, and Blaine stands to rejoin the Glee club on slightly unsteady legs. He ignores the looks from his friends, focuses on his breathing and remembering his starting note. He smiles instead, nods to Marley as she steps forward to begin her solo.

The audience hushes, the excitement from the previous songs segueing into stunned awe as the hall echoes with the a cappella piece.

The song ends and there’s a moment of silence before the audience stands, clapping. Blaine joins in the group bow, smiling. Then they step back, and Blaine returns to the piano; the Nationals performance was their pinnacle, but they still have almost an hour of performance time, even if their songs are now more for background noise.

Blaine plays the music by route, loses himself in the art of the performance.

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Kurt forcibly keeps his smile as the couple revises their order for the fourth time. In his pocket, his phone continues to buzz, as it has been for the past seven minutes.

Something’s wrong.

Something’s wrong and all Kurt wants to do is answer his phone. Instead he’s standing in front of a table as a woman who never left the eighties changes her order from a burger and fries to a chicken club.

Finally, she seems content and Kurt hurries away before she can change her mind. He rushes the orders to the kitchen and then steps away saying he’s going on break. Retrieved from his pocket, his phone blinks with 8 missed calls from Blaine before switching to show their engagement picture, lighting up with another incoming call.

“Blaine. What happened? I’m sorry – my last customers kept changing their order.”

“No.” Blaine’s voice is quiet. “I’m sorry – I know you’re at work but –”


“I messed up.” Kurt clenches the phone at Blaine’s voice, takes a breath but Blaine continues before he can respond. “We were performing and I thought I saw – anyway, I messed up during a performance Kurt.”

Kurt takes a moment, forces his voice to be calm before he replies. “Okay. Okay, but why? What happened during the performance?”

“I misstepped. I don’t know if the audience noticed, but I did. There was this caterer who had the same hair color as Steve. And then I saw a truck out the window. It wasn’t him; I know it wasn’t, but…I misstepped, Kurt.”

“Don’t even worry about it. You said the audience might not have even noticed, right? And even if they did, don’t worry about it. It was a misstep, Blaine. It happens.”

“Not to me.” Blaine sighs down the line. “I can always make the performance. And even if the audience didn’t notice, everyone in Glee did.”
“Blaine –”

“They all asked me afterwards. Sam was afraid I was dying or something, since I ‘never mess up’ and practice so much.” There’s a pause, and for a moment Kurt just listens to Blaine breathe. “I told them.” A brief pause and then the words a rush. “I told them about Sadie Hawkins and how –” Kurt winces at Blaine’s humorless laugh, “how I’m so tired I’m seeing things. I left before they could say much.”

Kurt pauses for a moment, leans against the wall and takes a breath. “I’m so sorry, Blaine. I wish –” Kurt closes his eyes, forces his hand to relax around his phone. “I wish I was there with you.”

“I miss you too. I just – I don’t know what to do, Kurt. I can’t mess up during performances. I can’t.”

“And you won’t. It was a mistake, Blaine. And,” Kurt pauses, thinks back over previous conversations. “You said Dad was going to call tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah.” Blaine’s voice barely carries over the line, quiet and shaken. “It’s just. They’re going to think I’m crazy.”

“They won’t.” Kurt’s voice is certain. “No one can begrudge you help, Blaine. They won’t.”

“I misstepped during a performance – our Nationals performance – and now I’m going to be seeing a shrink because I’m having nightmares about something that happened years ago.”

“Don’t do that.” Kurt’s voice has taken a hardened edge. “Don’t put yourself down; I know you, Blaine. And no one will judge you for getting help. And they’re your friends – our friends – they care for you. Besides,” Kurt takes a breath, “I’ve heard your fiancé is scary when he’s upset, and someone judging you for getting help? That would upset him.”

There’s a huff of laughter and Blaine’s following words are light. “There’s a reason I want to keep him happy, besides the fact that I love him.”

Kurt smiles in response, hopes his voice conveys his emotions. “Well, I love you too…I meant it though – you’re precious to me, and you don’t deserve any of this – you get whatever help you need, Blaine. I’m so proud of you.”

“What you think means the world me.” The words are soft, but ring with an honesty that leaves Kurt breathless.

“I love you.” Kurt’s about to speak more when he catches sight of Dani, gesturing to plates on the counter with exaggerated movements and raised eyebrows. He sighs, and clenches the phone. “Hey Blaine? I’m sorry –”

“You have to get back to work, don’t you?”

“I’m on shift for another hour and half. I’ll call as soon as my shift is over though; we can Skype once I’m home, too.”

“Don’t work too hard; I’m sorry for calling at work.”

“I don’t want to hear that word, remember? Anyway, I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

“Yeah. I’ll talk to you soon; I love you.”
“I love you too. And Blaine?” Kurt waits for Blaine’s hum of agreement before continuing. “Regardless of what happened today, you’re still my handsome, amazing, incredibly talented fiancé.”

He puts his phone back in his pocket with a sigh, heads for Dani and the waiting plates. Kurt loves this city, New York is everything he dreamed of back when he was stuck in Ohio, but back when he was dreaming of escape he hadn’t factored in having a fiancé. Much less a fiancé struggling with a painful past while he’s states away.

Reaching the counter he takes the plates, ignores Dani’s inquisitive look. He knows there will be questions later, but for now he has food to deliver.

He spins away, forces a smile on his face as he passes customers; unhappy waiters don’t get tips.

_text message from Kurt:

Courage. <3

_*_*_*_*_*_

Blaine follows Burt and Carole into the house, mentally replaying the performance from earlier.

“– amazing performance, Blaine.”

“I’m sorry?” Blaine turns at Burt’s comment, embarrassed to have missed the first half of the sentence.

“Just thinkin’ bout that performance; you kids outdid yourselves. I know I said it earlier, but really, I don’t know how you kids do it.”

Arriving in the kitchen, Blaine pours himself a glass of water, pours two for Burt and Carole without prompting.

“I messed up.” Blaine ducks his head, draws designs on the condensation surrounding the glass.

“You misstepped.” Burt’s comment has Blaine looking up, meeting his gaze. “You misstepped, Blaine, and I doubt anyone else noticed. It was a great performance.”

“It was beautiful.” Carole takes one of the glasses from the counter with a smile, pausing to give Blaine’s shoulder a quick squeeze before taking a seat at the table.

“I still messed up.” Blaine can’t ignore that fact, remembers being frozen before hurrying to get back in step. “There was a truck. Outside the window.” Blaine takes a sip of water, briefly closes his eyes to relish the cool slide of it. “There was a dark haired waiter, and then – then I saw a truck and I messed up.”

“Blaine.” Burt steps forward, looks Blaine in the eye. “You didn’t ‘mess up’ – you reacted. Something horrible happened to you, and you –”

“I messed up during a performance!” Blaine interrupts, the words coming out of him in a rush. “I messed up and I can’t – I can’t mess up during performances. We have Nationals in a few weeks; we have to do well.”

“You’re not letting anyone down.” Blaine turns, sees Carole smiling from the table. “The performance today was amazing; I can tell how hard you’ve all worked.”
“And I’m callin’ for you tomorrow, Blaine. You’re doing everything you can, so relax.”

Love, Love, Love cuts through the air and Blaine startles, forgetting what he was about to say in response and pulling his phone from his pocket instead.

“Talk to your fiancé, Blaine.” Burt smiles. “He’ll tell you the same things we did.”

Blaine nods, offering a small smile as he answers the phone and heads for the stairs.

“Hey, you.”

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine knocks on the door frame to Mr. Schue’s office, absently clutching the strap of his bag – a habit he’d picked up from Kurt – as the teacher waved him in, “You wanted to see me?”

“Oh, of course, yes. Please, have a seat.” Schue waits until Blaine is settled in the chair in front of the desk, and then continues, “I wanted to talk to you about the performance on Sunday.”

Blaine clutches the strap of his bag a bit harder, “Oh. Um, there was a guy in the audience. He just startled me, reminded me of something else. It won’t happen again.”

Mr. Schue sighs in response before catching Blaine’s gaze, “I heard you talking to Unique after the show, Blaine. I believe that you think you saw someone from your past, but we’re miles away from there. Isn’t it more likely you just saw someone wearing a similar jacket with the same haircut? Traumatic experiences can have delayed effects, Blaine - Emma has some pamphlets, I’m sure. And you can always talk to her.”

Blaine’s knuckles have gone white, but his words are steady when he responds, “I know I can. I’ll stop by her office before I go home.” Blaine gives a smile as he stands, glad for the first time that Kurt’s in New York so there’s no one in the school to see through his charade. He’s turned and almost out the door when Schue speaks again.

“Please remember to get those pamphlets, Blaine. You need to work this out; we can’t have New Directions members tripping on stage during performances because they’re seeing ghosts.” Schue ends with a small smile, as if his words were a lighthearted joke.

Blaine nods before turning and exiting the office. It’s not until he’s halfway down the hallway that he realizes his hands are numb.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the kudos, comments, and reads! I'm in awe of all the encouragement. I hope this chapter lives up to expectations, and thanks to my lovely beta slayerkitty who’s helped me through writer's block and stress!! :) 

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 14

Blaine doodles in the margins of his notebook, only half listening to the lecture about the process to add an amendment to the Constitution. He’d rushed to the class as soon as the bell rang, wanting to avoid the concerned looks he’d been receiving the past two days. Kurt had been correct; there hadn’t been any judgments, but the members of Glee could never be said to be inconspicuous, and while well-intentioned, the continued glances had Blaine on edge.

Absently, Blaine wonders if this was how Quinn felt after Beth was born.

At lunch the day before he’d been the center of attention. His friends concerned, questioning him and curious to know about his nightmares (asking how long and why and what can I do) making it so he couldn’t shift his focus, couldn’t ignore the past like he normally would.

The lights dim and Blaine looks up, sighs when he sees Amendments on the title slide of a PowerPoint, the spinning text mirroring his thoughts. He sighs, twirls his pen before shifting in his seat. It’s rare that he has to take notes in Civics, but occasionally there’s a frenzy with all the test information given in one class.

Apparently today is one of those days.

When the bell rings half an hour later, Blaine shakes out the cramp in his hand before clearing his desk. He’s not looking forward to Calculus, he’s never cared for the content and as much as he cares for Tina and Unique their glances and shared looks aren’t hidden.

No wonder Kurt was such a terrible spy.

Although, Blaine thinks with a smile, Kurt’s attempts at espionage were rather endearing.

“Hey Blaine!” Sam meets him in the hallway, pulling Blaine from his thoughts. “You know what you’re singing this week?”

“I’m guessing you don’t?” Blaine accompanies the question with a laugh, gives Sam a knowing look.

“Nah, not set in stone, anyway. But I figured I’d check with Mr. Prepared, see what you have.”

“You’ll find out with everyone else, when I sing on Friday.”

“Really? You’re going to make your best friend wait?”
“It’s two days; you’ll survive.”

Sam groans and Blaine ducks under his arm with a smile, entering his Calculus classroom.

Text message from Blaine:
Sam hasn't chosen a song yet...

Text message from Kurt:
Is this supposed to surprise me? Glee Club survives on impromptu performances

Text message from Blaine:
It still amazes me – practice is important

Text message from Blaine:
...wish me luck! Looks like the quiz is first

Text message from Kurt:
Glee practices for competition; everything else is temperamental ;)

Text message from Kurt:
Good luck (although I know how much you've studied – you'll do great)

Text message from Kurt:
Love you! <3

Blaine’s still smiling when Unique enters the room, shooting him a confused look before she sees his phone.

“I don’t care how much you love Kurt. You shouldn’t be smiling the day we have a quiz in Calculus. It’s just wrong.”

Blaine shrugs. “I’ve studied all I can.” He pauses, and gives Unique a smile. “And Kurt was just wishing me luck.”

“Mercedes was right. You two are like a Disney couple: unbelievably cute even in less than ideal situations.”

“I’m going to take that as a compliment.”

“Hm.” Unique nods before leaning forward, closer to Blaine. “Are you –”

“Can I borrow your cheat sheet? I want to compare it with mine. I feel like I’ve forgotten something.”

Tina’s interruption has Blaine releasing a sigh of relief, fumbling with his bag to pull out his papers and avoid answering Unique’s question.

He’s not looking forward to the quiz, but when Tina waits a beat too long before taking his cheat sheet he can’t find it him to resent the required silence that accompanies test-taking.
The bell rings and Blaine reclaims his sheet, sets it beside his graphing calculator with a sigh.

*Text message from Blaine:
Quiz time!*

_*_*_*_*_*_

Kurt straightens his bag and turns on his music as he exits is professor’s office, tired but pleased with the comments he’d received during his one-on-one conference. His early morning practices were paying off. He smiles to one of his waiting classmates he walks by them in the hallway; he may not have close friends at NYADA, but he’s been in enough classes with the same people to offer a hello in passing.

He exits the building minutes later, blinking as the sunlight hits his eyes. He digs his sunglasses from his bag as he heads down the sidewalk toward his favorite café, dodging businessmen intent on phones and a group of giggling young women oblivious to their surroundings.

Kurt sighs as he waits at a crosswalk, humming along to *Feel the Silence* and wondering what the man beside him was thinking when he put on such an ill-fitting outfit.

*Text message from Kurt:
[photo] Save me from New Yorkers with terrible fashion sense*

*Text message from Blaine:
You can’t have everything in New York, otherwise I’d never see you! ;)*

*Text message from Kurt:
Very funny.*

*Text message from Blaine:
You love me!*

*Text message from Kurt:
You yes…your sense of humor though? That’s questionable ;)*

*Text message from Blaine:
I love you, too :p*

Kurt enters the café with a smile, pauses his music as he joins the queue and orders a mocha (if he splurges on a chocolate chip muffin too, well, there’s no witnesses). Seated at a table moments later, steaming mug and muffin in front of him, Kurt pulls his laptop and papers from his bag.

With the extra rehearsals added to his already busy schedule, Kurt’s hoping to get a bit ahead with his reading, finish his homework early. Taking a sip of his coffee, Kurt sighs and pulls his theatre history text toward him.

There’s only so much medieval theatre history he can read; chocolate is a necessity.

_*_*_*_*_*_
Lunch is loud, the cafeteria echoing back the conversations within. At the table with his fellow members of Glee club, Blaine picks at his burger, the dry bun less appetizing than usual.

“– stare at it?”

“Hm?” Blaine looks up at Unique’s question, meets her inquiring look across the table. “What?”

“Your burger. You’re going to eat it, right?”

“Of course he is.” Tina gives Blaine a stern look. “We’re not going to have another incident,” Tina looks to Marley, “like we had Regionals.”

Blaine smiles, takes an exaggerated bite before replying. “I know better than to skip meals. Apparently my fiancé has spies everywhere.”

“I don’t know about spies, but I do know we got extra rehearsals to prep for nationals, and we can’t have one of our best dancers passing out because he skipped lunch.”

Taking another bite of his burger Blaine ducks his head, ignores the pointed reference to his misstep the previous weekend.

“I don’t get why Mr. Schue is calling for all these extra rehearsals; if he wants us to practice we can use regular Glee time. But instead he’s making us have Glee and extra rehearsal.” Tina pauses, takes another bite of her sandwich. “I know we have to work hard; we have to do well at Nationals, but making us have two sets every week? I’m going to make more mistakes with my feet being this tired.”

“It’s not so bad.” Sam leans forward, steals a fry from Blaine’s plate. “It’s not like our weekly songs take a lot of practice.”

“Yours don’t.” Tina’s voice drips with condescension. “You don’t even have a song yet. But some of us,” Tina looks to Blaine before continuing. “We practice for every performance.”

“It’s not so bad.” Marley smiles as she passes around a container of cookies. “Nationals practice is more work; our weekly songs are fun.”

Ryder and Jake respond, but Blaine only partly listens, startling a moment later when a hand settles on his shoulder as Sam attempts to whisper in his ear.

“You okay?”

Blaine faces Sam, represses his sigh at the question; it’s been the first thing he’s asked ever since he misstepped on Sunday.

“Mm.” Blaine swallows his bite of fries. “I’m fine. A little tired, but aren’t we all?”

There’s silence for a moment as Sam just stares, and Blaine fidgets, dipping more fries into his pile of ketchup.

“Just want to make sure you’re okay…I mean, I’m your best friend but I didn’t know anything until you told us Sunday.” Sam’s voice holds a hint of confusion, a trace of hurt.

Blaine sets down his fries, leans back with a sigh. “It’s not that I don’t trust you. It’s just not something I like thinking about. It happened years ago anyway.”

“Why’s it bothering you now, then?”
Blaine sighs. “I don’t know.”

“Oh.” Sam looks disappointed. “But you’re okay, right?”

“Yeah.” Blaine gives Sam a small smile. “I’m fine.”

Kurt wipes down the counter, putting extra pressure on the stubborn spot of dried sauce near the edge. The diner is moderately full, but he’s just delivered food to the last of his customers, and his quick glance around showed no one in need of a refill. To his left, Dani hums as she drums her fingers on the counter, waiting for orders.

“Oh!” Kurt turns at Dani’s exclamation, gives her an inquiring look when she takes a moment before continuing. “Before I forget – Elliott and I worked some more after rehearsal last night. I think we’ll have everything fixed so tomorrow can go smoothly.” Dani smiles and then claps her hands in excitement. “We started a new piece, too; it’s not that complicated so we’ll be able to practice tomorrow, too.”

Kurt slowly blinks before giving Dani an overly bright smile. “Sounds like you two got a lot done!”

“Yeah, well,” Dani shrugs, and then her voice turns teasing, “not all of us are in an elite arts school.”

“Right.” Kurt shakes his head. “Just because I’m in NYADA doesn’t mean I can join a performance on command. Do I even know this song you two practiced?” He holds eye contact, mentally congratulates himself on keeping his voice casual.

“We talked about it last week.” Dani winks. “You’ll know it two chords in.”

“You seem pretty confident.”

“Trust me. Besides, you and Santana will hear it tomorrow at practice.” Dani carefully gathers the plates of food from the serving window and leaves for her table before Kurt can reply.

“She really is perfect for Santana,” Kurt mumbles as he resumes wiping down the counter. “Always has to have the last word.”

He continues to absently wipe the counter, pushes down the worry that had risen when Dani mentioned practicing with Elliott on their own time. Dani was happy when she shared the information – she wasn’t hiding information.

Kurt ignores the little voice that wonders if that’s worse.

The rag slips when his phone buzzes in his pocket, startling him from his thoughts. He quickly glances around the diner to make sure he’s not needed before he pulls his phone free.

Text message from Blaine:

Why does MHS only have water and juice in the vending machines? I’m pretty sure that goes against the Geneva Convention

Kurt smiles, lets out a small laugh even though he agrees with Blaine’s comment.

Text message from Kurt:
The joys of public school ;)

Text message from Blaine:
Dalton had its perks

Text message from Blaine:
But MHS can’t have better company and caffeine – no one would choose private school then :)

Text message from Kurt:
You’re still a dork, Blaine Anderson

A loud burst of laughter has Kurt turning, slipping his phone back in his pocket as he looks across the tables. The laughter wasn’t in his section, but he resigns himself to step away anyway, seeing one of his customers with a half-empty glass.

Blaine may be the love of his life, and a wonderful, wonderful distraction, but Kurt can’t afford to be the inattentive waiter who doesn’t get tipped.

He steps away, represses his sigh when he sees a hint of the stain still on the counter. He still has an hour on the clock; he’ll get that stain after dealing with refills.

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Fifteen minutes later, Blaine pulls into the parking lot of Hummel Tires & Lube and circles to the back, parking his car. Moments later he walks in, waves a hello to the mechanics as he heads for Mr. Hummel’s office. He finds it empty, but when he turns back toward the garage floor Pete nods toward a blue minivan. Mr. Hummel stands seconds later, and Blaine makes his way to him.

“Overheated,” Burt comments with a gesture to the car, “anyway, can you go help Jim?”

Blaine nods and turns to leave when Burt stops him with a hand on his arm. “School go okay?”

Blaine smiles and ducks his head. “It was fine – well, except for the calc quiz.” He shrugs before continuing. “Never fun, but Unique and Jake were awesome in Glee.”

“You kids are talented.” There’s a pause and then Burt continues. “Now. How about you really tell me about your school day?”

Blaine lets out a small laugh. “Unique and Jake really were awesome. But,” Blaine meets Burt’s gaze, “they keep looking at me…like I’m going to break or something – and asking if I’m okay or if I want to talk about it.” Blaine keeps his voice steady when he continues. “I don’t. At least, not at school. Not there. I just want things to be normal.”

The hand on Blaine’s shoulder tightens for moment, and when he speaks Burt’s voice is warm. “You’re all great kids, but you’re still kids, Blaine. Maybe not for long,” Burt winks, “but for a while yet.” Burt sighs, and then his voice resumes its warmth, if not its teasing. “What you’re going through, it’s serious. None of you should have to deal with anything like this, but you do. And they’re going to ask about you because they care, Blaine, it’s part of having friends. You don’t have to talk about it with them either, if you don’t want to. Besides, you’ve got that appointment with Dr. Schamp next week; hopefully she’ll be able to help.”

“I hope so, too.” Blaine nods and steps away. “I’m helping Jim?”

“Mm,” Burt hums in agreement before his tone turns teasing. “You get to go under some cars.”

“Because I’m young or because I’m smaller?”

Blaine walks away to the sound of Burt’s laughter.

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The keys are cool under his fingers, and Kurt idly plays a few scales, waiting for the coffee to finish brewing. Finished with his vocal and acting work, he’s taking a break, switching focus to pure academics.

Hence the coffee.

The coffee stops dripping some time later, and Kurt steps away from the piano, heads for the kitchen. Kurt adds an extra pack of sugar to his coffee with a sigh, rolls his neck to release the tension gathered there. Annotating for hours has left his muscles cramped, and he still has work to do. Turning, he heads back to his room, sets his steaming mug on his desk as drops into his desk chair.

Text message from Kurt:

[photo] Study time!

Text message from Blaine:
So organized ;)

*Text message from Blaine:*

And you still have my note <3

*Text message from Kurt:*

It matches my décor :)

Kurt smiles, puts his phone down and picks up his book with a sigh, lets the music from his docking station drift over him. The book is dry, and Kurt knows he’ll need Tylenol before he’s done.

For now, he has music and coffee.

A chapter later Kurt absently notes the closing of the loft door, shakes his head when he hears Santana cursing in Spanish from the kitchen (judging from the opening and closing of cabinets). He slouches in his chair, propping his book against the ledge of his desk as the a capella chords of *Hear You Me* fade to a piano cover. He takes a moment to enjoy the strains of music before refocusing on his book, stretching the ache from his fingers.

He manages another chapter (four songs) before he hears steps approaching, turns as Santana enters and drops onto his bed with an exaggerated flop.

“This isn’t your room, Santana.”

“I might prefer ladies but even I’m not so gay I’d copy your sense of interior design, Hummel.”

Kurt sets his book down with a sigh, turns to face Santana. “Did you need something?”

“You and the hobbit. You do that anniversary stuff, right?”


“Hold up.” Santana sits up, his hand outstretched to stop Kurt’s words. “Dani and I are not you; we might be fabulous but we’re not into the whole looking disgustingly in love thing.”

“We –”

“I wasn’t done. I – I care for Dani, and she’d like…something, but it’s me and Dani, Hummel, not Porcelain and Hobbit.”


Santana rolls her eyes. “I didn’t say I wanted your help, Hummel.”

“You’re sitting on my bed.”

There’s a pause and Kurt watches as Santana studies her nails. “Music.”

“What?”

“Well.” Kurt smiles. “Work with that.” He speaks before Santana can voice a question. “Look Santana. You know Dani better than I do. Just think of times when she’s been happy. Times when she’s smiled, laughed.” Kurt leans back, doesn’t see how his smile has gone soft. “Blaine got us tickets to The Lion King for our anniversary. I got us dinner at a nice restaurant.” He startles from his memories at Santana’s burst of laughter.

“You went to a fancy dinner and show. You are officially the most boring college-aged couple in this city.”

Kurt narrows his eyes. “You asked about anniversaries, Santana. If you’re just going to sit there and make snide comments you can leave. I have other things going on.”

“I can see that.” Santana gestures to Kurt’s desk. “Yet another reason to be glad I didn’t apply to your fancy school. But really,” she eyes his books with disinterest, “all this?”

"I've got a lot to do Santana, and I don't want to be stuck spending my weekend doing homework.”

“Right.” Santana draws out the vowels, pushes aside Kurt’s blankets as she stands. “Well, you have fun with all that. I’m gonna go enjoy some quality television. Enjoy your homework.”

“Go plan your anniversary date, Santana.”

A smirk and Santana leaves, Kurt shaking his head as she does. He spins back to face his desk, sighs when he sees the book lying beside his laptop. He takes a sip of coffee, winces at its tepid temperature. He still has at least another hour of reading and annotation. Kurt pulls a highlighter from his pencil cup, eyes his book with a grimace before reaching for his phone instead.

*Text message from Kurt:

Santana’s turning into a romantic – New York really is magical ;)

_*_*_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine settles onto Kurt’s old bed with a sigh, tired from calculus problems and other homework assignments. Relaxed in Kurt’s pajamas (they really were the most comfortable clothes ever) he picks up his phone from the nightstand, smiles at his lock screen before hitting the code.

Moments later the call connects. “Hey you.” Kurt’s voice rings from down the line, happiness and exhaustion vying for dominance in his tone.

“You sound tired.”

“I thought you were supposed to charm me.” Kurt’s voice is light, teasing.

“I already did that; you’re wearing a certain ring, after all.”

“I knew it.” Kurt lets out a dramatic sigh. “It was only a matter of time before you settled. Should I stop expecting romantic serenades, too?”

Blaine laughs. “You know me better than that.”

“Mm. After three years I’d better.”

“Of course!” Blaine hears the resolve in his own voice. “You know me better than anyone.”
“Does Sam know that?”

“Very funny. Besides,” Blaine sighs and his voice goes soft, “he keeps asking if I’m okay. They all are, actually.”

There’s a pause and Blaine shifts on the bed, absently fiddling with the sheets as he waits for Kurt’s reply.

“No one in Glee has ever been subtle, Blaine. But they care about you. I’m sure they’re just worried.”

“But I don’t want them to be!” The words are louder than he intends, and Blaine makes sure to lower his voice when he continues. “Sorry. It’s just that school was where things were normal. I could ignore everything else… and now I can’t.”

“Blaine.” There’s a pause and Blaine closes his eyes, pictures Kurt sitting in his room, probably listening to music that masks the hustle and bustle of New York City. “Maybe that’s a good thing. You don’t have to tell them everything; you don’t even have to tell me everything. But they’re called friends for a reason.”

“I know.” Blaine shakes his head even though Kurt can’t see. “I know you’re right. I already talked about this with your dad earlier.” Blaine’s voice drops, mumbling the next words. “Doesn’t mean I have to like it, though.”

“No.” There’s a pause and then Kurt’s voice turns teasing. “But I think it will end up being helpful, and you know that I’m always right. Anyway,” Kurt speaks quickly, his voice ringing with delight, “my Voice instructor was impressed; he said I have a chance to sing at the end of year showcase!”

“Kurt!” Blaine sits up in excitement, the pillow against his back falling to the floor unnoticed. “That’s amazing! Although I can’t say I’m surprised; your singing outclasses all your classmates’.”

“You’ve never heard them, Blaine.”

“Doesn’t matter. You’re better.”

“I’m flattered with your completely unbiased opinion.”

“We’ve been through this. Just because I’m biased doesn’t mean it’s untrue.”

Blaine smiles at Kurt’s ensuing laugh, shakes his head when the laughter turns into a yawn. “I knew you were tired! It’s late; are you ready for bed?”

“Mm.” Kurt’s voice is quiet. “You still have your iPod?”

Blaine nods before he remembers Kurt can’t see him. “Yeah. It’s on your end table.”

“Good. I mean, I hope you don’t need it. But it can’t hurt, right?”

“No.” Blaine stretches, picks up the pillow from the floor. “It reminds me of you,” Blaine fixes the covers, leans back. “I miss you.”

“I miss you too. But for now, sleep, okay? Love you.”

“Love you too.” The words are automatic, and Blaine ends the call with smile before setting the phone on the nightstand and turning off the lamp.
“– finished Anderson! What did you think? That just because you’re one of those homos now you can ruin this dance for us?” The pavement is hard, cold, and the words are choppy, unevenly fading in and out. There’s something dark staining his shoe.

A streetlight flickers as laughter echoes, and then there’s a roar. Flashes of green and white streak by and music briefly blares before the shadows grow.

He can’t move, the cold seeps in, grows, and he can’t move –

Blaine startles awake with a gasp, blankets tangled around his legs. He takes a moment and just breathes, carefully untwists the confining covers.

Breathe in. It’s just a dream.

Breathe out. It’s been years.

Sighing, Blaine grabs his iPod and earbuds from the table with a tight grip before forcing his fingers to relax. Moments later, Blaine winces at the bright square of his iPod even as the list of songs brings a smile to his face.

Breathe in. Kurt made this.

Breathe out. Kurt is safety.

Blaine lays back down and presses play.
I'm still in awe from all the reads and reviews; thanks to every one of you for your support! Thanks to my wonderful betas slayerkitty and jessicamdown for their run-throughs and discussions as well :)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 15

The final bell rings and Blaine rubs his eyes, and takes his time packing his bag. He’s not anxious to join the rush in the hallway, especially since he’d be heading further into the building rather than toward the main doors. Moments later he exits the room, heads across the mostly empty hallway to join Sam at his locker.

“Ready for Glee?” Blaine starts the conversation, preempts the ‘are you okay’ he knows Sam’s itching to ask after he’d flinched crossing the hall.

There’s a pause, and then Sam replies, “You know it.” Sam closes his locker and Blaine falls into step as they head toward the music room.

“At least we don’t have Nationals practice today.” Blaine smiles. “Tina’ll be happy. We get a little break.”

Sam laughs as they enter the choir room.

“What’s so funny?”

Blaine turns at Unique’s question. “Nothing really. I just figured Tina would be happy since we only have regular Glee today.”

“I –” Sam ducks his head and laughs some more before he manages to control his breathing. “Sorry. I was just imagining Tina’s face.”

“Don’t let her hear that.” Unique pauses as she takes a seat in the front row. “Or at least change your phrasing. Nobody wants to hear that you were laughing because of their face.”

“Right.” Sam takes a seat next to Blaine, leans over him to face Unique. “Any other advice for me today?”

“No, you’ve met your limit of Tips from Unique; you’ll have to survive on your own for the rest of the day.”

Blaine nudges Sam’s shoulder. “Are you done getting your tips? Or should we switch seats?”

“Well –”

“Alright guys!” Mr. Schue’s arrival interrupts Sam’s reply. “We’ve had some amazing
performances this week; every song was meaningful to the performer and we could feel that, even if we don’t know why. I know today’s performers will be the same as we finish the week. So without further ado, Sam! You’re up!”

Sam stands with a smile and moves to the center of the room. Blaine sets his phone to record and the music starts moments later, Sam’s voice ringing with sincerity. Blaine sits back and smiles; he’d forgotten how emotive Sam could sing when the situation warranted it. He wouldn’t have chosen a Bruno Mars song for his friend, but Sam had obviously practiced, despite his comments days before. The song ends to applause minutes later and Blaine taps his phone before placing it back in his pocket.

“So that’s why you wanted a recording.” Blaine comments as Sam returns to his seat beside him.

“It was a good performance.”

“Right.” Blaine’s voice carries his skepticism. “No way you came up with that in two days.”

Sam offers a small smile. “Who said I only thought of it two days ago?”

“But on Wednesday you said –”

“–and our last performer of the week, Blaine Anderson!” Mr. Schue’s announcement interrupts Blaine’s reply.

“Explain later,” Blaine hastily mutters the comment before moving to the front of the room. It’s only as he passes by Mr. Schue and sees the concern in his eyes that it hits him: he’s singing today. He’s singing a song that speaks to him, a song he can relate to, in front of a group of people who already look at him like he’s moments away from breaking.

Blaine shakes his head slightly, pushes the thoughts away. He’s tired, but he’s not going to break: he’s done running. He takes his seat at the piano, closes his eyes, and begins.

He tunes out the whispers as he plays, keeps his eyes closed and focuses instead on the chords in his memory. He hears his voice catch and forces it to return to strength on the chorus, loses himself in the performance.

The last note fades minutes later and Blaine raises his hands from the keys. He’s met with silence from his fellow Glee Club members, concerned looks and worry replacing the usual applause. Blaine rises from the piano bench, returning to his seat with a tight lipped smile.

“So how long did you have that song planned?” Blaine questions Sam as he leans back into his seat.

“Huh?” Sam faces Blaine, leans closer. “Are you okay? That was –”

“A song that fit the assignment,” Blaine finishes for Sam, not giving him the chance to voice the obvious question. “But really. When I Was Your Man? You planned that.”

Sam blinks and then the concern fades to an impish smirk. “I know some amazing women.”

“I’m pretty sure you sang it to just one,” Blaine teases, internally sighing in relief at Sam’s acceptance of the change in topic.

“Maybe I did.” Sam’s reply is whispered, and Blaine wonders if Sam meant for him to hear the words.
“Well,” Blaine startles at Mr. Schue’s clap moments later, his spine hitting the plastic back of the chair in his surprise, “we’ve had some powerful performances today, and I think this week has been one of the strongest Glee’s had this year. Thanks for your work, guys. Let’s just run through Nationals – music only – and then you all can start to enjoy your weekend.” Mr. Schue ends with a smile, and Blaine absently wonders if the choir director is proud of the cliché speech.

He stands with the rest of the Glee Club (but without his fellow performers’ groans of annoyance) and takes a breath as accompanists prepare for the routine.

At least there’s a break from dancing.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt absently skips the song on his iPod and takes another sip of his coffee, wincing at the temperature. He enjoys his mochas; he enjoys them more when they don’t scald his tongue. He sets the cup down with a sigh and readjusts his ear buds before pulling his phone from his pocket.

_Text message from Kurt:
Burned my tongue :(

_Text message from Blaine:
I’m withholding my first thought to that comment ;)

Kurt laughs at Blaine’s response, shaking his head. It’s nice to flirt – even via text – the mundane action soothes the anxiousness that creeps when he thinks of everything Blaine’s going through. Some days Blaine laughs and flirts and sends Kurt surprise presents in the mail and Kurt can smile freely; others, Kurt remembers why Blaine isn’t living at his own parents’ house, sees the shadows under Blaine’s eyes, hears the fear in his voice.

Kurt absently shakes his head, intentionally dismissing the worries.

_Text message from Kurt:
I thought you were a gentleman

_Text message from Blaine:
I am! But I'm also a gentleman with an amazingly hot fiancé

_Text message from Kurt:
Amazingly hot?

_Text message from Blaine:
Fishing for compliments?

_Text message from Blaine:
You don’t need to – you’re beautiful, and I don’t know how I got lucky enough to find you so early, but I’m the luckiest man in the world :)

Kurt can’t suppress his grin, knows his cheeks are tinted dark but can’t bring himself to care.
Text message from Kurt:
And you claim you’re not romantic...

Text message from Blaine:
I wasn’t! I didn’t have the proper motivation yet ;)

Text message from Kurt:
You’re incorrigible

Text message from Blaine:
I thought I was the one in AP English?

Text message from Kurt:
You are; I’ve already graduated from that class, remember?

Kurt pauses after sending the message, takes another sip of his coffee before he sighs and taps out another.

Text message from Kurt:
...I’m not distracting you from homework, am I?

Text message from Blaine:
Not this Friday ;)

Kurt frowns slightly at the vague words even as he relaxes, knowing he’s not taking Blaine’s focus away from school work, even if it is technically the weekend.

Text message from Kurt:
I’m glad – you deserve to relax ;)

Text message from Kurt:
Mr. Schue even cancelled Nationals rehearsal today, right?

Text message from Blaine:
He did – I’m going to the house for the piano though...

Kurt pauses after reading the text, hand hovering over this phone. He doesn’t like thinking about Blaine in his parents’ house, even though he knows the Andersons aren’t there. Kurt takes another sip of his coffee, reminds himself that Blaine’s practiced at the house before (countless times, actually) – worry is irrational.

Unfortunately, it’s also persistent.

Text message from Kurt:
I thought you were going to relax
Text message from Blaine:
I need the practice

Text message from Blaine:
Piano is relaxing :)

Kurt’s frown turns into a laugh with the arrival of the second text, and he shakes his head.

Text message from Kurt:
Piano is relaxing? Weren’t you begging for a distraction the other afternoon?

Text message from Blaine:
I wouldn’t say I was begging…

Text message from Blaine:
And regardless of how relaxing something is, any distraction is welcome after several hours :p

Text message from Kurt:
I’ll be sure to keep that in mind the next time I know you’re rehearsing

Text message from Kurt:
...are you going to practice for hours? Because it’s Friday, Blaine

Text message from Blaine:
And now that song is stuck in my head

It takes a moment, but when he catches the reference Kurt huffs a laugh. Moments later he’s humming.

Text message from Kurt:
Mine too. And don’t think I didn’t notice that you avoided the question

Text message from Blaine:
I’ll practice until I’m confident for Nationals ;)

Kurt shakes his head even as fondness sweeps over him. He finishes his coffee and taps out a reply.

Text message from Kurt:
I suppose that’s the best I can hope for…

Text message from Kurt:
Don’t work too hard! Weekends are supposed to be fun and you can’t talk to me if you’re sleeping <3

Kurt jumps when his phone rings moments later, skidding slightly on the table. He turns off his music and gathers his empty coffee cup before picking up his bag and standing.
“Hey Dad.”

The door closes behind Blaine, the quiet click sounding disproportionally loud in the silent house. Blaine adjusts the strap of his bag on his shoulder as he turns, heads for the hallway with a barely perceptible skip when he passes the staircase. Moments later he sets his bag down next to the piano before pulling a warm-up book from inside the bench. With Nationals in just three weeks, Blaine can’t afford any additional mishaps, and while the keyboard at the Hudson-Hummels did have all eighty-eight keys, it couldn’t replace the feel of a piano – which he’d be playing in California.

He has practiced here since moving into Kurt’s old home – if he’s been coming here more often since he realized the keyboard bothered Carole, well that was his own prerogative – but this is his first return since the performance Sunday. Blaine mentally plans – he can’t afford to get sidetracked. He rolls his neck and stretches his hands with a sigh, ignores the unease brought on by being in the empty house. Shaking his head, he takes his seat, sets his phone by the highest C key and opens the book to a series of scales embellished with trills. He plays them until the progression is smooth; his fingers crossing and stretching with ease. With a slight smile he takes the book from the ledge, setting it aside. He takes a breath and rests his hands on the keys; then, with a determination settling on his shoulders, he begins to play.

Time passes and despite Kurt’s worries, Blaine does relax, the notes flowing as he goes through the songs. He takes a break, getting a glass of water and setting it on the lower end of the piano, wonders what it says about him when he deliberately forgoes a coaster just to spite memories of his parents.

He plays through the Nationals pieces, and after getting through the second piece without any errors he sits back with a smile, picks up his phone and dials.

“Hi. Are you done practicing?” Kurt’s light voice makes Blaine’s grin widen.

“I’m done with Nationals. But,” Blaine pauses, and when he continues his voice is teasing, “we have another concert soon, and I was hoping you’d be willing to be my duet partner.”

“Blaine,” Kurt laughs. “I might be talented, but not even I can sing a duet in a concert from New York.”

“Oh!” Blaine laughs and shakes his head before remembering that Kurt can’t see him. “I didn’t mean then. I was thinking you could practice with me now? Over the phone…”

“I hope your phone’s speakers aren’t too distorting.”

“So you’ll do it?” The words come out in a rush, Blaine almost merging them all in his haste to reply.

“When have I ever turned down a duet with you?”

Warmth blooms in Blaine chest and he’s smiling as he pulls the phone away to set it to speaker.

“– even know this song you want me to sing?” The latter part of Kurt’s sentence has Blaine shaking his head.

“Is Kurt Hummel admitting I know songs he doesn’t?”

“Didn’t we have a conversation about your sense of humor?”
“Mm.” Blaine laughs. “But don’t worry – you know the song.” With careful hands Blaine sets his phone back on the ledge before retaking his seat on the piano bench. “Here we go."

Blaine plays the opening chords, ignores the intake of breath from the line. He closes his eyes, sings through the first verse - Measuring days in the spaces between our goodbyes – and fights to keep his voice steady when Kurt joins in for the chorus.

Kurt takes the next verse without hesitation, the two of them in sync even via the phone. Blaine continues to play, relishing in the sound of Kurt’s singing. The speaker does distort the sound some, but Blaine’s fiancé is talented, and the notes are beautiful in spite of it.

“– I want only to stay where the farthest you are is a heartbeat away.” The echo of words, Kurt’s voice clear and bright, has Blaine’s hands slipping on the keys in a discordant mash of sound before he spins so his back is to them.

Kurt stands in the doorway.

Blaine is frozen. Absently he notes that his mouth is open, gaping in shock. Kurt steps forward in the ensuing silence, waves his phone.

“I was going to just surprise you while you were playing, but when you called to ask if I wanted to sing…well, I couldn’t resist. It was too perfect. For a second I worried you’d somehow found out I was here.”

The comment snaps Blaine out of his shock and he scrambles to stand, crosses the room in quick, hurried strides. He pulls Kurt in for a too-tight hug, feels a previously unnoticed tension lift when he rests his head on Kurt’s shoulder and breathes in his cologne.

Moments later, Blaine pulls back enough to look Kurt in the eye, keeps his arms around Kurt’s waist.

“Hi.”

“Hello.” Kurt smiles, and the arms around Blaine’s shoulders tighten.

“What – How?” Blaine pauses, takes a breath. “Kurt,” Blaine has to pause again, bask in the pleasure of saying Kurt’s name face to face, “Kurt not that I’m complaining, but how are you here?”

“Well,” Kurt smirks, “I got on this thing called a plane…”

Blaine shakes his head. “Kurt.” Blaine draws out the name, overemphasizes the vowel even as he gives his best pleading look.

Kurt rolls his eyes. “Did you really think I’d forget?” A pause and his eyes go soft. “Happy Birthday, Blaine.”

“My birthday’s not til Wednesday.”

“Oh, is it? In that case,” Kurt moves his arms and starts to take a half-hearted step back, “I guess I’d better go back to New York…”

“No!” Blaine’s voice is firm despite Kurt’s teasing. “You’re stuck now,” he takes half a step forward, gives Kurt a kiss. “Aren’t you supposed to be nice to people on their birthday?”
“Mm.” Kurt mumbles, “But it’s not your birthday yet. Besides,” Kurt gives Blaine a playful glare, “that wasn’t a very convincing kiss.”

Blaine takes the comment as the hint that it is, leans forward again. By the time they separate they’re both a bit breathless, and Blaine notes that Kurt’s cheeks are a lovely shade of pink.

“Better?”

“If you have to ask…” Kurt trails off, ending the sentence with a small laugh. “Sorry,” he shakes his head, “I’ve missed you.”

Blaine swallows back the emotion rising at the words, blinks before responding. “I missed you, too.” The thought has Blaine frowning, elation fading. “How long are you here?”

“I fly back Monday morning.” Kurt gives Blaine a warm smile. “I can afford to miss one class, so you’ve got me for two whole days.”

Elation returns; Kurt’s staying the whole weekend. “I think,” Blaine moves and runs his hand over the ring Kurt wears, “that you’re stuck with me longer than two days.”

“Is that so?” Kurt glances around the room before he reaches out and takes Blaine’s hand, leads him around the room. “It’s a good thing it’s lovely, then,” Kurt comments with a nod to his ring. “Although,” Blaine smiles when Kurt rubs his thumb over their clasped hands, “it seems a bit one sided.” The backs of Blaine’s knees hit the piano bench and he sinks down at Kurt’s unvoiced prompting.

“Kurt, what –”

“Shh.” Kurt grins before sliding to his knees. “Just…just listen, okay? I don’t have show choirs or rose petals.” Kurt gives a slightly nervous laugh. “I don’t even have a song, unless you count my surprise entrance earlier. But,” Kurt reaches into his pocket and Blaine’s breath leaves him when he sees the small box in Kurt’s hand, “I do love you, Blaine Devon Anderson, and as much as I love showing the world that I’m yours, I want the world to know you’re mine, too. We’re in this together, after all.” Kurt pauses, takes a breath even as Blaine still struggles to find his own. “So,” Kurt flips the box open, revealing a twin to the ring Blaine had picked out months before. “It’s just us, and this is me, asking you a question: Will you marry me?”

Blaine’s off the stool in seconds, collapsing into Kurt’s arms.

“Yes, yes, yes.” The word is a litany, falling from Blaine’s lips in an unending stream. Kurt slides the ring onto Blaine’s finger and then Blaine can’t stop himself from leaning forward, stealing salty kisses.

-*.*.*-.*-

“Blaine,” Kurt sighs and starts to lean back for the fifth time before giving in with a sigh and stealing another kiss. “No, Blaine, Blaine.” Kurt pulls back and stands. “Sorry,” Kurt gives an apologetic shrug and offers Blaine a hand, “but Dad and Carole are expecting us for dinner at some point.”

“You talked to your dad and Carole?”

Kurt shakes his head at Blaine’s question, gives him a teasing smile. “Someone had to pick me up from the airport.”
“The airport…” Blaine’s sentence trails off before he gives Kurt a startled look. “When did you get here?”

“Not too long ago, promise.” Kurt’s tone turns teasing, “Why do you think I was so curious about if you were practicing?”

“You were here then?” Kurt lets out a small laugh at Blaine’s words.

“There’s a reason I texted you instead of calling.”

“You! You –” Blaine sputters and Kurt can’t hold in his laughter, allows Blaine to tug him close with a pull of his hand. The ensuing kiss can barely be called such, Kurt’s unwavering smile preventing more than the barest brush of lips.

“It wouldn’t have been much of a surprise if you’d heard flight announcements over the phone.”

“No,” Blaine leans back and Kurt lowers his eyes to meet his gaze, “that would have been hard to explain.”

Kurt hums in agreement and squeezes Blaine’s hand. “I like giving surprises.” He smiles and then gently leads Blaine back toward the piano, picking up the bag there and ignoring Blaine’s attempts to grab it himself. “Now, though, we have to get back to my house.”

“I didn’t know we were on a schedule – didn’t you say weekends were for relaxing?”

Kurt smiles at Blaine’s teasing tone even as they head for the hall. “Yes. But we can’t relax if Dad and Carole are constantly calling because they’re holding dinner.” Kurt pauses and pulls his phone from his pocket, jokingly waves it in front of Blaine. “And you know Dad would call – he wants his dinner and he’d want to know where we are.”

“I’m not going to win this, am I.” Blaine comments with a sigh, getting his own phone from the piano. “I just,” Blaine cuts himself off and Kurt tightens his grip on his hand, waits for him to gather his thoughts. “I guess I still can’t believe you’re really here.” Blaine gives a small smile and Kurt’s breath catches. “Part of me thinks that as soon as I step out the door you’ll vanish.”

Kurt stops, pulls Blaine in to a hug before stepping back and moving to catch Blaine’s hands in his own. “Look,” Kurt raises Blaine’s left hand, tilts it until the newly given ring catches the light, “that’s real. It’s yours; you’ll still be wearing it when you leave this house, you’ll have it when you go to sleep tonight.” Kurt pauses and then his voice turns teasing. “You’ll have it Monday too – for all of Glee to see…unless you plan on keeping it at home?”

Blaine’s shaking his head as soon as Kurt finishes his sentence. “I’ll never take it off; I want everyone to know.”

Kurt feels himself blushing and ducks his head before gathering his thoughts and managing a reply. “Right answer.”

Blaine smiles and Kurt resumes leading them out of the room, content.

“I meant it, you know.” Blaine’s statement has Kurt turning to glance at him. “It’s perfect,” Blaine continues, swinging his left hand and Kurt’s along with it, “I’ll always think of you when I see it.”

Kurt smiles even as his hand gives Blaine’s a brief squeeze. “Hm. Mine always reminds me of you, too,” he adds with a quick glance to his left hand. “It’s comforting.”
“I’m glad.” Blaine’s warm tone has Kurt blinking rapidly, swallowing back emotion even as Blaine continues. “Something to remind you of me in the big city.”

Kurt quirks a smile, “Of course. I’d be liable to forget you otherwise.” Blaine laughs and Kurt aches with happiness brought on from the evidence of how he and Blaine have grown: a year ago the comment would have held hints of worry, rife with tension. Now, the humor rings true.

“– put on a ring on it.” Blaine’s words startle Kurt from his reverie and have him shaking his head in fond exasperation.

“You’re never going to get tired of using that lyric, are you?” Kurt keeps his voice light, teasing.

They exit the house, and Kurt watches as Blaine fishes his keys from his pocket before giving a shrug. “It fits.” Blaine pauses as he locks the door and then turns back to face Kurt, smiling. “Besides, Beyoncé is queen and you can’t argue with that.”

“Mm.” Kurt hums as he nods in agreement. “I’m pretty sure you could manage something better than a Top Forties lyric, though.”

“Maybe.” Blaine laughs and Kurt wraps his left arm around his waist, leading him to their cars. He jerks to a stop moments later when Blaine freezes.

“Blaine, what –” Kurt starts to question before Blaine interrupts him.

“We have separate cars.” Despite the seriousness of Blaine’s tone Kurt can’t hold back his laugh, tension brought on by Blaine’s sudden stop vanishing in seconds.

Kurt forces down his laughter to reply. “Did you just realize that?”

“Well, yes.” Blaine blushes and lowers his head. “I just – I forgot that we wouldn’t be riding back home together.”

Kurt catches the hint of sadness in Blaine’s voice even as warmth blossoms in his chest as his mind connects home and Blaine in the same sentence, half-formed fantasies of coming home to Blaine taking prominence in his thoughts. He shakes his head slightly, brings his focus back to the present, to Blaine standing a foot in front of him.

“It’s not that long of a drive,” Kurt says with a hint of a smile. “And I promise I won’t disappear as soon as your car door closes.”

Kurt watches as Blaine glances to their clasped hands, smiles at the sight of the ring newly adorned to his finger. “I know.” Blaine sighs. “I wish we didn’t have to, though.”

Kurt hums in response before closing the distance between them, giving in to the urge to kiss the frown from Blaine’s lips. He loses himself in the sensation, wonders how he’s made it months without being able to touch Blaine, much less kiss him. The simple peck Kurt had intended is lost within moments, Blaine’s arms tightening around him and Kurt relishing in the contact. They part an indeterminate about of time later, Blaine breathing heavily and Kurt eying his bruised lips with a thrill of satisfaction.

“I think it’s obvious I don’t want to be away from you either.” Kurt’s voice has a touch of breathlessness to it, and he forces himself to steady his breathing before he continues. “It’s not for long though. We can even listen to our playlist so we have the same music. And,” Kurt darts forward and pecks Blaine of the cheek before he has a chance to respond, “you can kiss me hello again once we’re home.”
Blaine’s smile is brilliant, and Kurt absently congratulates himself on deciding to get Blaine a ring too – the world (and New York boys) needs to know Blaine is very much off the market.

“I’ll hold you to that.” Blaine’s soft words carry easily across the scant space between them, the happiness audible.

“We’d better get going then,” Kurt skips back a step with Blaine’s bag swinging from his shoulder, waits until the last possible moment to let go of Blaine’s hand. “The sooner we get home the sooner I get my kiss. And I’m not known for my patience.”

Blaine laughs before giving Kurt a look that has him tempted to close the distance again. “I can think of one time you were patient,” Blaine adds with a wink, “it took me a while to overcome my stupidity and recognize my soul mate, remember?”

Kurt laughs, bright and clear. “Extenuating circumstances,” he pulls his keys from his pocket. “Get in the car, Blaine.”

“Fine.” Blaine fiddles with his keys before finally unlocking the car door with a teasing smile before slipping inside. “You still have my bag, you know.”

“Oh?” Kurt speaks clearly, ensures his voice carries between the two vehicles. “Do I? Well, consider it insurance.”

“I’m following you anyway.” A pause. “Can we pretend that didn’t make me sound like a stalker?”

Seated in his car, Kurt chuckles, the sound barely audible over the hum of the engine. “Just get ready to drive, Blaine,” Kurt replies before shutting the car door.

He pulls out of the Anderson’s driveway moments later, Perfect streaming from the car’s speakers as Blaine follows behind.

Blaine shuts off the engine and exits his car in a flash, his keys jangling as he crosses to meet Kurt who’s pulling Blaine’s bag from the back seat.

“I can get that, you know.”

Kurt turns with a smile, shutting the car door with a bump of his hip. “Mm. You could, but I already have it. Now,” Kurt steps forward and Blaine smiles when his arms come to rest on his shoulders, “I believe you owe me something.”

Blaine had planned on prolonging this moment, relishing in the ability to just flirt and see Kurt’s responses. But now, with Kurt’s arms around him Blaine can’t bring himself to wait, and he leans forward on instinct, re-familiarizes himself with the taste of Kurt’s lips. By the time they break apart Blaine feels the heat in his cheeks, the slight soreness that comes with bruised lips, sees the mirror on Kurt as they both catch their breath.

“Better?”

Kurt nods and takes Blaine’s hand as they turn to head to the front door. “Much. Although you already knew that.”

“Affirmation is always appreciated,” Blaine responds with a squeeze of Kurt’s hand, “but I’ll admit I’m a bit out of practice, so if you want to continue later…” Blaine lets the sentence trail off,
delights when the flush on Kurt’s cheeks darkens.

“Blaine Anderson!” The admonishment loses its edge with the fondness in Kurt’s tone. “My Dad is inside,” Kurt adds with a slight shake of his head. “Anyway, here,” Blaine meets Kurt’s gaze as Kurt drops his keys into Blaine’s free right hand. “I can’t open the door left handed.”

Blaine gently swings their clasped hands as he fits the key in the lock, gives Kurt one last smile before opening the door.

“Should –”

“Happy Birthday!” The shout cuts off Blaine’s question, has him giving a slight jump in alarm as he’s surrounded by the Hudson-Hummels and members of Glee Club.

“I – what?”

“Happy Birthday, dude!” Sam yells from his left, “You’re late though – I thought you were never going to get here and I’m starving!”

Blaine blinks. “But, my birthday isn’t til Wednesday,” he comments for the second time. “I don’t –”

“You didn’t really think Mr. Schue cancelled Nationals practice just because we were tired, did you?” Tina questions as she steps forward, heels clicking on the floor. “We needed time to get ready for the party.”

Blaine’s overwhelmed, only the grip of Kurt’s hand keeping him grounded. Smiling faces greet him from every angle, excitement floating in the air like a drug.

“Happy birthday, kid,” Burt comes to stop in front of Blaine, rests a hand on his shoulder. “Kurt figured an early party would be a better surprise. And he was more than willing to make sure you stayed out of the house for a bit.”

Burt laughs at Kurt’s responding hiss, gives Blaine’s shoulder a squeeze before stepping back. “I’m glad you’re here now, though. I think everyone’s ready for dinner.” Burt glances around, “Pizza’s in the kitchen, but the birthday boy gets first pick, so I think we’d better head that way.”

Blaine nod and lets Kurt lead him to the kitchen. “I can’t believe you did this.”

“Like I’d let my fiancé turn eighteen without throwing a party.” Kurt smiles, “And I wanted to give you a certain present while it was just us, so it all worked out.”

“I love you.” Blaine feels the words resonate in him, emotion gathering behind his eyes and swelling unimpeded. “So, so much.”

Kurt bends down and gives him a quick kiss as they enter the kitchen, heedless of the audience. “I love you, too. Happy early birthday, Blaine.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

First off, I am so sorry I missed posting last week. I was sick (I had the cold/cough from *hell*) and given my IMs to slayerkitty (my reaction to the medicine is "hilarious" apparently) I was not up for posting. Sorry, again! Anyway, here's 16 - which is long - to make up for it. I hope you all enjoy it! Thanks to jessicamadawn and slayerkitty for their wonderful beta skills, and a special thanks to them for putting up with my high on meds messages ;-) 

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 16

The music winds down with applause and laughter, and Blaine feels the smile on his face as he steps away from the front of the room and heads for Kurt, who's smiling next to Burt.

"Still with the 80s songs?"

Blaine nods. "David Bowie is classic."

"Right." Kurt draws out the word, and Blaine laughs at the skepticism in his voice.

"You owe me a duet." Blaine responds, wrapping an arm around Kurt’s waist. "Last song of the night."

"Mm." Kurt agrees, turning into Blaine’s hold. “I’m guessing you already have a song, too?”

Blaine leads Kurt to the front of the room, Burt’s laughter fading as they cross the distance. “Of course,” Blaine squeezes Kurt’s hand, “I always have a song ready.”

“If I hadn’t already chosen two songs earlier I’d be debating with you right now.”

“I thought everyone had to agree with someone on their birthday?”

Kurt laughs. “They do,” Kurt’s grin turns teasing, “but as you told me earlier, your birthday isn’t until Wednesday.”

Stopping beside the keyboard Blaine loses himself to breathless laughter before managing to get himself under control. “It’s a good thing you’re not actually arguing; I’d have to forfeit.” He pauses and then moves to where his laptop rests beside the speakers, available for karaoke versions the Glee members can’t recreate on their own. “Ready?”

Kurt smirks and Blaine presses ‘play’ before returning to Kurt’s side. They trade the lines easily, dancing together across the small space. Blaine spins Kurt around, pulls him in as they sing – I could show you love in a tidal wave of mystery You'll still be standing next to me – sees Sam grinning from behind his guitar, Marley dancing with Ryder, Carole entering the room and going to stand near Burt when he slides away for the chorus. The song ends and Blaine smiles when he and Kurt bow in unison, feels his cheeks start to ache from the force of it.
Gradually conversation replaces applause, their friends gathering up bags and instruments. Blaine keeps Kurt close as they walk around the room, helping their friends find misplaced cell phones in between showing off his new ring.

Blaine’s never been more grateful for the conversation change from ‘How are you?’ to ‘Can I see?’ Blaine never says ‘no’ and even though Kurt blushes through Blaine’s retelling of the story Blaine knows he’s secretly basking in the continued attention.

“I can’t believe you’re engaged!” Sam’s exclamation has Blaine turning away from Ryder with a shrug.

“I’ve been engaged, Sam.” Blaine shares an amused look with Kurt, gives a slight shrug to say that no, he doesn’t understand the comment either. “You were there, remember? There were rose petals and you helped me get half the Glee clubs in Ohio to Dalton?”

“Well yeah. But now you’re really engaged. You have your own ring now!” Sam’s voice holds excitement and sincerity equally and Blaine can’t help but smile in response.

“It is nice that you have one, too,” Kurt adds, "we’re partners in this, after all.”

Blaine ducks his head, feels his cheeks burning. “You still manage to surprise me. I thought we were done with romance for the day.”

Kurt scoffs, gives Blaine a considering look. “Well, if you don’t want romance…”

“I didn’t say that!” Blaine hastens to reply, absently notes Sam turning way. “I just – you proposed earlier, Kurt.” And that’s not all of what Blaine wanted to say, but he can’t find the words; they’re trapped circling in his brain, not making the trip to his vocal chords. Kurt seems to understand anyway though.

He should have known: Kurt always understands.

Kurt lifts their joined hands so Blaine’s ring glints in the light. “I did propose earlier, but if I remember correctly you had flowers sent to the loft after you proposed, and you filled up my phone with a list of texts while I was on the plane.”

“Mm,” Blaine hums in agreement but any further response is cut off by a shout from the doorway. Turning, he sees Jake standing by Burt.

“You get to see each other the rest of the day; Blaine, you owe us some hugs!”

Blaine laughs and detangles his hand from Kurt’s, stepping away with a smile. “Sorry, sorry. I’m coming.”

Moments later it’s hugs and laughter and claps on the back and an uncountable number of ‘happy birthdays’ before the last person steps out the door and Blaine is able to collapse into a chair in the kitchen, half-heartedly reaching for the pizza and Tupperware in front of him.

“You’re not actually trying to clean up your own party, are you?” Carole’s question has Blaine pulling his arm back guiltily, ignoring Kurt’s snort of laughter from beside him.

“I guess not?” Blaine relaxes back into the chair, absently reaches to his left where Kurt’s hand is waiting. “Thank you, again. I can’t – I still can’t believe all of you did this.”
"You had to know we were going to celebrate your birthday." Burt responds with a clasp to Blaine’s shoulder as he reaches over him to start putting the pizza away. “It’s not every day you turn eighteen. And don’t start with the actual date; there can’t be a party in the middle of the week.”

Blaine swallows back his comment, and feels a rush of gratitude to Burt and Carole as he remembers birthday phone calls (occasionally belated) and impersonal presents from previous years. “Still, you didn’t have to, really. So thank you.”

Silence reigns for a moment broken only by the snap! as Burt puts the lid on the pizza box. “You’re welcome, kid, but it’s not like we didn’t enjoy it too.”

“You better not have snuck some extra pizza, Dad. You know –”

“Relax.” Burt interrupts Kurt’s comment with a raised rand. “I can have fun without breaking your diet rules. I got to listen to some nice music and dance with a pretty girl.” Burt’s wink has Carole rolling her eyes and Blaine joins Kurt in quiet laughter.

Minutes later they’re all seated around the table, pizza safely in the fridge. “If you boys don’t mind, I was thinkin’ we could hang out around the house tomorrow. Have some family time.”

Despite Burt having said something similar times before, Blaine still feels a slight pressure behind his eyes at being included in the Hudson-Hummel family. Kurt squeezes his hand and Blaine turns to face him, smiles in answer to the silent question.

“That sounds great,” Kurt replies with a smile, “Blaine and I will even make breakfast.”

“*-*-*-*-*

“Are you sure your dad’s okay with us sharing your room?”

Kurt nods. “He knows the potential embarrassment outweighs any temptation.” He glances over, sees Blaine slowly pulling back the covers on the bed and appreciates the view with Blaine in a worn t-shirt and a stolen pair of Kurt’s pajama pants. “Besides, you’ve been here for a month; I think that makes this your room too.”

Kurt sees Blaine smile, shaking his head as he fluffs pillows and straightens blankets. “It’s still your room, Kurt. I’m just co-opting it for a while.”

“Hm. Well, it’s still a nice thought,” at Blaine’s questioning look he continues, “something that’s ours.”

“I’ll be in New York soon; then we’ll have a home.”

“Mm. Complete with Santana and Rachel.” Kurt narrows his eyes at the reminder, but they brighten again at Blaine’s laugh.

“Well yes.” There’s a pause, Kurt hums along to *Feel the Silence* softly playing from the docking station before Blaine continues, “We’ll have our room?”

Kurt laughs and steps away from the dresser, joining Blaine by the bed. “We will. And they can’t dictate decorating choices there. Oh!” Kurt hurries to his bag and pulls out a notebook before returning, waving the book slightly in response to Blaine’s unasked question. “I put together some decorating plans.”
Blaine's face scrunches in confusion. “But you’ve already decorated your room at the loft, Kurt. You love it.”

“I decorated my room, Blaine.” Kurt moves to sit on the bed, places the book between him and Blaine. “Once you’re in New York that room isn’t just mine anymore. And I want you to feel comfortable, too. Not like you’re just sleeping over.” Kurt gestures to the book. “I made some ideas, but I was hoping we could look over them together. We can change things, these are just early –”

Kurt’s comment is lost as Blaine surges across the distance and kisses him, and Kurt quickly drops his arms to the bed so the change doesn’t have them falling. Blaine pulls away moments later, lips bruised and eyes sparkling.

“I love you.” Kurt will never tire of hearing Blaine say those words.

“I love you too.” The words come out softer than he’d planned, but he blames that on Blaine’s kiss.

Kurt doesn’t have a chance to continue before Blaine leans over and kisses him again, pulling him closer before dipping him slightly. Kurt leans back, leaning his weight on his elbows, and sighs as Blaine shifts mumbling about ‘our room’ and ‘perfect’ as he drops light kisses to Kurt’s neck. Kurt loses himself for a moment, savoring having a hot, wonderful fiancé and a comfortable bed –

His bed.

In his parents’ house.

“Blaine.” Kurt halfheartedly calls the name before gathering his willpower. “Blaine. As lovely as this –” Kurt steadies his breath, “as wonderful as this is. We have to stop. Blaine. My dad and Carole are down the hall.”

There’s a sigh and then Blaine’s leaning back, looking smug even as he pouts. “You’re here in Ohio, we have permission to be alone in your room with door shut and you want me to stop kissing you; where’s your sense of adventure?”

“I left it in the car. Where there’s no parents.” Kurt smiles and doesn’t comment on Blaine’s change of heart from moments before. “Anyway, I’m certainly not complaining, but what brought that on?”

“You made a notebook for decorating plans,” Blaine says with a slight shrug, “plans for our bedroom in New York.”

Kurt’s breath catches at the words, seemingly only realizing now the magnitude of his plans. “Oh.” He blindly reaches out and Blaine’s hand intertwines with his moments later. “We’ll have our space. Well, some. We’ll have to talk to the girls about rearranging anything in the common spaces, and you’ll have to keep your bathroom stuff in our room because –”

“Kurt.” Blaine startles Kurt from the railroad of his thoughts. “It’ll be fine. I know it won’t be perfect, but we’ll be together and we’ll figure it out. Plus,” Blaine gestures to the notebook on the bed, “you’ve already started plans. And I’m sure we’ll figure things out as we go. Besides,” Blaine smirks, “we’ve always been good at improvising.”

Kurt laughs and gives Blaine a playful shove. “You’re impossible, Blaine Anderson.” He shakes his head and reaches for the notebook before moving and settling against the pillows, patting the space beside him. “Let’s plan out our room.”
The music provides a comfortable backdrop and Kurt loses track of time, caught in the discussion of fabrics and color themes. Eventually though, Blaine makes an outlandish suggestion (because as much as Kurt’s fiancé is sweet he also loves to push Kurt’s buttons) and Kurt leans forward, laughing even as he narrows his eyes.

“We are not copying your mother’s sense of style in any way, Blaine, and you knew that before you even suggested checkered curtains.”

Beside him, Blaine laughs. “Maybe I just wanted to see your reaction,” there’s a pause and Blaine’s voice loses its good humor, “but no, Kurt. I don’t want our home to copy my parents’ in any way.”

Kurt pushes the notebook aside, draws Blaine in until he’s leaning against Kurt’s chest and Kurt can carefully drag his fingers through Blaine’s curls. “You don’t have to answer…but earlier, I was a little surprised when I found out you’d be at your parents’ house. It made for a better entrance, I’ll admit, but it seems like you’ve been over there a lot lately.”

The sounds of a piano cover of *Viva La Vida* fade and *Hear You Me* is half over before Blaine speaks. “I don’t – there’s nothing wrong here, if that’s what you’re worried about.” Blaine sighs and Kurt drops a light kiss to his head. “I’ve been using the piano there.” Blaine twists to meet Kurt’s gaze. “Just for practice.”

Kurt feels his face tighten in confusion. “Blaine…Dad brought the keyboard here. I know that the keys feel a little different, but not even your work ethic and Mr. Schue’s desire for another trophy means you have to go over there multiple times a week.”

“It’s not –” Blaine ends the half formed sentence with a sigh of frustration, and Kurt waits, knows Blaine is searching for the words. “I know your parents said that it wasn’t a problem. And they’ve been so amazing, Kurt, really. They’ve done more – they’ve been so supportive, after everything.” Blaine pauses again, takes a breath before continuing. “At first I thought it was just timing because Carole’s always been so helpful.” Kurt ignores the knot of confusion at his stepmother’s name, forces himself to wait for Blaine to finish. “It bothers her when I practice on the keyboard.” Blaine lets out a soft chuckle. “I can’t blame her, really. Playing the same pieces over and over isn’t fun for me so I can see how it would be annoying for her. Plus, it’s new – she hasn’t had years to get used to it.” Blaine moves slightly, and moments later his hand tangles with Kurt’s. “She hasn’t said anything; she wouldn’t. She’s been so amazing, Kurt. But once I noticed,” Blaine shrugs, “I don’t mind driving out to the house to practice.”

“Blaine,” Kurt starts but lets the sentence die, unsure of how to continue. It doesn’t make sense. Carole *loves* music. She had come to every concert, even when she’d already heard the songs before. After performances she’d have a smile and sweet talk Kurt’s dad into taking everyone out to dinner.

She even demanded he and Finn practice in the living room –

Oh.

*Oh.*

“Kurt? Are you – Kurt what’s wrong?” Blaine’s question pulls Kurt from his thoughts, and he looks down and sees his knuckles standing white where he’s clenching Blaine’s hand.

“Sorry.” Kurt quickly releases Blaine’s hand, presses a kiss to his hairline along with another whispered apology.
“It’s fine, really. I’m hardly going to complain from you holding my hand.” Kurt feels the ghost of a smile at Blaine’s attempt at levity. “But Kurt; what’s wrong?”

“I don’t know for certain – I mean, we haven’t really talked about it.” Kurt pulls Blaine back against him, relishing in his warmth, in the feel of his heartbeat. “I might be looking too much into things. But,” Kurt sighs and drops his head to rest on Blaine’s shoulder. “I used to practice for Glee in the living room. With Finn.”

The a capella piece keeps the silence from being too trying, and Kurt relaxes a fraction when Blaine’s arms come up to trap Kurt’s against his chest. Kurt takes comfort in the strong beat. Proof Blaine’s alive.

He feels the ache in his chest, the pressure behind his eyes, and Kurt keeps his face hidden in Blaine’s shoulder until it eases – until he can breathe effortlessly. Slowly, Kurt raises his head and absently notes that the music’s changed again.

“I’m sorry, Kurt. I didn’t even think –”

Kurt’s ensuing laugh is strained, but honest. “What have I said about that word?” He takes a breath before continuing, “You don’t have to be sorry, Blaine. Not about this. And – and I could be wrong. I don’t know for certain that Carole is avoiding it. But it doesn’t make sense, otherwise. She loves music, Blaine. She does.”

“I know.” At Blaine’s affirmation Kurt feels some of the tension ease from his shoulders.

“But she didn’t stay in the room tonight. When everyone started singing – she left. I thought she was just organizing stuff in the kitchen… but she was gone too long. She didn’t come back until we were almost done with Safe and Sound.”

Blaine hums in agreement and the only sound is the music until Kurt fails to hide a yawn.

“You must be tired. And jetlagged, I mean you flew all the way here and then drove out to the house, and that was before the party.” Blaine leans back and his head rests on Kurt’s collarbone. “I think it’s time for bed.”

Kurt nods in agreement, reluctantly separating himself from Blaine as they head for the bathroom. Moments later, teeth brushed and faces washed (and cleansed with a slightly rushed, shortened moisturizing routine) Kurt climbs back into the bed, fumbles for the remote on the nightstand before turning off the docking station and setting his phone to charge. An echoing beep lets him know Blaine’s plugged his phone in too, and Kurt settles in the bed as Blaine joins him, radiating warmth.

“No iPod tonight?”

“No. I’m hoping I won’t need it. But,” Blaine pauses and Kurt feels him tense in his arms, “I might still have them. The nightmares. I know you’re exhausted after everything – I can take the couch so you can sleep without –”

Kurt cuts off Blaine’s words with a gentle kiss. “If you think I’m letting you sleep in another room when I haven’t seen you in months and we have the blessing of my father you’re sorely mistaken.” Kurt catches Blaine’s gaze and lowers his voice. “And don’t worry about it, Blaine. If you wake me up, you wake me up. I’d still rather be here, with you.” Kurt pauses as another thought occurs to him. “Unless… would it be better if you slept alone? I don’t want –”
“No!” Blaine’s exclamation seems impossibly loud after Kurt’s murmurings. “No. I love having you here. I just don’t want to keep you from sleeping.”

“I’m going to ignore that perfect opening you gave me and instead remind you that I want to be here, and,” Kurt reaches down and raises Blaine’s left hand, “you’re stuck with me – there’s no backing out now.”

Blaine turns and resettles, his head resting above Kurt’s heart. “I never wanted to back out; I asked you first, remember?”

“I think the months it took you to first catch up means I’m still leading.”

Blaine laughs before meeting Kurt’s gaze. “You’re sure, though? I can –”

Kurt reaches over and turns off the lamp, leaving the room with only the slight glow from digital clocks. “Go to sleep, Blaine. I love you.”

“I love you, too. G’night.”

Kurt smiles at Blaine’s mumbled response. “Goodnight. Sweet dreams.”

Kurt closes his eyes and wishes on the stars he can’t see that his comment holds true.

A punch pushes him back, further into the arms of his captor.

“Sadie Hawkins isn’t for homos, Anderson! Hold ‘em Mitch. Cover his mouth, too. Can’t have him crying, now.”

Hands hold him, and Blaine can’t move. His voice is as trapped as his body, and fear grows the longer he’s immobile.

Light flickers and the darkness grows and Blaine feels his breath catching. He’s being pushed again, pain exploding.

“Yeah, they’re down alright, Mitch. Whaddaya say, Blaine –”

“Blaine!” He startles upright, breath catching. Blaine brings his arm up to rub at his eyes, blinks when the pressure around his shoulders moves and seconds later the room is bathed in the dim light from the bedside lamp. He turns and sees Kurt sitting inches away. “Hey. Sorry. I know you’re not supposed to wake up someone in the middle of a nightmare, but you were gasping, Blaine, and I –”

“No, I –” Blaine stops, takes a breath before starting again, “thanks for waking me up. I’m sorry you had to, though.” Blaine sees Kurt clenching the blankets and his own hands move of their own volition, reaching across and grasping Kurt’s. “I hoped I wouldn’t get them tonight.”

“As romantic as it would have been, I knew that my being here wasn’t a guarantee they’d stay away.” Kurt releases the blankets, twines Blaine’s fingers with his own. “Are – are they always that bad?”

Blaine ducks his head, refuses to meet Kurt’s eyes. “Um, I don’t remember all of them, but I don’t feel any worse than usual.” Blaine takes a few more breaths, forces them to be somewhat steady. “I had a much nicer wakeup call though.”
There’s a slight huff and then Blaine’s being pulled forward into a tight hug.

“Thanks for the compliment, but you don’t have to try and charm me right now.”

Kurt’s words have Blaine tucking his head against Kurt’s neck and shoulder, releasing a still shaky breath. His arms snake around Kurt’s waist, clinging. He breathes in the comfort, keeps his eyes shut and loses the battle when he feels tears gather.

“Sorry. I’m sorry. It’s – I just want to enjoy you being here. I want things to be normal, Kurt. I want to go to bed with my fiancé and wake up in the morning. And I can’t even do that because of these stupid dreams. Oh God,” Blaine pulls back, looks at Kurt, “did I hurt you? You said it was bad. Are you okay? I know –”

Kurt’s lips press against his in a soft kiss that halts the flow of words before he breaks the kiss and leans his forehead against Blaine’s. “I’m fine, Blaine. I promise. I’ll admit that I wasn’t expecting it, but you didn’t hurt me. Not even a bruise.”

Blaine releases the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding and sags in Kurt’s arms, even as he scans Kurt in the low light. “Are you sure? I can go to the sofa – there’s already a pillow –”

Kurt presses a finger to his lips. “We had this discussion earlier, Blaine. We’re both staying here.” Kurt’s arms briefly tighten around Blaine’s shoulders. “And I’m fine, remember? Now,” Kurt shifts, and Blaine’s pulled down with him when he can’t bring himself to let go, “that’s enough talk of you leaving, okay? We’re getting married, Blaine, and I can’t make these nightmares go away, as much as I wish I could. But,” Kurt turns and Blaine shifts to meet his gaze, “I can promise to be here for you as much as possible.” Kurt offers a small smile. “And personally, I think sharing a bed with you more than makes up for any bad dreams.”

Blaine lowers his head back to Kurt’s chest, moves his left arm so his hand – and the ring – is in sight even as he takes comfort in Kurt’s breaths beneath him. “I love you, Kurt.”

There’s a click and the room loses its light before Kurt’s arm wraps around him. “I love you, too. You’re precious to me.”

Blaine doesn’t fight the smile even as his eyes close in exhaustion. “I’m So glad I found you.” Blaine shifts slightly before settling and allowing slumber to claim him.

_*_*__*_*_*

There’s faint light coming through the window when Blaine wakes again. He tries to be gentle as he reaches for his phone but Kurt blinks awake anyway, gives Blaine a sleepy smile.

“Hi.”

Blaine leans down, gives Kurt a soft kiss, heedless of morning breath. “Hey. You’re still here.”

“Mm. I am.” Kurt shifts, brings his arms around Blaine’s shoulders. “I like this wake up call.”

Blaine hums in response, leans down for another kiss only to meet air as Kurt twists away with a hint of laughter. Blaine lets his head fall against the mattress, lets out a groan as he draws out Kurt’s name. “I thought you liked waking up like this.”

“I do,” Blaine ignores the way his heart skips at the words, ”But we promised to make breakfast,” Kurt replies as he stands and holds out a hand, “c’mon. Coffee,” Blaine gets to his feet as Kurt continues, “but the bathroom first. Toothpaste – then kissing.”
Blaine laughs and follows Kurt. Minutes later, breath minty fresh and lips slightly bruised he starts the coffee while Kurt rummages in the cabinets. He turns, pulls his iPod from his pocket and quietly sets it in the docking station in the corner of the counter, smiles when music starts softly playing moments after. “So, pancakes?”

“Mm.” Kurt’s reply is distracted, he hasn’t turned from the cabinet, and Blaine dances over, wraps his arms around Kurt’s waist, grateful they’re alone so there are no witnesses as he leans his head against Kurt’s shoulder blades. “What’re you looking for?”

“Vanilla.” Kurt rummages a bit more before giving a small jump, startling Blaine back a step as Kurt spins. “Found it!” Kurt waves the bottle in jubilation. “For the pancakes.”

Blaine reaches forward, pulls Kurt in and starts moving them in a slow, playful dance. “I thought I was making pancakes.”

“You are. You make the best pancakes.” Kurt smiles, drops his head to Blaine’s shoulder. “I’m in charge of the eggs and bacon; otherwise Dad will try and sneak extra.”

The comment has Blaine huffing a laugh and pulling Kurt closer. “Carole’s been helping with that.”

“Mm. But I’m here now and it’s fun to be in charge. Speaking of,” Kurt steps back, loosening Blaine’s hold, “breakfast. We have to cook, Blaine.”

Blaine sighs and pulls away after a quick kiss. “Slave driver.”

Minutes later Blaine stands by the sizzling griddle, trading lines in the song with Kurt, who stands at the stove, whisking eggs while bacon cooks. Blaine flips a pancake and then quickly steps to give Kurt a surprise peck on the cheek before returning to take the now-finished pancake from the pan.

It becomes a game, then.

Kurt surprises Blaine as he’s pouring more batter into the pan, and Blaine retaliates while Kurt is distracted flipping the bacon. The unexpected pecks continue until Blaine’s put the last pancake on the plate, and he pulls a shocked Kurt (his fiancé really is a terrible spy – he can’t sneak up on anyone) in for a more thorough kiss, ignoring Kurt’s squeak of alarm.

“I saw your shadow,” Blaine murmurs when they pause for breath, “and I much prefer your lips on mine, rather than my cheek.”

Kurt’s bright laughter eclipses the soft music. “You really are incorrigible.”

“You really are very cute.”

Kurt laughs again even as he starts swaying, and Blaine follows until they’re circling the kitchen in a slow dance.

“I hope you’re not lettin’ the food get cold.” Burt’s comment has them springing apart, and Blaine ducks his head to hide the blush he knows is spreading.

“We’re not,” Kurt’s already back at the counter, placing himself between Burt and the bacon. “And sit down. We said we’d do breakfast, and that includes serving.”

“You just want to control what goes on my plate.” The audible humor takes any sting from Burt’s
words and Blaine smiles as he grabs plates from the cabinet, turning when Burt speaks again. “Can I at least get some coffee? Or are you going to pour that, too?”

Kurt sighs and waves Burt to the coffee pot.

“Is Carole up yet?” Blaine questions as Burt passes him. Blaine has three plates in hand, waits to reach for a fourth.

Burt takes two mugs from the cabinet before turning to Blaine. “She’ll be down in a minute.”

Blaine nods and picks up the final plate before crossing the kitchen and handing them to Kurt. He gives his fiancé a wink as he steps away, taking the plate of steaming pancakes to the center of the table.

“Oh, this smells delicious!” Blaine smiles as Carole enters.

“Go ahead and take a seat,” Burt replies. “We’re not allowed to serve ourselves, and I got your coffee.”

“Well, I’m not going to argue when it’s no work for me.”

Blaine helps dish out the eggs and bacon and takes two finished plates to the table, setting them in front of Burt and Carole before moving to refill his and Kurt’s mugs of coffee. He rejoins the Hudson-Hummels seconds later, takes the empty seat in between Kurt and his dad.

“You better come home more often,” Burt nods to Kurt, “if this is the kind of wake up I get.”

Blaine blushes at the unintentional reference, sees Kurt’s eyes widen as he quickly sips his coffee.

“It’s just breakfast, Dad.”

“Uuhh.” Burt gestures to the table. “We don’t eat like this every Saturday.”

“No we don’t,” Carole adds as she takes a pancake, “because you don’t want to end up being forced to go to the gym.”

Blaine shares a look with Kurt and Carole, breaks into laughter when Burt sighs.

“I represent Ohio in Congress, but I can’t even choose my own breakfast.”

Laughter fills the kitchen.

_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt takes the rinsed pan from Blaine and carefully sets it in the dishwasher, mentally organizing the rest of the dishes as he does. His dad and Carole had been politely dismissed after the plates were empty, and they’d laughingly left for the living room, saying they’d find a movie. He and Blaine had gathered up the dishes then, turning up the volume on the docking station so they could sing over the running faucet.

There had been a few duets, and one last impromptu dance after the pots were done, but now they’re almost done, and Kurt relishes in the glimpse into the domesticity of his future.

A dripping plate fills his vision and pulls Kurt from his thoughts. He offers Blaine a smile as he adds it to the lower rack, smiles when he sees Blaine’s ring glint in the light from the window. Blaine notices his inattention and playfully flicks some water.
“Blaine Anderson!” Kurt shrieks, takes a half step back, “I may be in pajamas, but if you start a water fight in here…” Kurt lets the threat trail off even as Blaine raises his hands in surrender.

“I just wanted to get your attention,” Blaine blushes and Kurt can help but smile in response, “and it’s not like I’d mess up your parents’ kitchen.”

Kurt’s reply is interrupted by a loud car going down the street, the engine’s roar – obviously sans muffler – overpowering both the music and any possible conversation.

He turns away from the window, annoyance settling at the disruption (idly wondering how he’s managed to be annoyed by a loud car after less than twenty-four hours in Ohio) only to halt seconds later, comment dying.

Blaine stands frozen in front of the sink, hands clenched at his sides.

But even as he watches, Blaine slightly shakes his head, releases a breath and turns to face Kurt, and if Kurt were anyone else he wouldn’t know the smile is for show – a mask to distract an audience.

For a moment, hurt blooms in Kurt’s chest – he never wants Blaine to pretend for him – but Blaine’s gaze is pleading, and Kurt holds back a sigh as he relents. In the middle of dishwashing on a Saturday morning isn’t the best time (or place) for such a conversation anyway.

“Small town Ohio,” Kurt adds after a pause, “where Neanderthals think they’re the coolest people around.”

Blaine releases a strained laugh before nodding in agreement and handing Kurt the last plate. “I’m going to go get my glass from your room.” Blaine pecks Kurt’s cheek and is striding away moments later. Kurt knows they gathered all the dishes earlier, but he also remembers Blaine’s panicked face from minutes earlier and he knows how important it is to take a moment to just breathe. He’d lain awake after Blaine’s nightmare, unable to sleep. The nightmare wasn’t a surprise, but the severity of it had been. Kurt had known that if anything Blaine was downplaying his fears when he texted, but to watch the love of his life struggling to breathe, trapped by memories of real events had given birth to fears Kurt hadn’t contemplated.

The bubble Kurt had been using to protect himself had been popped in the worst way possible, his fears raining down around him.

“Done already?”

Burt’s question startles Kurt from his thoughts, and he scowls once the jolt has passed. “Does everyone I know enjoy sneaking up on me?”

Burt laughs. “I don’t know what your friends are doing in New York, but I certainly wasn’t sneaking,” he raises his hands and Kurt notices the empty coffee mugs, “just came to get some refills.” There’s a pause and Burt’s face loses its humor. “You okay, Kurt?”

“I don’t know.” Kurt can’t lie: not about his feelings, and certainly not to his dad.

“First time he had a nightmare here,” Burt sets the mugs on the counter, runs a hand over his face, “I almost fell outta my chair.”

Kurt meets his dad’s gaze at the admission that he’d heard the night before. “I knew he had them. I just didn’t…” Kurt gives a helpless shrug, “His nightmares are memories - they’re actually real,” seeing his dad’s questioning look he continues, “He went to get a glass from upstairs.”
“Hm.” Kurt waits as his dad gathers his thoughts, “Hopefully Dr. Schamp’ll be able to help with that.”

“She’s good, right?”

“She is, but if she’s not the right fit for Blaine we’ll call every clinic in Allen County.”

Kurt’s hug has Burt letting out an oomph of surprise before reciprocating. They stand there until the song changes. The opening chords have Kurt’s arms tightening.

“That was a good performance,” Burt comments as I’m gonna make a change drifts from the speakers.

Kurt hums in agreement even as he remembers the conversation he had with Blaine the night before.

“Hey Dad?” Kurt knows his voice is soft, cautious. He lowers his arms and steps back, busies himself by rinsing out the sink – he can’t look at his dad and ask the question circling his mind. “Has Carole – Is she okay?”

“She’s as good as she can be, given everything that’s happened.”

“Hm.” Kurt hums in response, fiddles with the faucet. “Are you – has she acted differently, lately?”

“We’ve all been acting differently lately, Kurt. How about you just ask me what’s on your mind instead of dancin’ around the issue.” Burt’s voice holds a touch of frustration and Kurt reminds himself that it’s a sensitive topic.

“Does she still listen to music?” Kurt hadn’t meant to be quite that direct, but he can’t retract it now.

“What?” Kurt shuts off the water, turns to see his father looking confused. “What kind of question of that, Kurt? Of course she listens to music.”

“It’s just,” Kurt sighs, makes sure he has his dad’s attention before continuing, “she left the room as soon as we started karaoke yesterday, and –”

“She’s always gone when I practice on the keyboard.” Kurt turns, sees Blaine standing in the doorway, an empty glass in his right hand. “I’m sorry.” Blaine shrugs, “It could be nothing. I know playing the same songs over and over isn’t the best entertainment. But then she left yesterday and –” Blaine shares a glance with Kurt, “we just don’t want to upset her. After everything.”

Michael Jackson fades to Pink and the first chorus passes before Burt responds. “That why you’ve been goin’ to your parents’ house?”

Kurt sees Blaine flush and crosses to stand by him, takes his hand with a small smile as Blaine nods in answer. “I don’t mind.”

“Not the point, Blaine.” Burt sighs and refills the two mugs of coffee before reaching into the cabinet and getting two more, filling them as well. He turns back and nods two the steaming mugs. “Fix your coffee, boys.”

Doctored mugs held moments later (in Blaine’s left and Kurt’s right – Kurt refuses to let of Blaine’s hand) Kurt turns to face his dad. “Okay, we have our coffee…”
“Coffee always helps,” Burt comments, “besides, Carole’s expecting a refill. Now, how about we go sort this out?”

Kurt gives Blaine’s hand a reassuring squeeze even as an edge of panic sets in – what if he’s wrong? What if Carole really just doesn’t want to hear three songs on repeat? What if instead of helping Carole he hurts Blaine? – Blaine’s hand squeezes back and Kurt takes a deep breath as they follow his dad from the kitchen.

Carole looks up from her spot on the sofa as they enter, offers a warm smile. “I was thinking we could watch *The Princess Bride* since –”

“That sounds good,” Burt comments as he passes her a mug and takes a set to her left, “but I – we were hopin’ to ask you somethin’ first.”

Kurt leads Blaine across from them, sets his mug on the coffee table and sits on the floor, leaning into Blaine when he settles next to him.

“Okay,” Carole’s voice is light with confusion. “What’s this important question?”

For a moment, no one speaks, but then Burt reaches over and takes Carole’s hand. “How are you holdin’ up?”

“I’m fine,” beside him, Blaine tenses at the words, and Kurt runs his thumb over Blaine’s knuckles.

“It’s just…the boys said something that got me thinking.” Burt pauses, and Kurt briefly wonders if he and Blaine should step out for a moment; his dad continues before he can move. “You can tell us we’re wrong. You don’t even have to answer. I’d just like to know.”

Carole turns, looks at Kurt. “You want to tell me what’s going on?”

Kurt glances to his dad before he takes a steadying breath and straightens, Blaine’s hand a comforting weight in his. “You left the party last night.” Kurt keeps his voice soft. “We started karaoke, and you left.” Kurt offers her a small smile. “I thought you were just controlling the pizza intake in the kitchen, but you didn’t come back until Blaine and I sang the last song.”

“It’s my fault,” Blaine adds, “I told Kurt how you haven’t been here when I’ve practiced on the keyboard. I know rehearsal isn’t great for an audience, but –”

“But,” Kurt picks up where Blaine paused, “I remembered how you always had Finn and me practice in here for Glee. So I just didn’t understand why you were leaving. Or,” he glances to Blaine, “why Blaine felt like he was bothering you.”

“Oh! I never meant…” Carole spins to look at Blaine even as her voice trails off and her eyes shine. “It was never you Blaine. And I never wanted you to feel uncomfortable here. Or – or that you had to return to that house.”

Kurt shifts his weight, tilts his shoulder so Blaine’s leaning into him and Kurt can feel the expansion of Blaine’s chest as he breathes.

“He loved music. Even when he was a baby. Drove me crazy, actually – I’d be trying to sleep or working around the house and he’d be banging on the pots in the kitchen like they were the best drums money could buy.” Carole pauses, and Kurt rests his head against Blaine’s as she rubs her hands over her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she offers a humorless laugh, “I just – he was my little boy. My musician even when he wasn’t so little anymore.”
Burt moves then, pulling her into a hug and Kurt closes his eyes for a moment, focuses on the feel of Blaine beside him.

“– really loved music.” Kurt opens his eyes at Carole’s comment, sees her sitting beside his dad, no space between them on the sofa and their hands clasped when he reaches for his coffee. “He loved it.” Carole sighs. “I get up every morning and for a moment, for one second I expect to hear him singing in the shower, or complaining about the lack of breakfast choice. But he can’t – I won’t ever have that again. And I get through the day by focusing on what I do have,” Carole looks to each of them in turn, and Kurt ignores the sting in his eyes. “But I can’t do that with music. Music was Finn’s thing. I know you boys love music, and you’re both incredibly talented, but all I can focus on when I hear your performances is the fact that Finn can’t. I thought – I thought it would help, at first. That hearing Blaine play or your Glee club sing would help me remember the good times. But I can’t – I don’t think I can distance myself. And I am so sorry, I want – I want to support you.”

There’s silence for a moment, and Kurt replays Carole’s words, sees echoes of himself and Finn singing.

“You’ve been supportive.” Blaine’s words seem impossibly loud after Carole’s hesitant ones. “Never think you haven’t. I’ll never – I can never repay you. Either of you.”

“You don’t repay us, Blaine.” Kurt feels his lips twitch at his father’s words. “You’re family.”

“You are.” Carole agrees, leaning forward slightly. “And you don’t have to keep leaving to practice, honey. I can – I can go upstairs or something. This is your home, too.”

Kurt feels Blaine stiffen at Carole’s words, and when he replies the words are rough, choked. “Thank you. But really, I can practice there. I don’t want to bring up bad memories –”

“Are they though? Bad?” Kurt’s words interrupt, “Carole, I’m not sayin’ you have to sit in on everything, but Finn – he was my kid, too – and he wouldn’t want you giving up any more because of what happened.” Kurt feels a rush of pride; that’s his dad. “We can do whatever is best for you, we will, actually. But I don’t want you hurting more than you have to. I mean, I didn’t want to hear it when we went to the meeting,” Kurt feels his face scrunch in confusion before he remembers the grief counseling, “but I think they were right: we can’t only focus on the pain. We’re a family; we get through this together. And,” Kurt meets his dad’s glance, “the boys are talented, I know you don’t want to avoid that part of them for the rest of our lives.”

“No. You’re right. I know you’re right.” Carole looks up and Kurt feels Blaine’s hand tighten. “I don’t want to miss out on anything with you boys…you never know when – I want to be there.” Carole glances down and Kurt hears her take a steadying breath. When she looks up again her face has a strength that overpowers the pain in her eyes. “The next time you boys sing, I’d like to listen, if you don’t mind. I – I can’t promise I’ll stay, this time, but I want to try.”

Kurt’s nodding before the sentence is finished, feels Blaine doing the same before they both move without comment, standing before stepping around the table for a group hug.

They pull back an interminable time later, and Kurt distributes tissues from the box on the end table without comment. His head has the ache that comes from crying, and his eyes still sting, but he feels lighter than he has in months, a before unnoticed weight having lifted.

“Thank you. I love you all, you know that, right? We might be missing one, but you’re still all my boys. And this is the best family anyone could ask for.” Carole comments with a slight smile. They sit in silence for a moment, sipping their coffee. Kurt sits back, lets his weight rest against Blaine’s
side before raising up when Carole speaks. “Well, I think we’ve met our emotional family meeting quota for the year. So how about we go back to the plan and watch *The Princess Bride*?”

Burt steps away. “As you wish.”
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Sorry I missed posting last week, everyone. The short version is that last Tuesday was a bad day. A really, really, really, bad and stressful day. Anyway, I hope this chapter makes up for it (a bit) and thanks to everyone who follows me on Tumblr and supplied virtual hugs and happy things. Also, I'm still amazed by all of you and thanks for all the reads and comments! As always, thanks to slayerkitty and dlanadhz for the beta!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 17

Blaine erases his last problem, pushing a bit too hard on his eraser. Of course his answer doesn’t match the one in the back of the book. He sits at Kurt’s desk, calculus book (with truly evil problem sets), notebook, and graphing calculator spread out before him.

He and Kurt had agreed to be somewhat productive, although he knows Kurt finished his assignments at least a half an hour ago, given that laughs coming from the bed where Kurt is reading something on his laptop. He blinks and stares at the bits of eraser covering the now blank space on the page.

Behind him, Kurt sighs.

“Everything okay?” Blaine knows he sounds curious, perhaps a touch too invested in nothing more than a sigh, but it was a change after the laughter. And he could use a break from the evils of calculus.

“Oh, fine. Elliott just texted me – he and Dani came up with a new idea for our set next weekend.”

Blaine sets down his pencil and stands, crossing to join Kurt. He sits beside him on the bed, one leg dangling off the side as he rests his head on Kurt’s shoulder. “And that’s worthy of a sigh?”


Blaine puts his arm around Kurt’s waist, smiles when the iPod switches to a cover of *Little Talks*.

“Tell me anyway.”

“It’s nothing new. It’s just…they’re working on stuff for the band. Without me.” Kurt’s head falls but Blaine stills sees the blush in his cheeks. “I know I should be happy that they’re taking initiative. We hadn’t settled on the set list when I left, but…they’re so talented, Blaine.”

Blaine feels his face wrinkle in confusion. “Kurt, you’re the most talented man I’ve ever met – and I say that without bias.”

Kurt huffs a laugh, and Blaine feels a bit of the tension ease. “Thanks. And I know I’m talented, Blaine, I did get into NYADA – eventually.”

“Kurt –”
“Dani and Elliott look the part.” The words are rushed. “They listen to Van Halen and play guitar and I – I’m a countertenor, Blaine.” Kurt’s voice drops to a near whisper, “And they keep practicing without me.”

Blaine pauses for a moment to gather his thoughts, tilts his head to rest against Kurt’s neck. “I didn’t realize your band was a rock band. I mean, your cover of *I Love Rock and Roll* was amazing but so was *Into the Groove*. And,” Blaine raises his head, presses a light, quick kiss to Kurt’s jaw, “unless I’m mistaken, you can certainly sing and dance as well as your bandmates. And if I remember correctly you also stood up to your high school tormenter and spearheaded a campaign to deal with bullying at your high school. Plus,” Blaine tightens his arm around Kurt’s waist, “you moved to New York all on your own. I don’t know about you, but to me that says that my fiancé is pretty amazing.”

Kurt shakes his head, dislodging Blaine from the space between his neck and shoulder. “Mm. The thought’s appreciated, but I’m not exactly hardcore.”

Blaine leans back, moves so he’s facing Kurt. “Funny. The Kurt Hummel I know is the bravest man I’ve ever met.” He gently places his index finger against Kurt’s lips to prevent the counterargument he can see growing in Kurt’s mind. “You didn’t run, Kurt. Ever. You went back to McKinley and showed everyone that no one can keep Kurt Hummel down. You came to New York and won your NYADA sing off. You are going to sing at the NYADA showcase.” Blaine sees – and feels – Kurt begin to smile so he moves his hand to Kurt’s shoulder, leans forward to punctuate each word with a light kiss. “You wore a kilt to *Prom. In Ohio*.”

“That’s fashion –”

“Don’t downplay your strength, please.”

Blaine rests his forehead against Kurt’s, matches his breathing and offers him a smile before leaning in for a more thorough kiss. He pulls back some time later, moves to place light, teasing kisses along Kurt’s neck and jaw. Kurt’s breathing becomes more uneven, hitching when Blaine reaches under his ear. “I – um – I think I see your point.”

“I hope so.” Blaine murmurs the words, not taking his attention from Kurt’s neck.

“We’re supposed – supposed to be working.”

“Hm. We deserve a break.”

“We have been working for hours.” Kurt follows his comment by leaning away, causing Blaine to fall briefly before he manages to turn. He ends up lying on his back, arms around Kurt as he leans above him. “And Dad and Carole will be gone for at least a few more hours.” Kurt gives Blaine a truly evil (but gorgeous) grin before leaning down for another kiss. “This is some fantasy of yours, isn’t it. Your room?”

"It’s not my fault that when I was here the house was full while yours was conveniently empty."

“Well,” Blaine smiles, raises his hand so his ring catches the light before resting it on the back of Kurt’s neck, “I’d hate to leave your room bereft.”

Kurt gives a small laugh and shakes his head. “Our room, Blaine. It’s our room now.”

“Prove it.” Blaine counters, and pulls Kurt down.
Kurt shifts a bit in the booth, moving so his thigh rests against Blaine’s under the table. Carole had suggested a late lunch at Breadstix via text, but he and Blaine were the first to arrive. Luckily, their bored waitress hadn’t commented on the fact that the two present from the party of four were two gay teenagers. She’d simply taken their drink orders and stepped away.

Ohio may not be accepting, but at least he can keep his good mood.

He looks around the restaurant, absently notes that nothing’s changed. He can’t say he’s terribly surprised, but being one of the few sit down restaurants, would it be too much to hope the décor got an update?

“Is New York pasta really that much better?”

Kurt turns at Blaine’s question, knows his confusion is plain on his face.

“You looked offended.” Blaine accompanies the comment with a slight nod.

“Oh.” Kurt gives him a quick smile. “There are some restaurants I can’t wait to take you to, but I was thinking about the décor – I had hoped they’d updated.”

Blaine laughs and Kurt reaches to take his hand. “No, and you should know that if they ever had I would have called and sent pictures immediately.”

“True,” Kurt gives Blaine’s hand a brief squeeze, “but I still hope for the manager to have an epiphany.”

Blaine’s reply is interrupted by the return of the waitress with their drinks and a basket of breadsticks. He accepts his with a smile and nods in response when she questions if they want to wait to order until the rest of their party arrives. She steps away with a half-hearted comment to let her know if they need anything, and Kurt turns back to face Blaine.

“If I acted like that at the diner I’d never get any tips.”

“Probably not,” Blaine replies with a laugh, “but at least she’s efficient.”

“Hm. I guess –”

“Sorry we’re late!” Kurt and Blaine both jump slightly at Carole’s comment, and Blaine’s hand tightens around his before he looks across the table, giving Carole a smile as she sets down her purse. “Construction.”

Kurt winces in sympathy. “Summer in Ohio.”

“Yeah,” his dad agrees as he reaches for a menu, “but at least we made it.”

Their waitress arrives a moment later, and Kurt wonders if she’s been replaced by a pod person in the minutes she was gone. She jokes with his dad and Carole, smiling and describing the lunch specials.

Kurt takes a slow drink of his soda and shares a look with Blaine.

They manage to wait until the waitress (apparently her name is Lauren) leaves to get drinks before breaking into laughter.
“Sorry,” Kurt says between laughs, “she just – she really changes when there’s a chance for a tip.”

His dad and Carole’s widened eyes don’t help him control his laughter.

“She barely looked at us when we got our drinks,” Blaine comments from beside him, “and we certainly didn’t hear any specials.” There’s a small laugh and then he continues, “I didn’t know she could be that…peppy. It’s like she’s a pod person.”

Kurt’s overcome with affection at the moment, can’t help but give Blaine’s cheek a peck. He pulls back quickly, feels the blush staining his cheeks as he subtly glances around and releases a quiet sigh when he notes that most of the tables are empty.

“Well,” Kurt turns to look at his father, “maybe she’s tryin’ to be an actress.”

“I hope not,” Kurt mutters, drawing a laugh from Blaine.

“So,” Carole comments as she takes a breadstick, sighing when she realizes she doesn’t have a bread plate before Blaine slides her his and moves Kurt’s to the middle; Carole smiles and then continues, “I hope you boys weren’t waiting too long.”

“No,” Kurt shares a glance with Blaine, “not really. We hit a little traffic too.” He keeps the fact that they were a little late leaving the house to himself, although Blaine gives his hand a squeeze.

“That’s something, at least.” Carole takes a small bite from her breadstick, nods when Lauren returns with their drinks before giving them more time to glance over their menus. “But Kurt, how is school? You’ve been here two days and I feel like I’ve gotten more information from phone calls than over the past two days when you’ve been here.”

“Oh.” Kurt feels the blush staining his cheeks and ducks his head to look at the menu. “Sorry. But school isn’t terribly interesting –”

“Kurt’s singing in the end of year showcase,” Blaine interrupts, pride audible.

Carole and Burt both give Kurt looks of surprise and excitement before narrowing their eyes. “You were going to tell us.” Burt’s words aren’t a question.

“Of course!” Kurt looks up quickly, feels the words slide together in his haste to reply. “I was waiting for the right time,” Kurt adds with a shrug, “Blaine’s party was Friday, and yesterday…” He lets the sentence trail off, offers Carole a smile he hopes keeps her from feeling upset.

“Well, that’s wonderful Kurt.” Carole’s voice stays strong, open and ringing with sincerity. “What are you singing? When is it? You have to tell us everything.”

“And you better not hold back,” his dad adds. “It’s not every day we get to know about our kid performing at a NYADA showcase. I’m glad that school of yours is recognizing your talent.”

Blaine offers him half a breadstick. “They’d be idiots not to.”

“You’re all going to give me an inflated ego.” Kurt takes a bite of his breadstick before continuing. “Don’t get me wrong, you all are wonderful, but I’m going to struggle with the criticism I’m due for Monday.”

Any replies are postponed with the return of Lauren, but they manage to place their orders without mishap (although he and Blaine can’t hold back a few chuckles while ordering). Luckily, Lauren doesn’t comment, and she leaves before he and Blaine dissolve into full laughter.
“I’m glad you two can amuse yourselves,” Carole adds in a dry tone, “but Kurt – I meant what I said. Tell us all about this showcase.”

“I don’t know too much, yet. Madam Tibideaux is still deciding the theme and parameters. I have a solo, though.” Kurt feels happiness bubbling in his chest, along with a hint of pride that he’s finally being recognized. “Plus there will be at least one group performance; everyone sings in the finale.”

“That’s great, Kurt.” His dad is beaming, and Kurt hadn’t thought he could feel any happier, but the bubble in his chest expands, and his eyes sting. Blaine’s hand squeezes his again, and gratitude joins the maelstrom of emotions.

“It really is.”

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt pauses in the doorway to his old room, a mug of coffee in each hand. In front of him, Blaine sits at his desk, intent on something. Kurt’s face tightens as he takes in the hunched shoulders of his fiancé, frowns when he realizes that Blaine isn’t humming along to the piano cover of *Clocks* drifting from his docked iPod. He pushes off the doorframe and enters the room, moves to stand beside Blaine, setting one of the cups of coffee down on the desk.

“You look like you could use some coffee.”

“Have I mentioned that I love you today?” Blaine comments as he turns to face him, dropping something on the desk. He takes the mug with a smile, swallows a sip before setting the mug back down. “I grateful for the coffee, but I have to admit, I thought you’d be down there for a couple more hours.”

Kurt shakes his head. After getting back from lunch, Blaine had come upstairs to work on homework. Kurt had suspected Blaine wanting to give him one-on-one time with Burt and Carole (a sweet, if unnecessary gesture) but had happily talked with his parents. When the conversation had lulled Kurt had left for the kitchen, which had led to now, with him bringing coffee to his tired fiancé.

“Maybe I wanted to spend more time with you.”

Blaine’s smile could outshine the New York skyline.

“Well, I’ll never say no to that.” There’s silence for a moment as they both sip at their coffee before Kurt sets his mug on the desk and moves to stand behind Blaine, wrapping his arms around Blaine’s shoulders and resting his chin on Blaine’s head.

“What’s that?”

“Oh.” Blaine picks up the card and Kurt holds back his wince when Blaine continues in a flat voice. “Cooper sent me a birthday card.”

“Well,” Kurt pauses before he continues – Cooper has always been a sensitive topic, and Kurt doesn’t want to repeat past mistakes, “that was kind of him.”

Blaine lets out a strained laugh, and Kurt’s arms shake with the motion. “No, I’m sorry. It was. I just –” Blaine sighs and ducks his head before he reaches for the card and places it in Kurt’s hand.

Kurt steps back and opens the card.
Hey little bro!

L.A. is awesome! I’m so glad you get to come out here for your show choir thing! You’ll love it – the sun is wonderful, especially for Anderson skin. Mom was right, who knew? I’ll have to audition for a skin care commercial! I’d totally get it! Anyway, I know you’re having a rough time, and I would totally be there for you if it wasn’t for this audition. But it’s George Clooney, Blaine! No one says no to George Clooney! Besides, the two hottest men in Hollywood? Definite blockbuster. Anyhow happy birthday! Have fun with Kurt’s parents. :)

For a moment, Kurt can do nothing but stare. It’s not that the words are harsh – they’re not even particularly insightful. And yet, for a moment Kurt futilely wishes that Cooper had simply left the card blank except for his name.

“Blaine –”

“He hasn’t sent a card in years.” Blaine’s voice is hushed, and Kurt turns back to face him. “So at least he’s trying, right?”

“Right.” Kurt knows his voice lacks conviction, but he doesn’t lie to Blaine. And Cooper – Cooper knows what’s going on, knew what was going on when Blaine was attacked years ago. And yet, Kurt remembers that Blaine was alone in the hospital, remembers that Blaine had a home health aide to get to him to P.T., and a therapist more concerned with Blaine’s parents’ views and money than his health.

Cooper was never mentioned.

And now, Cooper’s sent a flippant – if genuine – birthday card. Suddenly, Kurt is overwhelmed with his love for Blaine (and guilt for past actions) realizing how much Cooper’s appearance a year before must have cost him.

“I called him while you were downstairs.” Blaine’s voice jolts Kurt from his thoughts, and he steps back to Blaine, setting the card on the desk. “I got his voicemail, but I left a message.” Blaine offers a slight smile and shrug, “He was probably at some audition – it was early afternoon for him.”

“Well, I’m sure he’ll call back when he gets a chance.” Kurt takes Blaine’s hand and pulls him from the chair, leads them over to the bed where he settles against the pillows, Blaine resting against his chest.

“Hm.” Blaine’s response stays quiet, noncommittal. “Maybe he will. But,” Blaine starts playing with Kurt’s fingers, keeping is gaze down, “I’m not going to lie and say I’ll expect it. Honestly, I’m surprised he sent a card. The last time I got one was after Sadie Hawkins.” Blaine’s hand freezes and Kurt catches his fingers, squeezes them in support. “He even –” Blaine releases a humorless huff of laughter, “he even sent this obnoxious ‘get well soon’ bear; it was a good thing I couldn’t squeeze it at first because he’d recorded himself saying what he considered to be ‘helpful thoughts’ – they repeated every time it was touched. My P.T. found out and had me use it during sessions once I was strong enough. Said it was great motivation because I kept hoping if I squeezed it hard enough eventually it would die.”

Kurt shakes his head and laughs even as his chest aches at the thought of Blaine in the hospital with nothing but an obnoxious toy from his family. “At least it was helpful.” Kurt pauses, “Do you still have it?”

“Hm.” Blaine leans and rests his head on Kurt’s shoulder. “I’m sure it’s buried in my closet
somewhere."

"Do you think it still works?"

"Don’t even joke," Blaine groans, “Those lines were in my head for months."

"Were they really that bad? I mean," Kurt pauses, searching for words, “I know Cooper’s a bit eccentric, but he’s not crazy."

“No,” Blaine agrees, “but he did say that ‘bruises just add color’ and that ‘wincing should always show authenticity’ I thought my P.T. was going to fall out his chair laughing the first time he heard it."

Kurt pulls Blaine closer even as he laughs. “He’s your brother."

“He’s something.” Blaine sighs, “I know he tries, and he does mean well, but…” The sentence trails off and Kurt drops a kiss to Blaine’s hair.

“But?"

“You’re going to think I’m a horrible person.”

“Doubtful. How about you just tell me and let me decide?”

“I –” Blaine’s chest rises with his deep breath, and then he starts again. “Sometimes I wish Cooper had just stayed away. It’s not that I don’t think he cares, or that he’s even done anything, really,” Blaine pauses and Kurt keeps to himself the memories of Cooper’s somewhat cutting remarks to Blaine when he visited. “But he’s not really here, either. After my dad –” Blaine’s cut off sentence has Kurt briefly closing his eyes, tightening his arms around Blaine’s waist. “After everything… I left him a voicemail saying that I was staying here, just – just so he’d know. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner, but it wasn’t that big of a deal. Anyway, he called back while I was in school. He left a voicemail saying that he’d always known Dad had a temper, but that that’s a useful cliché in Hollywood. He said that he was glad I could stay here, since you’re so ‘awesome’ and that if I needed anything to give him a call, but not to be surprised if I get his voicemail since auditions keep him busy. And I’m not mad at him, I’m not. It was just that for a second, after we sang in the auditorium, I thought things might change. But Cooper is still Cooper – he focuses on something so much that there’s no room for other things.”

Kurt stays silent after Blaine finishes, lets Umbrella drift over him as he organizes his thoughts. He wonders what it’s like, having a sibling who cares but doesn’t show it, at least not in the expected ways. How often did Blaine wait for a hug (or a phone call) when he was younger before he simply stopped expecting it? When did he start accepting the excuse of the next big audition? Against him, Blaine takes even breaths, not speaking.

“You’re not a horrible person, Blaine.”

“You’re biased.”

“Mm.” Kurt drops his head to Blaine’s shoulder. “But that wasn’t part of the criteria. You knew I was biased before you started talking.” Kurt leans back, moves his arms from around Blaine so he can quickly push himself away and move so they’re facing one another. “I wish Cooper was here for you, but unfortunately I can’t control the world. But, I’m here for you, and Dad and Carole are, too.” Kurt reaches across and picks up Blaine’s left hand, toys with the ring resting there. “We’re family now, too, and I know it’s…different, but we’ll always be there for you. I feel like we keep saying that, but apparently the Hudson-Hummels are big on repetition.”
Blaine offers a small smile. “Apparently I need to hear it multiple times for it to stick.”

“Hm.” Kurt briefly tightens his hold on Blaine’s hand. “You are a bit stubborn. But,” Kurt rests his forehead against Blaine’s, “you’re stuck with us, and once you’re with me in New York you’ll be stuck with me every day. Focus on that.”

“It’s a nice thought.” Blaine mumbles, turning to place a soft kiss to Kurt’s cheek. “And your family is wonderful. It’s not perfect, but it’s real and I – I love that you’ve shared so much with me.”

“Part of the deal,” Kurt murmurs before letting out a yawn. “Sorry, sorry!”

“Don’t be sorry.” Blaine drops his head to rest on Kurt’s shoulder. “Nap?”

“We shouldn’t. You’re supposed to be doing homework and I should be scouring EBSCO.”

Blaine hums and then shifts his weight, pulling Kurt with him so they’re lying side by side on the bed. “We probably should,” he says around a yawn, “but it’s the weekend, and I say we nap. Besides, you leave tomorrow morning – we should take advantage and cuddle.”

“You make a good argument. Nap it is.”

Moments later they’ve settled, Blaine resting his head on Kurt’s chest. Kurt gently runs his hand up and down Blaine’s arm, takes comfort in the rise and fall of his chest.

Naps really are the best thing.

-*.*.*.-*.

Blaine helps Kurt gather the plates from the table, carrying them to the sink. Carole refused to let them do all the dishes, but had finally conceded to allowing others to gather the dishes she washed. Setting the plates next to the sink, Blaine smiles before stepping back, letting Kurt set his down as well. Apparently Burt’s finished gathering the miscellaneous plates and silverware and moves to take a rinsed plate from Carole, toweling it dry. At a loss for what to do, Blaine shares a glance with Kurt.

Four people doing dishes is a bit much.

Still, it’s quiet, comfortable in a way that leads to Blaine bopping his head as he helps Kurt put away the dishes. He and Kurt jokingly dance around the kitchen, putting plates and pots away in cabinets. He stops to take a glass from Mr. Hummel, pauses when he pulls it back. “That must have been some nap – I don’t remember having that much energy even when I was your age.”

Blaine laughs and takes the cup. “I’m sure you danced just fine, Mr. Hummel. And we’re not really dancing, but it’s more fun this way.”

“I’ll take your word for that,” Burt comments as he takes a skillet from Carole, “seems like a lot of work to me.”

“I thought you’ve been keeping up with your exercise.” Kurt’s comment has Burt shaking his head with a rueful smile.

“I’ve been doin’ my part, Kurt, but you two were just dancin’ round the kitchen like you can’t stay still.”
“You’re just jealous,” Carole adds with a small laugh. “You are getting older.”

Burt’s eyes narrow and Blaine steps back just as Burt flicks a bit of water towards Carole. She shrieks in laughter and Blaine shares a look with Kurt before they both move to stand against the far wall, away from any potential water.

Not that they needed to, apparently.

Carole seems content having given Burt a hug with her wet hands; his shirt sticks to his back in two misshapen handprints.

After another shared glance, Blaine follows Kurt back toward the sink, carefully taking the last of the now dried dishes and quickly putting them away.

“Well,” Carole turns off the faucet and turns to face them, “do you boys want dessert now or later?”

“What?” Blaine hears Kurt echo his question, but keeps his focus on Carole.

“Dessert,” Carole gestures to the fridge, “there’s cheesecake – store bought, sorry – for whenever you want some.” She pauses, looks to Kurt before continuing, “I figured you deserved something special before you leave Ohio for the glorious Big Apple.”

“You really didn’t have to…” Kurt’s words trail off before he smiles. “What kind of cheesecake?”

Blaine laughs, and it joins Burt’s, echoing slightly in the tiled room. Carole’s reply of chocolate has Kurt grinning and Blaine ducks his head to hide his amusement.

“– later. Dinner was too delicious for me to have room for anything else right now, even if it is cheesecake.” Blaine looks back up at Kurt’s reply, catches his gaze and he knows the next words are for him. “Unless you want some now?”

Blaine shakes his head, “No, I totally agree. Dinner was amazing and,” Blaine jokingly pats his stomach, “I’m stuffed.”

“How about some coffee, then.” Burt nods toward the machine, “We can get some brewing and watch a bit of T.V.”

There’s murmurs of agreement and ten minutes later they’re all sitting in the living room, mugs of steaming coffee on varying tables. After joking arguments about the (lack of) quality of reality shows they finally settle on a marathon of How I Met Your Mother reruns. Blaine relaxes against Kurt’s chest, content.

They manage one and half episodes before Kurt announces that the cheesecake is calling his name, and Blaine stands to join him in getting slices.

“Plus,” Kurt adds as he cuts a thin slice, “this way we control Dad’s portion.”

Blaine laughs. “At least I’ll never have to worry about my weight; you’ll stop me before I even get the chance.”

“Is that a criticism?” Kurt holds the knife poised to cute a slice even smaller than the last.

“Not at all,” Blaine hurries to comment, “I don’t want people wondering why the fabulous Kurt Hummel is with the overweight Blaine Anderson.”
There’s a pause, and Kurt sets down the knife. “You know I wouldn’t care, right? I mean, I want you to be healthy, but don’t worry that I’d care what anyone else might say.”

Blaine smiles and takes the plate on the counter. “I know. Sorry,” he nods toward the cheesecake, “I didn’t mean to make you worry or anything.”

“I’m not worrying –” Kurt cuts himself off, cuts and plates another slice of cheesecake before continuing. “Well, maybe a little, but that’s my right. Anyway,” he turns, and nods to the last plate on the counter, “what do you say we drop these off and then go up to our room.”

“It’s still your room, Kurt.” Blaine comments as he takes the plate in his left hand.

“Our room, and you really should stop trying to argue.”

Blaine shakes his head and follows Kurt back to the living room where Kurt hands Carole and Burt (who shakes his head and sighs when he sees the size of his slice) before announcing that they’re going upstairs.

They head for the stairs with reminders to say goodnight before they go to sleep, and moments later they’re seated on the floor, door closed and music drifting from the docking station.

“Bless Carole,” Kurt says around a bite of cheesecake, humming in appreciation.

“I’m sure the cheesecake’s better in New York,” Blaine replies, staring at his plate.

“Hm,” Kurt takes another bite, “yes, but the company here is infinitely better.”

“I wish you could stay longer.” Blaine closes his eyes after he says the words, torn between regret and embarrassment. “Sorry, sorry. I wasn’t even expecting you to come this weekend, I know you have lots to do with school and work –”

“Blaine,” Kurt interrupts, stopping the flow of words. “It’s okay. I wish I could stay, too. Or,” he pauses, gives Blaine a smile, “that you could come back with me.”

Of course Kurt understands.

“I am glad you visited. Really.” Blaine looks at his ring, reflecting the overhead light. “There’s just so much happening.” Mentally, Blaine lists off the major events happening within the next two months: nationals, graduation, therapy.

“Mm.” Kurt scoots so he’s sitting beside Blaine, their thighs touching. “You’ll get through it though.”

“My appointment is Thursday.” Blaine takes another bite of cheesecake, takes his time chewing. “She, um, all new patients are seen on Thursdays since the first therapy session runs longer – it’s why I couldn’t be seen earlier.”

“Are you nervous?” Kurt’s question is quiet, hesitant.

“No – yes.” Blaine huffs a laugh, turns to look at Kurt. “I’m not nervous about the therapy itself.” Blaine pauses, trying to organize the multitude of thoughts swirling in his mind. “I don’t think therapy can be that different, even with a new doctor… but I don’t know what she’s going to say. I keep – I keep seeing those cars, and I messed up at the volunteers’ dinner. And then I remember all those shows on the History Channel,” he pauses, leans when Kurt places a hand on his shoulder, “before it started showing weird things, and it showed actual history stuff? There were always
shows about people who were involved in something, and they never – they never get over it.

“And I was over it, Kurt. For years. I was fine. But now I’m seeing cars and people who have absolutely no reason to be in Lima. And I can’t sleep. And what if – what if she can’t fix me? What if it’s – what if I become one of those people?”

The plate is taken from him by careful hands, placed on the floor. And then Kurt turns and pulls him in, hugging him to his chest.

Blaine just breathes.

“You won’t, Blaine.” Kurt’s words are soft, but strong with conviction. “And Dr. Schamp doesn’t need to ‘fix’ you. You’re not broken. Something – something horrible happened to you. And,” Kurt tilts Blaine’s head so he meets his eyes, “you might have been fine, Blaine, but your last therapist,” the word rings with derision, “wasn’t what I’d call helpful. And anyone would need a sympathetic ear after what happened. I don’t care what your diagnosis – if any – is, you’ll get through it, and I’ll be there to help as much as I can. It’s alright to be nervous, or even scared, but don’t feel bad because you’re getting help, okay?”

Blaine nods against Kurt’s chest, tightens his arms around Kurt’s waist. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to –”

“What did I say about that word?”

Blaine gives a weak laugh. “Right.” He sighs, pulls back so he can easily look at Kurt. “I know your dad and Carole looked around and have talked to Dr. Schamp. They said she was nice, at least, and I believe them. But,” Blaine ducks his head, hates that he has to stop to search for words again, “but that’s just it. She’s supposedly a nice lady who won’t – who doesn’t care that I’m gay. What if she says I’m crazy, Kurt?”

“You’re not crazy, Blaine.”

“I’m seeing –”

“You’re not crazy.” Blaine feels Kurt hands tighten on his as he says the words. “You went through a trauma when you were fourteen. And you survived, you survived and I am so, so proud of you for that. You need some help now, and no one can fault you for that. Okay? No one. Dad and Carole wouldn’t send you to someone they had questions about, someone they doubted. And regardless of what Dr. Schamp says, I’ll be there for you. Nothing could make me leave. Besides,” Kurt presses a kiss to Blaine’s cheek, “Dad’s already said he’ll go through every doctor in the county – the state if need be – until you find someone you can talk to.”

Blaine keeps his head against Kurt’s chest, counting heartbeats. He’s still worried about what the outcome will be from his upcoming therapy, but Kurt’s words have given him a focus point, hope that things might be okay. Even if what he suspects is true, Kurt’s promised to be there.

“I love you.”

“Mm.” Kurt pulls back, gives Blaine a grin. “I love you too. It’s part of why you’re stuck with me.”

Blaine feels the smile grow on his face. “Well, I’m not complaining.”

“You’d better not.” Kurt drops his head to Blaine’s shoulder for a moment before sitting up again. “So, how about we finish our indulgent cheesecake and then you can show me your parts for nationals again before we get ready for bed.”
“You just want to hear me sing.”

“You did say you can’t practice too much.”

Blaine laughs as he picks up his plate. “You’re never going to forget that, are you? My own words are going to haunt me.”

Kurt laughs around a bite to cheesecake.

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“Heaven forbid you pick a man’s profession.”

“Man up, Anderson!”

A hand grabs his shoulder, spinning him around. A punch pushes him back, further into the arms of his captor. “Sadie Hawkins isn’t for gays, Anderson! Hold ‘em Mitch. Cover his mouth, too. Can’t have him crying, now.”

Blaine struggles, twists but he’s trapped and he can’t move, held tightly –

Blaine jolts up, breath heaving. A hand settles on his shoulder and he jumps.

“Sorry!” Kurt’s voice is soft, and moments later the bedside light flips on, bathing the room in its dim light. Beside him, Kurt’s hair is a glorious mess, but his face is pale, worried even in the poor light from the lamp.

“No,” Blaine rubs a hand over his face. “I’m sorry. I – I woke you up, and you have to leave –”

“Don’t even go there, Blaine. We’ve been over this.” There’s a pause and then the hand settles again. Blaine leans into it, allows Kurt to wrap him in a hug.

“’m still sorry I woke you up.”

“Well, we can save our discussion on that word for the morning, okay? For now,” Kurt moves, carefully pulling at the blankets until they’re no longer a tangled mess on the bed, “just come here.”

Blaine goes, settles against Kurt’s chest.

“What do you need me to do?”

Stay with me. But he can’t voice the words, can’t put that pressure on Kurt the day he’s leaving to return to New York. “Nothing. You’re – you’re already helping.”

“Blaine.”

Blaine sighs, pulls Kurt’s arm so it’s wrapped around him. “Just hold me?” The words come out as a question and Blaine closes his eyes, annoyed at his own weakness.

“You never have to ask.” There’s a click and darkness returns, but then Kurt’s pulling Blaine to him, holding him and pressing soft kisses to his hair.

Breathe in. Kurt’s here.

Breathe out. Kurt’s still here.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

I'm hoping you believe me when I say that I truly meant to post on time but got swamped at work. It's Finals' Week, so I'm making assessments and writing evaluations for every one of my students to be sent to their embassies. Between that and other meetings/grading assignments I've barely had time to breathe, much less write and post. But I am sorry for having missed my post dates! That being said, I hope all of you enjoy this chapter, and it's extra long (23 pages!) to almost-sorta make up for my delay.

Thanks to slayerkitty for her speedy feedback and dealing with my stressed conversations about this chapter! I wouldn't even be posting now if it wasn't for her.

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 18

Kurt exits the library and straightens the strap of his bag as he heads for his Voice I instructor’s office. His draft has a clear plan now, with partial paragraphs and references he can build on later. His head hates him for it – the lack of caffeine combined with an early morning is truly evil – but he’d felt confident enough in his Voice performance to skip practice and work on his paper instead, before the rush of fellow freshman overtook the aisles. Blaine had delightedly been his accompanist over the weekend (and he had taken the harmonies when Blaine practiced in return) and the hours had passed quickly, the notes coming easier with every run through.

Carole had even managed to listen for two run-throughs. Luckily he and Blaine had managed to keep in any tears until she stepped out.

Text message from Kurt:

About to see if our practices paid off!

Text message from Blaine:

I’m sure they did, but am I still supposed to wish you luck?

Kurt smiles and eyes the contrast of his ring against his phone case before typing a reply.

Text message from Kurt:

Hummels don’t need luck (especially after our practice).

Text message from Kurt:

I wish I could have caffeine though.

Text message from Blaine:
Get a mocha for me after class?

*Text message from Kurt:*

I have to now – isn’t it the rule that I have to be nice to you on your birthday?

*Text message from Blaine:*

Then make sure you get a muffin, too! :)

Kurt laughs, can’t contain his happiness as he thinks of Blaine, remembers the sleepy laugh and heart-felt thanks when he called at six in the morning so he could be the first to sing *Happy Birthday*. And yet, even on his birthday, Blaine’s trying to spoil him.

Kurt silently thanks his past self for realizing that Blaine was *the one* (or rather, accepting what he already knew and choosing him) and wearing his ring – people aren’t possessions, but Kurt has never been so proud as when he can call Blaine his fiancé.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I seem to be the one benefiting from this rule, even though it’s *your* birthday…

*Text message from Kurt:*

Not that I’m complaining…. (although if I can’t wear my favorite pants we’re going to have to have a talk)

Kurt moves to the side as a fellow student rushes by, sighs when he has to quickly stop to avoid running into a pair of gossiping classmates. He ignores the mention of Ms. July, and walks in front of them, glad when he sees his building just a few yards ahead.

*Text message from Blaine:*

You’ll always be wonderful <3

*Text message from Blaine:*

And you got me the best present - the least I can do is try and make your day as stress-free and fun as possible :D

*Text message from Kurt:*

Trying to woo me?

*Text message from Blaine:*

[photo] I already have proof that I won in the wooing department :)”

*Text message from Kurt:*

[photo] Funny, I have one too.

*Text message from Blaine:*

: D

Kurt pauses in typing his reply when he reaches the doors of his building, keeps his phone clutched in his left while he fights against the weight of the door with his right. He manages to make it into
the hallway without dropping his phone, joining the other students in the hall.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Hopefully I'll still have a smile like that after my conference and class…

*Text message from Blaine:*

Your NYADA professor and classmates recognize your talent – you already won the diva off, remember?

Huffing a laugh at Blaine’s response, Kurt allows himself a moment to bask in Blaine’s compliments. He looks up moments later when he hears a loud laugh carrying over the buzz of conversation, sees the back of Adam’s head from where he’s talking with two members of Adam’s Apples.

It’s certainly not the first time he’s seen them in hallways (for being a decently sized school it’s surprising how often Kurt runs in to people he knows) but he feels a quick pang at the loss of potential friends. Glee had more relationships than any club had a right to, and yet they were still there for each other in the end, regardless.

Adam had asked him to leave the Apples based on a could have been. He had tried, he’d even attempted to force himself to move on from Blaine, but his heart was never in it, and Adam had known that from the moment they met.

Apparently British NYADA seniors hold slightly irrational grudges.

His phone buzzes in his hand.

*Text message from Blaine:*

You’re the most talented man I’ve ever known – they’ll see it too <3

*Text message from Blaine:*

[photo] And I took your advice, see? A bit of indulgence for my birthday :)

*Text message from Kurt:*

You flatter me

*Text message from Kurt:*

Everyone should have a mocha on their birthday!

Kurt smiles after sending his reply, slowing down as he enters the stairwell; Adam and his friends are gone, and Kurt shakes his head as he falls into step beside a classmate. He offers a small wave and they fall into the casual conversation between almost-friends: professors, class, papers, and lamenting the loss of sleep.

He pauses when sleep is mentioned, but luckily being almost-friends means small hesitations and worries are skipped over – Kurt forces away memories of Blaine’s nightmares and second-hand nervousness about his fiancé’s upcoming therapy appointment – he nods in agreement instead.

Arriving at the classroom Kurt leans against the wall, waiting for the previous class to leave. Beside him, his classmate falls silent, and a quick glance shows him engrossed in sheet music.
Text message from Blaine:

I agree – we can make it our own tradition ;)

Text message from Kurt:

I’ll add it to our ever growing list

Text message from Blaine:

:) We should pin the list to the calendar in your room once I’m in New York

Text message from Kurt:

We will – but it will be our room, Blaine :p

Kurt smiles and for once is glad he’s not drawing the attention of his classmate; his ring (gorgeous as it is) already sets him apart from his fellow freshmen, and after Santana had met him on campus once – something that would never happen again, after her yell ofHummel! I know you’re engaged but stop with the nauseating looks. I still want to eat my lunch! – the glances and searching comments had only increased. Soft glances because of texts (no matter how sweet) would only add to the NYADA gossip mill. After another quick glance at the time Kurt lowers his phone and begins mentally running through his upcoming performance. He already feels prepared, confident in the piece, but he knows in order to perform at his best he needs to focus, too.

Text message from Kurt:

Go enjoy your birthday, Blaine

Text message from Blaine:

‘Enjoy’ is a complicated term when said birthday is in the middle of the school week.

Text message from Kurt:

I’m sure you’ll manage.

Text message from Kurt:

Besides, it’s not a normal Wednesday.

Text message from Blaine:

I don’t know that my birthday makes the entire day different...

Kurt shakes his head, but doesn’t reply.

Text message from Blaine:

You’re up to something, Kurt Hummel. What did you do?

Text message from Kurt:

Happy Birthday, Blaine <3

Text message from Blaine:
You've already said (and sung) that. And you've thrown me a truly amazing birthday party...

*Text message from Blaine:*

Kurt...

*Text message from Kurt:*

I love you!

Kurt slips his phone in his bag with a smile, his melancholy thoughts banished with just a few texts.

He straightens and begins humming Handel.

_*.*_.*_.

Blaine still dislikes calculus. Behind him, Tina releases a sigh and he feels his lips twitch with a hint of a smile in agreement. At the front of the room, his teacher begins writing another example on the board and he looks back to his notebook, picks up his pencil and copies down the derivatives. Moments later he sets the pencil down with a sigh, and turns while the teacher passes out small white boards when Tina taps his shoulder.

“I was going to grab coffee before rehearsal this afternoon, want me to get you anything?”

“You know you’re supposed to avoid caffeine before singing, right?” Blaine keeps his tone light, but can’t help the small bit of judgment that escapes: everyone knows to drink water before (and while) singing.

“Yeah, but I don’t care,” she smiles at Blaine, “and I thought you’d want a coffee on your birthday. Besides,” Tina sighs. “One cup won’t damage my vocal chords, and I’m going to need some serious caffeine to get through the two hours of practice.”

“That’s why I brought Starbucks for lunch,” Unique comments with a smile. “I have the caffeine and I get to keep my fabulous voice for this afternoon. But don’t think I forgot what day it is – there’s some brownies in my bag, too.”

Blaine laughs and eyes his teacher who’s made it to the middle of the room. “Thanks in advance for the chocolate.” He turns away from Unique a bit, so he can talk to both of his friends. “You both seem to think this practice is going to be horrible; do you know something I don’t?”

“Why,” Tina questions, leaning forward so her head is practically on Blaine’s shoulder, “what do you know?”

For a moment, Blaine sits in silence. There are times, even after being at McKinley for a year, where the absurdity that is Glee Club hits him.

Like now.

“Nothing?” The word comes out as a question, and he leans away from Tina when she narrows her gaze. “ Seriously, it’s just a longer practice because we have Nationals next weekend.”

“Mr. Schue does seem intent to make up for the hour we missed last week. And we have the festival this weekend,” Unique taps her pencil, the click! surprisingly loud in between comments, “hopefully there won’t be yelling at this one.”
“Yelling?” Blaine keeps his voice even, glances down to his notes before meeting her gaze.

“Just because it’s a festival doesn’t mean the crazies stay home.” Unique releases a theatrical sigh. “Some people just don’t appreciate fabulousness.”

“It’s not that bad,” Tina adds, “but it’s Ohio – there’s always going to be more jocks who’d prefer country or…any music other than us.”

“Hm.” Blaine can’t be surprised, not really, but in the past any public performance always had more support than derision.

“But enough about Glee,” Tina comments as the teacher moves to the back of their row, “I’m still shocked that you can focus; on Friday all you did was stare at your new accessory.”

Blaine doesn’t even attempt to stop the smile spreading across his face, even as his eyes look to his left hand.

“I had all weekend to stare at it.” He pointedly ignores the giggled ‘and Kurt’ Unique adds, taking the white board and a marker from his teacher with a distracted nod.

Tina’s about to reply when Blaine hears the teacher clearing his throat, pulling Blaine’s attention back to the front of the room. He releases a slight sigh, glad for the excuse to drop the conversation. He’s not interested in sharing his memories of the weekend, despite the girls’ repeated attempts since Monday. Blaine slightly shakes his head, pushing the thoughts away as he focuses on the problem the teacher’s written on the board.

He should have known better than to be grateful.

He still really dislikes calculus.

_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine turns off his car with a sigh, quickly checking his appearance in the rear-view mirror. After an enthusiastic performance of *Happy Birthday* Mr. Schue had reminded everyone of the upcoming performance – and nationals – and started a truly impressive rehearsal.

Blaine was relieved.

He was tired now, his muscles aching even as he sat in the driver’s seat, but the long practice meant Tina was too tired even for a trip to the mall, and that Sam had to leave with Ryder. Blaine loves his friends, but the (admittedly entertaining) day has left him drained and he takes a moment to savor a moment alone in the silence of his car.

He steps out seconds later with a smile, slipping his keys and phone into his bag. Blaine heads for the entrance, pausing as he passes a white four door and again when he sees a green truck across the aisle. Shaking his head, he passes through the mall’s doors, breathes in the smell of pretzels and new clothes.

*Text message from Blaine:*

[photo] Should I fall in to The Gap?

*Text message from Kurt:*

Will you actually go in if I say yes?
Although I think we had a conversation about your sense of humor…

A boisterous echoing laugh has Blaine looking up, fingers pressing a mishmash of letters as he jerks. On the other side of the line of stores, standing in front of Auntie Anne’s pretzels and partially hidden by a fake tree, a sandy haired college student slaps the bleached-blond in a OSU football jersey. Blaine looks away as the two guys begin an intense round of half-hearted punches.

...I didn’t mean to actually offend you.

Hello?

Sorry – got distracted…

My sense of humor is fantastic, thank you.

And no – you know I can't show my face at the Gap.

Technically, you weren't banned. You could go there…they do have some good sales ;-)  

Haha. No.

Blaine gives a small huff of laughter as he puts his phone back in his bag and turns to head for American Eagle, absently hoping the store will have jeans in his size. He scans the other patrons as he walks, and can’t help the small smile that spreads when he sees a young girl enthusiastically eating a cinnamon pretzel as her mother searches her purse (probably for napkins). He flinches when there’s a yell behind him, though, and quickly hurries the last few yards to AE’s entrance.

He steps into the store and absently taps his hand on his thigh, keeping time with the beat audible over the murmurs of other customers. He walks toward the jeans, suppressing a sigh when he takes in the multiple racks.

Technically, he’s an adult – he can pick out a pair of jeans on his own.

Fifteen minutes later (assuming each song on the in-store radio is the average three minutes) his fingers twitch with the urge to text Kurt and he’s debating between a pair of dark wash skinny jeans and ones that fade to red when loud voices catch his ear.

“– still can’t believe you went for it, Steve!”

Blaine freezes.
Breathe in. *Steve is a common name.*

Breathe out. *There’s no reason for him to be at the Lima Mall.*

Breathe in. *It’s another Steve.*

Keeping both pairs of jeans in hand, Blaine slowly turns. It has to be another Steve, but he has to be sure.

Behind him, and to his left, a group of guys look through the graphic tees. As he watches, one – pale, red hair grown out longer than Sam’s – tosses a shirt with a laugh. The guy who catches it – tanned, with black hair peeking out under a hat – shakes out the balled up shirt before turning to his friend with a laugh.

“Real funny, Steve.”

Breathe out. *Steven was the forty-fifth most popular baby name in 1992.*

Blaine steps back and heads for the changing rooms.

*Text message from Blaine:*

[photo] [photo] Casually fashionable or fun?

*Text message from Kurt:*

Depends on the occasion, you know that ;-) 

*Text message from Kurt:*

Although both look amazing.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Nationals – I need some new jeans for the trip.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Ooh California! With Nationals I say go with casually fashionable – it can’t hurt to look semi-professional. :)

*Text message from Blaine:*

This is why you’re the one with the internship with Vogue.com

*Text message from Kurt:*

Possibly, but lucky for you I’m willing to share my talents :) 

Blaine feels his lips move into a small smile as he sets down his phone and reaches for his own jeans.

Ten minutes later Blaine exits the store, bag crinkling when it bumps against his thigh as he walks. He heads for the center of the mall, sighing when he sees that the Coke vending machine is the one farthest away. With a roll of his eyes he keeps walking, and luckily arrives at the machine just as a giggling group of young girls step away.

Drink in hand moments later, he turns back to go the way he came. The crowd grows as he gets
closer to the main doors, but he manages to narrowly avoid a harried women impatiently texting and ignorant of other patrons. He startles seconds later when his arm is jostled by a group of passing shoppers, breath catching when a sandy haired college aged man quickly strides by – he exhales in relief when he sees the guy in profile.

Stepping onto the sidewalk outside the mall, he shakes his head, pushing away memories. He moves off to the side, leans against a pillar as he rifles through his messenger bag for his sunglasses. Two girls shriek as they rush past him, and he glances up, hears the echo of revved engines as two cars race at the edge of his vision, several rows down. He tightens his left hand on the strap of his bag and looks back down, determinedly pushes papers and various school items aside with his right. His hand closes around cool plastic seconds later and he resists the urge to audibly celebrate his victory.

With his glasses shielding his eyes, Blaine looks back to the parking lot, absently counting rows until he remembers his. Pushing himself away from the wall, Blaine adjusts his messenger bag and picks up his shopping bag before stepping off the sidewalk and into the parking lot.

He walks down the row, notes the various cars: the gold Chevy, the blue Kia with a mountain of bumper stickers, a white Ford Taurus –

The concrete is hard, cold beneath him. Light from the streetlamp doesn’t quite reach him, and the darkness encompasses his vision.

A green truck roars by, quickly followed by a white Taurus, the bass matching the pounding in his head –

“–can’t believe you forgot where you parked again!”

The shout snaps Blaine out of the memory, and he adjusts his grip on his bag, continues to head to his car. He waits as a red Toyota backs out of a spot, stepping a bit closer to the parked sedan when a group of college-aged students walks by. One of the guys, dark skinned with unnaturally bright hair, darts forward and grabs another of the group, pulling the startled guy back into a tight hold.

“It’s not like you were payin’ attention either!”

“Did you see who walked by? I’d have to swing the other way to not get distracted!”

“You sayin’ I’m not hot, Brian? You know you want some of this!”

The group dissolves into laughter and Blaine feels his hand relax a bit against the strap of his bag as he begins walking again.

“If I were a homo you’d be at the top of the list, Kev.”

“Sadie Hawkins isn’t for homos, Anderson!”

Blaine’s hand tightens again, and he quickens his steps. He spots his car, finally, four cars down and releases a breath. A honk moments later has him turning his head, and a sandy haired man – Blaine’s too far away to make out his face – waves to a passing Ford.

Breathe in. It’s not Steve.

Breathe out. It’s not.

Breathe in. Just get to the car.
Breathe out. *Just keep walking.*

Moments later Blaine arrives at his car, and it takes two fumbles before he manages to hit the unlock button on his keys. He drops into the driver’s seat with a sigh, pulling the door shut behind him.

He leans his head back and works to control his breathing.

Blaine opens his eyes a few minutes later, only for them sting with frustration when his shaking hands can’t even manage to get his messenger bag off his shoulder. Irritation swells and Blaine slams his hands on the steering wheel even as he forces his breathing to even out, discarding thoughts as he does so.

As quickly as the annoyance had grown, however, it flees just as quickly, leaving Blaine exhausted and lowering his head to his still shaking hands, pausing only to look at the ring shining in the sunlight. Still, he focuses on the issue at hand, and with effort is able to get his messenger bag off of his body and sitting on the passenger seat, leaning against his purchase.

A glance at the clock shows it’s later than he’d like; he’d planned to be on the way back to the Hudson-Hummels by now.

But even Blaine knows it’s a bad idea to drive with shaking hands.

Blaine sighs, and turns to dig through his bag – Burt needs to know he’s running late.

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Burt mutes the television as the front door opens, rising to his feet in time to meet Blaine as he enters the kitchen. He leans against the doorjamb, taking in Blaine’s slightly pale face and the tense set of his shoulders as he pours himself a glass of water.

“There’s leftovers in the fridge, if you didn’t grab something on the way.”

Blaine jumps a bit before he turns to face him, and Burt silently chastises himself for startling the kid.

“Oh. Thanks, Mr. Hummel,” Burt suppresses a sigh at the continued use of the formality, and gives a Blaine a smile.

“So you didn’t grab a burger on the way back?”

Blaine gives a small laugh and his free hand goes to rest on the counter behind him. “No – I actually prefer home cooked food.”

Burt takes a moment to let the little comment sink in, absently wondering how often the Andersons took Blaine out to restaurants during their infrequent visits home. He pushes the building resentment away and walks to the fridge instead, pulling out clear plastic containers.

“Well, Carole certainly made plenty. I’m not sure what it’s called,” he turns to offer Blaine a joking smile, “somethin’ with pasta. She was hopin’ to make you something special for your big day. Anyway, it’s pretty good. I might have gotten seconds.”

“Might have?”

Burt nods. “Yup. So, you wanna get a plate and heat some of this up?”
Blaine moves to get a plate from the cabinet, not commenting on the blatant change in subject.

Kurt really did choose well.

Blaine’s beside him moments later, setting a plate on the counter before using a tablespoon to dish out the leftovers. Once the plate is in the microwave Burt waves off Blaine and gathers the containers, setting them back in the fridge.

“So how’s it feel to be an adult?”

“Is it supposed to feel different?” Blaine shrugs, “I know it’s a bit deal, but it’s just another day, really. Although everyone in Glee sang to me before rehearsal, and Unique brought me birthday brownies.”

“You’ve got some good friends.”

Blaine smiles and takes his food from the microwave, moving to sit at the table. “Yeah. McKinley’s been great for that.”

Burt nods and moves to take the seat across from Blaine, ignoring the slightly confused look he gets in response.

“Weren’t you watching TV? You don’t have to wait in here with me.”

Burt leans back in his seat, slightly shaking his head. “There’s nothing on anyway, and I’m pretty sure no one is supposed to eat dinner alone on their birthday.”

Blaine ducks his head and the next words are earnest, if a bit mumbled. “Sorry I was late, by the way. I did plan on making it back in time for dinner.”

“Hm.” Burt keeps his gaze on Blaine, notes how the kid won’t meet his eyes. “Funny thing about that. The news didn’t mention any extra traffic – no accidents or surprise construction.”

Blaine’s fork hits the plate with a bit more force than necessary.

“Oh.”

“Blaine.” Burt waits until Blaine looks up to continue, “You’re not in trouble. I’m just curious what made you be late – what had you worried enough you said you were caught in traffic instead.”

For a moment Blaine is silent, staring at the plate in front of him. “I – I actually didn’t think you’d check.”

Burt finds himself pushing down anger at the Andersons for the second time that evening.

“I find out you have less than optimal driving conditions I’m going to check to see what’s goin’ on. Kurt says I can be a bit overprotective, but it’s just part of being parent.” Burt pauses, stands to start a pot of coffee when it becomes apparent that Blaine isn’t going to immediately reply.

The coffee’s started to drip into the pot and he’s resumed his seat before Blaine starts to talk.

“It’s – I didn’t mean to lie. I just,” Blaine cuts himself off, and Burt bites back his questioning reply when he sees the white-knuckled grip Blaine has on his fork – interrupting wouldn’t serve a purpose at the moment. “There were some…cars, and I thought I heard Steve and Mitch at the mall. It wasn’t them, I mean, it couldn’t have been, but I got a little freaked out.” Blaine’s looking at his plate again, head down while his fork stirs the pasta. “I had to wait a bit before I felt
comfortable driving.”

Burt takes a moment to mentally replay Blaine’s words, picking apart the separate issues. “‘A little freaked out’ left you uncomfortable to drive?”

Across the table, Blaine blushes before ducking his head. “I figured it was better to be safe.”

Burt leans forward in his chair and asks the obvious question. “Why didn’t you call me, kid? You know I woulda come and picked you up.”

Blaine sighs but Burt stays as he is, waits for the reply. “I know – I know you would…but I didn’t want you – I didn’t want people to worry.” Blaine’s shoulders hunch and the next words are quieter, but rushed. “I just wanted to go to the mall and get some jeans. It’s my birthday – I just wanted a normal day.”

Burt keeps his eyes on Blaine, but lets his thoughts wander as he debates how to respond. Blaine certainly doesn’t need to feel guilty, and the kid obviously has come to accept that he and Carole would help, and despite the day, Blaine’s still a teenager: he can’t fault him for wanting to handle things on his own.

The dripping stops and Burt takes the signal for the break that it is, quickly moving to pour two mugs before placing one in front of Blaine and taking his seat.

“I get that.”

Burt’s shocked Blaine doesn’t get whiplash from how quickly his head raises.

“You – you do?”

“Sure.” Burt shrugs and takes a sip of coffee, wincing when the liquid scorches his tongue. “I can’t say I like askin’ for help either.” Blaine winces and Burt hurries to continue. “And you obviously made it home. I don’t like the thought you havin’ to take time to feel comfortable makin’ the drive on your own, and I’d prefer it if you call if anything like this happens again, but I understand where you’re coming from.”

Blaine takes a few more bites of his dinner as Burt blows on his coffee. “I have my first appointment tomorrow.”

The non sequitur takes Burt by surprise, but he manages to keep his expression open, calm. “Yeah. I’m picking you up for it, remember? No sense in us takin’ two cars.”

Burt thinks back to the conversation that had taken place over the weekend, with Blaine saying he could go on his own, and Burt – with Kurt’s welcome support – reminding him that just because he could, that didn’t mean he had to. Blaine had acquiesced with a tight smile.

“No. I mean, I remember.” Blaine gives a slight shake of his head. “I see Dr. Schamp tomorrow for the first time. I know – I know I need this, but it makes it real. I’m seeing a psychiatrist because I’m seeing things that aren’t there.” Blaine sighs and the next words come out in a rush, slurred with haste, “I just – I didn’t want my first appointment to be the day after I had a panic attack bad enough that my fiancé’s father had to pick me up from the mall.”

Burt’s breath still catches at the word fiancé – at the reminder that Kurt is certainly no longer his little boy, but the thought passes quickly. He takes a moment to sift through the Blaine’s comments, and then one point grabs his attention more than the rest.
“You had a panic attack?”

“Oh.” Blaine’s cheeks darken and he briefly ducks his head before meeting Burt’s gaze. “I can’t be sure. That’s what Dr. Schamp is for, right?” There’s a quick, humorless chuckle before he continues, “But before – it was similar, I think. But I know how to handle it.” Burt feels his eyes narrow before he pushes back his worries, again, and Blaine speaks again. “It took me longer to calm down, but it was nothing, really. They weren’t – it’s not like they were actually there. I just needed to remember that.”

“What happened, kid?”

Blaine pushes his plate away and takes a sip of his coffee before he speaks. “Nothing. I thought – in the parking lot there were some white Fords and a couple green trucks…and in the mall it seemed like there were people that looked like them, or had the same name.” Blaine shrugs and takes another sip of his coffee. “I just thought I saw, or heard them more than usual. Then, on the way back to my car some guys were joking around and it reminded me of something – of something Steve and Blake said. Or maybe it was Mitch. Anyway, it was just too much at once, I think.”

Burt closes his eyes for moment, silently cursing the parents of kids he’s never even met. They may not have directly hurt Blaine, but parents are responsible for their kids (even if it currently seemed like he and Carole were not the norm at the moment) and those kids had given Blaine enough torment to give him panic attacks years later.

After releasing a breath Burt opens his eyes, sees Blaine idly tapping on his mug. “You know, I’m pretty sure Carole left some birthday cake in the fridge. Sounds like you could use some. Actually,” Burt pushes back his chair and stands, “she went up to read a while ago – she’d probably like some, too. Why don’t you go check and I’ll get the plates.”

The request has Blaine rising too, and he leaves the kitchen after giving Burt a grateful smile. When he returns minutes later, Carole talking quietly behind him, Burt’s managed to plate three pieces of cake, and has a flickering candle in the largest piece.

“Now,” Burt turns and passes out the pieces. “Carole and I aren’t in your fancy choir, but I think we can manage Happy Birthday.”

Blaine blushes throughout the song and claps enthusiastically afterwards, even though Burt knows he and Carole will never be asked to sing professionally.

“It was perfect, really.” Blaine comments after swallowing a piece of cake. “Besides, no one can sing Happy Birthday in tune. It’s the bane of every choir, honest!”

Burt allows himself a small laugh, even as part of him marvels that the laughing kid in front of him was the same one who was self-conscious and admitting to a panic attack an hour before.

Burt’s not sure if he should feel impressed or worried.

“Oh!” Carole’s exclamation pulls Burt from his thoughts, and he smiles when he sees her pull out two small packages and set them in front of Blaine. “It’s not much, but we hope you find it useful.”

Blaine looks confused again and he carefully sets down his fork before reaching for the box. “You really didn’t –”

“Just open your birthday present, Blaine,” Burt interrupts the comment, “besides, only the one is from us.”
Paper ripped seconds later, Burt laughs when he takes in Blaine’s wide eyes and smile.

“We figured you could use it in L.A.,” Burt comments with a nod to the small video camera, “especially since Kurt can’t make it out and –”

He’s interrupted by Blaine giving him a quick hug. Blaine turns away before Burt can give him much more than a pat, moving to hug Carole as well.

“Thank you! You didn’t have to, really, but thank you, so much.”

“You’re welcome,” Carole echoes his comment and they share a smile as Blaine resumes his seat and takes his last bite of cake. “There’s more if you’re still hungry.”

“Oh, it was delicious, but I couldn’t eat any more.” Blaine sets down his fork and moves his dessert plate so it rests on his plate from dinner before turning to the small box sitting unopened on the table. The paper rips in under a minute and Burt smiles when he sees the look of awe on Blaine’s face.

“He handed that to me the day he left – made me promise to give it to you with ours, too.”

Blaine laughs and holds the bowtie with a gentle hand, seemingly mesmerized by the pattern. “He didn’t need to do this,” Blaine tilts his head and Burt notes that his gaze has shifted, focused on the ring on his left hand, “I certainly didn’t need more presents.”

“Don’t tell me you expected to tell Kurt ‘no’ to something he really wanted to do.”

“No…but I certainly didn’t expect it.” Blaine pauses before clutching the bowtie again, and picking up the camera, “Anyway, I should head upstairs – I still have some reading for tomorrow.”

“Well, why don’t you go do that,” Carole comments before Burt can respond, “and Burt and I can handle this. You shouldn’t do dishes on your birthday anyway.”

“Is that a hint?” Burt finishes his cake and gives Carole a wink.

“I certainly wouldn’t complain.”

“Are you sure?” Blaine’s question interrupts their dialogue and Burt turns back to face him with a joking frown.

“Go do your homework, kid. We can handle a few dishes.” Blaine hesitantly nods before standing and gathering his bags on his way out of the kitchen. He makes it to the doorway before Burt calls his name. “Happy birthday. And be sure to take some breaks too, okay? Don’t need you working too hard today.”

Blaine smiles. “I’ll try. Thanks again,” he raises the hand holding the camera, “really. I just – thank you.”

Once he’s gone, his footsteps faded on the stairs, Burt sighs and gathers the dishes before leaning against the counter.

“You look a bit too upset for this to just be because you only got one slice of cake.”

Carole’s comment has him turning, offering her a small smile even as he shakes his head.

“I actually watch what I eat, you know. I just happen to prefer cake and real burgers.”
“Umhm. Now,” Carole sets her plate in the sink and faces him, “what’s going on?”

Burt gestures for her to take back her seat at the table. “This’ll go better with coffee,” he adds as he moves to get his mug.

Maybe Carole will have some insights into Blaine, too.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt taps his pencil in time to the music coming from his iPod, sighing when he realizes he’s read the same line three times.

The call from his dad has left him unsettled.

Combined with the most boring textbook (he’s certain) ever written on theatre history, and he’s itching to call Blaine. Still, a glance at his clock shows that it’s only been twenty minutes since his conversation with his dad, and he knows Blaine can’t yet be done with his own homework.

Kurt sighs and rolls his neck, looks back at his book. He lasts two more songs before he closes the book with a snap, setting the book – along with his pencil as a place holder – on his desk and standing. He stretches before turning and leaving his room, heading for the kitchen.

He needs coffee.

He methodically fills the pot, leans against the counter as the water heats and the dark liquid begins dripping in the pot. The loft is eerily quiet – he can even hear the faint chords of music in his room. Rachel’s at rehearsal – he thinks – and Santana had gleefully informed him earlier that she had a date night with Dani and not to expect her back for hours, if she returned at all.

Shaking his head, Kurt moves to get his favorite mug, and puts in his sugar and milk as the coffee finishes. With his mug full minutes later he slowly makes his way back to his room, settling into his desk chair with a sigh.

He still wants to call Blaine.

Two minutes pass before he shakes his head at his own ridiculousness, and he grabs his phone with a bit more force than what is necessary.

It only takes two rings before the line connects.

“Hey. Have I mentioned that I love you today?”

“You may have, although in the future you might want to make sure I’m the one on the line before you declare your love.”

“Do you plan on letting someone else call me on your phone?” Kurt smiles at the hint of confusion in Blaine’s tone.

“No, but Santana would take my phone and call you just in the hope that she’d hear something embarrassing.”

“You’re right,” Blaine pauses, “but I still love you.”

“Mm. And this unprompted declaration is because…”

“You made me a bow-tie for my birthday.”
Kurt feels the smile spreading and doesn’t attempt to stop it. “Of course I did. And Dad was thrilled he’d get to help surprise you, too.”

Blaine laughs. “Well, I certainly wasn’t expecting your Dad to hand me a box from you.”

“Don’t tell me you thought I wasn’t going to get you something for your birthday.”

“You threw me a surprise party and came here to give me a matching engagement ring.”

“Mm.” Kurt agrees, absently spinning his own ring, “but as you pointed out, your birthday technically wasn’t until today.”

“I…” Kurt smiles when the sentence trails off, unfinished.

“You know I’m right.” Kurt pauses, takes a moment to relish in the happiness he feels. He doesn’t want to lose this feeling, even though he knows the rest of the conversation can’t stay as lighthearted. “So you had a good birthday?”

“Oh, yes. Of course!” Blaine’s words come out rushed. “Glee sang to me before practice, and Unique brought me brownies at lunch. Plus that camera…I can record everything in L.A. now – you’ll get sick on my emails.”

“I doubt that.”

“Mm. You could.”

“Well, we’ll find out next weekend.”

“I can’t believe we have nationals in a week. We’ve been practicing, and we have our last performance this weekend, but it still seems too soon. And it’s in L.A. It seems bigger somehow, since we’re going to the west coast.”

“Well, just make sure you document the trip – and your fashionable ensembles.”

“I will. You’ll get to see me in the shirt you got me. I actually think it will go well with the jeans I bought.”

“So you got them? I thought you might, but you didn’t say.”

“Oh.” Blaine’s voice comes through a bit subdued, and Kurt flashes back to his dad’s comments, to how he’d connected the dots when remembering the pauses between Blaine’s texts. “Sorry. I…the mall wasn’t the best.”

“You’re still in Ohio – no mall is going to be the best.” Kurt takes a sip of his coffee.

“No,” Blaine agrees, “but,” there’s a pause, and Kurt hears Blaine take a breath before he continues, “I kept freaking out. At the mall.”

Kurt can hear his heartbeat, briefly closes his eyes. He’s relieved Blaine brought it up himself, but it’s one thing to hear about this from his dad. It’s another to hear it directly from Blaine.

“What happened?”

As Blaine explains Kurt takes in the details his dad either hadn’t known or kept to himself, feels his hand cramp and forcibly relaxes his hold on his phone. After he mentions texting Burt Blaine falls silent for a moment, and Kurt takes another two sips of his coffee before Blaine speaks again.
“I know I should have called him, Kurt. Or you. But I didn’t want it to be a big deal.” Blaine pauses again, “I’m going to have to talk about it tomorrow, I know; I just didn’t want to focus on it today, too.”

“It’s not exactly cheerful birthday events.”

Blaine releases a huff of laughter. “No.”

“Just promise me that if something similar happens again that you’ll call me? I don’t want it to, but if it does –”

“If I see things again you’re on my speed dial.”

“Blaine.” Kurt knows his voice holds a hint of annoyance, but Blaine knows better than to joke.

“Sorry,” Blaine’s apology is quick, honestly spoken. “I’m just nervous about tomorrow.”

After taking a sip of coffee Kurt orders his thoughts and replies. “She’s a doctor, Blaine. I don’t –”

“It’s real now, Kurt.” The words of Blaine’s interruption are rushed, if quiet. “It’s real and today I was seeing things at the mall.” There’s a pause and Blaine next words are barely above a whisper. “What if I’m going crazy, Kurt?”

“I don’t care.” Kurt keeps his words firm. “You’re not crazy, Blaine. You’re not, but I don’t care what she says you have – if you have anything – because it won’t change how I feel. I just want you to get whatever help you need.”

“I wish I didn’t need it.”

“I wish you hadn’t been hurt after Sadie Hawkins,” Kurt hears the snap in his words and forces himself to calm down, to soften his next comment. “But I also wish we had teleportation so I could see you every day. Wishes can’t change things, but maybe Dr. Schamp can help you, and really, that’s all that matters.”

“I know. Logically, I know that. But I’m seeing a psychiatrist, Kurt.”

“Mm. You are. Thousands of people do. You know I did, after,” Kurt pauses, pushes down the emotion gathering, “after my mom died. I only saw her a few times, but I remember that she was really nice – she was the only person I remember treating me like a person after, rather than a breakable doll.”

“I know, I know. And I’m so glad she was there for you when you needed it, but I’m seeing things Kurt –”

“I love you,” Kurt interrupts, hopes Blaine can hear the truth of the words. “I love you and I hate that you’re going through this, but hopefully Dr. Schamp will be able to help, some. Focus on that.”

“Yeah.” Blaine releases a sigh that echoes down the line. “I’ll try. And I love you too, Kurt. So much.”

Kurt smiles. “It’s a good thing we’re getting married, then.” Kurt leans back in his chair, looking around his room and envision Blaine’s blankets and books tangled with his own. “I can’t wait for you to be in New York with me.”
“Mm. After graduation, I promise.”

“I’m holding you to that.” Kurt glances at his book still resting on his desk. “Speaking of, did you finish your homework or did I interrupt?”

“I have a few more pages of reading, and a couple Civics questions, but that’s it.”

“I should be a responsible fiancé and let you get back to your homework…and get back to my own.”

“We should, but I prefer talking to you.”

“I’d hope so.” Kurt takes a deep breath and releases it. “But really. Homework? We still can talk before we go to bed.”

Blaine hums in agreement. “They need to just invent teleportation so we don’t have to choose.”

Kurt laughs and opens his book. “Well, until they do, we have to deal with cell phones and Skype.” He glances at the clock on his computer. “I’ll talk to you in a couple hours, okay?”

Blaine agrees. “I love you.”

“I love you, too. And wish me luck – I think this book is the driest material ever written.” Kurt hangs up with Blaine’s laughter echoing in his ears.

Kurt sets down his phone and watches how the light reflects off his ring. He feels better having spoken with Blaine, knowing the whole story. And yet, despite his words of assurance, he’s nervous too – they’ll get through this, he knows that. But he also knows how scared Blaine is, how he worries about what Dr. Schamp could say.

Secretly, Kurt worries too.

But they’ll get through it, just like they got through his dad’s cancer and Finn and Blaine’s parents.

Blaine supported him through one of the toughest times in his life; now it’s his turn to support Blaine.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] Civics is dry, too.

Kurt laughs.

*_*_*_*_ *

Blaine opens another tab and types in his search criteria, sighing when he gets “about 13,600,000 results” in Google. He didn’t lie to Kurt, the Civics material is dry, but it’s also incredibly time consuming.

He skims through the results, trying to focus on finding relevant information even as his mind flashes back to the cars at the mall, and partially seen faces in the parking lot. Blaine sighs and shakes his head before clicking on a somewhat relevant article. He lasts ten minutes before he opens another tab and searches for forest green trucks in Ohio.

Yet another statistic he’s hoping to cling to when he can’t breathe.
Blaine narrows his eyes even as he finds what he’s looking for, committing the number to memory. Moments later he’s switched back to his Civics search and he’s grateful for the music drifting from his iPod as he reads the material.

Some time later Blaine closes his book and places it in his bag with a sigh before he stretches his arms above his head. He closes his laptop and stands, crossing the room to grab his pajamas.

He’s almost to the bathroom when he spots the envelope resting on the end table. Curious, he stops by the bed, setting down the clothes and taking a seat before he picks it up, smiling when he takes in Kurt’s handwriting and the small hearts decorating the front.

Kurt wrote him a letter.

His phone jolts him from his stupor, Love, Love, Love causing him to drop the letter on the bed, fingers trailing the – yours always, Kurt – before answering the call.

“You really need to stop with the presents.”

“What? Blaine – and didn’t we just talk about you waiting for me to say ‘hello’ –”

“I got your letter, Kurt.”

“Oh.” Kurt’s voice has dropped, the word slightly breathless. “I asked Dad to make sure you found it today. I just – I know I can’t always be there, right now. So I thought, well, it’s silly, but I thought it might be nice to have something you could read.”

“It’s not silly, Kurt.”

“Well, I’m glad you like it.”

“Of course!” The words are bit louder than he planned, and Blaine feels himself blush at his response. “It’s – I can’t even begin to describe that it means to me.”

“I’m glad. I meant it, too. All of it.”

Blaine shakes his head at Kurt’s endearing thoughtfulness, and loses himself to conversation.

When he climbs into bed almost an hour later the letter has been safely – carefully – folded and placed in his wallet after being scanned to his laptop. As the quiet strains from his playlist echo in his ears, he replays the words in his mind.

He falls asleep with a smile.

_*_*_*_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine jerks up, headphones tangling around his shoulders even as the sheets trap his legs. For a moment he can’t move –

He can’t move, the pain keeping him flat even as the coldness sinks in, settling in his bones. The darkness grows too –

Blaine shakes his head, physically pushing away the remnants of his nightmare. On the nightstand, the alarm glows.

3:37 A.M.
Blaine reaches for his phone, opening up his texts without thought.

Text message from Blaine:

Someone really should invent teleportation.

Blaine’s managed to untangle the covers and settle down again before his phone lights up with a reply.

Text message from Kurt:

Yes, someone should. Then I’d be with you right now.

Blaine winces at the thought of waking Kurt up with one of his nightmares – it was bad enough over the weekend. Even if it was comforting.

Text message from Blaine:

You need sleep – college students are already sleep deprived.

Text message from Kurt:

You deserve sleep too. Do you have your iPod?

Text message from Blaine:

Yeah - hopefully it works this time

Text message from Blaine:

Love you.

Text message from Kurt:

I love you too! <3

_*_*_*_*_*_*_

Blaine leans against the car door, absently humming along to the song on the radio as Burt and Carole talk in the front seats. In his lap, his right hand taps his ring along to the beat. His bag rests next to him, and after a moment he pulls it closer, digs around until he finds his phone.

Not that he uses it, but it’s a comforting weight against his leg.

Moments later the car rolls to a stop, and Blaine looks up as Burt cuts the engine, leaving the car in silence.

Blaine slowly undoes his seatbelt, throws his phone back in his bag before grabbing it and stepping out of the car. He closes Carole’s door behind her and they move to stand near Burt.

“You’ve got nothin’ to worry about, okay?” Burt’s comment is calm, and Blaine meets his eyes with a nod. “And it’s okay if this isn’t the fit. There’s other doctors.”

Blaine offers a weak smile before they turn and head for the doors.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Should I start with apologizing? I feel like every author I ever get irritated at, when I see that they haven’t updated. If it helps, I really am sorry and I am working on getting back on schedule. Finals’ Week and submitting grades got me off track for bit. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this update, and thanks for all your kind comments and feedback! You’re all amazing and I’m constantly overwhelmed by the response! Thanks to slayerkitty for keeping me from deleting everything and to her and jessicamdawn for their beta. :)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 19

Kurt glances at the clock in the corner of his computer after he reads the same sentence for the third time. Two minutes since he last checked. Blaine’s appointment should be ending soon, assuming his hour time-frame is correct. Blaine promised to call, after.

Another minute later and his phone is still irritatingly silent.

Kurt sighs and leans down to dig his headphones out of his bag, plugging them in even as he opens up his music player and fiddles with the volume until the din from the coffee shop is quashed. He manages a smile when the piano cover Clocks drifts through the speakers, and then switches back to the PDF, forces himself to focus on British theatre and read the twenty-nine page article.

He makes it through three more pages before a hand lands on his shoulder. He jumps, headphones falling to his lap before he spins his head to the left, sees Elliott standing beside the table, with his hands raised, despite the steaming cup resting in his left.

“Sorry, I didn’t think you’d actually jump.”

Kurt shrugs, “I seem to only have friends that sneak up on me. But,” Kurt gestured to the empty chair across from him, “feel free to have seat.” Kurt pauses, gives Elliott a smile. “It’s nice to see you, anyway. Since we didn’t have practice last week it seems like it’s been forever since I saw you.”

Elliott moves and takes the proffered chair, setting his bag under the table. “Changing your regular schedule and missing regular things always makes you feel different. Anyway, I’m not interrupting?”

“Hm?” Elliott nods to Kurt’s still open computer. “Oh!” Kurt shakes his head, “Not at all. I was trying to get some research done, but the distraction had the opposite effect.” Seeing Elliott’s questioning look Kurt hurries to continue, “I was trying to study instead of just sitting and staring at my phone waiting for Blaine to call, but it’s not going well.”

“I thought Santana was exaggerating when she said you and Blaine were a nauseating couple who
couldn’t go twenty minutes without some form of communication.”

For a moment, surprise steals Kurt’s words. He and Blaine can go twenty minutes without speaking; they’re in a long-distance relationship, which is why he’s stuck waiting –

“Oh! Oh, no.” Kurt pauses, takes a breath. “Blaine’s first therapy appointment is today. Now, actually.”

Elliott leans forward in his chair. “Then I can’t judge you for waiting.” He offers a smile and takes a sip from his cup, “How’s he doing?”

“I don’t know,” Kurt moaned, ducking his head as his hand reaches for his phone, “since he hasn’t called me.”

“He will.”

Kurt looks up at Elliott’s comment, offers him a small smile and a sigh. “I know I’m overreacting. But,” Kurt spins his engagement ring before taking a sip of his now-cold mocha, “he was so nervous, you know?”

“I can imagine.” Elliott fiddles with the coffee stirrer resting in his cup before meeting Kurt’s gaze. “But overall…I mean, you just saw him, right?”

Kurt smiles, glances at his ring before looking across the table. “Yeah – it was great…”

“But?”

Kurt offers a half smile. “But it was different, seeing him.” Kurt takes another sip of his coffee, “I knew he has nightmares, but – he looked so scared. He’s texted after he’s woken up before, but that’s nothing like what it was, when I was there, next to him.”

“Seeing things makes them more real.”

“Unfortunately.”

“Well, at least he’s getting help.”

“Yes…I hope.” Kurt meets Elliott’s questioning gaze and shrugs. “It’s his first appointment. Based on what I’ve heard Dr. Schamp is a good doctor, but we can’t know if she’s the right doctor for Blaine. I mean,” Kurt looks down, focuses on the swirls on the table, “he’s been dealing with this for so long, and he’s realizing he can’t handle it alone but he’s still trying to be strong for everyone. Even when he texts me after he downplays things. I – I don’t want him to, but he’s so worried about being a burden…” Kurt lets the sentence trail off before taking another breath. “I just really hope Dr. Schamp can help.”

“If you’ve heard good things about her I’m sure she’ll do her best to help him. And at least Blaine’s getting help. I mean,” Elliott resettles in the chair, “I don’t know fully how things are – that’s your business – but from what you’ve told me, Blaine’s dealing with a lot right now.”

“He jumped.”

“What?”

“This weekend…we were doing the dishes and then some idiot drove by without a muffler. And he jumped and it was – he just froze. Afterwards he acted like nothing had happened, and I could tell
he didn’t want to talk about it so I let it go, but,” Kurt pauses, grimacing when he drinks the last of his mocha (now mostly just chocolate and watered down coffee), “it made me wonder how many times he’s done that – acted like he’s fine.”

“But you noticed.”

“Sure I did, but I know Blaine better than anyone.” Kurt sighs, “Blaine’s a great actor – if he doesn’t want someone to know something, he can hide it.”

“Of course he can. And I know everyone hides things – just think of how New York would be otherwise,” Elliott comments after a huff of laughter, “but he’s going to therapy, so he’s realizing he doesn’t have to, right? Plus,” Elliott leans forward again, “it sounds like he could use a break from acting.”

Kurt sighs and ducks his head for a moment, pushing away thoughts of Blaine frozen and quiet. Kurt manages a weak smile, “He could. I know he’s tired, and I don’t like that he’s dealing with it on his own…I just really hope this helps. Sorry,” Kurt laughs, “I know I’ve said that a lot today.”

Elliott waves off the comment, “It’s fine. I know –”

Elliott’s comment is cut off by the ringing of Kurt’s phone, and Kurt has it in his hand before the first chord has finished. Kurt gives Elliott an apologetic glance, but his friend is already standing, grabbing his bag.

Kurt accepts the call as Elliott leaves, giving a small wave.

“Hey.”

“Hi.” If Blaine noticed the slightly breathless quality to his voice when Kurt answered the phone, he makes no comment.

Silence stretches for a moment and then can’t wait any more. “How – how was it?”

There’s a sigh down the line, and Kurt’s grip tightens before Blaine speaks. “It – it was good, I think.” Blaine pauses, but Kurt waits, knows his fiancé is gathering his thoughts. “She was really nice. We um, we didn’t talk about it much – mostly we just got to know each other. But I set up another appointment for next week.”

Kurt releases a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding.

“I’m glad it went well.” Kurt closes his eyes at his words. They’re true, but not the ones he wants. Now that he’s talking to Blaine the relief is messing with his head, making it hard for him to express his thoughts. “I mean, if after next week you realize that Dr. Schamp isn’t the best for you then that’s fine, really, but I’m glad today was okay.”

“It was.” Blaine’s reply is warm, holding a hint of surprise. “I was really nervous before, but she didn’t – um, she didn’t force me to say anything. And she told me first thing that even if she thinks I,” a pause and Kurt can practically see Blaine scrunching his face before the words come out in a rush, “even if I have something, she doesn’t diagnose someone until the second visit.”

“Well,” Kurt pauses, leans back in his chair, “it’s good that she wants to get to know you.”

“Yeah.” The word is softer than Blaine’s previous comments. “But…next week, Kurt. I don’t – I know something is – I mean, I’m seeing things and the nightmares but,” Blaine sighs and Kurt wishes he could offer him a hug, “I’ll find out next week.”
“We’ll find out next week,” Kurt corrects, putting emphasis on the first word, “and no matter what she says, you’re going to get through this.” Kurt waits a moment and then continues, making sure his voice stays steady, “We’re going to get through whatever this is, Blaine, I promise.”

“I know,” Kurt smiles at Blaine’s certainty, even as he takes notice of the undertone of exhaustion, the hint of nervousness. “I wish we didn’t have to, though.”

Kurt sits in silence for a moment, debating what to say. “It’s what’s happening, though, and we’re together. Just – just try and remember that.” The end of the words comes out as a question, uncertain of the strength of his sentiment.

“Like I could forget you.” Blaine’s words make Kurt release a breath of laughter, relaxing his grip on his phone. “But really, thank you. It helps, knowing I can always talk to you.”

“That’s what I’m here for,” Kurt adds, hoping to lighten the mood a bit. “But from what you’ve said, it sounds like Dr. Schamp might be helpful, too.”

“I think she might be, but,” Blaine releases a breath, “your dad is waving from the table, and I think it’s my sign that I should head back.”

“The table?”

“Oh! Sorry, I just wanted to talk to you and I forgot – your dad and Carole took me out for ice cream, after. I think they took their time eating so I could call, actually.”

Kurt’s overwhelmed with gratitude for a moment, mentally reminds himself to thank his dad and Carole later. “My dad can have good ideas, sometimes. But don’t tell–”

“Don’t worry,” Blaine interrupts, “your secret’s safe. But I really should go…” The sentence trails off, and for a moment Kurt wants to argue, to tell Blaine he’s not allowed to hang up the phone. But he can’t.

“Tell them hi for me, okay?”

“Of course!”

“I love you,” Kurt replies, not even caring that his voice has gone soft, fond in a way that makes Rachel sigh when they watch chick flicks.

“I love you too – I’ll call you later.”

“Hm,” Kurt sighs, “I have work so how about I call you. I shouldn’t be too late, though.”

“I’ll anxiously await your call then.”

Kurt laughs again. “You’re still a dork, Blaine Anderson.”

“Mm,” Blaine agrees, “but I’m still your dork. Love you!”

“I love you too,” Kurt repeats and then ends the call.

He sets the phone down on the table and takes a deep breath, relishing in the knowledge that Blaine’s appointment went well (all things considered) and that Blaine’s okay for now, probably being force-fed ice cream by his dad and Carole. He feels his lips form a small smile at the thought.
He glances at his computer and his smile falls.

He still has research to do.

Kurt slightly shakes his head even as he opens the PDF again, and he considers it an achievement when he manages to finish a paragraph without having to re-read sentences.

Hopefully he’ll finish it before he has to leave to change and head for the diner.

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Blaine shuts the hood of the Camry, wincing when it snaps shut with a bit too much force. A car over, Jim looks up at the sound, gives Blaine a confused glance before Blaine offers a sheepish smile and raises his hands. Jim nods before looking back down and Blaine releases a sigh.

He needs to focus.

Blaine shakes his head before turning and heading for Burt’s office. He makes it to the doorway before he notices that the office is empty. A quick glance around doesn’t show Burt either, and he sighs before another mechanic nods toward the back, and Blaine sees Burt crouched by an SUV, obviously busy. At a loss for what to do, he heads for the line of tool boxes, grabbing the empty bucket stored next to them.

Moments later he’s making his way around the cars, picking up tools left, unneeded, on the floor. The simple work keeps his hands busy, and he scans the floor with precise sweeps of his eyes, but it doesn’t keep his mind from wandering.

What he’d told Kurt was true: Dr. Schamp was nice, and her office was surprising comfortable, with overstuffed furniture and piles of books.

Still, he can’t forget the fact that for all that today was his first appointment, it wasn’t his first session.

Not really.

There’d been no discussion of possible diagnosis, and while his sightings of the cars and nightmares had been mentioned, they weren’t the focus of the discussion. Mostly, he’d talked about Glee, and getting ready for New York.

And Kurt.

Luckily he hadn’t seen any judgment when he called Kurt his fiancé, and she’d even laughed when he’d gone off on a ten minute monologue about Kurt’s accomplishments in New York.

But it was conversation, a ‘get to know each other session’ where they shared backgrounds and Blaine’s problems had only been a few mentions in between stories. Next week was therapy, and Blaine knew his nightmares – and everything else – would hold focus.

Oddly enough, Blaine feels more nervous about the upcoming appointment than he had earlier, sitting in the waiting room with Burt and Carole.

He drops a wrench and a discarded towel into the bucket, absently taking in the sounds of tools and the barely-there music drifting from the radio in the corner. Blaine keeps walking, stopping a few minutes later to pick up a wrench, only to jump when a hand lands on his shoulder.
“Whoa. Sorry, kid.”

Turning, Blaine sees Burt standing to his right, hands slightly raised and a contrite look on his face.

Blaine shakes his head, offers Burt a small smile. “It’s fine, really. Um,” Blaine pauses for a moment, sets the bucket so it rests on the floor, “did you want me to do something?”

Burt nods toward the front of the garage where a Chevy Cruze sits. “Apparently it’s making some weird noises; since you insisted on coming in today I thought you could take a look at it with me.”

“Sure,” Blaine reaches for the bucket, only to be stopped by Burt.

“Don’t worry about that, Blaine.” Burt gestures to the Cruze, “We’re headed the opposite way anyway.”

Blaine shrugs and rises from this half crouch, following Burt across the garage. “So…it’s just making a weird noise?”

Burt shrugs. “That’s what the owner said. Some kind of ‘thump’ when the car goes above forty miles per hour.”

“Hmm,” Blaine looks toward the car, considering.

“We’ll run some diagnostics; hopefully that’ll help some.” There’s a pause as they reach the car and Burt lifts the hood. “So,” Burt draws out the word, but keeps his gaze on the engine, “I’m not gonna ask you for details – that’s none of my business – but I know you got another appointment coming up. I just want you to know that if you change your mind, if she’s not the right fit that’s okay. Just let me know and we’ll find another doctor.”

Blaine stands next to Burt, focuses on the engine for a minute and ignores the slight stinging in his eyes and lump forming in this throat as he Kurt's words from earlier are reiterated by Burt. He swallows, and clears his throat. “I – thanks, Mr. Hummel,” Blaine takes another breath, “but hopefully things will work out.”

“I hope so too,” Burt moves and squeezes Blaine’s shoulder, “I want you to get the best help you can.”

“She was very nice,” Blaine comments, “it wasn’t that bad. But, I know next week is going to be…different.”

Burt hums in agreement as he inspect the spark plugs, “Just remember you’re gettin’ help, kid – there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“I’m getting that,” Blaine replies with a small smile, “but I really just want all this to be over.”

“I understand, kid. I’m proud of how you’ve handled all this,” there’s a pause before he continues, “that doesn’t mean I don’t wish you didn’t have to.” The latter part of the sentence comes out mumbled, and Blaine strains to pick out the individual words.

Blaine stays quiet, unsure of how to respond. The lump is back in his throat, and he’s overwhelmed with gratitude. “I – um, thank you.”

“No need to thank me. Now,” Burt releases a sigh and moves his hands from the engine, “looks like we’re gonna be here a while; how about you tell me about this performance you guys got Saturday.”
Blaine nods in agreement and then replies, sharing his nervousness and excitement.

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Kurt’s desk chair is surprisingly (or maybe not, it is Kurt’s after all) comfortable, and Blaine leans back to stretch after finishing his essay. Leaning back forward he switches tabs on his browser, bringing up Amazon with a small smile.

The birthday e-gift card from his parents should get some use, after all.

Twenty minutes later Blaine pushes the chair back, order placed. He closes his laptop and organizes the text books on the desk, slipping the ones he’ll need for the next day back into his bag.

Standing, he picks up his empty cup from the desk; taking it to the kitchen will be a welcome break. Plus, he knows there’s some leftover birthday cake in the fridge.

Apparently History makes him hungry.

Fifteen minutes later, stomach full of cake and the dirty glass responsibly placed in the dishwasher, he returns to Kurt’s – no matter what Kurt says, the room is still his. Blaine sits back on Kurt’s bed, relaxing against the pillows even as he uncaps his green highlighter, setting the cap on the nightstand. He rests The Turn of the Screw on his bent legs, sighing despite the music – a piano cover of Shadow of the Day – drifting from his iPod.

He shakes his head, focuses on the book.

Blaine takes a releases a deep breath and moves a book a little, making sure he has enough support for when he starts highlighting. He begins to read and loses track of time, only looking up from his book when he his phone chimes.

Text message from Kurt:

There’s a group of tipsy crewmembers from some show that keep asking for more salt – I’m pretty sure they’re making drinks at the table.

Text message from Kurt:

It would be funny if their intoxication didn’t mean they change their orders every two minutes.

Blaine huffs a laugh at Kurt’s messages, setting his book aside.

Text message from Blaine:

At least it sounds somewhat entertaining?

Text message from Kurt:

Yes Blaine, it’s terribly entertaining have to cancel a double bacon cheeseburger for loaded fries with extra cheese.

Text message from Kurt:

But thank you for being my optimistic fiancé! ;)

Text message from Blaine:
It's in my job description

Text message from Blaine:
And, you should be done soon, right?

Text message from Kurt:
Twenty more minutes…

Text message from Kurt:
And what am I distracting you from?

Blaine glances to the book beside him, the notebook with scrawled notes lying next to it.

Text message from Blaine:
[photo] Homework…but I finished the required pages – you have perfect timing! :D

Text message from Kurt:
I did, but now the order’s up :(

Text message from Blaine:
Don’t let any tipsy crewmembers make you too upset!

Text message from Blaine:
Love you! <3

Blaine smiles and sets the phone aside again, frozen as he debates if he wants to read more than the required pages. Then he remembers the upcoming performance, and nationals.

He should read ahead while he has the time. 
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Kurt closes the loft door with a sigh, absently noting the sound of Rachel belting out *Don’t Rain on my Parade*. Things are still rocky, though he has started leaving a cup of hot tea on the table for her in the mornings as a peace offering. They share polite hellos when they see each other, and Kurt remembers the cliché interactions between polar opposite roommates on made for tv movies. Still, it’s better than the lack of any interaction that had lasted for over a week. Shaking his head, Kurt moves to his room, dropping his bag by his desk. Minutes later he enters the kitchen, relaxed in his pajamas, making a beeline for the coffee maker.

Moments later he leans against the counter, eyeing the coffee maker and wishing he could afford to buy a new one with a shorter wait time. The drips as the coffee brews are actually fairly annoying.

He can still hear Rachel.

Absently, he notices that her notes are held longer – her breathing has improved, at least. Part of him wants to reconcile; he misses his friend. The unexpected conversation with Carole over the weekend he was home had dredged up feelings too, leaving him feeling wrung out – tired. And yet, even while he misses movie nights and sing-a-longs, he can’t forget Rachel’s words, her focus on
herself, on *Funny Girl*. Her single-mindedness is nothing new, but it cuts more now, when she’s so focused on her own problems that she fails to notice Kurt’s own stress.

Part of him can’t forget that Santana noticed, and Rachel didn’t.

Rachel didn’t know about Blaine, but only because she hadn’t taken the time to actually talk to Kurt.

Before graduation he’d heard all the stories: friends would drift apart, people you saw everyday would become people you talked to once a month, or during breaks. Or someone you only contacted through Facebook.

Of course, Kurt had dismissed all of them – that wouldn’t happen to Glee, they were the exception, surely.

He and Rachel haven’t had a ‘girl chat’ in almost a month.

The coffee finishes and he moves to the cabinet, pulling down his favorite mug. Moments later the mug is filled with doctored coffee (milk and sugar are needed – black coffee is a menace to society) and he breathes in the steam before cautiously taking a sip.

Rachel finishes her song.

Kurt waits, leaving it to fate: If Rachel leaves her room he’ll attempt to make up, if she stays he’ll take it for the sign that it is. Regardless of Rachel’s volume when singing, there’s no way she didn’t hear the door, and given Santana’s propensity for commenting on Rachel’s singing, she had to know Kurt was the one who’d entered.

Four slowly timed sips later, Kurt remains alone in the kitchen, the curtain to Rachel’s room unmoving.

With a sigh, Kurt moves away from the counter and returns to his room. He sits at his desk, carefully setting his mug next to laptop. He runs his hand over the touchpad, smiling when his screensaver melts away and he sees his and Blaine’s smiling faces, engagement rings proudly on display.

Sometimes, Carole’s attachment to her camera was a good thing.

Shaking his head, Kurt moves to open his Internet browser, sighing when he logs in to his email and sees notifications that his requests through Interlibrary Loan have been fulfilled.

Of course they have, hours after he left the library.

Making a mental note to stop by the library again the next day, he moves on, ignoring the alerts about replies on his class’s discussion board and reminders about sales at the bookstore. Inbox cleared, Kurt pulls up the draft of his upcoming paper, wincing when takes in the page count.

He’s still three pages short, not counting his citations.

McKinley hadn’t mentioned the countless papers when he was preparing for college, even if NYADA is a performing arts school. Kurt doesn’t mind writing, usually, but this many papers in the short time frame is trying his patience with academia.

Still, Kurt’s never backed down from a challenge, and he eyes the page count through narrowed eyes before starting his music.
His conversation with Blaine on the way home from the diner has left him in a decent mood, regardless of his lack of interaction with Rachel and his annoyance at research papers. Blaine had sounded comfortable on the phone, summarizing his therapy appointment again before sharing how he and Burt had spent two hours trying to figure out what was wrong with a car. Despite the time put in they hadn’t found an obvious problem and it was driving Kurt’s dad crazy.

Blaine had laughed, shared how Carole had eventually forbid Burt from mentioning anything related to cars at the dinner table.

Kurt smiles at the memory before shaking his head and refocusing on the Word document.

The sooner he finishes the sooner he can switch focus to his dancing practice. It’s tiring, and difficult, but it helps him clear his thoughts, focusing on steps and arm positions. The work is demanding but different enough from his research (and seemingly endless papers) that it helps him settle.

But that’s next on his To-Do list. First, he has to finish his paper.

Text message from Kurt:

[photo] I know I can meet the page count, but why are research papers evil?

Text message from Blaine:

They have to be, but yes, you can meet the page requirement! :)

Text message from Kurt:

You really are a cheerleader…

Text message from Blaine:

Only for you!

Smiling at Blaine’s response, Kurt sets the phone aside and turns back to his laptop. He can handle fifteen-hundred words.

After taking another sip of his coffee Kurt stretches and focuses on screen.

He has this.

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It’s warm, and the outdoor stage and crowds remind Blaine a bit too much of his summer jobs at theme parks. Still, he hums with nervous energy, mentally replaying the steps (and notes) of their performance.

He jolts in surprise when his phone vibrates, pulling him from his thoughts.

Text message from Kurt:

Courage

Text message from Blaine

Love you! <3
Text message from Kurt:

I love you, too. And I'm sure the performance will be great!

Text message from Blaine

That's the hope…

Text message from Kurt:

No hope needed; you know this music and you're amazing!

Blaine smiles at Kurt’s reassurance, feels a bit of the tension leave his shoulders. Hearing his name, Blaine turns, sees Carole making her way to him.

“You’ll be great, you know,” Carole comments, nodding toward the stage.

“I hope so,” Blaine hears the thready quality in his voice, notes that his voice is higher than usual.

“I’ve seen you practice,” Carole replies, “and you know this, Blaine.”

Blaine hums in agreement, scanning the crowd. “I knew it before, too.”

“It was a misstep,” Carole places a hand on his shoulder, “they happen. And you’re a great performer, Blaine.”

“And if I see another truck? Or car, or someone with the same hair color?” The words come out in a rush, his fears vocalized.

“Then you see it,” Carole’s words have him spinning in surprise, confused even as she continues, “I hope you don’t, but I can’t predict the future, Blaine, and you could see any number of things. And you know what? That’s okay. You’ve had trauma, and you’ve been dealing with it. But trauma affects people,” Carole pauses, takes a breath, “and you can only do so much alone. You’ve been to one appointment, Blaine. It’s not a magic fix. But even if you misstep again, it’s not the end of the world.” She holds up a hand when Blaine goes to speak and he concedes with a slight dip of his head. “No one’s going to fault you, and you know this performance inside and out.”

Blaine stands in silence for a moment, taking in Carole’s words. Quickly, he closes the two steps between them, wraps her in a tight hug. He pulls away not long after, ducking his head to hide his blush.

“Thank you.” Blaine keeps his head down even as he says the words, embarrassed at his inability to properly express the torrent of emotions swirling in his head.

“You really don’t have to thank me, but thanks for the hug.” Carole’s smiling when Blaine finally meets her gaze.

“I –”

“Hey Blaine! We gotta warm up!” Sam’s shout interrupts Blaine reply, and he offers Carole a small shrug.

“Looks like you have to go get ready; I won’t keep you. We’ll find you afterwards, okay?”

Blaine nods before turning away, jogging over to where the rest of the Glee club is standing behind the stage.
“– only piano is on stage,” Blaine catches the end of Mr. Schue’s comment as he approaches, moves to stand in between Sam and Tina, “so we’re going to have to go old school for warm ups today.” Well, that explains why Mr. Schue has a pitch pipe in his hand. Only at McKinley would a pitch pipe be considered old school. Yet, with most of their arrangements having accompaniment it makes sense that the Glee members are more used to having a piano.

Sometimes Blaine forgets the strong musical differences between the New Directions and the Warblers (both require a lot of work) – and then something like this happens and he remembers.

Pushing the thoughts away Blaine returns his attention to Mr. Schue, who’s scanning the group. “Alright guys, you’ve been working hard and nailed this in practice. Let’s give them a show!”

A round of scales and sung tongue twisters later, Blaine takes his place on the stage, flashing Tina a quick smile before moving to his starting position. At the front of the stage, Mr. Schue takes the microphone and introduces them, reminding the audience of the New Directions past accomplishments. Then, after some polite applause Mr. Schue motions to the band.

The music starts and Blaine counts the beats of the intro before he looks out over the audience, takes a breath, and starts to sing.

Carole was right: he does know this performance.

Blaine keeps the beat in his head, and the movements come automatically, without thought.

The crowd is clapping and Sam and Unique have pulled him in for a group bow turned hug before he realizes that the set of three songs for Nationals is finished.

The set is finished and he didn’t mess up. Blaine smiles, feels his cheeks start to ache with the force of it but can’t bring himself to care.

“That was awesome!” Blaine nods at Sam’s shout, catches Tina’s answering grin a few feet away. They revel for a moment, basking in the satisfaction of a job well done.

And then Artie gives them all a slightly exasperated look and reminds them they still have an audience waiting for another half hour of music. Blaine nods, laughing, and heads back over to the piano, sitting down and playing the opening chords of the next song. He casts a quick glance out to the crowd, sees Burt and Carole’s proud smiles before he turns back to the stage.

The performance isn’t over.

_*_*_*_*_

Kurt wakes to the chime of his phone, fumbles to move the blankets in order to sit up. He reaches for his blinking phone, glad for the golden glow seeping through his windows – street lamps are good for something, occasionally. Kurt stretches his arms, takes a moment to rub some sleep from his eyes before unlocking his phone, blinking when the harsh light breaks through the dim light.

2:54 A.M.

_text message from Blaine:_

I think the playlist is losing its effect :(

Even though Kurt knew it was a nightmare, the words still cause emotions to swell in him. Blaine doesn’t deserve this. He had hoped – futilely, it seems – that the exhilaration of performing well at
the festival would stave off the nightmares.

He should have known better.

*Text message from Kurt:*

I'm sorry – Want me to call?

Kurt wishes he were back in Ohio, curled up around Blaine; wishes he could fight Blaine’s nightmares. More than anything, he wishes Blaine wasn’t dealing with this in the first place, but he is, and so he adjusts his hopes accordingly.

*Text message from Blaine:*

No…it's late

*Text message from Blaine:*

...sorry for waking you up, again

Kurt sighs, pushes down the flash of irritation at Blaine’s apology even as he yawns.

*Text message from Kurt:*

We've been over this...

*Text message from Kurt:*

But you should try and get some sleep, too

*Text message from Blaine:*

I'll try – maybe second time's the charm tonight

*Text message from Kurt:*

We'll hope that's the case, but if it's not…you better text me again

*Text message from Blaine:*

I know better than to tempt the wrath of Kurt Hummel

Kurt releases a small laugh, shaking his head even as he types his reply.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Yes you do :)”

*Text message from Kurt:*

And for what it's worth, I'm wishing you sweet dreams <3

*Text message from Blaine:*

It's worth everything

*Text message from Blaine:*
Sweet dreams for you, too. I love you! <3

Text message from Kurt:

I love you too – now try and get some sleep :)

Kurt sets his phone back on the nightstand with a small sigh, still wishing New York wasn’t miles away from Blaine – or that some genius had perfected teleportation. They remain wishes, though, so he flips his pillow instead before grabbing Margaret Thatcher-Dog from the empty space beside him. Blaine had slipped the dog into his suitcase along with a note, and now he clutches the stuffed animal, breathing in the traces of Blaine’s cologne and not caring that if Santana finds out he’ll never hear the end of it.

Blaine isn’t the only one with fears.

He briefly tightens his hold on the dog, pulls it closer to his chest. He thinks of Blaine and closes his eyes, pictures his fiancé as he slips closer to sleep.
Chapter 20

I am so, so sorry. I don't really have an excuse do I? The best I can say is that I'm teaching higher classes this term, so that means more intense (and longer) grading/reading/lesson planning on my part. Still, for you lovely, wonderful people who haven't yet given up on me, hopefully this long (24 pages in Word) chapter is partly worth the far-too-long wait. Thanks to slayerkitty and jessicamdown, both of whom read countless drafts of this chapter (I may be a bit of a perfections/freak out before posting) and shared their superior beta skills. And to all of you kind readers, thanks again for all of your support through reads/reviews - seeing them always manages to brighten my day! :)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 20

Blaine exits the plane with Sam, laughing when his friend impersonates the pilot as they leave and the flight attendants’ smiles become a touch strained. Entering LAX, Blaine turns, taking in the crowds and hum of energy even as it adds to the nervousness thrumming in his veins.

Los Angeles is vastly different from anywhere in Ohio.

Blaine knew that before arriving, obviously, but the reality of being in Los Angeles and seeing the people (and taking some pictures to send to Kurt because really, what were they thinking?) couldn’t compare to Googled pictures and YouTube videos. Granted, the majority of people in airport appeared average, businessmen and women, families probably headed for a tourist trap, travelers in sweatpants rushing to a terminal; and yet, Blaine couldn’t help but notice the few (but certainly striking) non-conformists. Turning away from a man in eye-catching neon leopard print leggings, he spots another show choir across the terminal, pointedly ignores the increase of his heartbeat and his worry about the competition.

“– need some sugar, man.”

“What?” Blaine turns, offers Sam a smile.

“After that flight – I really need some sugar.”

“Oh. Well,” Blaine nods to his messenger bag, “I have some snacks in here, and –”

Sam nudges Blaine’s shoulder as he interrupts, “I got some chocolate in mine – I just wish the bus was closer. Why does this airport have to be so big?”

Blaine laughs, opens his mouth to reply when a shout of his name has him turning away. His smile widens when he sees Burt waving, further up and on the opposite side of the terminal. Blaine speeds his steps, hurries to where Burt stands before being pulled in for a hug.

“Hey, your flight okay?”
“Hm,” Blaine hums in response, stepping back, “it was fine, and yours?”

“Dulles is always hectic,” Burt adds as he shakes his head, “and security was as bad as usual,” Burt adds a quiet laugh, “but I made it, and I’m lookin’ forward to hearing you guys sing after a week of politics.”

Blaine smiles, “I think we can handle that.”

“Burt!” Sam’s shout has Blaine jerking back a step, ducking to hide his flushed face even as Burt turns with him to face Sam. “Sorry,” Sam pants as he reaches them, “Mr. Schue wanted me to tell you that there was some issue with the bus. I guess we’re going to hang here for a while.”

Blaine glances around the airport – the colorful crowd is more than enough to keep him entertained, but the terminal isn’t high on his “places to see” list.

“He say how long it’ll be?”

“Uh,” Blaine continues to face away, keeping his amusement at Sam’s response hidden even as Sam continues, “I don’t – um, no?”

“Well,” Burt offers a smile, “how about we go find out?”

Sam nods and Blaine steps back, moving to follow the two toward where Mr. Schue is standing, talking with a man in a car rental uniform.

They’re feet away when Blaine hears a shout, turns and sees Carole approaching from the baggage claim with a smile, suitcases rolling behind her. In front of him, Burt shifts, moving to Carole and giving her a hug and a quick peck on the cheek. Carole reciprocates, murmuring about slow teens and the toils of disembarking a plane with high schoolers.

They return moments later, Carole pulling Blaine into a hug despite having sat a row in front of him on the plane.

Carole’s then pulled away into discussion with Burt and Mr. Schue – Blaine shakes his head when he hears something about a mixup and waiting for ‘the right’ bus. He steps away, takes the time to wander with Sam – who’s happily munching on a Milky Way – taking in the bustle that is LAX.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] I didn't know they made hair dye that vivid

Text message from Kurt:

The blue is complimenting his construction orange shirt – it's an interesting combination ;-) 

Text message from Kurt:

Aren't you exited to experience the culture outside of Ohio?

Text message from Blaine:

I thought people outside of Ohio would be a bit more fashionable

Text message from Kurt:

Sadly, fashion sense isn't innate for everyone...
Blaine laughs at Kurt’s response, manages half a reply before a hand claps his shoulder, startling him and turning his response into an illegible mesh of words thanks to auto-correct.

“– we can head over.” Blaine takes in the end of Sam’s sentence, releases a small sigh of relief that his friend didn’t notice his momentary lapse of control. Moments later he’s following Sam, meeting up with the rest of New Directions and exiting the airport.

Outside, he pauses when he sees the uniform-clad members of Throat Explosion entering a bus two cars down. He ignores the smirk aimed toward him, pushes away the onset of nerves brought on at the reminder of the competition, of the legacy he’s expected to help uphold.

With a slight shake of his head, Blaine steps onto the bus, takes a seat next to Sam and smiles when Tina jumps in excitement, squealing that they’ve finally made it. Blaine laughs and relaxes into the seat as Burt and Carole take the seats in front of him, waving and smiling.

Mr. Schue enters last, quickly – and audibly – counting heads before nodding to the driver.

“I can’t believe we’re actually in California; finally we get to go somewhere cool for Glee.”

“New York wasn’t cool?” Blaine feels his eyebrows raise even as he questions Tina.

“It’s different. We’re in California and –”

“Alright guys!” Mr. Schue’s shout interrupts Tina’s reply and Blaine turns to face the front of the bus, takes in his director’s stance before tuning out the ensuing speech. He shifts his gaze to the window, watches as scenery he’s sure he’s seen in movies passes by, the bus’s speed slowed by traffic. He focuses on the buildings and signs, stretches his hands from the clenched grasp brought on by the reminders of legacy and hope, encouragement wrapped in remembrance.

He breaks free of his thoughts when the bus erupts into shouts, high-fives shared before Sam starts singing.

Blaine takes a deep breath and turns, joining.

_*_*_*_ *

Kurt ducks his head as he walks down the hall, hiding his laughter as he hears the echoes of Ms. July’s evisceration of yet another student. He turns the corner and leaves the tirade behind, nodding when he sees a classmate a few feet in front of him. He passes a few more classmates – and a stranger wearing a truly awful combination of checked pants with a brightly printed shirt – before leaving the building, stepping into muggy heat of a New York afternoon. He pauses beside a modern statue – a swirl of twisted metal – and pulls out his iPod, hooking up his headphones and humming along to the Some Nights/We Are Young mashup.

The walk to the café isn’t far, but the mugginess clings to Kurt’s skin, and he grimaces as he feels himself start to sweat. Minutes later he enter the café, smiling as the scent of coffee drifts across the blessedly air-conditioned interior.

“I’m not late!” Dani’s shout startles Kurt, and he turns in line, spinning and causing one of his headphones to fall out of his ear.

“No,” Kurt draws out the word, taking in Dani’s flustered appearance, hair falling out of a bun even as she reshoulders her guitar. “We just said we’d meet after your shift – I wasn’t going to think you were late for another twenty minutes.”
“Oh.” Dani smiles then, bright and honest. “Well I’m still not late. Anyway, I’m gonna go get us a table.” Dani turns, takes two steps before bouncing back and pulling some bills from her apron. “Since you’re getting something can you grab me a drink? I ate at the diner but I may have rushed to get here…”

“Keep it,” Kurt replies even as he pushes her hand away. “It’s not like a Cherry Coke is going to ruin my bank account.”

Dani smiles, pulling him in for a surprise, tight hug before stepping away again.

Kurt steps up to the counter a few moments later and places his order – an iced mocha and turkey panini, plus Dani’s soda – before turning to scan the café, finally spotting Dani seated at a table near the back, tapping the table in an unheard beat.

He grabs his order once it’s placed on the counter, and moves to join Dani at the table by the window, taking the seat across from her and sliding her the requested cup of soda.

“Thanks!” She takes a quick sip before leaning forward, “So I feel like we haven’t talked since you got back – opposite shifts suck.”

“We worked together on Wednesday.”

“That,” Dani comments as she fiddles with her straw, “does not count.”

“Okay?” Kurt takes a bit of his panini, keeping his eyes on Dani to show that he’s still paying attention.

“You went and proposed, Kurt. And the most we got was a dreamy look and a ‘he said yes’ at rehearsal.”

“Santana doesn’t –” Kurt starts to respond, to explain how Santana had threatened if she heard one more word about ‘the nauseating romance’ she couldn’t be held responsible for her actions.

Kurt isn’t inclined to test her, either.

“I know,” Dani interrupts, “which is why we’re having this lunch date.”

Swallowing his bite of panini, Kurt thinks over Dani’s comment. He loves talking about Blaine, feels himself start to smile at the memory of his proposal and Blaine’s surprise.

“Aright,” Kurt takes a slow sip from his mocha, “what do you want to know?”

“That’s your question?” Dani gives him an incredulous look, takes another sip of soda before continuing. “You know me – tell me everything.”

Kurt does.

He finishes his panini, and is down to the last third of his mocha before he feels satisfied with the story, pausing after telling Dani about Blaine’s repeated awe at the ring, his own joy at being with Blaine, sharing space.

“– else going on?”

“Hm, what?” Kurt glances up at Dani’s question, takes in her relaxed pose, seeming at odds with the questioning look in her eyes.
“That last bit, it was different. Don’t get me wrong,” she smiles, leaning forward, “I love that you surprised him and you’re introducing me first thing when Blaine comes to town, but the ending of your story wasn’t nearly as sweet as the beginning. So,” she takes a quick sip of her soda, “what else is going on to make you look less than indescribably happy.”

“I am happy,” Kurt counters, leaning forward himself.

“I didn’t say you weren’t,” Dani adds, raising her hands to emphasize the point, “I just said that you weren’t as happy when you passed the main part of your story.”

“Oh.” Kurt looks down at the table, drops his hands to rest on the bench. “I am happy,” he repeats, catching her eye, “but being there…it’s different, seeing the nightmares.”

“I’m sure,” Dani’s voice has dropped, quieter but just as strong as before. “But you were there. That counts. And you two certainly looked happy in those pictures you showed me.”

Kurt smiles, “We are. I just – I worry, you know?”

“Mm – one of the many wonderful side-effects of loving someone.”

“Right.”

“Well,” Dani smirks, “at least the perks seriously outweigh the disadvantages. I mean, Santana certainly knows how to –”

“Dani!” Kurt’s admonishing words interrupt the sentence and he narrows his eyes when Dani doubles over with laughter. “You’ve been spending too much time with your girlfriend.”

“I think we can both agree that there’s no such thing.” Dani offers a smile before pulling her cup closer. “Now, I’m going to go get a refill. What do you want?”

“A soda.” The statement comes out as a question, but Dani’s by the counter before Kurt can think of a better reply.

Text message from Kurt:

[photo] Dani’s plying me with food and caffeine to get me to share everything about my visit

Text message from Blaine:

Well, I can't fault her for technique ;-)  

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] Our hotel – at least it looks decent.

Text message from Kurt:

It does! I'm a little jealous…
Text message from Blaine:
Don’t be – I don’t think I’ll be spending too much time in the room…

Text message from Kurt:
??

Text message from Blaine:
We have rehearsal and then we’re going to check out the stage, I think.

Text message from Kurt:
Well, relaxation is important too, and I’ve heard some rehearsals – you’re amazing!!

Text message from Blaine:
I’m not sure relaxation is part of the plan, but I’ll keep that in mind! :)

Dani’s return moments later interrupts his reply, and he puts down his phone as she sets a cup in front of Kurt before reclaiming her seat. “Is he in L.A. already? Or are those,” Dani nods toward where Kurt’s phone is flashing on the table, “just nerves before he gets on the plane?”

“They’re in L.A.,” Kurt answers, “Blaine was just telling me about the more…colorful visitors at LAX.”

“Tell me he took pictures.”

After flipping through the pictures Blaine had texted, Dani hands back Kurt’s phone, the conversation shifts to the upcoming national’s performance. Kurt describes the set list in detail, happy to gush about Blaine’s talent before he releases a sigh.

“He doesn’t see it, though.”

“What?”

“Blaine,” Kurt gestures to his phone, “he can perform – even when he’s stressed and nervous he can pull out a performance – but he gets nervous before it. And it’s bigger this time, since it’s nationals.”

“Everyone gets nervous before a performance.”

“I guess so.”

“Please,” Dani laughs, “no matter how much anyone practices, there’s always that bit of nervousness before a performance, especially when it’s big. But it sounds like Blaine’s been practicing like crazy, and I’ve seen the videos – your group has talent. Just remind him of that.”

“You make everything sound so simple.” Kurt says before he takes a sip of soda, thinking over Dani’s words.

“Oh, I know it’s not, but it makes me feel better.”

“It is a nice thought.”
Silence reigns for a moment, and then Dani leans forward. “Speaking of nice thoughts… Elliott and I came up with a possible new song for our performance while you were romancing in Ohio.”

Kurt takes in Dani’s easy smile, the relaxed set of her shoulders, and smiles in reply. “Do I know this song?”

“Of course,” Dani adds with a wink, “but no more clues until rehearsal tonight.”

“You want to add a song to the set for tomorrow and not tell me for another five hours.”

“Yup.” Kurt shakes his head in amusement as Dani pops the ‘p’ and leans back in her chair.

“Fine. I guess I’ll hear this mysterious song after my shift. How was work, anyway? Am I going to need even more caffeine? Is that really why you got me a drink?”

Dani eyes Kurt’s cup for a moment before offering a smirk. “Maybe. It wasn’t bad when I left but I heard Gunther on the phone. I think you’re getting an after-show tonight.”

“Great.” Kurt briefly closes his eyes before taking a long sip of his soda.

Apparently he needs it.

-*-*-*-

Blaine gratefully drinks from the water bottle Sam had tossed him, pausing to take a breath after. Across the room, he sees Marley stretching along with Unique, Ryder downing water before wiping his face with his towel while Burt and Carole talk quietly near the door.

“Alright guys!” Blaine turns, watches as Mr. Schue moves to the center of the room. “That was good work, but we’re going to need everything to be ready for tomorrow. I know you guys can win this, you’ve all put in the work that’s needed, but our competitors have been putting in hours, too, so let’s take it again.”

“Alright guys, let’s do this!” Sam’s yell has Blaine smiling even as he feels the rush of nerves at the reminder of their reason for being in Los Angeles, he shakes his head to push the nerves away and takes his spot near Artie.

“One! Two! Three! Four!” Blaine counts off the beats that accompany Mr. Schue’s words, continues counting as the introduction to the song starts. Moments later he’s lost in the performance, dancing and ignoring the burn in his muscles. He’s tense even as he takes his seat at the piano, hitting the notes perfectly despite the tremble in his hands. Moving to rejoin the group afterwards he makes sure to keep his legs from locking, remembers the warnings about fainting and mistakes during performances.

There’s a pause after they finish – on key – before there’s a smattering of applause and Blaine sees Burt and Mr. Schue (but not Carole) clapping by the door, along with a hotel worker who catches Blaine’s eye and offers a smile before stepping out into the hall.

“That was awesome!” Sam offers Blaine a high-five with the comment.

“It was a good performance,” Blaine agrees in a rush, working to catch his breath, “I think we got a bit off-tempo during Just a Dream, though.”

“Huh?” Sam’s question is distracted and he’s gone before Blaine can reply, pulled away by a laughing Ryder.
Blaine shakes his head and moves to reclaim his water bottle, downing the rest of its contents before moving around the room, smiling and accepting one-armed hugs and comments about the routine.

*Text message from Blaine:*

[photo] Rehearsal is tiring.

*Text message from Kurt:*

That's why it's rehearsal ;)

*Text message from Kurt:*

I do like the sweaty frat-boy look - A+ for you!

*Text message from Blaine:*

You always manage to find the bright side...

*Text message from Kurt:*

I try my best!

“Looked exhausting.”

“Mm,” Blaine nods and accepts the water bottle that accompanies Burt’s comment while returning his phone to his pocket. “It’s still fun.”

“Glad to hear it,” Burt rubs his hand over his head before continuing. “Carole said you guys sounded great too.” Blaine looks up at the mention of Carole, moving the water bottle to his left hand. “She just had to step out for a bit,” Blaine takes in Burt’s lowered voice, the rapidly blinking eyes, and remembers Kurt’s last visit home.

Blaine nods, showing his understanding even as his shoulders drop at the reminder of what they’ve lost.

“Music can be draining,” he replies after a moment, “but it can be comforting, too.”

“Draining and hard work,” Burt shakes his head even as he offers Blaine a smile, “but yeah – I guess something has to make it worth it. Now, how’re you doin’ kid? And don’t try to distract me – we only got a few minutes before you’re back to working.”

Blaine ducks his head until he feels his blush recede, and then looks up to see Burt smiling even as he leans against the wall, waiting.

Blaine offers a shrug in response before responding – he won’t ignore his future father-in-law.

“Did you order the pizza, Hummel?”

Kurt looks up from his Kindle at Santana’s question, sees her sitting on the arm of the chair Dani’s taken. “No, Santana, I figured it would better for us all to rehearse on empty stomachs.”

“That would explain why I’m still hungry.”
“You have chips.”

“And they’re good chips, too.” Dani’s reply interrupts Santana’s intended reply, and Kurt offers her a quick smile in thanks.

“I still want that pizza,” Santana grumbles, but the comment stays half-hearted as she leans further into Dani, and Kurt looks away.

The loft door opens moments later, and Elliott sets his guitar down before joining Kurt on the sofa.

“Did I interrupt something?”

“No –”

“Hummel’s decided to starve us,” Santana interrupts, “although he claims to have ordered some mythical pizza.”

Kurt narrows his eyes and leans forward in annoyance.

“So tomorrow,” Elliott interrupts, pointedly ignoring Kurt’s raised brows, “I know we planned our performance on Tuesday, but I was thinkin’ we could make one addition to our set list.”

“We have to!” Dani adds around mouthful of chip. “Sorry,” Kurt eyes her swallow with a critical eye. “But if it’s the one that –”

“Of course it is,” Elliott cuts in with a wink.

“Kurt! Kurt we have to do this. Elliott and I were talking while you were in Ohio and it sounded okay but we were talking after practice the other day – after you and Santana did that duet – and that’s what was missing. Kurt we have to do Smooth Criminal.”

“I already schooled the criminal chipmunk with that song –”

“Criminal chipmunk?”

“It’s better not to ask,” Kurt replies to Elliott’s question – Sebastian may have redeemed himself but he would never be one of Kurt’s favorite people – takes another sip of water to control his voice, “but Smooth Criminal could be fun,” Kurt pauses, thinking over the lyrics and tone, “we could do a run through it. We all know the song.” Kurt adds with a smile when he realizes that he doesn’t feel any worry, despite knowing that Elliott and Dani worked on their own, “but we still need to rehearse if we’re adding it to the set.”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” Elliott says as takes another chip, “because the guitar,” Elliott shares a glance with Dani, “is amazing.”

“Alright,” Kurt takes another handful of chips from the bowl, “I’m sure it’ll be great.”

“Of course it will be,” Santana adds, leaning forward, “not even Hummel can screw up Michael Jackson.”

“Thanks, Santana.” Kurt keeps his tone dry, knows Santana’s still annoyed at him for taking the last of the coffee before leaving for class. He gives a slight shake of his head to stop the question he knows Elliott’s poised to ask, turning to Dani instead. “So this amazing guitar – who’s better?”

“We’ll decide that later,” Elliott quickly replies, even as Dani’s eyes widen. “Besides,” Elliott turns to face Kurt, “I want to know about your fiancé’s adventures in the Sunshine State.”
“You’re trying to get me to lose my appetite so I’ll forget about the pizza that’s still not here, aren’t you.”

Elliott ignores Santana’s comment, continuing to look to Kurt.

“He’s nervous,” Kurt shrugs, “It’s a big competition.” Kurt glances over, sees Dani distracting Santana with sly glances and whispered words before looking away – he’s grateful Dani’s distracting Santana, but he doesn’t want to watch. He thinks of Blaine instead, and keeps his eyes on Elliott while answering his question.

A knock at the door interrupts Kurt’s comments about the New Directions’ rehearsal, and he moves to answer it while ignoring Santana’s exclamation of ‘finally’ from across the room.

Minutes later with the pizza paid for, Kurt joins his bandmates at the table, setting the pizza boxes in the center. “You could have at least gotten some plates, Santana.”

“You could have at least gotten some plates, Santana.”

“Your pizza took too long, I’m not moving more than I have to.”

“It’s three feet!”

Dani rests her hand on Kurt’s arm, keeping him from shouting again even as she sets four plates on the table.

“Pizza smells awesome, but y’all better eat fast – I want to get through some songs!”

Kurt smiles at Dani’s excitement, huffing a breath of laughter before taking his seat and grabbing two slices of pizza even as Santana takes another from the box.

“Don’t judge me, Hummel,” Santana comments as she chews, “I said I was hungry.”

Kurt shakes his head, ignoring the barb and taking a sip of water. “And this is how I know you’re better off than me,” Dani comments as she passes him some napkins, “your napkins aren’t from restaurants.”

“You’re all class, Dani.” Elliott says in response, “I’m guessing all your napkins have logos?”

“Of course,” Dani replies with a smile and wink, “I’m all for saving money where I can.”

“And the five dollars is better spent on…”

“Food.” Dani answers Elliott’s question, “Always food.”

Kurt laughs, and takes another bite of his pizza.

Text message from Kurt:

[photo] Late but here – some pizza is better than none, right?

Text message from Blaine:

It’s New York pizza, I think by definition it’s ‘better’ ;)

Text message from Kurt:

You’re in L.A. I’m sure you’ll find something delicious when it’s your dinner time, too
Text message from Blaine:

We’re on our own, according to our schedule

Text message from Blaine:

Dinner’s in two hours... is that your way of saying to try something authentic instead of sticking with a chain?

Text message from Kurt:

You’re in L.A. – take advantage of non-Ohio food :p

“Stop sexting your boy,” Kurt jumps at Santana’s comment. “I’d like to keep my dinner down, and I thought we were all here for practice – not for me to see you looking like some R-rated Hallmark card.”

Kurt rolls his eyes but puts his phone back in his pocket anyway, mumbling that they weren’t sexting before standing to stack the dishes.

Time for rehearsal.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine stays against the wall as Jean-Baptiste and the rest of Throat Explosion leave the auditorium – the confrontation earlier had left Blaine scrambling, making cliché comments to cover his rapid breathing and shaky voice. The other choir’s words echo even after the doors close.

Everyone knows you’re ‘that’ show choir.

They are.

They’re the show choir that’s followed with whispers and pointed fingers, the show choir that, despite being the reigning champions, receives more comments about their history and membership than musicality on the blogs.

They’re bound to a ghost, and the entire show-choir world knows it.

Blaine stays still, ignoring the continued murmurs of his fellow glee members.

Breathe in. They’re gone.

Breathe out. They didn’t know him.

Breathe in. We’ll win this.

Breathe out. We have to.

Shaking out his nerves (mostly) Blaine moves back to the center of the stage, raising his hands into a clap to get everyone facing him.

“Guys. Guys! Look, they said they’d give us three minutes.” Blaine chooses to ignore the fact that they have two hours before Jean-Baptiste’s ‘scheduled time’ in the hall, they have to make curfew anyway, “So... we should –”

“You’re just gonna let them do this?”
Jake’s reply – more shout than question – has Blaine turning, finding the sophomore standing by Ryder.

“He’s not letting them do anything,” Sam cuts off Blaine’s planned reply, stepping in front of Blaine and holding Finn’s picture in a tight grasp. “But we don’t need to stay here to win this thing. Mr. Schue was right earlier – we have been practicing hard, and we’ve earned this. We just have to show that to everyone tomorrow.”

Blaine stays silent while Sam speaks, taking in the words from his friend. He wonders, sometimes, how it is that his fellow Glee members struggle with basic communication, or speeches, or preparation, and yet, when it’s most needed, Glee always meets the challenge.

Just as Sam is doing now.

At his sides, his hands clench against his thighs.

Sam’s his best friend, and Blaine is glad Sam is finding the right words, but a part of him can’t help but feel pushed aside.

Glee may have voted him the ‘new Rachel’ but Sam was the one chosen to lead by Mr. Schue. Sam had found him earlier, gone into detail about his worries for Nationals and Mr. Schue’s response, the weight of responsibility resting on his shoulders and his determination to lead Glee to another trophy in honor of Finn.

Blaine had assured him that Sam was doing the best he could, that there was zero chance of Sam letting anyone down.

As Sam continues to talk Blaine forces his hands to relax, pulls his phone from his pocket.

*Text message from Blaine:*

I think Mr. Schue gave Sam some tips for his speech.

*Text message from Kurt:*

What?

*Text message from Blaine:*

Throat Explosion interrupted us in the hall…Sam’s reminding everyone that we’re in this together

*Text message from Blaine:*

He brought Finn’s picture, too, to remind us who we’re singing for.

Blaine looks out at the rest of Glee as he waits for Kurt’s reply, suppresses a wince when his phone remains silent for longer than necessary. He startles when the message finally does arrive, the vibration of the phone mirroring his jolt.

*Text message from Kurt:*

You’re singing for you. In remembrance of Finn, sure, but he was just as happy performing for an audience of two as for a theatre of guests at competition. Sing to remember him, but don’t make it the only reason you’re singing.

Sam finishes speaking to small cheer, and Blaine slips his phone back in his pocket – without a
reply – and joins in, hoping no one noticed his texting. He gets pulled in for a half, one-armed hug with Sam and Tina before stepping back, heading for the door.

The group leaves the hall and Blaine falls into the procession, absently noting the landmarks and bright lights on their walk back to the hotel.

“I still can’t believe they just took over the stage!”

Blaine turns at Tina’s comment, offering her his arm as they fall into step. “It’s how they work. But it’s not that bad,” he hastens to continue when he sees her scowl, “it’s not like we were actually going to rehearse our performance, and the hotel is more comfortable.”

“That’s not the point.”

“I know. But we would have had to leave soon anyway,” he adds, speeding his steps a bit, “we have curfew in ten minutes.”

Tina sighs and detangles their arms as they approach a crosswalk, reaching into her bag to pull out her phone. “Sometimes, I hate it when you’re right.”

Blaine ducks his head to hide his slight smile and takes out his phone to snap a few more pictures to send to Kurt before the light changes. He manages a few shots before the group moves, but he stays toward the back, behind Unique and Artie.

Minutes later they arrive in the parking lot in front of their hotel, and Blaine blinks against the brightness of the additional lights. Ahead of him, Tina’s laugh carries across the lot and he looks up to see her leaning on Sam’s shoulder. He moves forward, debating making a comment “Hey Mitch! If you don’t have ‘em –”

“Make sure you hold ‘em Mitch. Cover his mouth, too. Can’t have him crying, now.”

Blaine can’t move. His arms stay held fast in an unrelenting grip even as his breath is pushed out of him. Feet away, the street light flickers, and the darkness grows as the pain keeps Blaine still.

He can’t breathe, either.

“– with two minutes to spare! Ha!” The shout and accompanying hand on his shoulder has Blaine jumping, spinning to see Ryder standing next to him, looking contrite. “Whoa, sorry. I thought you heard me. You okay?”

“What?” Blaine questions, even as he scans the parking lot.

“Are you okay?”

Ryder’s question registers and Blaine stops his search, turning to meet Ryder’s eye. “Oh. Yeah, I’m fine – just thinkin’ about tomorrow.”

“Big day,” Ryder agrees, “and I heard Mr. Schue say wakeup is at six.”

Blaine hums in agreement, but a yell from Kitty interrupts his reply – Ryder’s needed for a ‘new to Glee’ group photo. Blaine assures Ryder it’s fine as he runs off, leaving Blaine to continue the walk to the lobby alone.

Breathe in. It’s not the same Mitch.
Breathe out. *It can’t be.*

Breathe in. *They have no reason to be in California.*

Breathe out. *Mitch is a common name.*

Entering behind Tina (Artie was still taking pictures with Kitty’s direction) Blaine pauses by one of the overstuffed chairs, taking in the other patrons. It can’t be the same Mitch, he *knows* it’s someone else, but Blaine still can’t stop himself from looking.

Mr. Schue and Burt stand a few feet away, talking; there’s an old man waiting for the elevator; a family of six arguing about luggage, while their dog barks in its carrier; a woman in a business suit checking in at the counter; and next to her – two twenty-something guys in t-shirts and jeans.

Blaine feels himself relax as he takes in their dark skin and collegiate shirts, ducks his head as they walk past and he overhears Mitch being told to hurry up.

Blaine looks around the lobby again and starts walking when Mr. Hummel catches his gaze, motioning for him to come over. Mr. Schue steps away moments later, and Blaine meets Burt with a smile.

“Have a good walk?” Burt accompanies the question with slight nod to the lobby doors, though his tone lets Blaine know he doesn’t believe everyone just went for a walk.

“Yeah, there’s a lot to see.”

“Mm,” Burt agrees, “see anything special?”

Blaine stays silent for a moment, debating what to share. “Not really,” Blaine shrugs, “although we did run into Throat Explosion.”

“Ah,” the drawn out word is accompanied with raised brows, and Burt runs a hand over his head before continuing, “how was the competition?”

Blaine thinks back over the conversation with Jean-Baptiste – *You’re that show choir* – remembers the confidence of the other group, even those that stayed silent emanated an easy strength, dismissing the New Directions as competitors.

“They’re good.”

“You guys are, too.”

Burt’s words are quiet, but Blaine hears them even over the din of the lobby, feels some of the tension drain from his shoulders.

“Thanks, I – we try to be.”

“Well your ‘tries’ are pretty damn amazing, and I’d like to think I picked up a thing or two over the years.”

Blaine smiles and follows Burt as they head for elevator. “You know more than you think.”

Burt laughs as he presses the button before turning back to Blaine. “You wouldn’t be lying to an old man, would you, Anderson?”

“No,” Blaine huffs a laugh as they enter the elevator, along with a preoccupied Artie and Kitty,
“Kurt would call you on anything not true and it would be traced back to me.”

“I knew you were a quick learner. You’ll handle marriage just fine, kid.”

Blaine feels his cheeks heat and ducks his head. “I’ll take that compliment.”

“You should,” Burt comments as they arrive at their floor, “marriage isn’t easy.”

“But it’s worth it.”

“Every day,” Burt agrees, stopping in front of what Blaine assumes is his room, “even when they need their space.”

“Oh,” Blaine takes a moment and thinks over Carole’s absence from the lobby, “is everything okay?”

“It will be,” Burt replies with a smile, “she just needed a bit of breather. Don’t worry – she’s joining me for room checks, and we’re both looking forward to you blowing away the competition tomorrow.”

“We’ll certainly try.”

“Good. Now, you’re sharing with Sam, right?” At Blaine’s nod he continues, “You’re two doors down.”

“Thanks,” Blaine turns, intent on his room, when a hand on his shoulder stops him. He steps back, offers Burt a questioning glance.

“You need something, you let me or Carole know, okay?”

“Yeah,” Blaine focuses on the room number, takes in the glint from the hallway lights. “You’ll be the first.”

“Alright then, go get some sleep. It’s gonna be a long day tomorrow.”

Kurt refills the water glasses on the coffee table before dropping onto the sofa next to Elliott and grabbing a few chips from the bowl still sitting in the center. Singing – performing – is exhausting, even when it’s with friends. Across from him, Santana perches on the arm of Dani’s chair, leaning over to murmur in her girlfriend’s ear and Kurt quickly glances away.

“That was some nice voice work, earlier.”

“Thanks,” Kurt smiles before taking a sip of water, “I’ll be sure to let my voice instructor know.”

“You should,” Elliott replies with a wink, “I’m sure the old man would enjoy the validation.”

Kurt can’t hold in his laugh, imagining the face of his proud (talented, respected, but so, so proud) instructor if he said his bandmate – who isn’t even a student – was impressed with his vocals.

“Hey!” Dani’s shout interrupts his laughter, and Kurt turns to see her leaning forward in her chair, intent. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing,” Kurt replies, getting his laughter under control, “really. Just a funny thought.”
“Please spare us from your sense of humor,” Santana comments, “I’m not in the mood to pretend to be amused.”

Kurt shoots her a glare. “You know –”

“So we’re adding *Smooth Criminal* to the list, right? I mean, it was too awesome to not play.”

“Of course we are,” Dani agrees with Elliott’s comment, leaning forward in her chair, “It’s not up for discussion.”

“And here I thought we were a democratic band.”

“We still are,” Elliott says with a wink, “and Dani democratically agreed with my fabulous assessment.”

“Right.” Kurt shakes his head in amusement before replying, “Fine. But I seem to remember you two battling for a certain solo; who’s getting that?”

Kurt leans back as Elliott and Dani begin to bicker, pulling out his phone to check for the message he’d received during practice.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Artie put on some ‘cinematic masterpiece’ that has me questioning his admittance to film school.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Artie’s always had a unique sense of taste.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Talk with Sam instead?

*Text message from Blaine:*

He was so stressed about everything that he put in his earplugs and fell asleep a half hour ago.

Kurt sits back with a sigh at the reminder of Sam’s stress, torn between sympathy for his friend and confusion at why Sam was the one getting pep talks from Mr. Schue, acting as leader of the New Directions.

He shakes his head, takes another sip of water before typing out his reply.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Well, it may be earlier for you, but sleep is never a bad thing…

*Text message from Blaine:*

Is that your way of telling me to go sleep?

*Text message from Kurt:*

It’s a suggestion ;-)  

“Everything okay in sunny L.A.?”
Kurt looks up at Elliott’s question, “Yeah, well, mostly.” Kurt offers with a shrug. “He’s nervous – understandably – but…he’s worried, too; he thinks Mr. Schue doesn’t trust him right now.”

“Does he?”

Kurt thinks over Blaine’s comments, runs through memories of Glee. “I – I don’t know. He should,” Kurt feels his jaw tense, takes a breath and forces himself to relax, “Blaine’s a natural leader – he likes helping others – I don’t…I’m not there, but it just doesn’t make sense that Mr. Schue wouldn’t talk with him about this.”

Elliott stays silent for a moment, leaning back on the cushions and bringing up his right leg, bending it so his foot rests under his thigh.

“Don’t take this the wrong way,” Elliott even raises his hands in surrender, “but are you sure you’re not just reading too much into this?”

Kurt feels indignation rise, opens his mouth to retort before pausing and taking time to think over Elliott’s words.

Text message from Blaine:

Well I know better than to ignore your suggestions – I’ll try and get some sleep.

Text message from Blaine:

Love you! <3

It still doesn’t make sense, Mr. Schue talking to Sam. It doesn’t, and Kurt accepts the bite of anger with a small sigh.

But anger won’t help anything.

And, he knows he’s biased toward Blaine – he always has been – but despite the shifting roles in the New Directions, he never thought Blaine would be pushed aside. And yet, he should have, given the volatile nature of Glee club where the only consistencies were music and friends. Kurt knows if he had heard the same thing and it had happened to anyone but Blaine, Kurt knows he’d accept it as a part of Glee, feel pride at the knowledge that Sam has gained confidence and grown as a leader.

Kurt huffs and grabs some more chips.

Text message from Kurt:

Sending you sweet dreams – I love you, too!

“So is this a ‘I’m annoyed at you’ silence or a ‘you’re a genius’ silence?”

Kurt looks up at Elliott’s question, sets his phone aside. “Genius is stretching it, don’t you think?”

Elliott smirks.

“Alright boys,” Santana’s voice carries across the small space, and Kurt suppresses a wince as he hears the slyness in her tone, “you two just cuddling or are we gonna go over some songs?”

“You actually want to practice more?” The words come across more statement than question.
“I want to make sure you’re not going to ruin this duet; you were iffy earlier and I can’t have you bringin’ me down.”

Kurt narrows his eyes but stays silent.

“I don’t think your neighbors would appreciate a concert this late.”

Dani’s comment has Kurt ducking his head to hide his smile, “They wouldn’t, and after the complaints about Rachel’s early morning warm-ups we can’t afford any more calls.”

“And here I thought this was ‘the city that never sleeps’.”

“That’s just for the tourists, Santana.” Elliott replies with a smile, leaning forward.

“Fine. But if we’re done with practice I have other plans for the rest of the night.”

“Please Santana,” Kurt groans, “do not go into detail.”

“I won’t,” Santana replies, glancing to Dani while setting her hand on her thigh, “but only because that would take time away from our plans.”

“And that’s my cue to leave.” Elliott stands, grabbing his guitar from where it stands by the door.

He’s gone within minutes, and then Kurt stands alone in the living room, Santana and Dani having left in a rush of giggles and clicking heels.

The emptiness echoes and Kurt takes a moment to ponder the change before slowly moving around the living room, picking up the now-discarded cups of water and bowls of potato chips.

Of course he’s left with the cleanup.

Luckily it’s an easy fix, and he finishes quickly before heading for his room.

It may be a Friday, but he still has homework.

_.*_*_*_*_.*_*_

Blaine rolls over again, thankful his roommates are heavy sleepers as he pulls out his cell phone to check the time.

1:17 A.M.

_Everyone knows you’re that show choir._

Blaine can’t get the words out of his head. They’ve combined with his worries for the next day, fears of missteps and missed keys, of letting down people he respects. He knows they have more rehearsal the next day, knows Mr. Schue will work them non-stop, offering critiques and feedback.

It doesn’t help.

The New Directions are the reigning national champions, and regardless of the comments about them on the show-choir blogs, they have worked for their place. The hours of rehearsal and practice have to count for something.

Blaine wants to prove Throat Explosion wrong almost as much as he wants to not let anyone else down.
And now, hours before competition, he can’t sleep.

Earlier, he’d worried about nightmares and secretly had been grateful for Artie’s heaving sleeping habits and Sam’s earplugs. He still is – he doesn’t expect his nightmares to vanish, even if he is in L.A. – although now he simply wishes he could fall asleep.

Blaine sighs as he carefully gets up from the bed, using the glow of streetlamps (visible even through the closed blinds) to get to his bag and pull out his iPod.

Wrapped in blankets moments later, Blaine closes his eyes, focuses on the music softly playing through his headphones. The playlist hasn’t kept more nightmares at bay, but hopefully it will help lull him to sleep in the first place.

He can’t afford to lose more sleep.

He can’t make a mistake during competition; the New Directions deserve to win again, to keep the legacy Mr. Schue discussed.

Blaine moves his right hand until his fingers rest on the ring Kurt gave him, takes comfort from the metal, and wills himself to sleep.
Yes, I am alive! I am so, so sorry it's so long since my last update! I promise future postings won't be as spread out! Real life came in and took over, but I think I've managed to organize my time (and we have a long break coming up). Thanks, as always, to you wonderfully kind readers who (still are reading I hope) taking the time to read and review! It always makes my day a bit brighter!! :-) Thanks to slayerkitty for the advice (talking me down from deleting everything, walking through scenes, and putting up with my general whining) and beta.

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 21

“If one more hungover guy changes his order because he can’t read the menu I can’t be held responsible for my actions.” Kurt rips the order sheet off his pad and places it in the order window before leaning against the counter beside Dani, smiling and nodding in thanks when she passes him a mug of coffee. He takes a sip and closes his eyes in appreciation.

“You make it sound like the reordering is a new thing.”

Kurt opens his eyes at Dani’s comment, “Every week I have this hope where I exaggerated the annoyance of the week before and–”

“I think you’re being hailed.”

“What?” Kurt follows the direction of Dani’s nod and sees one of the hungover students weakly waving his arm.

“Great.” Kurt sighs and sets down his mug before pushing away from the counter, absently grabbing the coffee pot and unable to keep from mumbling that he’s ‘still not responsible’ as he heads for the table, ignoring Dani as he goes.

He manages a smile by the time he arrives, forces himself to keep it in place as his customer – who obviously slept in his clothes – mutters about adding bacon to his order (eggs over easy, sausage links, pancakes, toast) and asking if the diner has hot sauce and requesting two bottles once Kurt responds that they do.

He circles the table then, refilling the half-full coffee cups while shamelessly eavesdropping to the scandal of a party his patrons had attended the night before. Kurt ducks his head to hide his eye-roll when he overhears something involving silly string and basketball nets.

He has his phone out by the time he’s replaced the coffee pot and added the order of bacon to the kitchen’s list.

Text message from Kurt:

Why do people insist on going out to eat when they’re obviously hungover?
It’s only after he hits ‘send’ that he remembers the time difference. Kurt suppresses a wince before starting another message.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Sorry! I forgot about the time difference!!

*Text message from Blaine:*

Don’t worry – you’re a much better wake-up call ;)

Kurt lets out a breath of laughter and shakes his head; leave it to Blaine to have a cheesy comment, even – apparently – moments after waking.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Would you rather they attempt to cook and set their kitchens on fire?

Kurt smiles at Blaine’s response while he eyes his patrons. He certainly wouldn’t trust them in any kitchen in their current state, although the cynical side of himself still wishes they’d stayed home – his chances of getting tips are lower than any chance of fire.

*Text message from Kurt:*

If they then use their insurance money to eat out and give me tips I’m not seeing a downside…

*Text message from Kurt:*

Although they’d probably still be hungover, so I don’t think there’s a way for me to win in this situation.

*Text message from Blaine:*

…you’re still zigging

Kurt pauses, feels his face scrunch in momentary confusion before he remembers the first bouquet of red and yellow roses, feeling both proud and slightly envious of Blaine, but both being eclipsed by the sense of *rightness* when he thought of his relationship with Blaine.

“I thought your customers were the ones struggling with thought.”

“What?”

“You were zoned out,” Dani narrows her eyes before she looks down and sees his phone and gives him a smirk worthy of Santana. “And now I know why.”

“What? No!” Kurt ignores the blush he feels spreading across his cheeks even as he lowers his voice to continue. “You’re as bad as your girlfriend; and yes, I was texting Blaine, but not in the way you’re thinking.” Kurt leans the counter, side-eying Dani. “Unlike some people I have standards,” Dani gives an impressive snort before raising her hands in supplication. “Blaine just reminded me of the first time I gave him flowers.”

“That’s so sweet! Tell me the story.”

Kurt turns and feels the last of his tension leave as he takes in Dani’s relaxed expression and wide eyes; she genuinely wants to know.
Well, never let it be said Kurt hesitates to share his and Blaine’s high school love story.

He’s interrupted by the arrival of his customers’ assortment of breakfast items, and with a sigh and shrug he steps away from Dani, balancing the tray of plates. The group seems more alert as Kurt approaches the table, and conversation slows to a stop once he begins handing over orders. There are groans of appreciation and one enthusiastic patron declares his love for Kurt. Kurt offers a surprised laugh in response and flashes his ring with an exaggerated wave even as he gives the kitchen credit for the food.

“So what was that about?” Dani nods to the table as he rejoins her by the counter, taking a sip of his newly filled coffee cup.

“Apparently delivering two stacks of pancakes is worthy of love from a stranger; who knew?”

“I’m sure Blaine will be thrilled.”

Kurt takes another sip of coffee and looks at his ring, remembers their texts earlier. “He’s fully aware of how charming I can be.”

“Even without flowers?”

“Very funny,” Kurt replies as he sets down his mug, “There’s no competition, but even if there was, he certainly wouldn’t have to worry about hungover, simple minded college students.”

“But he could worry over strong minded college students?”

“Are you looking for an argument or something?”

Dani laughs and reaches for a cloth, wiping down the counter. “Nope. I’m just bored, and arguments are more fun.”

Kurt shakes his head, taking a moment to consider his response. “You never say what’s expected, do you?” It comes out as a statement.

“I thought you knew that already,” Dani comments as she focuses on a spot on the counter, “Anyway, since you’re talking to him, how are things in L.A.?”

Kurt smiles and takes another sip of his coffee. “Fine as of last night,” he sets down his mug and raises his hands in a placating gesture when Dani glares, “What? He hasn’t mentioned it today – he just woke up!”

Dani pauses and raises her brows. “So? You have a phone…”

“You’re that interested in California?”

“Remember how I’m bored?”

Text message from Kurt:

Dani wants to know how things are in L.A.

Text message from Blaine:

Dani wants to know?

Text message from Blaine:
You’re my fiancé – you don’t need to have a friend ask to get information ;)

Kurt laughs and shakes his head, ignoring Dani’s question of ‘what did he say?’ and typing out a reply.

Text message from Kurt:

She really does want to know…and I do, too.

Text message from Kurt:

And you should know better – I’d never use the friend ruse

Text message from Blaine:

We just finished breakfast and now it’s off to rehearsal. Although something happened with Jake and Marley – something about her songs, private lives, and judgment? I don’t even want to know…

Text message from Kurt:

It wouldn’t be a competition without some drama ;)

Kurt relays Blaine’s comment to Dani and then pauses, stares at his phone.

Text message from Kurt:

But…everything else is okay?

He sets his phone down and moves his coffee mug so Dani can continue her cleaning; he then takes the coffee pot from the stand, quickly crossing and refilling the mugs of the still hungover students.

Dani’s at her own table when he returns, and he’s internally grateful as he notes the blinking light on his phone.

Text message from Blaine:

Your dad’s fine – he even had a healthy breakfast! :) And Carole was convincing Jake to stop complaining so she’s good, too.

Text message from Blaine:

But in answer to your question, I’m fine. Just nervous.

Kurt feels himself relax as he reads Blaine’s messages, happy for the small insight into his family’s morning.

Text message from Kurt:

Just the right about of nervous, I hope – you’re still performing for you.

Text message from Kurt:

And your songs are wonderful, so keep rehearsal fun too – you guys know this ;)

After hitting send Kurt takes a moment to futilely wish he had the time – and money – to be in California. He knows the New Directions are ready, he knows they’ll perform well; he just wishes
he could see Blaine for himself.

Text message from Blaine:

:) You’re the best cheerleader

Kurt laughs and then sighs when he sees the customer from before – hopefully he doesn’t need more bacon – looking around the diner with a determined look.

Text message from Kurt:

The hungover masses are calling...have a good rehearsal! <3

With a sigh Kurt puts his phone back in his apron pocket, forces a smile on his face, and heads for the table.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

“They were really good –”

“Did you see their spins?”

“Do you know how to tie these –”

Blaine sighs and tunes out the frantic comments of his fellow Glee members. He forces his hands to unclench from fists and continues to head for an empty corner, between the curtain and the wall. Backstage is chaos – nothing uncommon during a performance – but Blaine pushes it aside, focusing on the curtain.

Moments later he pushes the edge of the curtain aside, taking a breath as he peeks around it, eying the crowd. The murmurs blend together, a familiar wall of sound. The lights flicker as Blaine catches sight of a group of young men hurrying to their seats.

The curtain drops quickly, rippling as it falls into place and Blaine steps back with a sharp step.

Breathe in. We’re in Los Angeles for Nationals.

Breathe out. We go on stage in fifteen minutes.

Breathe in. New Directions are the reigning champions.

Breathe out. I have to –

“How you doin’ Blaine?”

Blaine startles at the hand on his shoulder, turns to see Burt beside him with a smile, familiar baseball cap shadowing his face. He flashes a smile and shrugs his shoulders.

“It’s a lot to take in.”

“Certainly different from Lima. But a stage is still a stage, and I’ve been watchin’ your practices, both with the group and on the piano at home; you’re a great performer. Relax.”

A surprised laugh escapes and Blaine shakes his head. “This is my last show choir competition.”

“Yup,” Burt pauses and Blaine barely manages to keep his shock hidden. “So it’s your last
competition, that means something, but it’s not everything. Just do what you do. You’re part of a show choir: show them.”

Blaine starts to respond before stopping, taking more time to consider Burt’s words. They join with Kurt’s from the night before, but the thrum of nervousness stays with him, keeps his hands tapping against his thighs.

Burt speaks again in the ensuing silence. “Carole’ll be here soon. She went back to the room to get some things. I think – she just needed a break. You’re right; it is a lot.”

Despite Burt’s previous words – and Kurt’s complimentary texts from the night before – Blaine’s mind races, and he feels the pressure returning to his shoulders.

They have to win.

“– be in the front. I made sure we got seats so you can pick us out of the crowd.” Blaine forces himself to focus on the end of Burt’s comment, gives him a smile as he finishes speaking.

“I’ll be sure to look to you,” Blaine says, “are you on the right? Left?”

“The middle, actually,” Burt responds with a smile, “but the right – well, the left for you on stage.”

“Alright guys!” Mr. Schue’s shout has Blaine jerking under Burt’s hand before he turns to see the choir director further backstage, anxiously walking back and forth, pulling members of New Directions to him as he passes.

“Time to go,” Burt straightens his hat and Blaine nods before they start walking, meeting up with Artie and Kitty. Burt steps away moments later, and Blaine watches as he joins Mr. Schue a few yards away.

“You ready for this?”

Blaine turns at Artie’s question. “Mm. I hope so…I guess we’ll find out soon, though.”

“Yeah,” Artie rolls his chair a bit closer, lowers his voice as he speaks the next words. “It’s…different, this time. I mean – I know it’s different because of…everything. But I’ve never had a solo in the opening song before.”

“You’ll be great,” Blaine’s quick to reply, “You were awesome in rehearsal earlier.”

“You really are a cheerleader,” Artie’s nervous smile takes any sting out of his mumbled words, and Blaine smiles in response.

“He’s right though,” Kitty adds, taking a seat in Artie’s lap. “Besides, I agree with him and my opinion is the one you care about.”

Absently, Blaine notes that Artie replies but Sam is standing a few feet away, wringing his hands and walking in a small circle.

“You okay?”

“Wha – oh.” Sam stops and turns to face Blaine. “We gotta win this, you know? And we’re good, I know we’re good, but Jean-Baptiste was –”

“Whoa. Sam?” Blaine waits for Sam to meet his gaze before continuing, “Take a breath.”
He does.

“We still gotta win. And I have to help everyone, Blaine, Mr. Schue –”

Blaine holds up a hand to stop Sam’s sentence, internally wincing at the reminder of Sam’s leadership role. “It’s still a performance. And the New Directions can always perform, even before Blam was in the picture.”

Sam smiles and shakes his head. “Right. You’re right. But,” Sam pauses, looks over to where Mr. Schue is still talking with Burt, “there’s more this year. And…wait. Where’s Carole?”

“What?”

“Carole,” Sam gestures over to where their chaperones are still talking. “Where is she?”

“Burt said she just went to get something from their room. She’s on her way, I’m sure.”

“Okay. So for my speech. What do you think of *Braveheart*?”

“Alright everyone! C’mon, we’ve only got a few minutes!” Mr. Schue’s shout thankfully interrupts Blaine’s need to reply, and he turns, joins the New Directions as they gather, Tina skidding to slightly breathless stop moments later. “Okay, it’s a big day so –”

“So go out and show the wonderful audience how amazing the New Directions are!” Carole’s voice interrupts Mr. Schue’s words, and Blaine feels a bit of the tenseness ease from his shoulders. “Sorry I’m late,” Carole continues, “But I mean it. You kids are amazing. The New Directions,” Carole lets out a breath and ducks her head. When she looks back up her eyes shine but her voice stays strong, carrying over the din of backstage. “Finn loved this choir. He really did. And I know that not all of you had the chance to perform with him, but I’ve watched you perform,” Blaine smiles when Carole’s gaze rests on him for a moment, “I’ve watched you practice, you all put your hearts into this. Finn – Finn would be *so proud* of you.”

There’s silence for a moment, and Blaine briefly closes his eyes, remembers Finn’s enthusiasm when they were preparing a year ago.

“He would,” Blaine opens his eyes when he hears Burt’s addition, watches as Carole looks around and he makes sure to offer her a smile when she catches his eye before Burt continues, “Finn would be so proud of you kids.”

“And we’ll be cheering for you regardless of what happens on that stage,” Carole adds, “The performance matters but have fun out there.”

Her words are met with a round of yells, claps, as the New Directions close in, and Blaine steps forward, getting a quick, firm hug from Carole before he’s pulled away, turning to receive a high five with Ryder.

Moments later Burt and Carole are gone, leaving for their seats and Blaine joins the rest of the New Directions as they wait for their cue.

*Text message from Blaine:*

Two minutes!

*Text message from Kurt:*
You'll be amazing! And Dad's sending me video so I'll be able to see later. Wish I could be there!

Text message from Blaine:

Thanks! <3

Text message from Kurt:

Go make the world jealous that you already have a fiancé.

Text message from Blaine:

I don't know about the world…

Text message from Kurt:

Go blow them away

Text message from Kurt:

Love you!! <3

Blaine smiles and puts his phone back in his pocket, ignores the rush of whispers from his fellow Glee members.

Breathe in. It’s a performance.

Breathe out. It’s the same performance as a week ago.

Breathe in. We can win.

Breathe out. We have to win.

The curtain rises and Blaine takes his place on the dark stage. Moments later the lights hit the stage and he quickly blinks before focusing on the audience, spots Burt and Carole beaming in the front row. The music starts then, and Blaine takes a breath as he counts the beats of the introduction. A breath and then he’s singing, crossing the stage before turning, smiling when Artie starts his solo.

Then the measures rush together, the solos from Unique and Ryder blending and Blaine’s holding the final note of the song before he realizes it, crossing the stage seconds later to take a seat at the piano. He waits for a moment, takes a breath and forces his hands to still before placing them on the keys, wrists up and arched as he releases his breath. He casts a quick glance to Tina and steps on the pedal once she nods.

All of his practice for this one performance.

He smiles at Tina, nods in return and then begins to play; he focuses on the runs, on keeping on beat and keeping the notes smooth even when he joins in singing after Sam and Tina have their solos.

Blaine finishes the song and carefully pushes the bench back, getting to his feet and blinking when the lights change, shifting from the white and blue of before to a soft gold. By the time Blaine takes his place beside Unique – finishing the half circle – the angle of the light has changed too, and Blaine keeps his eyes forward (facing stage right rather than the audience) and gives Marley a smile.
He glances around the semi-circle, sees the hint of nervousness everyone’s attempting to hide. Their closing song is their most challenging; a choice borne when the pain of Finn was still fresh, when the choir room stood empty because they couldn’t bear to enter.

Blaine takes another breath before reaching and pulling the circular pitch pipe from his pocket.

A moment later, the tone rings out and he lowers his hand: The New Directions take a breath and then start their **first a capella piece** on the national stage.

The song ends and there’s a beat of silence before a roar of applause echoes in the auditorium and Blaine joins hands with Unique, stepping back until the semi-circle has become a line. They bow and Blaine can’t keep the smile from his face, even as a new thrum of nervousness rises; they’ve performed, they’re done and now all that’s left is for the judges to make their decision.

The clapping continues as Blaine joins the line of New Directions moving backstage, excited whispers carrying over the click of heels.

“Think it was enough?”

Blaine turns at Tina’s question, sees her biting her lip beside him and smiles before giving a small shrug. “I don’t know. We did the best we could though; I know that.”

Tina hums in response and squeezes his arm. “Yeah.”

Now backstage, Blaine drifts aside, Tina moving to follow Unique and Marley while he leans against the wall.

There’s nothing left to do; they’ve performed the best they can, and there’s two more choirs before the judges step out; there’s nothing left to do and Blaine doesn’t know where the New Directions stand.

They have to win. They need to, after the year they’ve had.

Breathe in. *We have to win.*

Breathe out. *I can’t have let them down.*

Blaine ignores the continued murmurs backstage, the echoes of the choir currently performing; he leans against the wall and just breathes.

Text message from Blaine:

And now we wait

-_*-_*_-*-

“That’s it. I’ve had enough of your mopin’ and –”

“Burt!” Carole’s words are sharp, if slightly hushed, and Blaine shifts in his chair, glances to his left to see them standing by the door.

“What?” Burt raises a hand and runs it over his hat before looking away, meeting Blaine’s surprised eyes before facing the rest of the room. “I mean it. So you got second place,” Burt pauses and Blaine sees that all the New Directions have raised their heads, giving Burt their attention, “it’s not the end of the world. You kids are young, you’re in L.A., and you’re supposed to be enjoying the city.”
No one spoke.

“Alright,” Burt offers a smile before taking Carole’s hand, moving to stand in the doorway. “Carole and I are goin’ to look at the sights, and since you have to stay with us, you’re all comin’ too.”

Blaine looked around the room, taking in the still-motionless New Directions before looking back to Burt and Carole. Burt raises his brows when Blaine meets his gaze, and Blaine feels his lips twitch.

“Can’t we stay here, Mr. Hummel?” Blaine turns to face Tina after she asks her question, sees Sam and Unique nodding in agreement beside her.

“Nope,” Burt’s response stays casual, but there’s a firmness to it that has Blaine rising from his seat, moving to cross the room – despite his disheartened mood – as Burt continues, “We’re gonna go explore the sites and be tourists.”

Blaine nods as the rest of the New Directions groan even as they stand, slowly gathering jackets and purses and murmurings of we didn’t win and doesn’t he know we need time to think and think we can sneak away filtering through the room.

“I know Burt’s just trying to make us feel better,” Sam whispers as he wraps an arm around Blaine’s shoulder, “but you’d think he’d get that we don’t want to go anywhere.”

“No,” Blaine agrees, keeping his voice down, “but we don’t have a choice. And maybe it will be good to get out for a while.”

“Maybe. We can – oh!” Blaine looks up at Sam’s exclamation, sees his friend grinning, the opposite of how he appeared just moments before. “Dude! We’re in L.A.! There’s gotta be movie stars everywhere. I can get their signatures! And there’s agents too – don’t worry though,” Sam says around a smile, “if I get discovered I won’t forget you!”

Blaine shakes his head, huffing a laugh at Sam’s enthusiasm as he follows him – and the rest of the New Directions – out of the room. He keeps the slight smile on his face, reminds himself of the fact that he’s Los Angeles.

He’s sight-seeing in the City of Angels.

But we didn’t win.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

“Whoa! You okay?” Burt looks up at Sam’s shout, sees him pulling Blaine further along the sidewalk as the line of cars drive past. He can’t hear Blaine’s reply – too much distance – but he frowns as he takes in Blaine’s pale appearance, the way he’s blindly following Sam’s lead. Burt narrows his eyes, subtly moving so he’s closer to them in the crowd.

“– fine, really.”

“Dude!” Burt winces at Sam’s shout, “You froze! And I had to call your name three times before you even looked up – and that was after you almost walked into traffic.”

Burt sees Blaine give a half-hearted shrug even as he keeps his head down. He can’t make out Blaine’s reply, but it makes Sam shake his head with a huff before he excitedly waves to a tour bus across the street. Tina joins the boys moments later, and Burt starts to smile when she and Sam
start an impromptu performance of *Walking on Sunshine* – only for the smile to fall, stilted, when he sees Blaine keep to the edges rather than joining in.

They arrive back at the hotel minutes later and Burt joins Carole for a quick head-count. Once everyone is accounted for Burt moves to where Blaine’s leaning against the wall, eyes shut, breathing a bit too evenly to be natural.

“Blaine.” Blaine jerks away from the wall, eyes snapping open even as Burt internally winces at having surprised him. “Sorry. You ready to head up?”

There’s a pause for a moment and Burt watches Blaine move away from wall, taking a breath before mumbling his next words. “– going to lie down.”

“Here,” Burt digs through his wallet and passes his hotel key to a confused Blaine, “I overheard your roommates talkin’ about some marathon – if you want sleep you can crash in our room for a while.”

“I –” Blaine stops, starts again, “Thanks, Mr. Hummel.”

“No problem,” Burt nods toward the elevator, “Go rest; we’ll be up in a while.”

A shaky smile and nod and then Blaine’s gone, heading to the elevators and unaware of Burt’s lingering concern.

“Mr. Hummel!” Burt turns at Marley’s shout, sees her standing between a glaring Jake and Ryder.

Burt starts to cross the room even as he lets out a sigh – so much for his relaxing afternoon.

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Blaine retreats to the back wall of the elevator after he presses the button for the fourth floor, glad for the slight chill from the metal. Surprisingly, the walk Burt had suggested had lightened his mood – it had taken almost an hour, but it really was impossible to stay upset when faced with the Walk of Fame. Now, however, away from the distractions of bright lights and famous landmarks it’s harder to focus on the positive. Blaine forces his breathing to remain steady as he watches the numbers rise, hurrying forward – despite being the only occupant – when the doors open to his floor.

He enters Burt and Carole’s silent room moments later, taking in the sight of familiar suitcases and a few discarded shirts – evidence of Carole’s unease? – on one of the beds.

He’s in the middle of re-hanging the shirts when it hits him: He ran again.

He lied and ran again.

He just needed space – he needed to think, to not be surrounded by curious friends and so he claimed rest. But he didn’t need to sleep; he couldn’t. But, he had run away.

Blaine’s hands tighten in anger. He had been fine. He had been taking in the sights, attempting to take Burt’s advice. He remembers Sam laughing at a hideously dressed mannequin as they waited at the crosswalk, remembers starting to walk and then he’d seen it, two cars back from the light. It wasn’t the same car – it couldn’t be the same car, but there it was: a white Taurus, with *Robin Thicke* blaring from it despite its rolled up windows.

He doesn’t remember freezing, but Sam’s ‘you almost walked into traffic’ comment won’t leave
his mind.

He froze because of a car.

Breathe in. *It couldn’t be the same car.*

Breathe out. *It can’t be.*

Breathe in. *It was a tourist.*

Breathe out. *There’s no reason for any of them to be in L.A.*

Blaine jumps when he hears a rattle, sees the hangar hitting the closet doorframe due to his shaking hands. He carefully hangs the shirt in the closet before stepping back, moving to lean against the closet door.

His hands are still shaking.

He froze earlier because of a car.

A car he saw while in Los Angeles.

He’s in *California.*

He’s in California, but there was a white Taurus –

*“Sadie Hawkins isn’t for gays!”*  
*“Be a man, Anderson!”*

*Pain surrounds him, keeps him pinned as effectively as the arms earlier. There’s a roar of sound then, green and white flashes speeding away, but his breath won’t come and –*  
And he can’t breathe.

The world is tilting, shifting through blurred vision.

He’s in California.

They can’t be here.

He’s in California and he can’t breathe.

_**_*_*_*_

*I know they’re good kids, but if I have to tell them ‘lights out’ one more time I’m takin’ their trophy.*”

Beside him, Carole laughs quietly as they continue down the hall toward their room. “You’d never do that, Burt.”

Burt reaches up to adjust his hat before offering Carole a smile. “Nah, but I can still think it.”

Carole hums in response as they arrive at the door, offers him a raised brow when he doesn’t move forward. “Too tired for chivalry?”

“Oh,” Burt shrugs, “Blaine’s got my key; kid needed a break earlier and his roommates were
havin’ some movie marathon.”

“I hope he was able to get some rest,” Carole adds as she fishes the keycard from her purse, triumphantly waving it in front of Burt once she has it in hand. “It’s been a long day.”

The keycard slides in easily and Burt feels some of the tension in his shoulders drop as the light changes to green.

The door opens and Burt follows Carole into the dim room, staying quiet in the hope that the lack of lighting means Blaine got his nap. Still, he reaches for the bedside lamp as soon as he’s close enough; hotels may follow the same basic setup, but he doesn’t relish the thought of stumbling around. He hears the gasp as the pale light floods the room, and he blinks while suppressing a sigh: he’d hoped Blaine would be spared nightmares.

“Burt!” He turns at Carole’s shout, follows her gaze from where she’s turned away from the bed – her purse and its contents scattered across the bedspread – and it’s only as he takes in the sight that he registers that both beds are empty.

Blaine’s on the floor, knees against his chest, gasping in uneven, shaky breaths.

Burt crosses the room in wide steps, suppressing a wince as he kneels on the floor, a flash of pain jarring his knees. Absently, he notes Carole standing beside him, her shadow covering Blaine’s downturned face.

“Hey, kid.” Burt reaches out, but his hand stops inches from Blaine’s shoulder – for once, he’s not sure if a hug would be beneficial.

Blaine hasn’t reacted to Burt’s words; if not for the harsh gasps – how had he missed those before? – he’d be a statue, frozen against the closet door.

“Blaine? Sweetie?” Burt’s unease grows when nothing changes.

“Blaine?” Burt forces the anxious worry away, focuses on the still unmoving teen before continuing, “You with us?”

No change.

“Blaine,” Carole’s kneeling now, eye-level with Blaine (if his head were raised) and Burt meets her concerned gaze before she turns back, “Blaine, you have to calm down, okay? You have to breathe.” Burt hears Carole take a breath, watches as she pauses before hesitantly placing a hand on Blaine’s shoulder.

Blaine jerks at the touch, his head barely missing a painful crash with the door, and his panicked eyes dart around the room.

“It’s okay,” Burt marvels at the steadiness of Carole’s voice, watches as Blaine turns to face her. “Just breathe with me, okay? Just breathe. You have to calm down, Blaine. Deep breaths. Breathe with me.”

Burt watches as Blaine’s eyes dart around some more before meeting – if not focusing – on him. He knows Blaine is trying, sees the struggle even as his uneven breaths continue to fill the room.

It isn’t working.

Burt had hoped to never feel as hopeless as he had after Kurt’s mother passed, after getting the
As Blaine continues to struggle to breathe, unable to talk, Burt feels the echoes of that pain returning.

“Blaine,” the blank gaze that meets his isn’t one he’s used to, but he forces himself to keep it. “Blaine, kid, you have to calm down for us. I know you’re tryin’ – I can see that, but it’s not enough.”

Stilted, gasping breaths are the only reply.

“He needs something to focus on,” Burt turns to face Carole at her words, feels his face twist in confusion.

“What?”

“A bag, something –” Carole cuts herself off, looking away from Blaine for a moment to nod toward the rest of the room, “he needs help to breathe.”

Burt shakes his head before Carole’s finishes speaking, keeping his surprise that breathing into a bag isn’t just for movies to himself. “The only bags we got are our suitcases…”

“Right,” Carole turns back to Blaine, moves so she’s directly in front of him. “Blaine, look at me – good – Blaine, you have to breathe with me, okay? Here,” Burt watches as she puts her left hand on her chest before reaching for Blaine’s right, moving it so it rests with hers, rising and falling with her breaths. “Follow me, okay? Look at your hand, and count with me.”

Slowly, with Carole’s direction for several too-long, too-tense minutes (and right before Burt’s about to suggest a trip to the hospital) the gasps fade. But Blaine stays two shades pale of normal, and while his breaths are now even, they’re still too rushed and labored for Burt to feel comfortable.

“How about we get off this floor, hm?”

Blaine shakily nods at Carole’s question, and Burt quickly – if gently – steadies Blaine’s arm, guiding him to the nearest bed once he’s standing.

There’s a hint of sound as Blaine sits and Burt makes sure to meet his gaze, “What was that, Blaine?”

“‘m – sorry –”

“Just keep breathing, Blaine.” Burt watches as Blaine briefly looks up at Carole’s comment before quickly dropping his gaze, focusing on the floral comforter instead.

“She’s right.” Blaine’s breaths seem to echo in the ensuing silence, and Burt hastens to fill it. “You just keep breathing, kid.”

And Blaine does – loud, harsh breaths, but even enough for Burt to feel some of the tension easing from his shoulders. He looks up, meeting Carole’s concerned gaze. She looks to the door before glancing to her phone, and Burt nods in acceptance; she gives Blaine a careful squeeze on the shoulder before stepping back and exiting the room.

Burt slowly stands too, moving to sit next to Blaine on the bed.
Blaine doesn’t react, stays hunched against the headboard. Burt studies his profile, marveling at how small Blaine looks. Burt’s seen him after his reaction in the shop, when he crumbled cookies and faked smiles; he’s seen him shaking in his car, bruises in stark relief against his skin, frightened and confused as his world turned inside out; and yet even then Blaine had managed a half-hearted smile.

Now, Blaine stays eerily still, knees drawn up and head lowered, hiding his slightly glazed eyes.

For the first time since Blaine dropped the bucket in the shop, Burt is unsure of what to do next. Still, he needs to cover the sound of Blaine’s too-quick breaths, the slight buzz from the lamps. So, he talks. He talks about Kurt, about childhood tea parties and acted out musicals, about blanket forts to hide from the world, and surprise cupcakes to assuage grief.

Burt’s just moved to more recent years, to Blaine’s introduction and acceptance in the family, when there’s a click and the sound of the door opening. He looks up and gives Carole a small smile, taking in the absence of her phone, but the small bag clutched in her hand.

Burt carefully rises from the bed, moves to stand by Carole near the entrance to the room.

“Shopping?”

Carole offers him a dry look before raising the bag so he can take in the pharmacy logo. “I called Dr. Schamp.”

Burt raises his eyes, does some quick mental math. “She answered this late on a Saturday?”

“Emergency line.” Carole drops her voice, shifts her gaze to where Blaine’s still huddled on the bed. “I explained what happened and she shared her assessment,” she nods toward the bag, “low dose Ativan, at least until we get back.”

Burt sighs. “I know he was hopin’ to avoid meds.”

Carole’s gaze hardens a bit. “There’s nothing wrong with taking medication to help. And Blaine’s getting help, whether he wants it or not.”

She’s walking across the room to Blaine before Burt manages a reply.

“– need you to take this, okay?” Burt catches the end of Carole’s question as he exits the bathroom, paper cup of water in hand. Slowly, Blaine looks up, a hint of confusion on his face even as a shaky hand reaches for the small pill in Carole’s.

“You’ll probably feel tired after this,” Carole explains as Blaine carefully sets the pill under his tongue before taking the cup from Burt, “but Dr. Schamp felt it would help. You have an appointment on Monday, too, so if this dose doesn’t help enough we can fix it then, okay?”

Burt thinks Blaine nods, but he can’t be certain. Regardless, minutes later Blaine’s breathing finally, finally calms to something almost normal. Slowly, his knees unbend too, and Carole removes his shoes while Burt hands him a soft, worn t-shirt – an old *Hummel Tires* that definitely belongs to Kurt – to replace the colorful polo.

Blaine’s asleep before Carole finishes fussing with the blankets.

“Did he say anything?”
Burt turns at Carole’s question even as he shakes his head. “No. First time he moved was when you gave him that pill.”

“Mm.” Carole hums in response. “I didn’t think he would, but –” Carole stops, reaches for Burt’s hand, “I’d hoped we had a hint to what caused it.”

Possibilities echo in Burt’s mind, but he only nods in response; they can’t know for certain until Blaine tells them – if he does. Burt shakes his head. “Wish he had, but the only one talkin’ was me.”

“Well, you still helped. I know –”

A buzzing interrupts Carole’s comment.

Burt automatically reaches for his phone, sees Carole doing the same, only to stop when he sees his phone is blank. A quick glance and he sees Carole’s is the same: dark. Carole’s standing moments later, crossing the room before bending in front of the closet door.

Blaine’s phone.

“They’re from Kurt,” Carole comments, showing the lock screen and its ‘6 new text messages from Kurt’ “but I can’t read them. It’s locked.”

Wordlessly, Burt holds out his hand.

“I may have glanced over when we were watching the game,” he explains in response to Carole’s raised brows, “it’s not like he was tryin’ to hide anything. Besides,” he hastens to explain, “I figured it was better to know, with everything.”

A chime, and the screen clears.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Good luck!

*Text message from Kurt:*

I love you! <3

*Text message from Kurt:*

I know you’re performing, but remember that I expect a detailed report later – dad’s recording can’t give me the full performance ;-) 

*Text message from Kurt:*

I need a report soon, mister. Somehow I got the boring tables today.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Send me some of your good will (I’m guessing you’re out celebrating) – we perform in twenty minutes!!!!

*Text message from Kurt:*

[photo] We have an audience!
Burt sighs, noting that the last message was over an hour ago – Kurt’s probably on stage now – and looks up, meeting Carole’s gaze.

“I need to call him.”

“Mm,” Carole agrees, taking the phone from his hand and glancing over to where Blaine’s sleeping, “it’s probably good that he’s asleep, then. It gives Kurt time to process.”

“Us, too.” Burt reaches up, runs restless hands over his cap, “I don’t know what to tell him – we still don’t know exactly what happened.”

“You can tell him as much as you know; it’s better than nothing.”

“He’s gonna want to fly out here.”

“Of course he is,” Carole’s agreement has Burt looking up, “he loves him.”

“Isn’t high school love supposed to be charming and cute?”

“You never thought of Kurt and Blaine like that – don’t lie, Burt Hummel.”

Burt offers a weak smile, “No. But I didn’t want this, either.” They’re still just kids. Kids who’ve had to deal with too much – he wishes they could bask in their youth a little longer.

“No one did,” Carole comments, interrupting his thoughts. She looks over to the bed again, “But that’s life. And –” a breath before she continues, “our children grow up. We can’t protect them from the world.” She moves then, crossing to set Blaine’s phone on the nightstand. “We can’t hide them away, but we can fight for them, give them what they need before they leave.”

Burt pulls Carole into a careful hug, ignoring her suspiciously bright eyes. He holds her in the quiet room, wishes he was the hero Kurt believed him to be as a child: but there’s no ‘bad guy’ to battle, no quick fix to save the day.

He eyes Blaine, his chest rising and falling in medicated sleep, and offers Carole one last squeeze before stepping back.

He needs to call his son.

─*─*─*─

“– asking for another performance next week! We killed it!”

Kurt feels his smile – which he thought was already as wide as possible – grow even more, his cheeks aching with the strain in response to Elliott’s comment.

“You mean I killed it with my guitar solo,” Dani replies, scooting closer to Santana so Elliott can take a seat and pass around the waters in his hands.

“You keep thinkin’ that, Dani,” Elliott adds a wink to the comment, taking out any possible sting even as Santana shoots him a half-hearted glare.

“I think,” Kurt interrupts, preempting any argument, “that we should just be happy that the audience enjoyed –”

“Here,” Santana interrupts Kurt’s comment, holding out his bag. “Take this. If I wanted a sex toy right now Dani and I’d already be gone.”
For a moment, Kurt’s lost for words. “What?”

“Your phone,” Santana adds in a dry tone, waving the bag slightly, “it’s been adding some vibrations to our seating and I’m not in the mood.”

Kurt takes the bag, ignoring Santana’s mumblings about clingy couples. He dig through its contents, smiling when he finally produces his phone.

His smile falls when he sees the ‘5 missed calls from Dad’ and ‘1 text message from Carole’ on the lock screen.

He’s out of the booth moments later, ignoring Dani and Elliott’s calls and pushing his way through the crowd. Outside, leaning against the wall with the din of customers behind him, he dials.

His dad answers on the second ring, and Kurt presses the phone harder against his ear, ignores the strain on his hand as he listens.

New York is the city that never sleeps, a bustling city of movement, but Kurt can’t move, stays silent and still under the streetlamps.
Chapter 22

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 22

Blaine exits the choir room quickly after Mr. Schue finishes his ‘you-lost-nationals-but-second-place-isn’t-horrible’ speech for the third time this week and dismisses Glee – for once Blaine’s grateful for his excuse of a doctor’s appointment to get out of the post Glee discussion. He hears Tina and Sam complaining behind him, a hybrid dialogue combining the worst of Mr. Schue’s phrases with the general melancholic words that have been staples since receiving the second place trophy on Saturday.

Adjusting his bag after opening the lobby door, Blaine blinks in the bright sunlight before crossing to his car.

Text message from Blaine:
We put the trophy in the case today

Text message from Blaine:
No practice though – at least we get a small break before the end-of-year performances

Finishing the text, Blaine drops his phone beside his bag on the passenger’s seat, only to reach over when it starts ringing moments later.

“Hey,” Blaine balances the phone between his ear and shoulder as he fumbles with his keys.

“Hey you,” Kurt’s voice comes clearly across the line, but it’s slightly strained, radiates tension.

“Is everything okay?” Blaine leans back in his seat, moves the cradle the phone in his hand even as he feels his face tighten in confusion.

“You tell me.” The short response has Blaine sitting up straight again, tightening his hand around his phone.

“What?”

A sigh. “Sorry. I just –” there’s another sigh and Blaine forces himself to stay silent while he waits
for Kurt to continue. “You really want to talk about Glee?”

“Yes?”

“I didn’t –” Kurt’s response descends to mumblings and Blaine glances at the clock.

“Kurt?”

“I don’t want to fight with you.”

“Well, I didn’t know we were fighting, so congratulations.”

“Blaine –”

“What?” Blaine snaps, sitting forward in his seat, “What did I do? Did you not want to know about my day, or something? Did I forget about a concert, did you just want me to listen to your day at NYADA? What did I do, Kurt?” Silence rings in the car once he finishes; his breath sounds unusually loud until Kurt replies.

“You didn’t talk to me!” Blaine pulls the phone back from his ear at the loudness of Kurt’s response. “God, Blaine – you had a panic attack Saturday! I got one of the worst phone calls of my life five days ago, and the most you’ve said on it is that you’re sorry! I don’t want you to be sorry. I want you to talk to me. I want to know what happened; what caused it; what’s to keep it from happening again. Every time I have to wait for another text, or another call – every time! I worry that you’re somewhere and you can’t breathe. And today – today when you have your second therapy appointment of the week, by the way – I’ve been pacing, ruining my hair and unable to hold a conversation with anyone because I’m too distracted to pay attention to them! I could barely focus to take notes in class! I’ve been – you texted me about Glee, Blaine. Glee!”

“I have talked about it! But maybe I don’t want to talk about it every day! Did you think of that? Maybe I want to be a normal high school student and complain about calculus and Mr. Schue’s terrible pep-talk, and not have my fiancé reminding me at every turn that I’m anything but normal, living in his parents’ house because my dad can’t stand to look at me and I got beaten up after a Sadie Hawkins dance!”

“I wouldn’t have to if you’d just talk to me! And don’t patronize me, Blaine Anderson. Your two-minute summary about Saturday and telling me Dr. Schamp is keeping your Ativan for emergencies isn’t talking about it! You said you’d stop hiding – stop ignoring things. And don’t try to twist this, either – you know I am glad you’re with my parents. But we can’t keep doing this; we can’t be planning our wedding when you still try and keep everything to yourself!” And then, mumbled so Blaine almost didn’t catch it, “That’s what started this in the first place.”

“Don’t!” Blaine’s voice was hard, a tone he couldn’t remember using on Kurt before, “Or, is that what this is? You want to call off the wedding because you finally realized that you have a broken fiancé and that’s too much baggage for the oh-so-talented Kurt Hummel?”

A choked breath is the only response and Blaine blinks, feels the pressure building behind his eyes as he recalls his last words. “Oh God, I’m sorry. I didn’t – the meds are messing with my head and –”

“Meds?” Kurt’s voice is soft, drastically so after the words of before, but his tone carries a sharp edge of wariness that has Blaine clutching the phone tighter.

“Yeah…I.” Blaine takes a breath, looks at the band on his ring finger, “Dr. Schamp prescribed me Elavil.” Another breath. “It’s an antidepressant. She um – I take it once a day. But until I’ve
adjusted and she’s settled on the dosage it can cause mood swings.”

“Okay,” Kurt’s voice has returned to normal, and Blaine feels some of the tension leave his shoulders. “Okay. You’re – Why didn’t you tell me? You have to – you didn’t think I would –”

“No!” Blaine winces at the volume of his interruption, “No, I just…it’s a low dose. She just wants me to try it, for now. See if it helps.”

“So that was reason to not tell me?” Kurt’s voice holds a trace of hurt, and Blaine lets his head fall against the headrest, allows himself to wallow for a moment before he replies.

“It was one more thing, Kurt. One more thing that shows how much has changed – and I didn’t want to focus on it. On the fact that I’m now on daily medication.”

“There’s absolutely nothing wrong with that, Blaine.”

“No,” Blaine agrees, “but it’s not exactly normal, either.”

“Being normal is highly overrated. And besides,” Blaine takes note of the slight teasing tone, feels himself start to smile preemptively, “you were the lead soloist of the Warblers as a sophomore and asked the male Prom Queen to dance: you’ve never been just normal.”

Blaine laughs. “Of course you see the good.”

“Mm,” Kurt agrees. When he speaks again his voice has a hint of nervousness, a hesitance that kills Blaine’s smile. “Blaine? Please don’t take this the wrong way. I don’t want to fight.” A pause and then Kurt’s voice steadies. “I really, really don’t. But earlier? That wasn’t just a mood swing from a new medication.”

“No,” Blaine sighs, keeps his voice soft. “It wasn’t.”

“I get that this isn’t the easiest thing to talk about. I really don’t expect you to tell me everything.” Kurt’s earnest reply has Blaine nodding, even as Kurt continues, “It’s not even about –” a pause, “I was so scared when Dad called, Blaine. So, so scared.”

Blaine leans back in his seat, takes a moment to think over the weekend, to pretend he’d gotten a call from Burt, if he’d had to listen, states away, as Burt told him Kurt was in trouble.

He takes a deep breath, shakes his head even as he looks to his ring again, and reminds himself that Kurt is fine, safe in New York.

Blaine steadies his hand and replies. “I’m sorry. I can’t imagine if – I promise I’ll call more.” When Kurt sighs Blaine tightens his grip on the phone, starts talking again. “I’ll tell you what’s going on. I will. I just wish I could forget it, and it’s so – I don’t want it to hurt you.” Blaine takes a breath, forces himself to continue, “It’s easier to keep things separate. There’s school, and therapy, and then there’s you, and it’s just…” Blaine lets the sentence die, “I’m sorry, Kurt.”

Silence reigns for a moment.

“I don’t want you to apologize to me, Blaine. And,” a pause and then Kurt continues, “as much as I’m grateful that you trusted me with what you just said, I don’t want you to tell me what you’re feeling out of guilt. I want you to talk to me because we’re in this together. I love you, and part of that means being partners.”

“We are!” Blaine insists, “I don’t like talking about this with anyone.”
“I’m not just anyone, though.”

“No,” Blaine agrees, “you’re my fiancé.”

“I just – don’t pretend for me, okay? I mean, if you really want to complain about calc or Mr. Schue that’s fine. But…I know there’s more going on, so you don’t have to ignore that with me.”

“Can I blame it on habit?” Blaine attempts to bring some levity to the conversation, “Like the apologies?”

A soft laugh echoes down the line and Blaine relaxes, rests his shoulder back against the seat. “I’m afraid that excuse is already taken. But,” Blaine leans forward when Kurt’s voice takes on a soft tone, a touch of hesitance, “you’ll stop pretending, right? For me?”


“Oh! I’m sorry – don’t be late, but drive safe, okay?”

“Of course! I’ll call you later.”

“I’m holding you to that.”

Blaine smiles. “I love you. Kurt?”

“Yes?”

“We’re okay, right?” Blaine keeps his voice light, but he can’t control the slight tremble at the end.

“We’re so okay. I love you, too. Just – don’t forget to call, okay?”

“Not possible,” Blaine assures, and ends the call moments later.

He starts the car and *Human* drifts from the speakers. Exiting McKinley’s parking lot, he forces his thoughts to stay focused on the cars ahead of him, on the stop signs and traffic lights. Still, he arrives at his destination less than twenty minutes later, shutting off the engine before slowing unbuckling his seatbelt and reaching for his bag and phone.

He exits the car, double checking to ensure he has his phone before pressing the lock button. He’s seated in the waiting room, tapping out beats on his knee and taking in the warm – if cliché – décor minutes later, the check-in and entry having passed in a blur.

*Text message from Kurt:*

You’re still the kindest, bravest man I know – nothing can change that! <3

When his name is finally called, he quickly stands, absently straightening his clothes before reaching for his bag. His hands may shake, but his smile remains honest, unmoving.

_*.*_

Kurt slowly walks down the hall, adjusting his bag so it rests more comfortably on his shoulder. He keeps to the edge of the hall, hoping to avoid the slicker spots on the tile floor – a recipe for falls and embarrassment.
He takes his time, avoiding the small clusters of students waiting for another class, or talking about various parties; he ignores the slight headache building behind his eyes, pauses when a small group rushes out of an adjacent hallway. Shaking his head, Kurt pulls his phone from his pocket, sighing when he sees no new texts.

Not that he’d honestly expected any.

Blaine’s appointment would have ended while he was in class, and Kurt knew Blaine would want some time to himself before talking with others, even his fiancé. Still, after their conversation earlier he can’t help but feel nervous, anxious to hear from his fiancé.

Blaine had promised to call, to text, something – and Blaine wouldn’t lie about that. Still, Kurt remembers the angry, hurtful words from earlier and briefly closes his eyes, cursing his impatience. He hadn’t meant to snap at Blaine, and Blaine wasn’t innocent either, but losing his control as he had wasn’t helpful to anyone. Kurt takes in a slow breath, reminding himself that Blaine hadn’t ended the call in anger.

He relaxes his hand, relinquishing the white-knuckled grip on his phone before sliding it back in his pocket. By now, Blaine would be at the shop. The lack of texts is normal – based on Blaine’s appointment from Monday – and yet a small part of Kurt can’t help but remember his snap response earlier, Blaine’s rushed and panicked reply.

Kurt shakes his head, reminds himself that his call with Blaine ended with ‘I love you’ and Blaine’s promise to call later.

And he’ll work on his patience, on not pressuring Blaine.

Stepping outside, he pauses under the overhang, taking a moment to open his umbrella (standing at an awkward angle to avoid the smokers off the side) before moving to the sidewalk, heading for the coffee shop not far from campus. At least the rain leaves the sidewalks clearer than usual, so his hurried steps remain unhindered.

He smiles slightly when he finally enters the shop, the scent of coffee easing some of the stress from his shoulders. Carefully holding his umbrella to the side, he joins the surprisingly short line, ordering his coffee along with a sandwich before finding an empty table. He scans his sheet music as he eats, reviewing the crescendos and suggestions his professor had added to help him ‘connect’ with the music. Once he’s finished his sandwich he puts in his headphones, listens to the accompaniment and mentally hums his part. He’s run through it twice, and is debating getting another cup of coffee when the music is taken from his hands even as the scrape of chairs has him jumping.

“Hummel, why don’t you save the practicing for when your boytoy has your mouth full. I’m sure he’ll appreciate more than us.”

“What? No!” Kurt feels the flush hot on his cheeks, and studiously ignores the smirks on his bandmates’ faces. “I was reviewing notes from my conference yesterday.” He pauses then, narrowing his eyes as he looks around the table. “How did – are you guys stalking me or did I just miss a mass text?”

“Oh, we were stalking.” Dani’s voice stays upbeat, and Kurt leans back a bit in his chair. “Not that it was too hard, you’re here every Thursday.”

Kurt blinks before slowly taking a sip from his empty coffee cup. “Okay…”
“So what’s up with the hobbit, anyway?”

“Santana!” Dani’s admonishment has Santana crossing her arms, and Kurt uses the moment to collect his thoughts.

“I think what Santana meant,” Elliott adds from next to Kurt, “is that we’re wondering how you’re doing, given everything.”

“I’m fine,” the words come out more clipped than Kurt intended, and he studiously keeps his eyes on the table.

“Wow. And I thought Schue was a bad liar.”

“Sorry. I just –” Kurt sighs before looking up with a shrug. “Believe it or not I don’t have that much to say.”

“Since when do you not want to share your opinion, Hummel?”

Kurt sees Dani’s open curiosity, Elliott leaning forward in his seat, and Santana’s smirk; he sighs, remembers how for all the petty arguments about the band, they still listen when he talks, offering advice when they can. He knows Blaine better than anyone, but Blaine’s words from earlier still have him on edge. He loves Blaine, and he’ll do whatever he can to continue to help.

So he takes his own advice, and talks.

_*.*_.*_.

Blaine waves to the mechanics as he enters the garage, casting a quick glance before spotting Burt in his office. He heads for the restroom and quickly changes before moving through the various cars in the garage, pausing just outside Burt’s office when he notices the phone held in Burt’s hand. Burt looks up moments later, however, and gestures for Blaine to enter the room.

He takes a seat in one of the faded chairs as Burt rolls his eyes and gestures to his call. Blaine ducks his head to hide a smile and crosses his arms before pulling out his phone. He stares at his lock screen for a moment, taking in Kurt’s bright eyes and wide smile before tapping in his password and pulling up his texts.

When he hears Burt ending the call minutes later, his and Kurt’s conversation is still open, with no new messages sent.

He shakes his head and puts his phone away.

“The supplier in Columbus mailed me the wrong part, and they wanted me to pay for the replacement.” Burt huffs a laugh, “Turns out they hired a new worker whose accuracy weakens when he speed reads. Anyway,” Burt adds as he adjusts his hat, “we have back-to-back oil changes ‘til close.” Blaine stands as Burt does, following him back to the garage, he quickly glances away from the truck to his left –

*green and white speed past*

*he can’t see*

*he can’t escape*

*he can’t run*
he’s so scared and he’s held down

- he blinks and Burt stops in front a maroon Toyota Camry, the hood already open. “This one’s a couple of months overdue – figured we check it first.”

Blaine nods and leans in, looking over the engine.

“Never understood why people wait. The date is on the car an’ they still can’t be bothered to bring it in on time. And now,” Burt gestures to the car, “they’re gonna need more than that oil change.”

Blaine hums in agreement as he continues to look over the car, absently noting the older model of engine.

“So,” Blaine looks up at Burt’s comment, watches as the man then moves to look at the engine as well, “how was school today; you had a quiz, right?”

Blaine looks up quickly, feels a brief flare of pain in his neck from the swift action. Of course Burt Hummel would remember a throw away comment from two days before.

“Yeah,” Blaine smiles before remembering the assessment. “Vocabulary and an essay over A Streetcar Named Desire.”

“Well I’m sure you did great.”

Blaine shrugs and leans back down, eyeing where Burt’s got his hand covered in oil. “That’s the hope.”

“Right,” Burt sighs and stands, offering a smile when the sound of his back cracking is audible even over the sounds in the rest of the garage. “Mind grabbing what we’ll need from the rack? I meant to get it before that call.”

Blaine stands with an absent smile, moving to gather the requested tools; he doesn’t notice Burt’s gaze as he crosses the garage, misses the slight frown that grows when it takes two tries for him to grab hold of one of the tools.

“So,” Burt starts once Blaine’s back and they’re both busy checking under the hood, “I’m in D.C. next week; I told Jim to let you help out whenever you wanted, so you’re not on the schedule. That okay?”

“Oh,” Blaine pauses, pulling away from the engine, “That’s – I mean, thanks, but you could have added me to the schedule. I don’t mind.”

“I know you don’t, kid,” a quick glance shows Burt’s smile, “but you’ve got a lot goin’ on; you don’t need to make stoppin’ by here a requirement. Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad for the help, and you’re always welcome to help out, but senior year is trying enough – don’t push yourself just to work here, too.”

Blaine takes a breath, bites his tongue to keep his ‘I can handle it’ silent, trapped between clenched teeth. “Thanks,” Blaine feels his smile turn brittle, “but I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

“Mm,” Burt agreed, “seems everyone is, lately.”

Blaine jerks back, out from the car. “What?”

He watches and Burt sighs and carefully steps back, setting his tools aside before running his hands
over his cap. “I know –” a pause and then Burt starts again, “You’re going through a lot. Just remember that you’re not alone, alright?”

Blaine nods, keeps his eyes on the concrete floor until the burning recedes and he’s able to meet Burt’s gaze steadily.

They complete their work on the car in silence.

-*-*-*-

“You’re sure we have lids for all these?” Burt stared at the Tupperware containers, at the lids that somehow, despite their stack, didn’t appear to match any of the clear boxes currently out on the counter.

“Yes, they’re all there,” a pause, “if it’s too complicated we could trade?” Carole’s voice stays light, teasing even over the rush of water from the sink. “I know how much you love doing dishes.”

Burt sighs and stares at the mess of plastic on the counter before glancing up to the shelf. “Blaine offered to help clean up.”

“And I believe your words were, ‘and you have homework’ before you implied that helping us would make us feel old?”

Burt eyes the cabinet, resolutely not turning towards his wife. By the time he finds both a box and lid Carole has finished washing all the plates, and is laughing at him from by the stove.

“Congressman Hummel, how does it feel to have been beaten by some plastic?”

Burt continues to scoop the leftovers into the container before moving to place it in the fridge.

From her spot by the sink with the now-empty pans, Carole sighs. “Why did you tell him that?”

“What?”

“Blaine.” Carole carefully rinses the plate and sets it in the dishwasher. “He did offer to help, after all.”

“He’s got enough on his mind.”

“Burt?” Carole turns off the water, crosses to stand beside him at the table.

“You know Kurt called me earlier? Apparently he and Blaine got into a fight. I don’t – he didn’t give me specifics or anything, but it rattled him. Blaine hadn’t told him about the Elavil –”

“He didn’t tell us, either.”

“No,” Burt sighs, “but leavin’ the bag out where we can see it is as good as.” Burt reaches up, runs his hands over his face. “Anyway, he seemed on edge, at the shop,” he reaches out, carefully tangles Carole’s hand in his own, “not enough to upset anyone, but he paused a lot, seemed to be debatin’ his words.”

“That to be expected.”

“Doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“No,” Carole squeezes his hand, “but he’s getting help. And his argument with Kurt – how he was
at the shop—some of that’s the meds; they’re going to cause some mood swings for a while. And the rest.” Carole shrugs, “he’s polite, but at heart he’s still a teenage boy.”

Burt huffs a laugh. “It’s easy to forget sometimes, without the yelling and the mess.”

“Kurt Hummel cleaned this house more than you did.”

Burt rolls his eyes and gestures toward the sink. “Was that a subtle way of suggesting I finish the dishes?”

“Well, I certainly wouldn’t say no.”

_*.*.*.*_

Kurt plays the melody again, leans forward on the bench in an effort to better hear the ‘subtle hints of melancholy’ his professor had described. The minor key keeps the tone from sounding upbeat, but that’s all he notices.

He leans back moments later, a frustrated sigh escaping his lips.

His plan had been to take advantage of the empty loft (Rachel was busy with something _Funny Girl_ related, and Santana had left for Dani’s with a smirk and an overnight bag) and use the piano to pick out the nuances he couldn’t hear through his iPod.

Except the piano doesn’t appear to hold any secrets, despite what his professor had said. He eyes his phone for a moment, debating. He hasn’t heard from Blaine since before his therapy appointment.

_Text message from Kurt:_

[photo] Is piano practice always frustrating?

_Text message from Blaine:_

Not always, but often. It’s why almost everyone can play Chopsticks but only a few know Goldberg Variations ;)

_Text message from Blaine:_

Take a break?

Kurt smiles at the message, slipping from the piano stool and grabbing his mug of coffee before heading for his room.

_Text message from Kurt:_

Take one with me? My Skype is feeling neglected

_Text message from Blaine:_

Give me half an hour to finish up Civics?

Kurt agrees, smiling as he moves to straighten his hair and move his computer from his desk to his bed. A sip of tepid coffee has him grimacing and when he returns from re-heating his drink his computer is beeping; he quickly sets the mug on the nightstand before scrambling on his bed.
“Hi!” Kurt pauses, takes a moment to calm his breathing and run a hand over his hair before leaning back against his pillows.

“Everything okay?” Blaine’s laughing, leaning forward so much that the top of his curls disappear, cut off from the camera.

“Yeah – yeah, sorry. I had to set down my coffee. And,” Kurt continues, taking in Blaine’s quick glance down at the clock, “yes I need it this late; my rewrite is due tomorrow and I have to finish memorizing my lines for Acting.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

Kurt raises his brows. “You didn’t need to.”

“No,” Blaine’s smile turns shy, “I usually don’t, with you.”

Kurt takes a breath, debates taking the opening Blaine had unwittingly left him. In front of him, Blaine’s face stays pale in the light of the camera, but aside from the slightly unsettling shade he looks comfortable, soft and happy in one of Kurt’s old t-shirts.

“Do –” Kurt sighs, starts again. “You will though, right?” When Blaine’s face scrunches in confusion he quickly continues. “We’ll still talk, I mean. I’m sorry about –”

“No!” Blaine’s voice echoes through the speakers, his lurch forward disjointed in the lagging camera. “Don’t apologize. I’m sorry for making you think –” the picture blurs as he shakes his head, “I’m sorry for not telling you about the meds. Really.”

“It’s not about that. Not all of it, anyway,” Kurt reaches for his mug, taking a sip and gathering his thoughts. “Do…do I bring it up to much? I don’t mean to – that’s not how I see you – I just worry, Blaine.”

“I know,” the response is strained, and Kurt hides a wince when he catches Blaine’s face tighten even through the low-quality camera. Blaine takes a slow breath and Kurt waits, holds back the words he wants to say to fill the silence. “I know this isn’t just about me. I know that. And I can’t – I can’t ignore it; I just don’t always want to talk about it either.”

“You don’t want to talk about it at all.” The sentence slips out, and Kurt claps his hands over his mouth almost before he’s finished speaking. “Sorry! I’m – I didn’t mean that.”

“You did.” Blaine shrugs and offers a weak smile. “And you’re right: I don’t want to talk about it.” His voice drops and Kurt leans forward a bit, closer to his speakers. “But I will; Dr. Schamp wants me to anyway.”

“She does?” Kurt hears the incredulity in his voice, knows his eyes are wide for the camera.

“You – you’re the most important person in my life; of course I’m going to talk to you.”

Kurt feels his shoulders drop, lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “That’s all I want; I can’t be in Ohio, and you can’t be in New York yet, so this,” he waves toward the computer, “is how we have to do things.”

“Things?” Blaine’s smile has turned sly, and Kurt feels his cheeks heat in response.

“Blaine Anderson!” Kurt shakes his head and doesn’t fight the smile. “I was trying to have a serious conversation.”
“And we’ve had one; two actually. But I know for a fact that your dad and Carole are engrossed with *Elementary*…”

Kurt’s pulling off his vest even as he shakes his head. “You’re incorrigible.”

“But you love me.”

“Mm,” Kurt agrees as he winks, “but I have it on good authority that it’s reciprocated.”

Kurt unbuttons his shirt to the sound of Blaine’s laughter.

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A blast of sound has Kurt jolting up, legs tangling in his blankets even as they drop to his waist. To his right, shadows dance from his alarm clock – 3:22 AM – and the light coming off his phone – Oh.

He reaches blindly, knocking a pad and pen to the floor before pulling his phone towards him, wincing as the light hits his eyes. He swipes away the picture from Blaine’s birthday, wishing he had cause to smile now.

“Hey.”

“Hey, sorry for waking you up.”

“Don’t,” Kurt winces at his sharp reply before continuing, “Always call, remember?”

He gets a choked laugh in reply and reaches over to turn on his lamp; he’ll stay awake as long as Blaine needs him.
I'm alive! I'm so, so sorry for the extreme delay with this posting! I had surgery (carpal tunnel and cubital tunnel) and so I couldn't type for a while. I'm still recovering (technically - long story) and this chapter fought me for a while but I triumphed - with a great deal of help from slayerkitty. All my thanks to her for talking me through my writer's block and putting up with some...interesting conversations while I was on medication post-surgery.
Again, I'm sorry for the insane wait for this chapter; hopefully it lives up to expectation!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 23

“I’ll give you ten bucks for that.”

Blaine startles at the question and accompanying hand on his shoulder before running a hand across his eyes and leaning out of his locker. “What?”

“Your coffee,” Tina adds with a nod, “I was up too late taking math review exams.”

Blaine blinks, takes a moment to focus on Tina’s comment rather than his nightmares from the night before. “Tina, it’s already May; we passed the deadline for ACT submissions.” He offers a small smile, hopes the confusion in his voice doesn’t upset his friend.

“I know that.” Tina’s voice holds a note of annoyance, “But most schools have you take a math placement test; no way am I testing into algebra.”

Blaine wordlessly hands her his cup.

“You’re the perfect gentleman.”

Blaine shakes his head before reaching back into his locker. “No problem, but I suggest you drink it fast. We only have a few minutes before the bell.”

“I can tell time, Blaine,” Tina replies with a grimace after lowering the cup, “but what is this?” She carefully waves the cup, “It’s certainly not coffee. Did you even put any sugar in it?”

Blaine ducks as he adds his books to his bag and closes his locker with a sigh. “That is espresso,” he adds, “and cream.”

There’s a pause as Tina simply stares at the cup but moments later her eyes narrow, and she fixes Blaine with a slight glare. “You could have warned me.”

“You did ask for my drink,” Blaine adjusts his bag and turns, “but I’m not looking forward to being tardy, so I’ll see you at lunch.
“Since when do you even get espresso?” Tina’s shout carries down the hall, and Blaine winces when he sees half his classmates turn in response.

“I –” Blaine pauses, bites back the ‘I’m still having nightmares and the Elavil is making me groggy’ and rephrases, “I like espresso.”

He hurries down the hall then, ignoring Tina yell of frustration as he goes.

Text message from Blaine:

If I’m late talking to you later it’s because Tina’s after me

Blaine pauses, his hand hovering over the ‘send’ icon as he glances at the clock in the corner of the screen. He doesn’t want to wake Kurt up – again his mind whispers, memories of his nightmare the night before (and the ensuing 3 AM phone call) returning to the forefront of his mind – but he’d promised Kurt he would stop ignoring things, that he’d treat Kurt like the partner he is.

He doesn’t want to push Kurt away again, doesn’t want a return of the hesitance that had shadowed their conversations after their argument. They’d finally resumed their regular conversations; he doesn’t want to risk losing them again.

He releases a breath and hits ‘send’ before he can change his mind.

With the nightmare still haunting his thoughts he needs a distraction before attempting class.

He needs Kurt.

He always needs Kurt, actually. But with almost six-hundred miles between them, texts will have to do.

Text message from Kurt:

Do I want to know what you did?

Text message from Blaine:

I gave her my coffee, when she asked…

Text message from Blaine:

Although it may have been espresso with cream, instead

Text message from Kurt:

Tina doesn’t like espresso

A loud yell from the letterman-wearing group in front of him and Blaine’s phone drops to the ground, the clatter unheard over the din of sound in the hall. Coach Sylvester rounds the corner moments later with a shout, causing the group to scatter. He quickly kneels in the confusion, grabbing his phone and standing, heading back down the hallway and away from the group of overly loud classmates.

Text message from Kurt:

Although I’m glad you don’t know her coffee order ;)}
Text message from Kurt:

...don't judge me

Blaine smiles at Kurt’s message, shaking his head slightly as he types out a reply.

Text message from Blaine:

You’re still adorable

Text message from Blaine:

And I’d never judge you <3

He slips his phone back in his pocket before hurrying down the hall, makes it to the door of his classroom as the warning bell rings. He finds his seat, absently waving to his teacher before setting his bag down and hiding a yawn behind his hand.

He misses his espresso.

Artie rolls in then, and Blaine quickly gets his phone again, hoping Artie (and his other Glee friends) will take the hint and not immediately start talking about Nationals and other Glee related things. Sharing with Kurt was hard enough – he winces as he remembers the argument the day before – he doesn’t have the energy to deal with a New Directions interrogation.

Text message from Kurt:

[photo] Where did they all come from?

Text message from Kurt:

The diner is never this full on Tuesday mornings. :( At least there’s tips.

Blaine huffs a laugh at Kurt’s predicament, hastily typing a reply before the bell rings; he’s not in the mood to lose his phone, especially since he and Kurt have gotten back to texting each other random information about their days.

The hesitancy left from their argument is finally gone, and Blaine doesn’t want to risk upsetting that balance by being unable to reply to Kurt until after school. The bell rings just as Artie turns to face him, and Blaine releases a breath of relief at his luck even as tendrils of guilt at avoiding his friend have him clenching his hand.

At the front of the room, the teacher offers a smile before happily holding up a stack of papers.

A reading quiz without his espresso. Blaine winces and rolls his pencil as the luck he had embraced thirty seconds earlier goes the way of his caffeine: to someone else.

He sends up a wish that it finds its way to Kurt.

*-_*-*

Kurt hurriedly exits the diner, taking a deep breath of the New York air even as he winces at the smell of exhaust and various fumes. The air may not be as clear as it was in Lima, but after the hours of endless requests and the permeating smell of grease and coffee it’s a welcome change. The rush from earlier in the morning had lingered, and if Kurt had had to deal with one more person call him ‘Carl’ or ‘Dude’ his nametag would have ended up on someone’s plate.
Or drink glass.

Really, it could have gone either way.

With one last glare to the diner – his tips had been sparse – he steps away from the building, pulling out his cell and headphones as he heads for the subway. Moments later he’s humming to *Keeping*, appreciating the a cappella melody even if not the melancholy lyrics.

He’s almost to the crosswalk when a burst of sound breaks through his headphones; when it happens again he turns to look over his shoulder.

And sees Dani waving madly from the door of the diner.

He raises his eyebrows at the display even as he hurries back the way he came, reshouldering his bag as he goes.

“This better not be because someone called in sick,” he states as he reaches her and lets his earbuds fall to his shoulders, “because I’m not going back in there – not unless you think Gunther’s up for a lawsuit. Besides, I have class in an hour anyway.”

“Do I seem like the kind of person who would yell from a doorway because we’re short a waiter? Wait,” Kurt stifles a laugh as she narrows her eyes. “Don’t answer that.”

“Okay,” Kurt draws out the word. “But I’m guessing the shouting and waving was because you did need something?”

“I did, actually.” Dani pauses long enough Kurt releases a breath of annoyance before losing his patience.

“And?”

“Rehearsal’s at six, right?”

Kurt stares. “You yelled – I – you couldn’t have *texted*?”

“Phone’s dead,” Dani says with a smile, “I forgot to charge it last night; Santana came over and –”

“I don’t want to know,” Kurt hurriedly interrupts, “but yes, rehearsal is still at six; just like we decided two days ago.”

“I was just –” Dani stops, turning back inside. ”Nevermind, I’m being summoned.” She flashes him a smile, “See you at six; I can’t wait to run through *Radioactive* and dethrone Elliott with my guitar solo!”

She’s gone before Kurt can think of a reply, the door softly closing behind her. Kurt waits for a moment, absently wondering where solo even was in the song. He shakes his head at the door and puts his headphones back in, quickening his step when a glance at his phone reminds him he has two minutes to get to the subway if he wants to make his intended train.

*Text message from Kurt:*

Remind me that the day can only improve?

*Text message from Blaine:*

I don’t think there are any geriatric, hungry patrons at NYADA
Text message from Blaine:
And if there are, I'm sure they're talented?

Kurt can’t contain the burst of laughter at the message, even as he marvels at Blaine’s ability to make him smile.

Text message from Kurt:
You've described two of my professors

Text message from Kurt:
I'm going to lose signal though – getting on the subway so I can change at home before class

Text message from Blaine:
No waiter-chic at NYADA today?

Text message from Kurt:
You're still not funny

Text message from Blaine:
And yet you're still marrying me :D

Text message from Blaine:
And you pull off waiter-chic; I know you tailored your uniforms

Text message from Kurt:
No amount of tailoring makes up for the smell of bacon grease and spilt coffee

Text message from Kurt:
And you know I wouldn't wear my uniform to school, Blaine

Text message from Blaine:
No…you'll wear one of your amazing outfits and all the NYADA boys will be falling over you

Text message from Kurt:
[photo] Doubtful, but it doesn’t matter – I'm happily taken ;)

Text message from Blaine:
[photo] Love you!

Kurt pauses at the subway entrance, ignoring the bustle of people around him, takes a moment to appreciate the picture – Blaine blowing a kiss, ring proudly on display despite the background of McKinley High’s hallway – and bask in knowledge that Blaine is his fiancé.
At the subway :( 

Text message from Kurt:

Love you! <3

_*_*_*_*_*_*_*  

Blaine turns the key but stays in the driver’s seat, lets Clocks continue to play while he relaxes, grateful to be done with his school day. He may have passed his reading quiz, but he’s not sure he’ll get the grade he would have preferred, and Sam and Tina had shot him questioning glances all day; Unique had luckily commanded attention at lunch by mentioning their final public, paid performance, which had – unsurprisingly because it’s Glee – led to a lunch-long debate of whether anything should be changed due to their placement at Nationals.

Then, Blaine had stayed mostly silent, listening to the arguments from Sam and the others while remaining uncertain. He knew they’d done their best in Los Angeles, but they’d also still come in second; maybe they should make some changes, even after the fact.

He simply wasn’t sure.

He hadn’t been sure in therapy either. Dr. Schamp had asked about his time in California, how he felt about Nationals and what had happened after.

He hadn’t had an answer. Not a clear one, at least.

Later, once he was back in Kurt’s old room he’d wondered if Dr. Schamp had expected his complicated answer; he suspected she had, given how well she’d kept him talking, even leading the conversation back to how the events from Sadie Hawkins were still affecting him.

He hadn’t cared for that topic – he still doesn’t – but Dr. Schamp had been insistent, if kind, and he hadn’t had another panic attack.

A blast from his speakers – Runaway has changed to Jump – breaks him from his thoughts, and he glances at the clock before quickly leaving his car, heading for the entrance.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] See? The garage is fine

Text message from Kurt:

I never said it wasn’t….

Text message from Kurt:

I’ve known most of the guys longer than I’ve known you, Blaine

Text message from Blaine:

Maybe, but you still asked me five times if I planned to go by the garage ;)

Text message from Kurt:

...five?
Blaine smiles at the text, mentally picturing Kurt’s embarrassed half-smile and blush.

Text message from Blaine:
Don’t worry – it was cute :)

Text message from Kurt:
I’m not sure if I should find that endearing or worrying

Text message from Blaine:
Can I vote?

Text message from Kurt:
No.

Text message from Kurt:
Don’t you have cars to fix?

Blaine huffs a laugh as he types his reply, hurrying the last few steps before entering the garage.

Text message from Blaine:
Trying to get rid of me?

Text message from Kurt:
No…but Carole’s expecting you for dinner, so you’d better start soon ;)

Text message from Blaine:
I see – this is all for Carole’s benefit

Text message from Kurt:
You caught me <3

Text message from Blaine:
Love you! <3

Blaine keeps his phone in hand; he’ll be changing in a moment, and he’d rather not risk dropping his phone on the concrete because it fell from a pocket.

After changing – and leaving his phone on Burt’s desk for safekeeping – Blaine exits Burt’s office and glances around the garage, taking in the gold Honda at the far end (distance makes it so he can’t tell faces, but judging by the confused posture he’s guessing it’s Lou and Tom) and the red Ford Focus where Jim’s just raised the hood. He notes the unaccompanied cars with a sigh, hoping he’s not up for back-to-back oil changes. Still, it’s a common scene, nothing noteworthy or special about it.

Except for the feeling that won’t leave; unease settles on him like a worn blanket, and for the first time his Hummel Tire & Lube outfit feels uncomfortable.
It’s the first time he’s been in the garage without a Hummel.

Burt had been absent before, of course, but Kurt had always been nearby, looking far too put-together in his worn mechanic’s clothes while organizing tools or considering an engine while humming Wicked.

“Blaine!”

He shakes away the memory at the call, puts on a smile as he crosses to meet Jim.

“Need some help?”

“If you want,” Jim nods to the car, “wasn’t sure if you were comin’ in today, but you can choose: I’m on this one – somethin’s up with the electrics in it so I’m destined for running about three different tests; but those,” he gestures to a grey Civic and a white Taurus –

“You too good to look me in the eye?” There’s pain in his side, growing even as the laughter fades.

*He blinks and the darkness breaks in a rush of green and white –*

“– so what’ll it be: the new tires, oil changes, or helpin’ me with these tests?”

Blaine takes a moment, blinks before replying.

“Um, if you don’t mind I’ll give you a hand; I want to know what’s going on, too.”

Jim laughs and Blaine just manages to suppress his flinch when he claps a hand on his shoulder. “I certainly won’t say no to the help.”

A smile and Blaine turns, moving to the car to look under the hood to see if he notices anything offhand.

Completely missing the slightly confused and worried glance the older man shoots him.

---

Kurt steps off the elevator and adjusts his bag, heading for the stacks. This close to finals – and Kurt has to stop thinking about the fact that they occur in two weeks – the library is full of harried students. He dodges a guy in a jarring 80s inspired jacket and turns up the volume of his music in an attempt to block the humming from the group of girls to his left.

This week it’s papers and research and reading until his eyes hurt. His plan is to finish his essays early so he can spend next week practicing for his practical finals (Voice, Theatre, Dance). Still, a glance around the library has him wondering if his fellow students all had the same idea; he doesn’t see one empty table.

He sighs and mentally changes his plan – he’ll have to work at the loft – and pulls up his reminders on his phone to double check the list of authors he’d found.

And jolts when it vibrates in his hand, Blaine’s smiling face filling the screen.

He glances around the floor; technically it’s not required to be silent, but most people text rather than speak on the phone. He lets the call go to voicemail and taps out a reply, ignoring the quick spike of anxiety.

*Text message from Kurt:*
Sorry! I'm in the library. Everything okay?

Text message from Blaine:

No.

Before Kurt can fully succumb to the worry from the single word answer, his phone buzzes with another message.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] You send me a collage of our relationship and I can't even hug you :( 

Kurt feels the fear leave him as quickly as it came, replaced with a smile he knows is wide enough his eyes narrow.

Text message from Blaine:

I love it! But you didn't need to; you were right, on Thursday.

Kurt thinks back to the argument, to his shock at Blaine’s anger, before pushing the thoughts away and focusing on the present. The argument was resolved, after all.

Text message from Kurt:

I'm glad you like it. And I sent it because I wanted to :)

Text message from Blaine:

You're the best! <3

Text message from Blaine:

And I know the feeling :) But finish whatever you’re doing in the library so I can call you!

Text message from Kurt:

Bossy

Kurt shakes his head slightly and pulls up his app as intended, reviewing the authors’ names before resuming his walk – quickening his step when his eyes start to water from the scent of too-much perfume – toward the stacks. The library truly is a wonderful assembly of information about theatre, but Kurt doesn’t intend to spend hours he doesn’t have looking through the entire section on Medieval Theatre.

All six rows of it.

He rolls his eyes at a group of students ‘studying’ (only students distracted by the Internet had books that strategically placed) and huffs a laugh when he sees an annoying classmate from his Acting class asleep on a sofa, glasses askew. In the adjacent chair a girl bobs her head to music only she can hear while highlighting one of the books precariously resting on her lap.

He turns the corner then, entering the row with the books he needs. He breathes in the scent of old pages as he walks, finally stopping at the appropriate letters.

And groans.
Text message from Kurt:

[photo] The book I need is supposed to be here.

Text message from Kurt:

Either the catalogue lied or some idiot is lazy and/or doesn't know the alphabet

Text message from Blaine:

Check around? Maybe you'll get lucky

Text message from Blaine:

With the book, anyway ;)

Kurt can’t keep in the burst of laughter at Blaine’s message, even as he rolls his eyes at the ridiculous message.

Text message from Kurt:

I will never understand your sense of humor

Text message from Blaine:

:) At least I’m not predictable

Text message from Kurt:

Never!

Text message from Blaine:

<3

Kurt lowers his phone, smiling even as he scans the shelves on the off-chance Blaine was right. The titles alone are enough that his feels the beginnings of a headache – must academics be so pretentious? – and while the smell of old pages had been relaxing, prolonged exposure is making him reconsider his stance. Plus someone recently in the aisle (probably the same person who took his book) had worn far too much cologne and Kurt pinches his nose in desperation.

Fifteen minutes later, on the opposite side of the aisle and four rows above where he had been looking, hands full with two new books that looked promising, he pauses.

Text message from Kurt:

[photo] Does this count as lazy or illiterate?

Kurt carefully lowers his bag to the ground, stuffing in all three of the books before rising, looking at Blaine’s message as he goes.

Text message from Blaine:

Both? But at least you found it! :)
You deserve a reward!

Text message from Kurt:
I better get an ‘A’ on this paper

Text message from Kurt:
I’ll grab something on the way home ;)

Text message from Blaine
Cheesecake. Or chocolate. Coffee doesn’t count as a reward; it’s a necessity

Text message from Kurt:
I’ll keep that in mind

Kurt keeps a tight grip on his phone while heading back for the elevator in a hurried walk. He hadn’t counted on staying in the library so long, and now he has twenty minutes to make it back to the loft on time for rehearsal.

He’s going to be late.

Santana will never let him live it down.

As he presses the button for the first floor, he eyes the four others in the elevator with him, suppressing a sigh when they all exit with him – and head for the circulation desk.

He sends Elliott a text letting him know he’s running late and joins the queue, making the decision to take Blaine’s idea and grab an iced mocha (and maybe a muffin) from the library’s coffee shop on the way out because the extra ten minutes can’t make a difference now.

At least there’s caffeine in his future.

_*_*_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine sits in Kurt’s desk chair and stares at his Calculus book, the letters and numbers blurring in the glare from the desk lamp. He has nine problems left and his brain feels scrambled.

He turns to look at his recently gifted collage instead, the small note tucked into the frame.

You’ll always be my teenage dream. ~ Kurt

A soft knock on the door has him turning, and he smiles at the interruption as Carole steps into the room.

“Hey, Blaine. I know you’re working on homework, but I just got a craving for some ice cream and was wondering if you wanted to go to Dairy Queen?”

“I never turn down ice cream,” Blaine replies, grabbing his phone and wallet before following Carole out of the room.

“It is a good idea, isn’t it?” Carole laughs the question as they head down the stairs, “I feel like we’re breaking the rules, too, but Burt isn’t here, so it can’t hurt him.”
Blaine laughs. “I suppose.”

“I can’t tell you how many times I’ve craved a pineapple sundae and not gotten one out of solidarity. But,” Carole looks at him with a conspiratorial smile, “now I have a teenager to accompany me.”

Blaine hums in reply, following Carole out the front door and locking it as she heads for her car. Moments later she’s backing out of the driveway, and Blaine sings along with the radio; only to stop abruptly when he catches her eye.

Oh no.

He’d forgotten.

He’s not sure how, exactly, but he was happy – he had a surprise gift from Kurt and Carole and invited him for ice cream and –

“It’s fine.” The comment carries across the small space of the car, audible over the soft sound from the speakers. “Really, Blaine. It’s – it’s nice. And you have a wonderful voice.”

“I –” He cuts off his own sentence, unsure of what he was planning to say.

“It was lovely, Blaine. Sometimes,” she pauses, and Blaine notes that her hands have tightened on the wheel, “sometimes it will be too much, but today…Today we’re taking advantage of the beautiful weather and getting ice cream. That deserves at least one song, right?”

“…right.” Blaine knows his reply lacks conviction, but Carole smiles anyway.

She nods as a new song begins and Blaine takes it as his cue, closing his eyes and letting himself relax with the music.

He doesn’t see Carole reach up and wipe at her eyes.

And he doesn’t know of the phone call she’d gotten earlier, after he’d left the garage to head home for dinner; how Jim was just keepin’ an eye out like Burt had asked, and things had been fine. Except for the two minutes where he’d seen Blaine go ghost-white and still, before he’d come back to himself, smiling and offering to help with a troublesome Focus.

“So,” Carole’s voice carries over the music, “not bad for a Tuesday?”

“No,” Blaine smiles and turns to face her, “minus my reading quiz it’s been a good day.”

“Not a fan of The Scarlet Letter?”

“Not a fan of quizzes,” Blaine laughs, “but I think I did okay.”

“I don’t know anyone who’s a fan of quizzes,” Carole replies with a wink, “but I’m sure you did fine.” Blaine ducks his head at her comment. “Quiz aside – I’m glad things are going well. You look,” she pauses and Blaine looks up, meeting her gaze before she returns her focus to the road, “You look better, less tired.”

“I am,” Blaine agrees, “I mean,” briefly he remembers lamenting the loss of his espresso, “I still have them – the nightmares, but it’s not every night. Not like before, anyway.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Carole’s voice is soft, matching her smile. “Now,” her smile turns sly as she turns into the parking lot, “are you going to join me in splurging on a sundae or are you going
to be adventurous and try something new? And no," she parks and preempts his reply, “you can’t just get a milkshake; we’re breaking the rules, my treat – take advantage of it.”

Blaine stares in stunned silence for a moment before letting out a small laugh and raising his hands in surrender.

He knows better than to start an argument he can’t win.

-*-*-*-

Kurt greedily downs the glass of water, tired but pleased after their rehearsal; there had been a few hiccups (Dani and Elliott had both tried for a particularly troublesome solo and the resulting mash of chords hadn’t been pleasing) but he’s certain they’ll be fine by their performance Thursday night.

“That went better than I thought it would. I was sure Santana was going to end me when I disagreed with her harmony.”

Elliott’s comment is a welcome distraction from the sight of Dani and Santana across the room, and Kurt turns to him with a smile. “Me too.” He shrugs, “Maybe she’s growing as a person.”

“Hm,” Elliott agrees around a sip of water, “Maybe she is. Anyway,” he leans forward to get a chip from the bowl in the middle of the table, “do you have any other thoughts for our set list?”

“It’s a little late for changes, don’t you think?”

“Maybe,” Elliott smiles, “but does that mean you have some?”

Kurt takes a moment to think back over their rehearsal; they have a good mix of songs, current top 40s along with some 80s power ballads and a few new mashups. Any audience member should recognize at least one of the songs.

“No, actually.”

“Awesome!” Kurt feels his eyebrows rise at Elliott’s enthusiastic comment. “Sorry,” he continues, “I just thought it was an amazing practice, but I wanted to make sure you thought so, too.”

“Oh. Well, there’s nothing to worry about – I’m sure we’ll have hordes of fans after our performance.”

"Of course we will," Elliott laughs before standing and reaching for his guitar case. “Sorry, but I have an early shift tomorrow I should head out if I want to actually get some sleep.”

“Are you leaving?” Dani’s question carries across the loft and Kurt suppresses the urge to roll his eyes as Elliott repeats what he just said. Minutes later the door rolls shut and Kurt heads for his room as Dani and Santana return to the sofa.

He pushes the curtain aside and moves to drop his bag by his desk – in his tardiness to rehearsal he’d set it by the door and moved to start singing as soon as he’d arrived home – only to have it fall with a thump as he freezes.

“They arrived earlier.” Santana’s voice carries from where she’s standing by the curtain, and slowly Kurt takes his gaze away from the gorgeous bouquet on his desk to look at her. “I figured you’d act like some love-struck idiot,” she gestures to him, “and wouldn’t be able to practice if you saw them first, so I put them in here.”
“What?”

“Damn, Hummel. If I’d known flowers made you lose the ability to speak I’d have sent you some years ago.”

Kurt narrows his eyes at her but he knows the effect is lost since he’s still smiling.

He can’t help it, really.

Blaine sent him flowers.

He pulls out his phone to call his impossible fiancé, only to laugh when he sees his messages from earlier. Blaine probably thought he was clever, his “I know the feeling” seemingly innocent and quickly pushed aside when Kurt had been focused in the library.

“Does this mean I can keep the note?”

Santana’s comment breaks him from his revere and it takes a moment for him to make sense of the words.

“There was a note?” Kurt spins back to glance at the flowers – sees the empty card stand seconds later.

“Santana!”

“Your Hobbit is sickeningly romantic, Hummel. Really. I should spare you from the Hallmark sentiment.”

“Give me the note, Santana.” He sets down his phone and quickly crosses the room, stopping inches from his roommate.

“But this is so much more fun.”

Kurt suppresses the urge to scream. “Shouldn’t you be getting back to your girlfriend?”

Santana huffs a breath but Kurt knows he’s won and he barely resists the urge to tap his foot as she slowly pulls a slip of paper from her pocket.

“Please wait until I leave to read it. I’d rather not have to vomit because of your heart eyes.”

She’s gone a second later, the curtain falling closed behind her.

Kurt makes it to his desk chair before looking at the note:

in the rain-/ darkness, / the sunset / being sheathed i sit and / think of you

I’m sorry about Thursday; I always think of you first. Always.

All my love,

Blaine

Kurt’s smiling so wide he feels an ache in his cheeks, but he doesn’t care. A glance at the time on
his phone and he carefully moves the vase of flowers to the side before he turns on his computer; he needs to see his fiancé.

Text message from Kurt:

Why aren't you on Skype?

Text message from Blaine:

Sorry! I'm out with Carole

Text message from Blaine:

...was I supposed to be on Skype now?

Text message from Kurt:

Yes!

Kurt waits a moment before typing out another message; he does need to talk to Blaine, but he doesn’t need Blaine thinking he’s upset.

Text message from Kurt:

But only because I really want to talk with you :)

Text message from Blaine:

:) We’re on our way back now…give me 15 minutes?

Text message from Kurt:

I'm counting the minutes

Text message from Blaine:

<3
Chapter Notes

Oh goodness - also, I had all this ready to post and accidentally closed Chrome. Story of my life. Anyway, work and medical issues kept me too busy/unable to write for a while, but once I was able to write I finished 24-26 relatively quickly, and got them to my wonderful betas quickly, so I will be posting regularly for the next three weeks! Thanks to slayerkitty for both keeping me sane and preventing me from both scrapping this story and having a break down and special thanks to tchrgleek for reading through the current chapters and reading the upcoming ones for a new - necessary - perspective with the upcoming climactic chapter; you are both awesome ladies and this chapter wouldn't exist without you! Also, as always, thanks to you lovely, wonderful readers who continually surprise and encourage me with your continuing support!! I hope you enjoy this chapter! :-)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 24

Kurt carefully wipes up the last of the spilled Coke – a victim of the sudden thunder storm and an easily startled blonde – from the table, ignoring the how the sticky remnants remind him of tossed slushies. He suppresses a wince as thunder cracks again, and quickly moves aside as the blonde’s arms swing out in response, narrowly avoiding a hit to his nose.

Behind him, he hears Santana snort a laugh.

He snaps the cloth at her as he passes by on his way to the counter a moment later, smiling when he sees an ice cube hit her shoulder before slipping to the floor.

“You’re gonna pay for that, Hummel.”

Kurt flicks the towel again in response, pointedly ignoring the hiss he gets in return as he drops the towel in the proper bin and moves to wash his hands.

By the door, Dani laughs, blowing Santana a kiss before resuming her mopping; Kurt shakes his head and shakes the excess water off his hands, stopping when Santana moves to stand beside him.

“Is there a reason you’re lurking, Santana?”

“I didn’t know I needed a reason to stand by the counter.”

Kurt ignores Santana’s smirk and steps away, moving to pick up the plates intended for the overly loud group in the corner booth – and suppressing a grimace when he sees the extra mayo on the side of one plate, next to a truly impressive pile of fries. He carefully sets all the plates on a tray before slowing making his way across the diner, wary of the still-wet floor.

He pauses at his customers’ table, shamelessly eavesdropping on their conversation as he waits for them to notice him (and move their arms) so he can set down the food. When the two seniors – based on their wrinkled clothing and discussion of final projects – show no sign of having realized
Kurt is here, he politely interrupts before setting down the plates, pointedly ignoring the lingering gaze of the recipient of the plate with the outrageous amount of mayonnaise.

If he ensures his ring is visible as he gathers their cups for refills, that’s his own prerogative.

Waiting for the cups to fill (Sprite and Coke) at the fountain, Kurt takes a moment to pull out his phone –

And promptly drops it, when something cold slides down his back.

He spins, his phone clattering to the counter even as his arms scramble, attempting to reach the piece of ice in between his shirts.

“Santana!”

Several feet away, Santana has her hands over her face, her cackling laughter – audible even over the thunder – the only response to Kurt’s shout.

“She did warn you,” Kurt gives Dani a scowl in response, although he does allow her to help him move, deftly catching the partly-melted ice cube in her palm seconds later.

Kurt steps back to the counter, picking up the now-finished drinks and resolutely ignoring Santana as he moves to his table, placing the sodas down with a slightly strained smile.

Text message from Kurt:

Remind me to hide my coffee later; Santana doesn't deserve the privilege of sharing

Text message from Blaine:

Taking away coffee privileges?!

Text message from Blaine:

...she didn't actually commit murder, did she?

Kurt feels his lips twitch in a smile in spite of his mood, and he shakes his head to keep Dani and Santana from seeing.

Text message from Kurt:

Although I wouldn't put it past her, she hasn't – not that I'm aware of, anyway

Text message from Kurt:

She did put an ice cube down my shirt

Text message from Blaine:

I thought I was the only allowed to do that?

Kurt feels the blush heat his cheeks and back of his neck and takes a breath before he returns his focus to the counter where he’s attempting to get rid of a particularly stubborn stain.

Text message from Kurt:

It was over a hundred degrees out – that doesn't count
Text message from Kurt:

And if you ever want to even think about what happened after again, you’ll agree with me.

Text message from Blaine:

Of course ;)

Kurt huffs a laugh at Blaine’s swift response, internally rolling his eyes even as his phone buzzes with another reply.

Text message from Blaine:

I love you!

The words are common now, said at least once in every conversation they have, and yet Kurt still feels the joy-awe-bliss he first felt across a table in a mediocre coffee shop whenever Blaine says (or texts) them.

Two years in, and Kurt hopes that it will continue for two, twenty, forty more.

Text message from Kurt:

Love you too ;)

Text message from Blaine:

…and tell Santana your fiancé would appreciate it if she kept her hands and ice cubes to herself.

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] Miss you!

Kurt imagines Santana’s reply to Blaine’s comment and stifles an embarrassing laugh at the image, especially when he imagines her seeing Blaine’s exaggerated pout as well. The frantic waving from one his customers changes his smile to a sigh but he quickly taps out a reply before making his way over, side-stepping the “Wet Floor” sign as he goes.

Text message from Kurt:

I don’t think you have to worry…

Text message from Kurt:

Duty calls – don’t you have a lunch to be eating? <3

Kurt does laugh when, five minutes later, Blaine sends a picture of his empty lunch tray, complete with a folded napkin.

-*-*-*-*

Blaine takes his seat in the choir room and silently curses the tiled floor and open space; great for choral acoustics, less so for the high pitched laughs and yells of the glee members when Blaine already has a headache.

“Hey! Give me back –”
“Get back here, Anderson!” Down and he can’t move, can’t get away from the taunts and growing pain.

“Yeah, they’re down, Mitch –”

“What’s up with them?”

“Hm?” Blaine turns at Tina’s question, blinking away memories even as he turns again, focusing on the source of the shouting where Ryder, Marley, Unique and Jake seem to be having some kind of competition/argument/discussion in the middle of the floor. “I have no idea.”

“Well,” Tina shifts in her seat, “it can’t be too important, otherwise I’m certain they would have shared whatever-it-is.”

Blaine takes in her narrowed eyes before nodding in agreement. “Sure.”

“And what’s up with you?”

“What?” Blaine leans forward, closer to Unique and twists his hands in his lap.

“Those four,” Tina offers a judgmental nod to the center of the room, “can’t shut up, and you’re giving one-word answers.”

“Oh,” Blane shrugs and offers a smile. “Sorry – headache. Probably from the new unit in Calc.” And possibly his Elavil, but he keeps that fact to himself.

Tina offers a wince in reply, “And here I was hoping I could get you to be my tutor.”

Blaine laughs, shaking his head, “I can’t say I recommend that, sorry.”

Mr. Schue enters then, clapping his hands before moving to the board, circling where “Memories” is written, making the letters slightly harder to read. He starts to speak, but Blaine can’t make out the words over Marley’s shriek so he turns back to Tina with a shrug.

Text message from Blaine:
[photo] Sometimes I miss the order of the Warblers Council

Text message from Kurt:

It did lead to a more comprehensive rehearsal…

Text message from Kurt:
[photo] I’d still trade you, though – this is just for theatre history. I still have rehearsal tonight with my acting group :( 

Text message from Blaine:

And here I thought the movies were exaggerating about college finals

Text message from Kurt:

They weren’t

Text message from Kurt:
Although they did lie about college parties and drunken escapades

Text message from Blaine:

Is that a good thing?

Text message from Kurt:

I haven't decided yet

“Hey, you can talk to Kurt later.” Tina comments as she leans over and plucks the phone from Blaine’s hands.

“What?”

“I don’t like being ignored,” Tina says, moving the phone further from Blaine’s reach. “And,” she narrows her eyes and Blaine scoots back in his seat, “you’ve been doing enough of that lately anyway."

“No, I –” Blaine pauses, thinking back over the past week, of his schedule of therapy, school, the garage, and home. “Sorry,” he offers a smile and a shrug, “end of year craziness, you know?”

Tina’s reply is cut off by Mr. Schue’s raised voice as Unique moves to the row in the back, and Marley and Ryder take their seats in front of Blaine, with Jake unhappily stomping behind them. Blaine lets out a quiet sigh of relief, grateful that Tina’s response remains unspoken.

“Now,” Mr. Schue continues, “I know I said we’d finish the solos today,” he holds up his hand at the resulting onslaught of raised voices, “but with the festival tomorrow we need to run through the performance before we leave. So we’ll have two performances today and we’ll finish the assignment on Monday.

“So,” Mr. Schue smiles, “Who’s first?”

There’s a clamor of sound as Sam, Jake, and Tina all start to speak, and Blaine takes the moment to lean forward, touching Jake on the shoulder. “I don’t mind waiting til Monday.”

Five minutes later he’s managed to convince Tina to wait as well, after promising that she can have the last performance and reminding her that she owes him since he’s doing her the favor of dropping off the costumes at the cleaners after she double booked herself; Tina smoothly hands him back his phone in recompense.

Jake moves to the center of the room with a smirk that reminds Blaine of Santana, his moves confident as he gestures for the band to start. He sees Marley stiffen in her seat as the opening chords become recognizable, her hand reaching for Ryder’s. Behind him, Blaine hears Unique’s “Oh no he didn’t” as she crosses her arms. A glance shows Mr. Schue looking slightly worried, but not moving to stop the song.

Text message from Blaine:

...Has Mr. Schue ever stopped a performance?

Text message from Kurt:

He stopped us to have us rework some steps before when he randomly decided we needed to work harder, but never a weekly assignment…why?
Text message from Blaine:

[photo] ‘Since U Been Gone’ for this week’s assignment…

Text message from Kurt:

One time Rachel and Finn sang “With You I’m Born Again” while dressed up as a nun and a priest…

Blaine feels his eyes widen at the message, pauses, reads it again. When it doesn’t change he subtly shakes his head, glances up to see Jake spinning in front of Marley before he types out a reply.

Text message from Blaine:

Wow. I can’t decide if I want to see the pictures or not…

Text message from Kurt:

Check the scrapbook in my room ;)

Text message from Kurt:

Besides, Santana sang “Trouty Mouth” to Sam and you guys sang “Blurred Lines”

Text message from Kurt:

Plus… I seem to remember a certain someone singing “It’s Not Right But It’s Okay” in the middle of the choir room

Text message from Blaine:

I apologized! There were cookies and kisses!

Text message from Blaine:

...And I thought we agreed to never speak of that again

Text message from Kurt:

And now we won’t, but I think Jake’s going to get his chance in this week’s spotlight

Text message from Blaine:

Kurt Hummel: Knower of All Things

Jake ends the song then, and if the weak applause he gets in return affects him he doesn’t show it, sauntering back to his seat with a smile.

He’s barely in his seat before Marley’s standing, her haste almost tipping the chair before she rushes from the room, Unique following quickly, despite her heels. Ryder’s turning to Jake with arms raised and Blaine is tense, waiting for blows when Sam steps between them, holding Ryder back even as he turns to Jake with a “Not cool, man” that’s clearly audible across the small space.

There’s a moment where Blaine waits, hopes he won’t have to step in – he is closer than Mr. Schue – but then Jake steps back with a huff, stalking to his seat while muttering about overreactions and girls.
Unique and Marley return moments later, and Marley’s eyes still look a little watery but she’s composed, silent as she and Unique take their seats, noticeably further away from Jake than before.

Sam waits for a smile – from Marley and Ryder – before moving to the center of the room, motioning to the band as he goes. The band starts and Blaine nods along to the music, joining in when Sam hits the chorus, thinking of Kurt as he sings, “I’m blind and waiting for you.” He pulls Unique into an impromptu dance, carefully leading her down the few steps and around chairs before spinning them both away. He sees Kitty laughing a few feet away, holding onto Artie’s shoulders as he spins them on his chair; everyone is dancing, singing along (except for Jake, who Blaine spies slouched in a chair, resolutely staring at the wall).

The song, in Blaine’s opinion, ends far too soon.

Mr. Schue finally puts an end to the shouts and high-fives, telling them all to head to the auditorium for rehearsal.

It’s amazing, really, how quickly laughter can turn to groans of disapproval.

Blaine slowly moves back to his seat, grabbing his water bottle from his bag before heading for the door. Rehearsal may be draining but at least it’s Friday.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt carefully steps around the legs of several students sitting in the halls, obviously waiting for classes to begin – but really, sitting on the tile floor when it’s rained? He barely suppresses his grimace – and makes his way toward the exit. He passes a few classmates as he goes, offering small nods of acknowledgement before stepping outside. Luckily it’s stopped raining for the moment, though the clouds hold the promise of rain again in the near-future, and there’s still dozens of puddles on the ground.

The gloomy weather is doing nothing to help his mood, or his ability to remain awake, and he decides to move his study session to the local café instead of staying at the library after retrieving his inter-library loans. The café’s coffee is infinitely better anyway, and if he’s lucky he’ll manage to grab a booth and be able to spread out his work instead of attempting to cram everything into one of the tiny cubicles on the library’s second floor.

*Text message from Kurt:*

[photo] I know there’s a song about rainy days and Mondays, but what about rainy days and Fridays?

*Text message from Blaine:*

...I think we’ll have to write one?

*Text message from Blaine:*

[photo] And it’s just muggy here – can you send some of the rain?

Kurt shakes his head at the picture of the parking lot of *Hummel Tires & Lube*, the tow truck and Blaine’s car along with various others shadowed under a grey sky.

*Text message from Kurt:*

While I’m flattered that you think I’m equal to Storm, I can’t actually control the weather
Text message from Kurt:

But we can write a song...we should do that this summer :)

Text message from Blaine:

I'll add it to our 'to-do' list!

Kurt laughs at Blaine’s enthusiasm even as he arrives at the entrance to the library, opening the door and wincing when the squeak of shoes from some of his less fashionable classmates follows him as he makes his way to the circulation desk. Luckily the line isn’t too long, although Kurt hopes he can get his books and make it to the café before the rain starts again. His umbrella is only so much help, after all.

Text message from Kurt:

Add making sure we never buy shoes that squeak in the rain, too

Text message from Kurt:

I'm cringing

Text message from Blaine:

If it makes you feel better, the guy who dropped off a rusted Chevy was wearing overalls with no shirt and a cowboy hat.

Text message from Blaine:

No one needed to see that, Kurt. No one.

Kurt’s still laughing when he makes it to the desk, handing over his ID with a smile.

_*_*_*_*_

Blaine pauses in gathering the correct oil carton, taking a moment to breathe and relax against the wall beside the shelves of supplies. He’s tired, the combination of classes and Glee having sapped most of his energy, and while he wasn’t required to be at the garage, there was something calming about changing oil and rotating tires.

And he could do with some calm.

He’s getting better; he knows he’s getting better, that the medicine and therapy and acceptance are part of it. And yet –

Accepting what happened to him means acknowledging it. Acknowledging that it’s affecting him now – that it’s not normal that he freezes when he sees a green truck, or hears a raised voice; that he needs a moment when a white car speeds by, or when he hears certain names.

And talking about those things two times a week makes it harder for him to push them from his mind when he’s elsewhere.

Like at school.

Shaking his head, Blaine grabs the correct carton of oil and pushes away from the wall, making his way back to where Burt stands by a blue Kia.
“There’s a reason we tell people to bring ’em in for whichever they hit first. But,” Burt nods toward the car, “apparently six months sounded better than three thousand miles. Luckily it’s not too bad this time. Anyway,” Burt continues as he readjusts his cap, “you manage to find the oil?”

“Oh, yeah,” Blaine waves the container in his hand before setting it down, “you might need to order more soon though; we’re running low.”

“I’ll put in the order we –”

A shouted name interrupts Burt’s sentence, and Blaine turns to see one of the mechanics jogging to the door –

*Shoes pound behind him before an arm grabs his shoulder, spinning him around and into a punch that pushes him further into the arms of his captor. “Look at me! Think you’re too good to look me in the eye? Be a man, Anderson!” Pain bursts and his breath catches –*

Burt huffs in annoyance. “I’ve told them not to yell for no reason…they just keep tellin’ me it’s the fastest way to get an answer.”

“Well,” Blaine clears his throat and blinks, focusing on the Kia, “they’re not wrong.”

A hand claps on his shoulder and Blaine hopes his stance against the car hides his slight jump. “And here I thought you’d agree with me, being the poster boy for manners.”

Blaine laughs and pulls off the oil cap. “Believe it or not the etiquette books never mentioned mechanic shops.”

“Of course not,” Burt mutters, moving to help Blaine under the hood of the car. “Anyway, let’s finish this up – etiquette or not, Carole will have words for both of us if we’re late for dinner.”

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A particularly loud burst of thunder has Kurt startling in his seat, second-guessing his decision to study in a booth by a window. His books lay scattered across the table in front of him, and he blinks as he finally looks away from the harsh light of his computer screen. He leans back, taking a moment to stretch and pull out one of his headphones, replacing *Enough for Now* with the chatter from the coffee shop. Only for the peaceful sounds to be interrupted by a shout of his name moments later. A quick glance toward the door and he’s carefully piling up his papers, closing his laptop, and placing his pens and highlighters back in his case, offering a slightly embarrassed wave to Santana, Dani, and Elliott.

They reach his table just as Kurt gives up and shoves everything into his bag, cringing when he sees some of his printouts crumpling into awkward angles.

“And here I thought you’d be eagerly anticipating our arrival.”

“It’s Finals, Santana, the only things I eagerly anticipate are coffee and sleep.”

“Hopefully not in that immediate order,” Elliott adds, offering a smile, “unless you’re now immune to caffeine?”

“Wait,” Kurt says as he clears away the last of his post-its, “can that actually happen? Because I need my caffeine. I can’t get through NYADA without my coffee.”

“I wouldn’t worry,” Dani comments as she takes her seat, “otherwise everyone over twenty-two
would avoid coffee or be drinking decaf.”

Kurt hums in agreement before looking to the counter. “On that note, I’m going to get some food; we were meeting for dinner, right?”

“I don’t know about them,” Santana turns her head toward her girlfriend and Elliott, “but just your company isn’t enough to drag me out in the rain on a Friday night, so why don’t you get me a sandwich, Hummel.”

“I’m not buying you dinner,” Kurt sighs, “especially when I know you made more in tips than I did this week.”

Santana offers a truly terrifying smile.

“I’ll go up with you,” Dani comments even as she slides out from the booth, “and I don’t mind buying for lovely ladies, especially when it means they’ll make it up to me later.”

Kurt groans and Elliott attempts to cover his laugh in a napkin.

“You are seriously spending way too much time with her,” Kurt says as they take their place in line. “Now even you’re mentioning your sex life in public?”

“Trust me,” Dani smirks, “I have no reason to hide anything about my sex life.” A wink, and Dani continues, “Besides, at least I wasn’t talking about your sex life. Santana says your fiancé is quite the catch.”

Kurt feels his cheeks burn and silently curses his pale complexion. “I – I think we’re done with this conversation. Have you tried their spinach wrap? Is it good?”

“You’re not subtle at all, Kurt. And no, I haven’t, but so far everything here has been good.” She pauses and then offers a smile, “But really, we did well, I think. We have some smokin’ significant others.”

Kurt ducks his head as he laughs, absently twisting his ring as he does. “Well, never let it be said that I claimed Blaine was anything less than good-looking.”

They arrive at the counter then, placing their orders and it’s only as Kurt takes in the food on display that he realizes it’s been hours since his last meal.

Another thing the movies got right: everyone’s eating habits in college are abysmal.

Back at the booth minutes later with arms full of food and cups of soda, Kurt carefully slides in next to Elliott.

“Sorry I had to leave after the performance last night, by the way,” Kurt moves his fries away from his wrap before carefully pouring a pile of ketchup. “But I think it went well – the audience seemed to like it, anyway.”

“Oh of course they did,” Santana adds as she takes a bite of her sandwich, “I had two solos. Although,” she narrows her eyes across the table, “be glad this is a good sandwich – did I mention I don’t like going out in the rain just to fit in to your schedule? I could be –”

Kurt’s never been more thankful for Dani than when she cuts off Santana’s tirade by leaning over and whispering in her ear, even if he never wants to know what she says judging by the blush now staining Santana’s cheeks.
“It was a good performance,” Elliott agrees, and Kurt turns to face him, “and the audience really seemed to like that we switched genres.”

“Makes us unique,” Dani chimes in, “we’re more than some one-trick pony.”

“We’ve got half the queer rainbow in our band,” Santana comments with a smirk, “we couldn’t be a one-trick pony if we tried.”

“I’m not sure I want to know what you mean by that,” Kurt mutters, eating some his fries.

“Anyway,” Elliott draws out the word, blatantly changing the topic of conversation, “Dani and I were thinking we could build on that –”

“Oh! Yeah,” Dani continues talking about classic songs across the musical spectrum and Kurt holds in his sigh that his bandmates have, yet again, discussed the band without him. Still, he manages to join in the conversation from time to time, adding in names of songs and artists, and soon his plate is reduced to crumbs, with only a few smears of ketchup left to show his consumption. “So,” Dani concludes, “we’ll meet Sunday? Usually the shop isn’t too busy, then.”

Kurt feels the smile stretching across his face even as he nods. Dani and Elliott - and Santana, if he’s being honest – had accepted his contributions, listening to his reasoning before adding their own suggestions. And he’s not being excluded; they’re all going looking for music.

“Not that I’m actually hating this conversation,” Santana comments, “but didn’t you have some practice thing tonight? I was looking forward to having the loft to myself for a while.”

Kurt jerks his head up even as he pulls out his phone. And curses.

He’s supposed to meet his Acting group in twenty minutes.

An angry swipe at his phone shows him that while he did set the alarm he didn’t actually turn it on, so his plan to have time to leisurely walk back to campus and call Blaine is now moot.

He’s out of the booth and sliding into his jacket seconds later, mumbling his thanks when Elliott offers to take care of the trash while Dani offers an exaggerated wave. He hastily throws his bag over his shoulder as he heads for the door, pulling out his phone as he goes.

“Hey,” Blaine’s voice is warm, welcoming, “Have a good dinner? Carole made some kind of casserole thing and I’m pretty sure I ate my weight in pasta.”

Kurt laughs even as he pauses at the door to the café, staring out at the rain coating the glass and city streets. “My sandwich was decent enough, although your meal sounds better. Look,” Kurt sighs and tightens his grip on his phone, “I know we planned a Skype call but can we move it to later?” At Blaine’s silence he hurries to continue, “I forgot to actually turn on my alarm and now I’m running late and I have to be at rehearsal in…eighteen minutes or my Acting group might actually kill me. And,” Kurt sighs and reaches for his umbrella, “it’s still raining.”

“Oh,” Blaine’s voice stays soft, but sure, “That’s fine. I have some homework to do anyway.”

“And you could keep me company now,” Kurt adds, hating how his voice catches, “I’m walking back to campus so I shouldn’t lose service.”
“Hm. You’re walking in the rain? You have your umbrella, right?”

Kurt allows a small smile at Blaine’s concern, “You’ve seen my wardrobe. Do you really think I’d leave home without my umbrella when it’s supposed to rain all day?”

“Well,” Blaine’s voice takes on a slight teasing edge, barely audible over the rain as Kurt exits the café and opens his umbrella before making his way out into the downpour. “Not intentionally.”

“I get caught in a freak summer storm without an umbrella one time and you never let me forget it.”

“You were wearing a white shirt, Kurt. I couldn’t forget that day if I wanted to,” a pause, “which I don’t.”

“You’re incorrigible,” Kurt mumbles as he makes his way around a slow-walking tourist, before his brain remembers what Blaine had mentioned minutes before. “Are you actually doing homework at seven on a Friday night?”

“Well,” Blaine draws out the word, “my fiancé postponed our date, so I suddenly find myself with some unexpected free time.”

His response cuts Kurt short, and he tightens his grip on his umbrella even as he waits at the crosswalk, unsure of his next words. The rain pounding on the umbrella makes it hard to decipher Blaine’s tone, and he wonders if the remark was meant to be teasing or not. He thought he and Blaine had worked out their issues (most of them, anyway) but against his will his mind flashes back to their argument the week before, and he feels his shoulders tense. “I’m sorry, Blaine.” Kurt keeps his voice steady, even if it is soft, “I didn’t mean to lose track of time. I know I’ve had trouble with this in the past, but I’m working on it. And I’ve been doing better but I just got caught up today.”

“Kurt, Kurt!” Blaine’s shout has Kurt pulling the phone away from his ear a bit, even as he joins the crowd in crossing the street. “No! I didn’t mean it like that. I know you didn’t mean to. I just —” a pause, “You are always saying I have an awful sense of humor.”

Kurt huffs a laugh and feels the tension slip away, gone as quickly as it had come. “You’re lucky I love you.”

“Yes.” Blaine agrees, “I love you, too.”

Kurt smiles and glances to where his left hand is wrapped around the handle of his umbrella, his ring a flash of silver against an otherwise dull wash of color. “I do. Questionable humor and all.”

“So, tell me,” Blaine draws out the words, “how was the post-performance band meeting?”

“Pretty good, actually.” And if he spends the next ten minutes of the walk to campus gushing about how his bandmates actually listened to his ideas and how they’re going music shopping Sunday, well, there’s no one he trusts more with his emotions than Blaine.

Time seems to have rushed, then, because Kurt’s entering the building, hears his classmates talking in a commandeered classroom down the hall – their voices echoing in the otherwise empty building. “Look…I hate to do this, but —”

“You’re at school, aren’t you.”

“Well since comedy’s out you could always try being a psychic.”
“I think that only works with you.”

Kurt laughs even as he shakes his head. “I’ll take that as a compliment. Anyway, this should only take a few hours, I hope. So around 10? Maybe 10:30?”

“I’ll make room in my busy schedule.”

“I’m flattered.”

“Hm,” Blaine agrees, “I’ll talk to you later, then. Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Kurt lowers his phone and enters the classroom, pushing away thoughts of his band and fiancé; the sooner he finishes the sooner he can get back to Blaine.

---

The streetlamps flicker on as Blaine pulls into the parking lot, a not-so-subtle reminder that his trip to the dry cleaners is hours later than he had planned. He parks with a quiet sigh – near the red Corolla but away from the door and the surrounding potholes – turning off his car (and the sounds of *Pompeii* from his speakers) and moving to unbuckle his seatbelt.

He had gotten caught up in homework after his conversation with Kurt, hoping that by finishing his calculus assignment he’d be able to enjoy the rest of his weekend. An hour and a half later had left him with three problems – and four sheets of notebook paper – finished and the desire to throw his graphing calculator against something. It was only as he’d moved to take some Tylenol that he’d glanced at the time, and the picture of him and Kurt after last year’s nationals had reminded him of the costumes currently piled on his back seat.

*Text message from Blaine:*

I think I need to work on my time management skills – help me make a schedule?

With a sigh, Blaine puts his phone in his pocket and exits his car, slowly moving to gather the outfits and huffing a laugh as he remembers Burt’s comments about the size difference between the amount of clothes and himself – if he staggers slightly under the weight of the costumes at least he’s the only one to notice. The drop-off for the dry cleaners may be open twenty four hours, but it’s not the busiest place in Lima on a Friday night. Even the Walgreens and Speedway around the corner are quiet.

Then again, the only places busy on Friday nights – in Lima, anyway – are places with movies or food.

For a moment as he picks his way across the pot-hole ridden parking lot he debates texting Sam or Tina, asking if they want to see what’s playing, but then he remembers that Mr. Schue wants them in the auditorium for a last-minute run through at nine the next morning, and they’re due at the festival by ten-thirty despite not being scheduled to perform on stage until noon.

Carefully, he adjusts the pile of costumes in his arms and steps up to the drop off window, pushing the clothes through with a grateful sigh. A flash of headlights illuminates the lot briefly, and Blaine feels a flicker of kinship – at least he’s not the only one making last minute runs to dry cleaners.
His eyes adjust as he turns away from the building, the now-dark headlights allowing him to see a truck – dark in the low lighting, blue maybe, or green – parked a space over from his own car.

Breathe in. It’s just a truck.

Breathe out. It’s not them.

He pauses, drumming his fingers against his thigh. Blaine stills his hands before he takes a steadying breath and heads for his car.

-*-*-*-

“Be a man Anderson!” A shout that echoes along with harsh laughter making his ears ring. “I guess you can’t do that, huh?” He’s caught, tight arms trapping him against a body too large for him to overthrow. He can’t breathe, air trapped in frozen lungs, unconsciousness beckoning like a siren’s call.

“Freakin’ homo. Didn’t you learn nothin’ before?”

A white car idles in a parking lot, voices carrying over even the sounds of engines.

“You couldn’t even put up a fight?” A punch and he’s dropping, gasping for breath and ignoring the jarring of his knees.

“Look at me!” Hands grab him and he feels a pop, his arm going numb as his phone drops, the plastic shattering inches away even as he falls, pain growing with each heartbeat, shadows dancing across his vision.

A dark haired student leans against a dark truck, waiting for the gas to pump.

Pain flares in his side, blurring his vision even as a shoe returns, hitting again.

“You’re finished, Anderson!”

Darkness.
Here's the promised update! As a warning, there is discussion of both an attack as well as medical issues and injuries in the chapter, so be prepared for that. Thanks to everyone for the wonderful response to the last chapter! Many, many thanks to tchrgleek and slayerkitty for their quick and insightful betaing of this chapter, and a special thanks to kaleidoscopeheartstories for her insight and clarification for the medical policy & procedures, too.

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 25

A blaring ringtone cuts through the night, its owner fumbling to answer in the darkness of the room.

“Hello?”

_*_*_*_*

“Sir, sir can you tell me your name?”

“You’re finished, Anderson!”

Bright lights shine in his eyes, before leaving –

A green truck speeds away, tail lights fading to darkness.

There’s something around his neck, hands at his wrists. “My name’s Angela; I’m going to help you feel a bit better, okay? Now, can you open those eyes for me, maybe tell me your name?”

“Couldn’t believe it when Mitch told me he saw you at Meijer, but there you were. And workin’ at a garage? What’s a homo know about cars?”

“My partner’s getting your IV, okay honey? You might feel a pinch, but he’s good at his job. Now keep those eyes open for me, it’s not time to rest just yet. Maybe you can tell me if you have any allergies? I know medical bracelets aren’t the coolest things to wear.”

Pain blossoms in his arm before it goes numb, a chill spreading from it to the rest of his body even as the concrete breaks his fall.

“Sorry, I know this hurts,” there’s pressure on his side but he can’t move, feels the scream get trapped in his throat. “Looks like you’ve got some bleeding, but we’re gonna get you all patched up.”

His side is burning, but he can’t move, the pain keeping him frozen even as it grows; something cracks and then it’s harder to breathe.
“Hey, Blaine?” A blur of blue and brown and then pressure’s back on his chest, “Is that your name? I’m going to guess that your ID is right; you look like a charmer. Do you remember what happened?”

Another kick and then he can’t breathe at all –

“He’s crashing! Dammit, kid –”

Blaine gives in to the darkness.

Kurt winces as his phone rings for the fifth time. It may be on silent, but vibrating phones are merciless on hardwood floors, the skittering hum audible even though Kurt’s bag. When it starts again he moves to the edge of his seat, his annoyance at Blaine for forgetting their scheduled call at ten – or at his father for just wanting ‘check in’ – fading.

His phone is still buzzing.

“Why don’t we take a break,” Kurt’s already standing as his classmate makes the suggestion, ignoring the hint of aggravation in the tone. He crosses the small space in quick steps and has his phone in hand seconds later, its screen lit up with a candid picture taken by the waitress when they’d all gone to Breadstix to celebrate Blaine’s birthday.

“Hello?”

“Hey, kiddo.” His dad’s voice sounds rough, and Kurt leans against the chair, clenching the phone. He recognizes that tone. It’s the tone he heard when he realized his mom wasn’t coming home, when his dad’s check-up didn’t go well, when Finn –

“Something’s wrong, isn’t it.” Kurt doesn’t even make it a question, “What happened?”

“I –” Kurt bites his lip when his father doesn’t finish the thought, listens to him pull in a breath. “I got a call, about ten minutes ago. Are you sitting down? You should be sitting down, and you’re not alone –”

“Dad!”

“It’s Blaine, Kurt.”

Three words. Three words and Kurt feels the world tip, change focus (what is it with three words?) as he takes in the new information, and then he’s moving, his bag on his shoulder and the calls of his classmates fading as he exits the room.

“I –,” Kurt swallows, takes a breath as he leaves the building, “What happened?”

“No sure, kid.” Again with the three words.

“What do you mean? You’re not sure. How can you not be sure? What’s wrong with Blaine?” Kurt winces, knows his voice has gone shrill, the last question a shout loud enough to earn him second looks even on a busy New York sidewalk. He makes himself forcibly let out a breath, ignoring the pressure behind his eyes as he focuses on the band of silver on his left hand.

His dad replies then, breaking his concentration, but it’s just noise, pointless words about HIPPA and only knowing admittance. Kurt lets that information – too little, far, far too little – settle while
stepping around a slow moving tourist, offering a half-hearted hum in reply to assure his father he’s still on the line.

“I’m gonna find out what’s going on, Kurt, but we don’t know yet, so don’t go borrowin’ trouble.”

“He would have called.” *Always call* Kurt remembers, nervously swallowing, and Blaine would call, if he could.

“Not if his phone’s dead, or broken.” Some small part of Kurt knows his dad is doing the same as him; grasping for the smallest hint of explanation, a way to protect Kurt from the hurt, the scary pieces of the world. And Kurt would be grasping too, but Blaine’s dropped his phone on cafeteria tiles and New York sidewalks and countless tabletops, and never lets his phone fall below a forty percent charge. *Blaine would have called.*

And nothing good comes from a hospital phone call after ten at night. A pause and Kurt waits, hears the sound of breathing down the phone line. “We’re almost to the hospital and then we’ll know.”

“Which hospital?” The words are clipped as Kurt brings his focus back to the conversation, but he doesn’t care. His world has shifted into two parts: facts about Blaine and everything else.

“St. Rita’s. We’re ten minutes away.”

“Ten –” The word catches and Kurt blinks, his eyes feeling hot. He’s almost six hundred miles away. “Dad the emergency credit card – I have to be –”

“Carole’s already booked you a flight.” The statement cuts off the torrent of words, and Kurt knows that later, when he’s able to feel things, he’ll be grateful for his stepmother. “It’s not til 5,” Kurt hears a rush in his ears; 5 AM is over seven hours away – “but you’re on standby kid, *anyone* doesn’t show for a flight to Columbus and you’re on that plane.”

Kurt lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding.

“And,” Kurt presses the phone a bit closer to his ear, needing to hear what his father says more than the stranger yelling in the storefront a yard away, “Jim’ll pick you up from the airport; I’ll let him know what time as soon as you board.”

“Jim knows?”

“I knew you’d be comin’ here, Kurt, and that you’d need a ride home.”

“Of course,” Kurt agrees, tapping his foot as he waits at the crosswalk.

“Alight, I’m at the parking garage, Kurt. I’ll call back as soon as I have news for you. Okay?”

“Yeah. Okay. I’ll talk to you soon.” Kurt hates that the last comes out as a question.

“As soon as I have somethin’ to share.” Another pause, “I love you, kid.”

“Love you too, Dad.”

The call is over, and Kurt begins to plan.

He’s moving to the edge of the sidewalk moments later, hailing a taxi with the same hand holding a now-blank cell phone.
He taps his folded umbrella against his thigh as he waits, sighing when two taxis pass before one pulls aside. Ignoring the driver’s comment about the weather, he slides into his seat, holding onto his phone as he buckles his seatbelt and gives his address to the driver. It’s been one minute since he hung up with his dad.

One minute and three words since his world changed.

Blaine’s not-yet-replied-to text remains at the forefront of his lock screen. Kurt twists his ring, feels the spin of the metal against his finger.

He has to help Blaine with his time-management, apparently.

(Two minutes.)

He needs to get back to the loft.

His phone is silent.

He has to email his professors, tell them he’ll be absent from class, ask to turn in assignments over email, to do his Dance, Voice – and possibly Acting – finals over Skype.

He has to ask for Incompletes if his professors won’t allow for alternative end-of-term assessments.

(Four minutes.)

He has to pack. He’ll need jeans, it’s muggy and there will be thunderstorms in Ohio – he’ll need shorts for days when it’s particularly sweltering.

He just did laundry, he should have plenty of shirts, and he’d washed Blaine’s favorite –

He needs to write a note for Santana and Rachel.

He’ll have to let Dani and Elliott know too; he’s not going to make it to any of the band’s performances.

(Nine minutes.)

His ring slides to his knuckle on his next spin, and he pushes it back down, spins it again.

He’ll need his toiletries: shampoo, body wash, shaving cream, deodorant. His moisturizers and hair products.

He needs to find his suitcase; his carryon isn’t going to hold enough of his clothes.

(Seventeen minutes.)

The cab arrives at the loft and Kurt pulls out his wallet, counting the bills and paying the driver, tapping his umbrella as he makes his way to his front door.

(Twenty-two minutes.)

Inside the loft, umbrella carefully balanced against the wall by the door, he makes his way to his room, turning on the minimal amount of light as he goes. The loft is mostly dark – silent, too; Santana may have wanted a night alone with her girlfriend, but not even she is going to be home before eleven on a Friday night.
At his desk, the flowers from Blaine – slightly thinner with some having been pulled for drying – provide a splash of color against the dull wood. Kurt pauses, takes in the flowers before he drapes his bag over his chair, pulling his computer out and placing it on his desk to boot up while he tugs his carryon out from under his bed. A glance shows Windows still loading so he crosses to his dresser, methodically pulling out his best blue jeans and carefully refolding them as straight as possible before setting them in his bag.

He manages three pairs before his computer chimes a welcome.

(Twenty-eight minutes.)

After entering his password he steps back, turning as the screen flashes, fading from blue to show him and Blaine at Blaine’s birthday party, leaning together, hands thrust forward, rings proudly displayed in the foreground of the picture.

He blinks, spinning his ring.

He needs more jeans. And he hasn’t even started packing his shirts.

(Thirty-one minutes.)

He pulls down his grey button down, his white short-sleeved polo. He folds them carefully, makes sure they’l’ll end up as wrinkle-free as possible. His carryon is getting full, jeans and shirts taking up inches of space, the depth of the bag seeming smaller than before.

He moves to his bureau then: socks, underwear, pajamas. All necessary, all now added to the space between shirts and pants.

Zipping the carryon shut he drops it to stand on the floor, pulling the handle before moving back to his desk, quickly opening his browser and bringing up his email.

(Forty-three minutes.)

In his pocket, his phone rings. He jolts, stumbling out of his chair, answering the call before the ringtone makes it to the chorus.

“Dad – how is he?” Kurt stays standing, taps his left hand on the back of his chair when the wait lasts a beat too long.

“He’s,” A sigh, and Kurt’s hands clench, knuckles white points against his skin, “it’s not good.”

Three words.

And Kurt’s world shifts for the third time.

“What do you mean.” It’s not a question.

“They just took him back for surgery.” Another pause, “There’s bleeding, Kurt, looks like they might have to take out his spleen. He’s got bruised ribs, some are fractured, and they’re workin’ to make sure they don’t hit a lung. He’s got a concussion, bruises – and his right arm’s out of socket, but that’s pretty easy to fix.” There’s a sigh down the line, and Kurt briefly closes his eyes, waiting. “I wish I had better news for you, kid.”

“How long is the surgery?” The question is calm, even, and Kurt glances around his room, tries to remember if his suitcase is in the storage closet or buried in the corner while he waits for a reply.
“That depends,” Kurt narrows his eyes, though he knows his dad can’t see, annoyed at the drawn out words. “The doctor said they have to check the damage...they won’t know what they have to do til they’re in there.” For a moment Kurt thinks he hears a trace of irritation in his father’s tone, but it’s gone before he can fully tell. “It could be anywhere from thirty minutes to a few hours.”

And Kurt repeats his question from over fifty-seven minutes earlier: “What happened?” Because that much injury, for Blaine to be that hurt –

“He wasn’t in a car accident.” It takes a moment for it to register, what his father is implying. It wasn’t a car accident. So it wasn’t an accident at all. And if it wasn’t an accident –

“Do the police have who did it?” This time the silence stretches, and Kurt moves, unclenching his hand from the back of his desk chair and crossing to the corner of his room, raising a blanket to peer underneath. “They don’t, do they.”

“Not yet.” And Kurt can practically see his father, face tightened in promise, in fury, even as lines show exhaustion.

Kurt hums in reply as he shifts a box of scarves, finally seeing his suitcase visible in the least-accessible inch of the corner. “Okay. I have to finish packing; the first standby flight leaves in just over an hour.” Kurt takes a breath and bites back a curse when his voice catches on his sentence, “You’ll call?”

“You know better than that, Kurt. Soon as I know somethin’ I’m dialing, okay?”

“Yeah. I – yeah. Okay. I’ll talk to you soon, then.”

“Yes you will. And make sure you take a cab to the airport; use the credit card if you need to. Love you.”

“You too.” If his dad notices the hitch in his breathing as he replies, it’s not mentioned.

(One hour and eleven minutes.)

He puts his phone back in his pocket and manages to free his suitcase, pushing everything else back into a pile before dragging it over by his bed. He moves to his clothes rack, pulling off shoes and belts, arranges them so they take up the least amount of space.

Back at his computer, he banishes the screensaver, starts composing a mass email to all of his professors and Madam Tibideaux. He keeps the subject line succinct and to the point: “Fiancé in hospital” – his English 101 professor should be pleased. He explains his impending absences, listing what he knows of Blaine’s injuries, says that he’ll drop his Theatre History paper in his professor’s mailbox on the way to the airport, asks for extensions on his other assignments, requests non-traditional assessments for his other courses or for an Incomplete, but never apologizes for leaving.

(One hour and twenty-six minutes.)

He moves to the bathroom, gathering his toiletries. Shampoo, conditioner, body wash. Razer, toothbrush, moisturizer. The thin drawstring bag is heavy on his arm, bottles clacking as he moves back to his room, placing the bag in the zippered portion of his suitcase.

He taps his thigh as he crosses back to his dresser, pulls out his blue pajamas and sweatpants. A pause, and then a slightly worn, long-sleeved black and white Henley joins the pile in his suitcase,
carefully folded. He pulls out his phone, swipes past his home screen – *1 new message from Blaine* - and uses his app to order a taxi.

(One hour and thirty-nine minutes.)

Bags packed, email sent, Kurt sighs and heads for the kitchen, starting a pot of coffee and grabbing a blank note from the magnetic pad on the fridge.

Seated at the table he taps the pen on the wood, considering his words. The coffee pot hisses on the counter, and Kurt begins to write as the liquid finally falls. It’s short; he knows it’s short – no matter his current situation with Rachel, and Santana being Santana they’re still his friends – but he can’t share more than he knows.

And all he *knows* is that Blaine’s in the hospital.

He folds the paper, stands it in the center of the table before pouring a cup of the newly-brewed coffee into his travel mug.

He grabs his jacket from the hook by the door on the way to his room, slides it on as he pushes the curtain aside. He shuts down his computer, places it along with his larger textbooks in his still-open suitcase, securing the items before zipping it closed and moving it beside his carryon. His phone charger and tablet are taken from the bedside table, slid into the front pocket of his bag. The note from Blaine’s flowers slides in his pants pocket too, the cardstock barely catching on the fabric.

His carryon strap bites into his shoulder as he leaves the room, his suitcase scraping along the now-dark floor. He grabs his coffee and keys, makes sure his note hasn’t fallen.

(One hour and forty-seven minutes.)

The door slides shut with a bang, the echo shadowing him as he makes his exit. Muggy New York heat greets him as he leaves the building, but it’s soon replaced with the air-conditioned (if stale) interior of his cab.

Kurt leans back in his seat, spinning his ring, the silver invisible in the darkness of the cab.

His coffee is bitter in his mouth, a touch too hot since it had no time to cool.

He has to drop off his paper – stapled and carefully sitting behind his tablet in his bag. He needs to organize his IDs, make it easier – faster – for him to get his boarding pass once he’s at the airport.

He needs to find the central terminal for his stand-by flights.

(Two hours and nine minutes.)

Despite the late hour, NYADA students slump in various hallways and voices drift from lit practice rooms, sheet music and instruments littered around the tile floor. Luckily none offer more than polite nods as he walks to his professor’s office, slipping his essay under the door.

The cab seems chillier after his brief walk outside and Kurt rubs his arms and drinks several swallows of coffee before pulling out his wallet, shuffling his cards so his ID is easily accessible, prominently displayed. A moment later Kurt pulls the note from his pocket, takes a moment to reread the poem – and rub his hand over Blaine’s additional comment before sliding it into his wallet, protected from damage.
The bright airport lights illuminate the interior of the cab, and Kurt blinks away the spots from the change in lighting. His suitcase clicks on the concrete before he enters the airport, boarding calls and echoes of chatter replacing the singular sound. He finds his airline, joining the line of soon-to-be passengers before arriving at the counter.

Most people want to leave Ohio; why are all the immediate flights fully booked?

He grips both tickets with a careful hand, puts his suitcase on the scale for baggage before heading for security.

Kurt glances up at the boards, taps his thigh as he figures out the best way to get to his terminal. On the tram he stands by the door, is the first one off when they arrive at the correct exit.

His terminal is nearly empty, the bagel shop dark with its gate drawn. The plastic seat creaks as he sits down, placing his carryon beside him. Announcements blare over the speakers, and Kurt reads the weather and terror alert for the fifth time.

The terminal starts to fill.

Kurt thanks the flight attendant, confirms (again) that she’ll call if there’s been a miscalculation. If there’s any space on the plane.

Kurt taps his thigh and returns to his seat.

He chooses to love Blaine every day; he knows Blaine is his one love, knows they were made for one another, but he chooses to trust him and show the world that with their rings.

Kurt looks at his hand again, takes in the glint of silver – makes a promise to himself that he’ll never take it off.

No matter what happens.

So Kurt counts the turns of his ring and curses every fairy tale and romance he’s ever read, because there is no red cord tying him to his soulmate; no sixth sense that lets him know when the worst has happened. Because he knows Blaine’s hidden dreams and greatest fears and favorite food and brand of toothpaste, but while his fiancé got beaten and rushed to the hospital, Kurt didn’t know.

Another plane taxies on the runway. Kurt rereads his tickets, the fine-print and the details of his admittance based on a stand-by seat. New workers take their places behind the counter and Kurt
stands, pats his wallet, gathering his tickets as he moves.

The employee is sympathetic, promises Kurt will be the first to know. Asks if he needs a blanket or some water.

He needs to be in Ohio.

Kurt returns to his seat, plugs his phone in at the nearby charging station. His phone glows with the alert – 1 new message from Blaine.

A woman in a business suit takes a seat beside him, lamenting the state of the economy.

(Three hours and thirty-three minutes.)

Kurt stands before the announcer finishes his name, pocketing his phone and pulling out his ID and tickets as he walks.

Kurt Hummel has a seat.

(Three hours and forty-two minutes.)

_*_*_*_*_*_*

“You’d think they could come out an’ tell us somethin’! It’s been over two hours!” Burt stands, unable to remain sitting for another minute, and rubs his hands over his face as he paces in front of their seats. Carole holds up the plastic pager, still silent, and Burt can’t help but scowl. “They use those things at Breadstix – they shouldn’t be in a hospital.”

“They keep people like you from harassing the poor nurses.”

“Is it really too much to ask for an update?”

“Apparently,” the word is tight, and Burt pauses, takes in Carole’s tightly clasped hands, the straight, almost military posture.

And Burt is done waiting.

His phone beeps on his way to the nurse’s station – Kurt’s on a standby flight. Burt feels a bit of tension leave his shoulders; at least Kurt will spend a little less time in limbo.

The nurse – Laura according to her ID – looks up when he reaches the counter offering a polite if slightly distracted smile. “Yes? Can I help you?”

“Blaine Anderson? We’ve been waitin’ on an update.”

Clicks on the keyboard and then Burt’s spelling Blaine’s name, giving his birthday, when asked. He’s pulling out the paper in his pocket – hastily retrieved earlier from his nightstand drawer in near-darkness, added to the essentials of keys and wallet, too, ready to prove he’s more than Blaine’s Emergency Contact; he holds Medical Power of Attorney and he’s not above showing every piece of that documentation to get answers (he still hasn’t received a call back from the harried voicemail he left for the Andersons).

“So how’s it feel to be an old man, Anderson?”

“He’s not actually eighteen yet. And even if he was, I don’t think that counts as old, Dad.”
“He had a party, and it’s close enough. Besides, I wasn’t askin’ you, Kurt.”

He smiles as the boys laugh, taking in their sleep-mussed hair and tired eyes; it’s early enough that there’s more coffee in their mugs than in their stomachs, and he relishes in the fact that for these next twenty minutes he can out-think them.

“Well,” Blaine takes a bite of pancake, “It was a pretty amazing party, but can’t say I feel any differently. It’s been a wonderful weekend, though.” He looks down to his left hand before he flashes a smile at Kurt and Burt feels a swell of gratitude for this boy who makes his son blush.

It’s later, after the coffee mugs have been emptied and refilled, that Burt manages to broach the undesirable topic that’s haunted his thoughts – the rational but unwelcome thought that’s been in the back of his mind since the countdown to the days when Blaine would no longer be a minor in the eyes of the law reached single digits.

“So, you’re gonna be an adult soon.”

“Is there a reason you’re repeating common knowledge, Dad?” Kurt laughs, but it holds an edge of exasperation. “That hasn’t changed in the past few hours.”

“No,” Burt drops back into his seat on the sofa, ignoring the glare his son shoots him as he’s forced to resettle. “But eighteen year old adults don’t have guardians.” He pauses, lets the words sink in, turns to look at Blaine. “You’re still welcome here, kid,” he adds, emphasis on the last word, “but, legally, you’ll be in charge of all your decisions, not me or Carole. And in three days if something were to happen to you, the law says to contact next of kin. And until you and Kurt are married, that means your parents will make decisions for you if you can’t. Not Kurt, not us. So,” he pauses, taking a moment to watch as his son and his son’s fiancé (and no matter how much he loves Blaine that is still weird) communicate through facial expression. “Blaine, there’s a few different options, and hopefully we never have to use ‘em, but what would you like to do?”

Two hours later, Burt Hummel is asked to be Blaine Devon Anderson’s medical power of attorney and emergency contact, at least until he joins Kurt in New York. Because, as the boys explain, if anything were to happen, New York is hundreds of miles away, and while they accept the responsibility that comes with planning for marriage, the commitment and all that entails, they also know that logistically, if Blaine’s hurt, Burt’s in the same zip code.

He found the signed papers centered on the kitchen table the morning of Blaine’s birthday. There’d been no more discussion, no mention of the forms.

Just like it was unspoken that if they were ever needed, Burt’s name would just be for show once Kurt arrived.

“Mr. Hummel?”

Burt raises his head, ignores the question in her tone. “Yeah.”

“I don’t have any updates for you, Mr. Hummel; it looks like Mr. Anderson is still in surgery.”

“Blaine.”

“I’m sorry?”

“His name,” Burt swallows, “it’s just Blaine. Not – he doesn’t go by Mr. Anderson.”

“Right. Blaine, then. You were given a pager?” At Burt’s nod she continues, “Just come back here
when it goes off; I can’t promise any more information on Blaine until that happens.”

Burt clenches his hands around the edge of the counter, reminds himself that Laura is simply doing her job, that it’s not her fault that Blaine’s in an OR with doctors and nurses too busy to share information outside of the four walls they’re currently in.

He releases the counter, refolds and pockets his papers, absently thanking Laura before making his way back to Carole.

She’s still sitting in the vinyl-covered chair, although a steaming cup of coffee now rests on the table to her left, and another is clutched between her hands. She nods toward the cup as he approaches. “It’s not the best, but it’s hot.”

Burt takes the offered cup with a weak smile, blows across the steam for a moment before taking a cautious sip.

Carole was right: it’s nowhere near coffee, but it is hot.

A broken laugh and Burt turns, sees Carole setting her cup on the table, moving to cover her face. “When we got the call – when they told us about Finn –”

Burt feels the coffee burn in his stomach. “Carole –”

“Part of me wished for this.” A shake of her head, “Not this – we got the call too late. He – he was already gone. But part of me wished that I’d had a chance to hope.” Burt sets his coffee on the floor under his chair and pulls Carole in, blinks as he feels right shoulder dampen, almost misses the whispered confession. “I was wrong. This is worse.”

Burt closes his eyes, drops his head to Carole’s shoulder and tightens his arms around his wife.

He held his eight year old son when the world took away his mother.

He held his second wife through shared grief as they lost a son (and if a secret, selfish part of him had been glad it wasn’t Kurt, no one would ever know), as they mourned and packed up football trophies and drum sets.

And now he holds his wife again, wonders if the Hummel men are cursed to watch as people they love are torn from their lives.

Carole tightens her hold then, and Burt returns the gesture, forces himself to banish the pessimistic thoughts.

Yes, he lost a wife and Kurt lost a mother, and they lost Finn – they wouldn’t lose Blaine.

Blaine is in surgery.

Carole was right the first time: There is hope. And he tells her as such, pressing a quick kiss to her cheek as he does.

“You’re a good man, Burt Hummel.”

Burt passes her a tissue.

In Carole’s lap, the pager lights up. He and Carole are standing seconds later, crossing the short distance to the nurse’s station in ten quick steps, and Burt practically throws the still-blinking pager at Laura.
“Blaine Anderson. He was brought in over two hours ago.”

“Of course. Blaine.” Laura pauses, reaching under the counter for something Burt can’t see. “A nurse should be out soon to give you an update on his condition, but I do have his things for you.” She holds out a draw-strong plastic bag, a sticker with Blaine’s name and information attached to it.

“Thanks,” Burt looks at the table as Carole takes the proffered bag, “but you’re tellin’ me there’s no news?”

“Burt.” He ignores Carole’s comment, the hand resting on his arm.

“They didn’t say anythin’ when you got that bag?”

Laura has the decency to look apologetic, offers a sad smile. “I’ll page you when I receive any updates,” at Burt’s stare she continues, handing back the now-silent pager, “if there had been any issues they would have called. And,” she hands over a clipboard full of pages, pen attached, “if you could fill this out?”

“Right.” Burt takes the clipboard and rubs a hand over his eyes, steps back from the counter.

“Thanks.”

Back at their seats, Burt watches Carole carefully open the bag while he takes a sip of his now tepid coffee.

Keys, a wallet, a cracked cell phone, a silver ring with flecks of red.

“I’m gonna go wash this.” Burt stands, gripping the ring in a tight fist and stepping away before he can hear Carole’s reply.

In the bathroom he carefully rinses the ring under water, rubs his calloused fingers over the metal until it gleams, untarnished.

He slips it into his shirt pocket.

He takes a moment to stare at himself in the mirror, winces at the shadows under his eyes, the crooked baseball cap, and the wrinkled shirt he’d thrown back on while heading for the car. He splashes some water on his face, drying off with some paper towels before exiting the room.

*Why is it always the kids?*

Carole’s still in her seat in the waiting room, but she’s not alone: two uniformed officers stand beside her.

“Burt,” Carole looks up at his approach, “these are Officers Randall and Daniels; they have some questions about what happened to Blaine.”

“Yeah?” Burt eyes the two policemen, wonders at Daniels – who looks all of sixteen – and feels the anger return. “I got some questions about what happened to Blaine, too.”

“Burt –”

“You got anything on what happened to him?”

“Sir,” Randall steps forward, in front of his younger partner, and Burt resists the urge to roll his eyes. “I get that you’re upset –”
“Damn right I’m upset!”

“Burt,” Carole sighs, places a hand on his arm, “they’re just trying to do their jobs.”

A pause and then Randall speaks again. “You’re Burt Hummel? Blaine Anderson’s emergency contact?”

“Yeah.” Daniels has pulled out a notepad, starts writing notes.

“Can you tell us what happened tonight?”

“What happened tonight?” Burt clenches his hands. “What happened is I got a call from this hospital tellin’ me my – tellin’ me Blaine was admitted.” Burt keeps eye contact, lets out a breath, “Turns out somebody used him as a punching bag.”

“Does Mr. Anderson –”

“His name’s Blaine.”

“Does Blaine have any enemies?”

“He’s a gay teenager in Ohio,” Burt huffs, rubbing a hand over his face, “So only every homophobic bastard in the state.” Burt keeps his voice even, watches, waits for the look of disgust, itches for the ensuing argument.

But Officer Randall doesn’t react, at least not that Burt can see. “Anyone in particular?” A pause. “I notice Blaine’s parents aren’t here.”

“We called them, but they’re away on business,” Carole smoothly answers, “Blaine’s been staying with us.”

“Friend of the family?”

“My step-son’s fiancé.” Carole smiles then, and Burt feels a well of gratitude, reaches to squeeze her hand.

“Okay,” Randall pauses, and Burt brings his focus back to him, “So, no known enemies; no one who you can think of who would want to hurt him?”

“He’s eighteen,” Burt snaps, “what eighteen-year-old has any enemies?”

“We’re just trying to follow all possible leads, Mr. Hummel.”

“Well Blaine’s currently bein’ cut open, so I’m not sure what leads you’re lookin’ for, here.”

“Look Mr. Hummel,” Randall sighs, takes a step forward, “I’ll be honest with you. Right now? We got a 911 caller who found Blaine unconscious in the Advantage Cleaners parking lot with no one else around, and no camera in the area. We got Blaine’s clothes from the ER nurses, and the admitting doctor’s statements that his injuries are consistent with a physical attack, but that’s it. Unless he wakes up and gives a statement we have no leads; no suspects –”

“You mean when he wakes up?” Burt knows his voice is too loud, too harsh but he can’t stop it, doesn’t try. “Someone beat my – Blaine’s undergoing surgery, has been since we got here so we haven’t even seen the kid! He has injuries I can’t even pronounce – but there’s nothing you can do?” Burt remembers dropped tools and a conversation over cookies and mugs of coffee, “But that’s nothing new, right? There was nothin’ to be done in 2009, either.”
The room seems too silent after his words and Burt waits, listens to his breathing as the spark of anger fades.

“What happened in 2009?”

Burt turns, sees Officer Daniels looking surprised by his own question. “Blaine took a friend to a dance at his old school in Marysville; apparently some of his classmates didn’t approve – put him in the hospital.” Burt sighs, “I don’t know all of it, but I do know no charges were ever filed, and Blaine transferred schools not long after.” Burt lowers his voice, looks to the doors he can’t enter. “The kid can’t catch a break.”

“Without evidence we’re going blind, Mr. Hummel. We’ll do everything we can, but we’re limited. Now,” Randall pulls out a card and passes it to a too-quiet Carole, “this has my number at the station and my cell. When Blaine wakes up, or if you think of something, you give me a call, alright?”

The officers leave moments later and Burt moves back to seat, taking his place beside Carole, who is carefully putting the officer’s card in her wallet. She switches her purse for the bag of Blaine’s items then, and Burt looks away, drinks some of his coffee.

“His phone’s broken,” she comments, looking down, “won’t even turn on. We’ll have to get him a new one.”

“Hm,” Burt glances at the pager before turning back to face her, “I’m not good at this part.”

“No,” Carole reaches to clasp their hands, “you’re a man of action. But,” she briefly tightens her hold, “if it helps, I don’t think anyone is good at this.” A pause, and then her voice cracks. “All this, and he was just dropping off the dry-cleaning. Just another stupid errand.” She releases his hold then, taking a breath and nodding to the abandoned clipboard in answer to his questioning glance. “Do you think we should call his parents again?”

Burt huffs and leans forward in his seat, keeps his voice quiet even if the tone is cutting. “I left them both messages after we got the call. I’ll answer when – if they call back, but I’m not killin’ my battery tryin’ to get in touch with them.”

Since his visit to the Anderson house back in March he hasn’t heard from Blaine’s parents, though he knows they’ve received invoices for Blaine’s therapy (he had been ready to pay if the claim had been denied) and he vaguely recalls something about gift cards on Blaine’s birthday. But there have been no phone calls. No communication.

Burt unclenches his fists and lets out a breath.

A glance shows Carole shaking her head, balancing the clipboard in her lap even as she carefully pulls Blaine’s wallet from the bag. “I still don’t – being out of touch from you child.” A sigh. “Do you know Blaine’s social?”

Burt pulls the papers from his pocket again, reading off the string of numbers before setting them aside on the off chance they hold some information Carole needs.

He manages a few swallows of now-cold coffee before Carole’s gasp has him turning, confusion turning to worry when he sees the pager silent and still on the table.

On top of Blaine’s open wallet a worn, creased letter sits in Carole’s shaking hand.

“I was looking for his insurance.”
Curious, Burt reaches over and takes the letter.

**Hey Blaine,**

Now that I have the stationary and pen this seems somewhat silly, but it seems even sillier to stop before I've even started. First off, Happy Birthday! I hope your day was amazing, and hopefully Dad remembered to give you your gift from me. I can’t have my fiancé missing his signature bowtie while touring L.A. And by now Dad should have given you his and Carole’s gift too, so I expect to see the bowtie in one of your many, many videos.

When I first thought of writing this letter, I held off (only partly because Santana could ruin me if she found out) because I couldn’t find the words. I still don’t know if I can, but you deserve for me to try.

You’re so brave, did you know that? When I first got to know you, after you grabbed my hand and led me around Dalton – and don’t lie, there never was a short cut – I couldn’t understand how you were so comfortable with yourself, how you were always unapologetically you, even when you were doing your best to help anyone (everyone). You noticed me when no one else did. You went with me to confront a bully (and I’m just realizing how strong you are, to have done that) after knowing me for less than a week. I think I started to fall in love with you then.

You were amazing, Blaine. You were amazing when you were serenading me with ‘Teenage Dream’ and you’re still amazing now that you’re my wonderful fiancé with a questionable sense of humor. I know I’m in New York and you’re in Ohio, but never doubt that you inspire me. I choose to be with you every day, and whether my professors know or not, every song I sing is dedicated to you, is perfected so we can build our future here.

I know you’re struggling right now, and I absolutely hate that I’m in another state. I love you so much, Blaine, and there are times I hate the 594 miles that separate us. I want to hug and kiss you goodnight (and before sleep, actually) every day, but I can’t. Not yet, at least. But I can tell you these things – or write? – and hope that it helps, at least a little.

Sometimes you need to see the words, and life means that I can’t always immediately answer the phone. So I thought that I’d give you this letter, so you can keep the words with you – I guess I still am a silly romantic.

I love you, Blaine Devon Anderson.

I love you, and you’re brave, and no matter what you’re feeling, no matter what has happened or what life throws at you I will **always** love you. We’re soulmates after all. And I choose to love you with everything because I know that’s how you love me in return.

**Just remember that for me, okay?**

Yours always,

**Kurt**

Burt refolds the letter and drops his head to his hands. He knows his kid. Kurt will cry because Bambi’s mom died, and shed tears of empathy for a friend’s broken heart, but for all that he shows the world his anger at injustice, at heart Kurt keeps his feelings silent; uses gestures rather than words.

Burt knew his son loved Blaine long before he heard the words.
Blaine had never just been ‘a friend from school.’

He knows what it cost for his son to write this, for him to put his emotions to paper. He understands what it says about Blaine’s place in Kurt’s life – in Kurt’s heart – understands that the letter shows an acceptance the ring in his pocket only hints to.

He remembers the phone call earlier, Kurt’s cold voice on the other end of the line. Burt knows his son, knows Kurt better than anyone (except maybe, possibly Blaine) but he had never heard that tone before, a flat voice and brisk sentences. The Kurt in the letter was gone; missing.

Why is it always the kids?

“You didn’t tell him Blaine crashed.”

“What?” Burt looks up, meets Carole’s eyes.

“When you called Kurt earlier,” her eyes cut to the letter at the mention of Kurt’s name, “you told him about the other…injuries. But you left that out.”

The pager lights up then, buzzing as its own momentum sends it skittering across the table.

He grabs it with his right hand even as his left reaches for Carole’s and they’re moving seconds later. Burt hands Laura the pager with a steadiness he doesn’t feel.

“Dr. Collins just called,” she comments with a slight smile turning off the pager before passing it to Carole, “he helped treat Blaine when he was admitted. He’s on his way with an update.”

Absently, Burt notes Carole nodding and expressing their thanks, but his attention has shifted, his focus on the wide white doors to his left. He follows Carole a little further down the desk, and then doors open.

The dark-skinned man in blue scrubs looks around before meeting Burt’s eyes, walking forward. “Family of Blaine Anderson?”

“That’s us,” Burt comments with a nod as he and Carole follow the man to a small cluster of chairs.

“Mr. and Mrs. Anderson? I’m Dr. Collins; I’ve been working on Blaine.”

“It’s Hummel, actually,” Burt corrects with a slight smile. “But Blaine’s a member of the family.”

“Of course,” he replies as they take their seats. “I’m sorry for the delay in updating you,” the doctor begins, and Burt appreciates the frankness of his tone. “But obviously Blaine is our primary concern.”

“How is he?”

Burt squeezes Carole’s hand at her question, listens as Dr. Collins re-lists Blaine’s injuries, and then goes into detail. He describes the severity of the damage to Blaine spleen; the rupture and how the best option given his condition is a splenectomy.

He listens to the expected time to complete the surgery – performed by one of the on-call surgeons, the possible complications, to the changes Blaine will have to make to get by without the organ.

But Blaine will be alive, and right now, Blaine’s bleeding in an OR.
Burt signs the consent forms, waits until Dr. Collins has vanished back behind the doors before he slumps back against the chair, the severity of the action hitting him.

“Blaine’s strong,” Carole comments, “even Dr. Collins said so.”

Burt manages a grunt of agreement before Carole pulls him to his feet, leading him back to their chairs, jackets and papers evidence of their occupancy.

“I never answered your question.” Burt remarks as he sinks back into the uncomfortable chair.

“What?”

“Before,” Burt pauses, casts a glance to the doors where Dr. Collins disappeared. “You asked why I didn’t tell Kurt about the ambulance; he didn’t need to know.” Burt sighs and slumps against the back of his seat. “You didn’t hear – he’s a mess, Carole. Sounded like a damn robot. It’s bad enough with the other – he knows how serious it is.” He glances to the pager. “It wouldn’a changed anything, and he…he didn’t need to know.”

“You’re right.” His head rises at Carole’s agreement, and Burt knows his face is betraying his confusion. “I just saw that letter…” Carole pauses and Burt watches as she pinches the bridge of her nose, takes a breath. “They’re still teenagers. And Kurt is an amazing kid, but I don’t even know why I asked.” She shakes her head and meets Burt’s gaze, “He shouldn’t – no one should hear that over the phone.”

Burt fights down the comment that no one should have to hear that ever, least of all his son. The anger is back – not that it ever fully left – because someone hurt his family. And Blaine is in surgery with a list of injuries and he doesn’t know –

Blaine’s going to fine.

Because Kurt needs him to be, and Burt knows Blaine will do anything for Kurt Hummel.

“I’m gonna get more coffee,” Burt grabs his cup and stands, gestures to Carole’s cup, “you want some, too?”

Carole passes him her paper cup before turning back to the clipboard. Burt takes his time walking to the alcove with the water and coffee dispensers, ignoring the vending machines when the thought of food makes his stomach turn.

He dumps out the old coffee and then systematically crushes the empty cups, squeezing the flattened paper before throwing them away and pulling new ones from the stack on the counter. He fills them absently, hoping whoever brewed this pot did a better job than before.

At least it smells like coffee, the bitter scent replacing the smell of disinfectant and medical supplies.

Burt takes a moment to breathe, to actually accept the situation and curse at the world.

By the time he rejoins Carole, the majority of the clipboard’s papers are flipped upward, and she’s scribbling on the last page. He sets her cup on the table when she makes no move to stop her writing, and turns to face the television, drinking his own coffee (brewed by someone who knew how to make coffee, luckily) and reading the closed-captions.

He manages a story about some freak weather in California and the promise of more rain for the Eastern United States before he hears Carole flip back the pages. “I’m going to drop this off; you
“A kiss from my pretty wife?” It’s not a great joke, but Carole seems to appreciate the effort, smiling in response before pressing a chaste kiss to his cheek.

He takes another sip of his coffee before reaching into his pocket to pull out his phone and check the time.

Carole’s back then, sans clipboard, stretching before settling into her chair.

“Laura said to let her know if we get tired; she can get us some spare pillows or blankets.”

“Don’t think I’m gonna be sleeping.”

“Maybe not,” Carole agrees, “but we’ll have to try at some point. We’re no help to anyone if we’re falling asleep on our feet.”

“You tired?”

Carole keeps her eyes forward, away from Burt. “I didn’t say that.”

“Yeah,” Burt leans over, wraps an arm around her shoulders, “Me either.”

“You know what I keep thinking about?” A hint of something that might be a laugh, and Carole continues, “Dinner. That dammed casserole. It wasn’t even anything special, but he kept putting more in that bowl. And I don’t know where he puts it, small as he is, but when he got seconds it’s just – that’s such a teenage boy.” A hiccup, “Of course he voluntarily did the dishes, but – he’s just a teenager, Burt.”

“He’s gonna be fine.”

“Burt –”

“You heard the doctor; he’s a fighter. Besides,” Burt forces a smile. “Kurt needs him to be okay; when have you ever known the kid to let him down?”

A sigh, but Burt sees the hint of a smile, so he leans back in his seat and drinks some more coffee, not quite as good with its cooler temperature. On the television, a special about tornados plays on and he loses himself in the monotony, ignores the calls over the announcement system, the sounds of hospital beds being wheeled down halls, the beeps from innumerable cellphones joining those from the elevators.

A discord, and Burt looks up.

Kurt stands in the entrance to the waiting room, pale in jeans and a NYADA t-shirt and ill-fitting sweater, his carryon still on his shoulders.

“Dad.” His voice breaks, and Burt just catches him as he falls.
Chapter 26

Kurt had managed to keep himself calm throughout the ride in Jim’s car. Through the hospital lobby. Until he stepped off the elevator.

(Seven hours and three minutes.)

His dad catches him when his knees give out: when the idea of Blaine being in the hospital merges with reality, when the scent of disinfectant and medical supplies joins the announcements for doctors over the PA system and it hits him that Blaine is in the hospital.

His hands clutch at his dad’s shirt, bunching the fabric in the back, and he pulls in quick, harsh breaths in-between gasping sobs. Distantly, he hears murmurs, knows his father and Carole are talking, but the words are jumbled, nonsense sounds that hold no meaning.

Absently, he notes that he’s moving – held upright by tight grips on his shoulders that compensate for his unsteady legs. But he doesn’t raise his head, keeps his face buried in his dad’s shoulder as tears streak his face and clog his nose.

He pulls in a breath, recognizes the detergent Carole prefers and the cheap body-wash his dad uses, feels a flicker of comfort before the sob rips from his throat.

He gives up attempting to stop, then.

Eventually, as his breathing evens, the sounds merge into recognizable words, and he relaxes his hands, pulls back a breadth from his dad’s chest.

“– just let it out. We can talk when you’re ready, okay? There’s no rush. You’ve been so brave gettin’ here, so just do what you need.”

He needs Blaine.

His breath hitches but Kurt steadies himself – he can’t see Blaine if he can’t control himself – carefully pulls his arms away and leans back from his father, avoiding eye contact and wiping his face with his hands until Carole hands him a tissue.
“Thanks.”

“It’s not much,” Carole adds with a slight shrug, “but there’s a restroom right around the corner.”

Kurt nods, wincing as he imagines the state of his face even as a headache begins to throb behind his eyes. He’s still a bit unsteady as he stands, but he waves off his dad’s assistance; he needs a minute.

In the unforgiving bathroom light he looks even worse than he’d feared: under the tear tracks and red blotches his face is pale, bleached in the light. His red-rimmed eyes still glisten and he blinks before turning on the faucet, cupping cool water in his hands before rinsing his face.

He doesn’t even attempt to fix his hair, just runs a damp hand through it until it stays out of his eyes.

(Seven hours and forty-one minutes.)

He squares his shoulders and exits the restroom, crosses the waiting room with steady steps.

“Sorry about your shirt,” Kurt comments, nodding to his dad as he sits down. “I –”

“Kurt.” Kurt looks away from his dad’s shirt, from the damp tear-stains and wrinkles.

“How,” Kurt swallows, forces himself to meet his dad’s gaze. “How is he?”

A sigh. “He’s in recovery.” He holds up a black circular pager, “They’ll let us know when we can go back to see him – they said it could be a while, though. They…they had to take out his spleen; there was just too much damage.”

Kurt brings a hand up to his mouth, bites his lip to keep in the shout. “What does that mean?”

“Once he recovers he’ll be more susceptible to infections,” Kurt relaxes a fraction, feels a sliver of hope from his father’s mention of the future even as fear coils, restless in his mind. “He’ll always need his flu shot.”

“Of course,” Kurt looks down, tries to remember if NYADA’s health clinic offers vaccines at a reduced rate. He shakes his head, looks up to see his dad staring at him. “There’s something else, isn’t there. Oh God – what else –”

“Take a breath, Kurt.” Carole’s voice cuts through his panic, and he forces himself to do as she says, breathing in and out before looking at them both.

“What haven’t you told me.”

“It happened a while ago,” Burt pauses, rubs his hands over his eyes, “Blaine crashed earlier. In the ambulance on the way here they –”

His dad is talking. Kurt knows this, but his world has tilted, even the waiting room taking on a blurred quality. Years of episodes of Grey’s Anatomy and House, M.D. suddenly seem a curse, because he knows what “crashed” means.

He wishes he didn’t.

“– Kurt, you still listenin’?”

“I’m – yeah. Yes. But, he’s okay now, right? Dad? Blaine’s okay?” Kurt hates the vulnerability in
his tone, the raw scratchiness of his words, but he needs his dad to answer him. He needs his dad to
tell him Blaine’s alright.

Because his dad won’t lie, and he needs to know.

*He needs Blaine.*

“He’s stable,” Carole answers, her voice carrying from next to Burt. “They wrapped his ribs, too,
got his arm back in socket while he was out. He’s stable, Kurt, but he’s not okay – not yet.”

Kurt appreciates the response, is glad for Carole’s calm tone and precise words, but a small part of
him, the part that remembers years of being a family of two, wishes his dad had been the one to
answer.

“I need to see him.”

Carole’s voice is gentle, placating, “We have to wait til he’s out of Recovery, Kurt.”

For a second, Kurt hates his stepmother.

“And when will that be?” Kurt knows his words are cold, cutting, but he needs them to understand:
he has to see Blaine. “You said it could be a while? How long is that? An hour? Two? I need to see
him!” He turns, takes his dad’s hand, “Dad, I need to see him. Please. I need to.”

“It’s not up to me, you know that. I’d take you to him if I could, Kurt – I would. But we have to
wait. For now,” Burt leans over and Kurt accepts the hug, “we just have to wait, Kurt.”

“I’ve never been good at waiting,” Kurt mumbles, huffing before he leans back in his chair. He
looks over, eyes the silent pager. “I’ve got a headache,” he stands, “I’m going to go see if they’ve
got something I can take.”

“You’re not a patient –”

“I have a headache and this is a hospital,” Kurt snaps, but then he pauses, turns back to face his
parents, “even if they won’t give me something they should have a suggestion for where I can go.”

Kurt steps away before another word is uttered, makes it to the nurse’s desk in a few quick strides.

(Eight hours and two minutes.)

The nurse looks up, curly red hair bouncing as she does, “Can I help you?”

Kurt loses his words. He stands at the desk, staring at the nurse who can’t be much older than him
with his hands clenched on the edge of the counter, and can’t get his mouth to move.

“Sir?”

Kurt blinks, forces a swallow. “I – I’m Blaine Anderson’s fiancé.” He watches that information
settle, sees her glance to his left hand. “I know…my dad told me the pager would go off if there
was any new information, but is there any update? Anything?” Kurt sighs, drops his gaze. “I just
got here from New York.”

A few taps on the keyboard, and then she looks up again, offering an apologetic smile. “You’re
Kurt Hummel?” At his nod she continues, “He’s still in Recovery. The –”

“Do you know how long he’ll be there?” Kurt interrupts the nurse – Becca, according to her ID –
and leans forward, hoping for more information.

“I don’t, I’m sorry.” Kurt sighs, pinches the bridge of his nose and forces himself to breathe evenly. “But,” he jerks his head up at the word, meeting Becca’s warm gaze, “I could call back for you. I can’t promise I’ll get any new information –”

“Thank-you.” Kurt moves to rest his arms on the counter, feels his body slump when she nods to his ‘I can wait here?’ follow-up.

He spins his ring as she reaches for the phone, counts the turns as he waits.

He listens in, doesn’t even bother pretending he’s doing anything else, but only hearing one-side of the conversation limits his understanding.

His ring spins faster with every reply.

He makes it to forty-three rotations before Becca hangs up the phone.

“I don’t have much for you, sorry.” She offers a smile and Kurt forces himself to nod; it had been a fool’s hope anyway. “However,” Kurt feels his eyes widen and he leans forward over the desk, “They’re just waiting for a bed, and then they’ll move him up to a room.”

“He’s okay?” The words rush out in a breath, and Kurt’s grateful for his arms resting on the counter; he’d have fallen otherwise.

“He’s stable,” Becca replies, “I can’t really tell you more than that; sorry.”

“No, no,” Kurt takes a breath, “you already – thank you. Really.”

“Someone should be out to take you up to see him soon.” She smiles, continuing when Kurt stays by the counter. “Did you need something else?”

“Could you –” Kurt shakes his head before pausing, taking a breath. “I know I’m just a visitor, but do you have anything for a headache?”

“I’m afraid I don’t have anything here,” she frowns, “I’d ask again once you’re upstairs; they’re more likely to be able to help.”

Kurt nods, gives a small wave before stepping back from the counter and moving back across the room.

(Eight hours and seventeen minutes.)

“So what did you find out?”

Kurt startles at his father’s question, his head jerking up as he comes to a stop in front of his dad and Carole. “What?”

“I fully believe you have a headache, Kurt, but no way did you go up there and not ask about Blaine.”

“I –” Kurt pauses, ignoring the flush he knows has taken over his face. “They’re moving him; we should get to see him soon.”

As if on cue, the pager in Carole’s lap begins to flash, its buzzing muted by her clothes.
Kurt’s turning, heading back for the desk at a brisk pace, only absently noting the echoes of his parents’ steps behind him.

“Blaine Anderson!” The name is rushed but Kurt can’t bring himself to care, leaning over the counter and into Becca’s personal space, anxious. “The pager – I – we can go see Blaine now, right?”

“You –”

“Please,” Kurt ducks his head, hates that his voice cracks on the word, “I just – you said they were moving him and then I could see him. So –”

“How about you let her get a word in, Kurt.”

His dad’s words cut through Kurt’s panic and he takes a breath, slowly raising his head. “Sorry.”

“I think we’re all just a little anxious,” Carole adds, placing the pager on the counter. “I believe you have some information about Blaine Anderson?”

“That I do,” Becca smiles and nods. “He’s been moved to the in-patient unit, room 309. Leah,” she nods to a nurse standing to the left, “is going to take you there – she was with Blaine in Recovery, too, so she should be able to answer more of your questions.”

Kurt nods, stepping back and narrowly avoiding running into his father in his haste. He sidesteps, manages a shadow of a smile for the new nurse even as he forces himself to focus, to take in every piece of information Leah says.

(Eight hours and twenty-three minutes.)

Leah steps around the counter, and Kurt follows her, feels a fraction of comfort when his father’s hand settles on his shoulder. “Blaine’s still unconscious,” she comments, “between the meds and concussion I wouldn’t expect him to be fully aware or even wake up anytime soon. But,” she pauses, pressing the button for the elevator, “he’ll know you’re here.”

“How long do you expect him to be out?”

“Honestly it depends,” she answers Carole’s question as they step into the elevator, “it could be a couple hours or several – Dr. Olt will have more for you once we’re upstairs.”

They’re upstairs seconds later, the elevator announcing their arrival to the third floor.

The lights are dimmed – in deference to the early hour, Kurt guesses – but the low light still bounces off the tiled floors, and the smell of the hospital seems stronger than it did in the surgical waiting room.

Kurt fights the urge to be sick.

“There’s several nurses stations on this floor,” Leah comments as they pass one, “the one closest to Blaine’s room is up ahead.”

The hand on Kurt’s shoulder tightens for a moment.

“There anythin’ else we need t’know before we see him?”

“Your phones need to be off,” Leah answers Burt’s question, “though they wouldn’t work in the room anyway. As for Blaine, as I said, Dr. Olt can tell you more. Although,” she hastens to
“Yeah,” Kurt bites his lip at his parents’ simultaneous replies, remembering the list of injuries he’d heard earlier: *bruised and fractured ribs, shoulder out of socket, bruised kidneys, collapsed lung, splenectomy.*

“Well his condition hasn’t changed,” she comments, “he’s currently serious, but stable. But,” she stops, and Kurt takes in the grey door, the numbers 309 next to it, “these types of injuries – he’s pretty bruised, and it can be disconcerting.”

Outside the door, Kurt freezes. He’s seconds away from seeing Blaine, and he can’t bring himself to move.

For a moment.

*He needs Blaine.*

He crosses the threshold, taking in the beeping monitors, the dimmed lights, the doctor standing by the bed –

*Blaine.*

Kurt’s hand raises and he covers his mouth, trapping the gasp-scream-shout that wants to escape. And then he’s moving, his father’s hand falling from his shoulder as he crosses to Blaine’s side, reaching out to grasp his hand only to stop, his hand hovering inches above the bed.

Because the figure on the bed isn’t Blaine.

Not the Blaine he knows, anyway. The body is too still, the only movement the slight rise and fall of his chest.

“It’s okay – you can touch him, I mean. It won’t hurt anything. I’m Dr. Olt – I worked on Blaine in the O.R.” Kurt looks away from Blaine at the comment, sees the doctor offering him a smile.

“Oh,” Kurt nods. “I’m Kurt Hummel – Blaine’s fiancé.” He waits a moment gauging her reaction to the title before continuing once he’s sure there’s no judgement. “I – thank you. Is he –”

“He’s stable,” she interrupts, “Although he’s likely to be unconscious for a while longer.”

“He’s never this still,” Kurt comments, his voice quiet.

“You said he's doin' alright?” Kurt notes his father moving after he asks the question, standing beside him even as Carole moves to stand on the other side of the bed, shaking Dr. Olt’s hand as she goes.

“For now,” Kurt raises his head at the comment, meets Dr. Olt’s gaze. “We’ll keep a close watch on him – make sure there’s no additional bleeding or complications. We have to keep an eye on his kidney function, too, given the bruising.”

“I thought you said he was stable?” Kurt feels his heart pounding, knows his voice has taken on a shrill edge, and he forces himself to breathe, turns to look back at Blaine.

“He is stable,” Dr. Olt confirms, her voice carrying over the beeps in the room, “we just need to keep a close watch on him. But,” she pauses, and Kurt turns back to face her, “he’s a fighter, and I put a lot of work into him in that O.R., so I have every hope that he’ll make a full recovery. He just
might need a little more help along the way.”

Kurt nods before reaching back and pulling one of the room’s chairs a foot closer to the bed and sinking into it, leaning forward and resting his elbows on Blaine’s bed.

He hears his parents talking with Dr. Olt, knows he should be listening, taking notes to look up information later, but he can’t drag his eyes away from Blaine.

Kurt leans forward, pushing some of Blaine’s hair off his forehead before moving down; past the scrapes and bruises on Blaine’s cheeks, Blaine’s right arm resting in a sling; the left, with an I.V. taped to the back of his hand –

And no ring.

“Dad. His ring – Dad they took Blaine’s ring! He wouldn’t have taken it off. He wouldn’t –”

“Kurt,” His dad’s hand is back on his shoulder, interrupting his tirade. “I got his ring. They brought it out to me while he was in surgery. Here,” Kurt can only watch as his dad pulls the silver ring out of from his shirt pocket, dropping it into Kurt’s lax palm, “I meant to give it to you earlier, but –” his dad shrugs, “didn’t seem like the right time, then.”

“Oh,” Kurt looks at the ring resting in his palm before he makes a fist, trapping the ring inside.

“You’ll need to hold on to that for a while,” Kurt startles at Dr. Olt’s voice, turning to face her.

“What?”

“It’s just a precaution,” she continues, “but Blaine will have to go for some testing over the next few days. And if something were to happen, I’d hate to have to cut that off in an emergency.”

“Oh,” Kurt repeats, clenching his fist a bit tighter. “I’ll – I’ll keep it, then.”

“Just for a while,” Dr. Olt’s comments, “But, if there’s no more questions I should go check on some of my other patients. Some of my fellows will be by throughout the day, and I’ll be on call if I’m needed. Technically visiting hours don’t start until nine –” she holds up a hand and Kurt keeps his protest silent, “but given how long you’ve been waiting I managed to get them waived for you. Still,” she nods toward a recliner by the window, “Blaine will be out for a while; try and get some sleep, if you can.”

“Of course,” Carole agrees, although Kurt doubts anyone in his family will be sleeping in the near future.

The door clicks shut moments later and Kurt lets his shoulders drop, now alone with his family.

(Eight hours and forty-two minutes.)

Slowly, Kurt reaches out with his right hand, clasping Blaine’s in a gentle hold even as his left tightens around Blaine’s ring.

“He’s gonna get through this, Kurt,” Kurt nods at his father’s comment, but doesn’t look away from Blaine, “you heard Dr. Olt’s – Blaine’s a fighter.”

Kurt hums in agreement even as he focuses on the rise and fall of Blaine’s chest. “He is. I just – I wish he was awake. I have to talk to him, Dad, I need to.”

“You can still talk to him, Kurt.”
“But he can’t talk back.” Kurt blinks, takes a steadying breath to fight the lump in his throat. “He’s too still, Dad. This isn’t – who could do this? Who could hurt him like this?”

“I don’t know, Kurt. But the police are lookin’ into it.”

“And he has us,” Carole adds, offering a smile from across Blaine’s bed. “He’ll have all the support he needs.”

Kurt nods – he’s not leaving the hospital until Blaine is free to leave with him.

He sighs, adjusts his grip on Blaine’s lax hand and tries to look past the bruising, past the bandages and tubes and bags of liquid hanging off the bed and on poles to see the Blaine he knows.

But there’s too much – too many tubes and monitors and bruises – everywhere he looks is a reminder that Blaine was beaten.

Blaine may be a fighter, may be the strongest person Kurt knows, but at the moment he’s broken, and until he wakes up, that’s all Kurt can see.

“I know you need to rest,” Kurt whispers, dropping his head near Blaine’s ear, “but I’m here now, okay? I’m here and I love you and I’m not leaving until you get to come with me. So just keep fighting, Blaine. I’ll be here.”

He leans back in his chair then, blinking to keep the tears at bay even as he counts Blaine’s breaths, takes comfort in the steady beeps from the monitors.

His dad moves some time later, pulling a chair to join Carole on the other side of the bed and Kurt leans forward again, rests his head beside his and Blaine’s hands.

A tap to his shoulder jolts him and he blinks, wondering when he managed to fall asleep. “Sorry,” he turns, sees a nurse standing to his left, “I didn’t want to wake you, but it’s time for Blaine’s vital check – and medication – before I take him to Radiology.”

“What?” Kurt blinks, rubs a hand across his eyes to brush away the remnants of sleep, “No,” he continues, shaking his head, “Dr. Olt said we could stay – I have to stay with him.”

“It won’t be for long,” the nurse – Kara according to her nametag – replies, “you and your parents can get some coffee and we’ll have your brother –”

“Fiancé,” Kurt snaps, tightening his grip on Blaine’s hand, “He’s my fiancé.”

“Oh,” the nurse – Kara, falters then, and if she weren’t about to take Blaine away Kurt might even feel a shred of sympathy for her. “I’m sorry; it’s just only family is allowed –”

“We’re his family,” and Kurt has never been so proud to call Burt Hummel his father as he is in that moment. “I have his medical power of attorney.”

The beeping of the monitors break the silence after the comment, but Kurt keeps his eyes on the nurse, “I’m sorry for the confusion.” The polite words are at odds with the judgement in her gaze, and Kurt glares.

“You mentioned something about Radiology?” Carole’s voice carries across the small space, but Kurt doesn’t turn to face her, keeps his eyes on the nurse.

“Yes, Mr. Anderson is scheduled for an ultrasound to check his kidneys; we need to –”
“Blaine hasn’t even woken up yet,” Kurt interrupts, keeping his voice quiet after stressing the first word, “Can’t it wait?”

“I’m afraid not,” the nurse replies, and Kurt tightens his grip on Blaine’s hand. “You can wait here or in the waiting room until he’s back.”

“No,” Kurt straightens in his seat, keeps his hand entwined with Blaine’s. “I need to go with him.”

“I’m sorry,” Kara replies, though her tone says she isn’t, “but you’ll have to wait. It shouldn’t take long; half an hour, an hour at most.”

“No!” The word is punched out of him and Kurt forces himself to not crush Blaine’s hand, to breathe evenly. “You can’t—”

“Kurt.”

His father’s voice interrupts his frantic pleas and Kurt turns to face him. “Dad I can’t leave him. He doesn’t even know I’m here.”

“He knows, Kurt. And I know you wanna stay with him, but you also want what’s best for him. And right now, Kara needs to take him for that ultrasound.”

Kurt ducks his head, hating that his father is right. He does want what’s best for Blaine, but he also needs Blaine. Needs to be able to see him and watch the rise and fall of his chest and hold his hand. But he has to put Blaine first.

He releases a drawn out breath before straightening his shoulders, standing to lean over Blaine.

“Hey,” he whispers, “They’re going to take you for some tests, but I’m here, okay? And I promise I’ll be right here when you get back.” Kurt swallows, takes a breath before continuing, “I love you,” he brushes a kiss against Blaine’s cracked lips, “I’ll see you soon, okay?”

He pulls back, tightening his fist around Blaine’s ring even as he slowly loosens his grip on Blaine’s hand. He stays as close as possible while Kara moves around the bed, releasing the brakes on the bed’s wheels and moving some of the lines running from Blaine to the monitors.

Kurt doesn’t fully release his hold on Blaine until the bed is moving, and Blaine is pulled from his reach, out of sight seconds later as Kara pushes the bed around a corner.

(Nine hours and forty-eight minutes.)

The silence is jarring.

“Kurt—”

“We should go to the waiting room,” Kurt comments, interrupting his father, “they probably have coffee.”

He doesn’t wait for a reply, exiting the room and heading down the hallway to the waiting room with hurried steps. He sees a small alcove with a carafe of coffee and some Styrofoam cups. Kurt carefully fills three of them, doctoring his and Carole’s before picking up all three, carrying them back to where he sees his dad and Carole waiting.

They stop talking as he approaches, thanking him as they take their cups before lapsing into silence.
Kurt takes a seat, staring at the steam rising from his cup while he focuses on the feel of Blaine’s ring still resting in the palm of his left hand.

In his pocket, his phone buzzes.

Kurt startles and his coffee sloshes in his cup, narrowly missing sliding over the edge and spilling onto his hand.

After setting his coffee on the table next to him Kurt pulls out his phone. Text messages from Santana and Dani and Rachel…and Tina.

He stares at the message for a moment, uncomprehending.

Because his world has narrowed to room 309 and beeping monitors and the still form of Blaine.

He stares a moment longer before standing and practically dropping the phone in his dad’s lap.

He knows he’s not the only person who loves Blaine, but he can’t reply. His eyes burn and he swallows the lump in his throat before offering a quick apology and darting from the room.

Burt barely manages to catch the phone Kurt throws at him, fumbling one-handed even as Kurt vanishes around a corner. He almost follows, gets as far as setting aside the coffee before Carole rests a hand on his arm.

“Why don’t we give him a minute.”

“He shouldn’t –”

“Burt,” Carole’s grip tightens, “Just give him a minute. Why don’t you see what had him throwing his phone?”

“Hm,” Burt finally tears his gaze from where he last saw Kurt, looks down at the cell sitting in his lap.

He curses when he sees the newest message; Tina asking if Kurt’s heard from Blaine since he was supposed to meet her for coffee before rehearsal.

“What is it?” Burt passes Carole the phone without a word, takes a moment to rub a hand over his eyes.

“I’m gonna have to call Schuester, tell him what happened.” He doesn’t want to make the call, doesn’t want to have to repeat the list of injuries.

“Emma.”

“What?” Burt shifts in the chair, wonders why all hospitals have uncomfortable furniture.

“Call Emma,” Carole repeats, “She can tell Schuester; she can notify the school, too.” Burt squeezes her hand when her voice cracks, “He’s going to be out for a while and Emma – Emma can help tell the other kids.”

Burt closes his eyes; he doesn’t envy Emma that task.

A touch to his arm and he turns, sees Carole pulling out her phone, dialing before he even manages
to pull his out from his pocket. Carole’s making the call and he –

He has nothing to do.

He clasps his hands, leans forward as he listens to Carole apologize for calling so early, explain that Blaine won’t be singing at the festival. He rubs at his eyes, raises his head to stare at the doorway where Kurt disappeared.

For the first time since he got the phone call – the horrible, jarring life-changing call – he doesn’t know what to do. There’s no nurse to pester, no forms to sign.

No family member needing his support.

Beside him, Carole’s voice catches, but she shakes her head at him when he stretches out his arm. He clasps his hands again, rests them on his knees to prevent himself from standing, from searching the labyrinth of a hospital to check on Kurt.

Carole was right: Kurt needs a moment.

And as much as his paternal instincts are screaming for him to find Kurt, to comfort him and protect him from the world, this is something he can’t protect him from.

Burt sighs, offers up his thoughts to a God he’s not sure he believes in; what kind of God allows this to happen to Blaine, twice? What kind of God gave Blaine parents that didn’t cherish their child?

He relaxes his hands, breathes out.

Carole ends the call, “Emma’s going to call the kids’ parents.” She lets out a breath, turns to lean against Burt’s shoulder. “She’s coming with Schuester, though. They should be here soon.”

Burt nods, processing the information. He knows others care for Blaine; Blaine’s a great kid – smart and kind and popular – and part of Burt’s family. Despite having all the respect in the world for Will (for Will and Emma) at this moment he doesn’t want to see them.

Because Burt just wants to gather his family and barricade them from the rest of the world.

And the Schuesters aren’t family.

Blaine – Blaine isn’t officially family yet, but that’s a technicality.

He was the name Kurt couldn’t say without a smile; the boy who took Kurt to see a musical that left his son humming for weeks; the overly polite, nervous boy who showed up to help Kurt plan a wedding and then turned down the ensuing invite until Burt forced him to promise his attendance, assuring him that he was welcome.

He was the boy who got Kurt to attend a football game with a smile.

Burt glances to the doorway again – still no sign of Kurt – and reminds himself that Blaine is stable, that Blaine would never leave Kurt.

He pushes away the thought that Blaine may not have a choice.

Blaine is stable.

Burt rubs his hands over his face again, sighing when that only causes starbursts in front of his
eyes.

“I’m gonna grab some more coffee,” he comments as he stands, “you need a new cup?”

“Please,” Carole nods, “with some extra cream to help me forget that it’s poorly made.”

“At least it’s caffeinated,” he manages a weak smile before he steps away, heading for the alcove Kurt had raided earlier.

He stops once he’s there, though, just stares at the carafe and the white cups and red stirrers. He’s struck suddenly by the mundane action, wonders at how even something as common as pouring coffee seems foreign when done in a hospital.

For one single, too-quick moment he has the desire to simply wipe everything from the table; to yell and rage against the fact that his son is probably crying in a sterile hospital bathroom because someone had attacked the boy his son chose to love.

He shakes his head slightly, forces himself to copy the yoga breathing techniques he teases Carole about before reaching for the cups. He carefully fills them, watches the steam rise and curl before disappearing. He pulls a handful of creamers from the basket, pockets them before gathering the cups with a sigh and walking back to Carole.

“I think it’s been sitting a while,” he comments as he hands her the cup, “but it’s definitely hot. Here,” he passes the creamers, “I wasn’t sure how many you’d need.”

“Well,” she replies, eying the creamers in her hand, “I’m sure this is more than enough.”

Burt nods and stares into his coffee cup.

He’s still staring minutes later when Kurt reappears, dry-eyed but pale, with a few droplets of water clinging along his hairline.

Kurt glances back toward Blaine’s room before stopping in front of his father, “Blaine isn’t –” Kurt pauses, blows out a breath, “He’s not back yet?”

“It’s only been twenty minutes,” Carole speaks up from his left, “but no, Kurt, they haven’t called for us.”

Kurt nods even as he slides into the seat beside his dad, reaching to grab his abandoned coffee cup from earlier. He tightens his hand around Blaine’s ring, stares into his now-cold coffee.

He makes himself stay quiet, focuses on the metal in his palm and remembers Blaine’s face when he had offered him the ring; remembers Blaine’s smile, and how he’d jumped in surprise when Kurt had entered the room.

Kurt tightens his hand, feels the edge of Blaine’s ring cut into his skin.

(Ten hours and thirty-one minutes.)

Kurt takes a moment to count his breaths, forces his fingers to relax. There’s an indentation in his palm; a perfect circle to mirror the silver band sitting just to its left.

He’s still staring at the ring when his father shifts next to him, and looking up he sees Mr. Schue and Ms. Pillsbury approaching, looking anxious.
Kurt can’t bring himself to care.

He looks back to Blaine’s ring again, watches as it catches the dim light of the waiting room. Carole is explaining Blaine’s trip to Radiology and Kurt resists the urge to give in to his need to see Blaine and head for the department himself.

He needs to see Blaine – to hold his hand and count his breath and be with him.

He hailed taxis and caught a midnight flight and now he’s the closest to Blaine he’s been in weeks and he’s being stopped by a set of doors and a less than accepting nurse.

Kurt clenches Blaine’s ring and sets his coffee aside as straightens in his seat, rocking with the effort of staying in the chair.

The voices raise then, scattering his thoughts.

“– else has been going on? Emma? What do you mean?” Mr. Schue’s question and seems abnormally loud in the waiting room.

“He’s been going to therapy, Will, and meeting with me to discuss some things. He’s getting better,” Ms. Pillsbury pauses, “it was helping.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” His former teacher’s voice is shocked, but Kurt hears the undercurrent of stress – a hint of anger. “One of my students is going through something and you just decided not to tell me?”

Kurt can’t help it; he laughs.

“You could have helped?” Kurt looks to Mr. Schue, ignoring his father’s question as his fist tightens around Blaine’s ring, “Blaine had – has – worse than that every day and he’s worried he’s going crazy because of something outside his control. He’s so scared that he’s going to let someone down that he didn’t even open up to me about what happened at that dance until he had a flashback. He’s tired and scared and then on top of that he thinks he let everyone in Glee down because of some stupid misstep, because you gave Nationals to Sam. He worked so hard and then you just decided that it wasn’t enough? What would you have done, had he told you?” Kurt raises his head, switches his focus from his clenched hand to his former teacher. “You knew – you saw me getting shoved into lockers and put in dumpsters and your only comment was to question why the repeated bullying was actually getting to me. Wanted to know why that stuff wasn’t just rolling off me like usual. So tell me, exactly, how would you have helped him, Mr. Schue?”

Mr. Schue doesn’t reply.

Kurt stares a moment longer, feels his anger settle even as he gives up on staying seated.

He stands in a rush. “I’m going to wait in Blaine’s room.”

He leaves before anyone has a chance to reply, hurrying across the room and down the hall. He ignores the nurses as he goes, bypassing their station and not even knocking before opening the door to 309 and slipping inside.

The room is empty; the space where the bed should be a physical reminder that Kurt sill is separated from Blaine.
Kurt hates everything about the room.

He pushes the door closed, moves to the chair he had claimed earlier. It’s still uncomfortable, with too little padding and a truly hideous green covering, but its wide seat allows him to bend his legs and rest his forehead against his knees. He takes a minute to just breathe, counting his breaths even as he wrinkles his nose against the smell of disinfectant and hospital.

(Ten hours and fifty-one minutes.)

Blaine’s ring is digging into his palm again, and he can hear the footsteps of nurses and voices of strangers, muffled as they are through the walls and shut door.

Every piece of information is a reminder of how wrong the situation is: Blaine is in the hospital and Kurt isn’t with him.

Just like he wasn’t there when Blaine had a flashback in the garage.

Or when Blaine got hit by his own father.

Or when Blaine misstepped during a performance.

Or when Blaine had a panic attack after Nationals.

Or when Blaine got beaten in a parking lot.

Kurt’s breath catches, and he wraps his arms tighter around his calves, keeps his head against his knees to prevent himself from looking at the empty space in the room.

(Eleven hours and thirteen minutes.)

Kurt startles when the door opens, almost falling out of the chair in his haste to stand. Blaine’s still asleep (just asleep, Kurt reminds himself, and not unconscious), head resting on a pillow. The various bags attached to bed sway as it moves, and Kurt swallows a scream at the tangible reminders of Blaine’s injuries. Kara nods but stays silent, ignoring Kurt as she moves around the now stationary bed, reattaching wires and turning on monitors.

Kurt keeps his gaze on Blaine.

“Here,” Kurt reluctantly looks away from Blaine, sees Kara holding out the control that looks far too much like an oversized television remote, “This controls everything in the room; the bed, lights, tv.” Kurt resists the urge to roll his eyes as she points to each button – he’s far too familiar with the workings of a hospital room. “This calls the nurse’s station,” a pause, “in case you need anything.”

The only reason Kurt will be pressing that button is for Blaine.

He manages a nod anyway.

He doesn’t move until Kara exits the room, the door closing with a quiet click. He carefully steps closer to the bed, watches the rise and fall of Blaine’s chest as he pulls the chair with him. He sits moments later, carefully stretching his left arm and clasping Blaine’s hand, trapping Blaine’s ring between them, where it belongs.

“Hey,” he keeps his voice soft, barely above a whisper. “Told you I’d be here when you got back.” Kurt leans forward, brushes back some of Blaine’s curls with his right hand. “I’m not going
anywhere.”

Kurt rests his head on the bed, inches away from their joined hands. He can’t risk getting on the bed – not yet, anyway – but he needs to be closer; needs to count Blaine’s breaths.

(Eleven hours and twenty-eight minutes.)

Blaine still hasn’t woken up.

He squeezes Blaine’s hand. He still hates the room, hates everything from the dated tile floor to the 90s inspired curtain - currently pushed against the wall - to the grey and blue walls. And yet he draws comfort from each beep of the monitor, knows that without this room Blaine would be much, much worse.

It’s an odd dichotomy.

Kurt raises his head, lets out a breath before wiping a hand across his eyes. “It’s been over an hour; I know Dr. Olt said you could be asleep for a while, but I really wish you’d wake up.” Kurt pauses, stares at Blaine still form, “I need you to wake up for me, okay?

“I know you’re in there. You’ve been through so much – more than anyone should – but you’re so strong, Blaine. You’re still the strongest person I know. But you have to wake up, okay? You have to wake up and make fun of me for not sleeping and wearing your cardigan. You have to wake up so I can tell you how proud I am of you and then have you promise to never make me go through this again.” Kurt leans forward again, resting his head beside his and Blaine’s hands. “Wake up Blaine, please. We’re getting married, but you have to wake up.”

Blaine – lovable, kind, anxious to please and sends-flowers-just-because – doesn’t respond.

Kurt closes his eyes and ignores the tears dampening the sheet.

(Eleven hours and forty-one minutes.)

A burst of voices from outside the door startles Kurt from the lull he’s fallen into, and he straightens in his seat, raising his head and rubbing his face with his right hand. Blinking, Kurt focuses on Blaine, watches the rise and fall of his chest for a moment before raising his gaze to Blaine’s face, tries to look past the nasal cannula and bruises and split lip.

He leans forward again, brushes a kiss across Blaine’s forehead before grimacing when he realizes how dry his mouth is. He sits back with a sigh, takes a moment to stretch out his sore muscles. He stands then, crosses to the small table to pour himself a glass of water from the plastic pitcher.

Kurt takes a moment to breathe, finishing the water in slow, careful sips. He turns back toward Blaine then, setting the cup on the table and moving back toward his chair. He settles in, reaches forward and reclaims Blaine’s hand.

“You always wake up before me,” Kurt comments quietly, “even when you’re exhausted. You –”

Underneath his palm, Blaine’s hand moves.

“You?” Kurt surges forward, standing in his haste even as he pushes his hand tighter against Blaine’s before quickly loosening his grip, not wanting to push the ring into Blaine’s skin. “Blaine, it’s Kurt. I’m here; I’m right here.”

The hand beneath his tics again, but Kurt stays focused on Blaine’s face, on the twitches of his
eyes and the minute movements around his mouth. And then, Blaine opens his eyes just enough for Kurt to make out the barest hint of hazel in between slow blinks.

“Kurt?”

The word is a cracked whisper, rough and fragile, like it will break at any moment.

Kurt has never loved the sound of his name more.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

I'm so, so sorry for the length between updates! I actually meant to post this about a week ago but various things happened (with work and my life and my dog) so there was an even longer delay. Again, I'm sorry for the late update; first the chapter fought me - quite literally, as slayerkitty and jessicamdawn can attest - and then I ended up adding some scenes, later. Anyway, tremendous thanks to slayerkitty, jessicamdawn, and tchrggleek for their amazing betaing skills and comments and talking me down from going insane and wanting to delete it all. Also, thanks to all of you lovely, wonderful readers; your replies and comments continue to shock and amaze me, and hopefully this chapter lives up to your expectations!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 27

Burt watches as Kurt leaves, the silence of the waiting room seeming even more jarring in his absence. Kurt; who demands attention in his long sweaters and quest for solos and unwavering morals, who lives up to being an only child and claiming attention, has now left twice to avoid that very thing.

Absently, Burt wonders how often that happened when Kurt lived in Ohio. How many times had he taken Kurt’s fashion at face value and missed the bigger issue? He certainly hadn’t known how awful McKinley was until right before Kurt had transferred to Dalton. Burt shakes his head, sighing as he turns to face Carole.

“Give him a while, Burt.” Carole softly comments before he can get a word out. “He needs it.”

“He had time alone earlier,” Burt replies, leaning forward, “he shouldn’t be by himself.”

“Kurt’s never had any problem speaking up for what he needs. Besides,” Carole offers a small smile and catches Burt’s hand, before nodding toward where Will and Emma are still standing, silent, “I could use your help.”

“Kurt didn’t pull any punches, did he?” Burt winces as he remembers Kurt’s sharp words; his son is the best person he knows, but Burt also knows Kurt’s flaws, and when Kurt breaks, he’s glass – pieces splintering and shattering, cutting those around him in the process.

Burt knows Kurt will regret his outburst later, will do his best to quickly apologize and then will work to pretend the event never happened. But it did, and for a moment Burt thinks back over Kurt’s exclamation, wonders how much of Glee Club helping Kurt survive McKinley was through Will’s influence and how much was the band of kids Burt knows far too much about from years of sleepovers and road trips to competitions.

Burt sighs and pushes the thought away – it doesn’t matter. Not today, anyway.

“Will,” Burt turns away from Carole, makes sure his voice is loud enough to carry the few feet
separating them. “Kurt, he didn’t –”

“He’s very upset,” Emma finishes, and Burt gives a grateful smile. “People often lash out in stressful situations,” she continues, “and he must be exhausted, too.”

“Right,” Will nods, “It’s fine.” Will steps forward, takes Emma’s hand before moving to the seat to Burt’s left. “But Blaine – how is he, really?”

“He’s stable,” Burt repeats the words that he’s focused on since the nurse had taken Blaine to Radiology. “He’s got a lot of recovery ahead of him, but for now he’s as good as we can expect, given what he went through.”

“What happened, exactly?”

“That’s the question,” Burt mutters, remembering the detective’s card in his pocket.

Carole fields the question and Burt tightens his grip on her hand in appreciation. It’s no easier hearing the information again, but he remembers seeing Blaine in the hospital bed – obviously beaten and looking smaller than ever but breathing and comfortingly alive under the wires and hospital gown.

“That’s just awful,” Emma’s comment draws Burt from his thoughts. he looks over to see her dabbing some antibacterial gel on her hands, “when – when will he be up for visitors?”

“I’m not sure,” Burt shares a look with Carole, “I know they’re only allowing family for now.”

“How are Blaine’s parents handling it?” Burt feels his eyes tighten at Will’s question, even as he leans forward in his seat.

“What?”

“Blaine’s parents,” Will repeats, “I’m guessing they’re in Blaine’s room? With Kurt? How are they handling this?” He slows at the end, uses his hand to gesture to the expanse of the room .

“They’re not here,” Burt keeps the words short, tries to keep the anger from growing. “Haven’t heard from ‘em.” Burt sees Will’s and Emma’s faces scrunch in confusion, “I called them not long after the hospital called me.” He releases a short sigh and looks away. “Haven’t heard anything back, though.”

“I’m sorry,” Will leans forward, clasping his hands, “the hospital called you?”

“Blaine’s been staying with us,” Carole answers, “there have been some…issues with his parents.”

“What do you mean?”

Burt waits a moment, considering. “Blaine’s father,” Burt says the word quickly, hating associating the title with the man, “is away on business most of the time anyway, and his mother travels. Blaine’s been staying with us in the meantime; with everything going on we figured it was better if he wasn’t alone.” Burt shrugs, “It’s a shorter drive to McKinley, too.”

“Blaine’s been staying with you,” Burt blinks, wonders at Will’s insistence on that point, “alright. But that still doesn’t –” Burt watches as Will stops midsentence, shakes his head slightly before continuing, “the hospital called you?”

“I’m his emergency contact and medical power of attorney,” Burt replies, “it’s easier, since his
parents are out of reach so much.”

“He never said anything,” Will says, the words barely audible even from the short distance, “I’m his teacher and I didn’t know –”

“He didn’t want people to know,” Emma’s quick to cut in, “he just wanted something to be normal, and school could be that.”

“You should have told me.” Will’s comment holds a hint of the anger from before and Burt shares a look with Carole, “I’m their teacher – I’m supposed to help these kids. How can I do my job when I don’t have all the relevant information?”

“You did your job, Will.” Burt sighs at Emma’s response, glad that she seems to be working to ebb Schuester’s irritation, that she’s calm in spite of Will’s somewhat cutting remarks. “Blaine needed you to be his teacher and lead Glee practice and that’s exactly what you did.”

There’s a pause and Burt leans forward a bit, hopes Will takes Emma’s words to heart even as his mind treacherously remembers Blaine’s worry at Nationals, his increasing focus on ensuring every Glee performance was perfect.

“Mr. Hummel?” Burt turns at the sound of his name, sees the nurse from earlier standing by Carole.

“Yes?”

The nurse glances around the room before offering a polite smile. “I just wanted to let you know that Mr. Anderson is back in his room. Your son is with him,” she pauses a moment, shifts her weight before continuing, “He’s likely to be unconscious for a while yet, though.”

“But he’s okay?”

Burt jumps a bit at Will’s question, turning away from the nurse – Kara – in response.

“I’m sorry; I can only give out information to Mr. Anderson’s family.”

“I’m his teacher,” Will adds, “and after this I have to go tell his friends. Surely you can tell me something?”

“I’m sorry,” Kara repeats, “but HIPPA prohibits –”


“There’s been no change,” her voice is clipped and Burt feels his eyes widen in response. “The test went smoothly, however, and one of the residents should be by to talk about the results when they make rounds.”

“Of course,” Carole offers a smile, “Would you happen to know when Blaine might be up for more visitors?”

“Not until he’s in the step-down unit,” Kara says with a shake of her head, “as long as he’s here it’s family only, I’m afraid. Although,” she nods toward the hall, “the love-seat in the room folds out into a bed; one family member is allowed to stay the night, given the doctor’s approval.”

“I’m sure Kurt will take you up on that offer,” Burt silently hopes Kara hasn’t told Kurt yet – if she has, there’s no way he’ll get Kurt out the hospital for any reason.
“Okay.” Kara nods, turns to leave before stopping and turning back. “If you’re hungry, the cafeteria should start serving breakfast in about half an hour.”

“We should leave, too,” Emma comments, looking to her watch as Kara heads back down the hall, “We need to get to the school before the kids.”

“Yeah,” Burt still doesn’t envy them the task and he takes a moment to rub a hand over his eyes.

“They’re gonna want to camp out here,” Will adds, looking around the room. “They’re going to want to see him.”

“They can’t,” Carole’s voice is firm, and Burt glances to her, tightens his grip on her hand. “They’re all great kids – wonderful friends to Blaine and Kurt – but they won’t be allowed to see Blaine for a while, and they shouldn’t –” she takes a breath, “we can’t protect them from finding out what happened, but having them wait in the hospital won’t be helpful for anyone. I’m sure Kurt will text once he’s up for it, and I’ll call when we know more, but don’t let those kids suffer more by pointlessly waiting around a hospital.”

“I can’t stop them from showing up,” Will’s comment seems overly loud after Carole’s quiet words, the sentence carrying across the small space. “These kids are close – I can tell them only family’s allowed, but I can’t stop them from coming here.”

“Maybe not,” Burt agrees, “but you can make sure they know how serious this is; how they’d just be sittin’ in a waiting room.”

“We’ll do our best,” Emma replies, standing and reaching for her purse, “Just keep us updated?”

“As soon as we know anything,” Carole nods, stepping forward and giving Emma a brief hug.

Burt steps forward too, shakes Will’s hand before stepping back and taking Carole’s hand, clasping it as Will and Emma disappear inside an elevator.

Burt sighs, uses his free hand to reach up and rub across his eyes. The caffeine from the cups of coffee may prevent him from sleeping, but it hasn’t taken away his exhaustion.

“Why don’t you go check on the boys,” Carole comments, briefly squeezing his hand, “and I’ll head down to the cafeteria, see what I can find for breakfast.”

Burt pauses for a moment, torn. He needs to see Kurt, needs to hug his son and see that he’s okay – But he needs to be with Carole, too.

“Go,” Carole offers a slight smile, “I’ll meet you there, okay?”

A nod, and then Carole steps away, leaving Burt standing in the middle of the waiting room.

He needs more coffee.

Burt shakes his head, and with a familiarity he resents, he crosses the floor to the alcove where the coffee sits. He pours the coffee, waits a moment before pouring a second cup – Kurt was already upset, last he’d seen him; coffee – even weak, poorly made coffee – can only help.

He sets the second cup aside and then reaches for the packets of cream and sugar, only to pause, hand still outstretched.

He can’t remember how Kurt takes his coffee.
He knows his son adds both cream and sugar, enough that Burt doesn’t think the liquid in the cup should still be classified as coffee – he’s certainly teased Kurt about that, but the exact amount of cream and sugar eludes him.

Blaine would know.

Burt lets out a breath, rests his hands on the counter for a moment while he stares at the steam rising from the Styrofoam cups. He leans back, lifts and flexes his hands before reaching into the baskets, pulling out handfuls of sugar packets and plastic holders of creamer and shoving them into his pockets. He grabs the cups then, carefully holding them as he turns and heads for the hallway that leads to Blaine’s room.

He manages a nod as he passes the nurse’s station, suppressing a grimace as the smell of antiseptic grows stronger. Burt pauses when he reaches room 309, stares at the closed white door. Through the window, he sees Kurt slouched in a chair, head dropped down, leaning forward over Blaine's bed.

Burt lets out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding, shoulders relaxing at the sight of Kurt. His son’s clothes are visibly wrinkled, the sweater hanging off one shoulder, his hair unkept and askew even to Burt’s limited gaze. He cracks open the door – carefully opening it with an elbow not hindered by coffee – needing to be closer to his son. He needs to relish in the fact that Kurt’s here, visible and breathing and –

asleep.

Burt stops, takes a moment to watch Kurt breathe, debates moving him to a more comfortable position – leaning forward over a bed can’t be the best – before deciding to leave Kurt to his sleep. Kurt’s face has lost the hardened, frantic edge it had when he was awake, the lines around his eyes – that Kurt will no doubt complain about for months – have vanished; he looks like Burt’s little boy who invited him to tea parties not so long ago. He turns his gaze then, looks to where Blaine lays too-still, too-small in the hospital bed.

He sets the cups down on the small side table, winces as the path brings him closer to Blaine.

He feels the anger returning then, feels it rising as he takes in each bruise, the neat rows of stitches, and sling cradling Blaine’s arm.

Burt looks to the monitors then, tries to focus on the sound of Kurt’s breathing rather than their steady beeps (he can’t). He only turns back to the bed when the lines on the monitors make no more sense even after minutes of staring.

He unclenches his fists slowly, steadily stepping forward and resting one hand beside where Kurt is clasping Blaine’s, the grip lax with sleep but steady just the same.

“Hey kid,” he keeps his voice low, not wanting to disturb Kurt even while he watches Blaine, looks for a hint that he’s been heard. “I never got used to hospitals. I don’t care for them; don’t like it when family is here, either. So you keep fighting like Dr. Olt said – you focus on gettin’ better so we can get back home.” Burt pauses for a moment, wonders how Blaine’s relatives can stand to leave him in an empty house when Burt’s already dreading the hours without him in theirs. “Our family can’t lose any more members, Blaine, so you just take the time you need.” Burt lets out a breath, loosens his hand from where it’s clenched the sheet. “You haven’t let me down yet, kid; don’t you dare start now.”

Burt reminds himself that he hadn’t expected a response, that – like Kurt – Blaine is sleeping.
He just has the aid of narcotics.

Burt frowns briefly, reaches out to straighten the blanket covering Blaine’s legs before turning, carefully pushing the bangs out of Kurt’s closed eyes, taking in the boys’ still-clasped hands as he leans back.

Even in the dim lighting, the ring on Kurt’s finger manages to shine; a contrast against the starched white blanket and Kurt’s pale skin. Burt doesn’t see Blaine’s ring, but he bets it’s still held in Kurt’s hand, a cold comfort.

“You went and grew up on me.” Burt sighs, forces himself to step back, putting more space between him and the boys. He can’t help them at the moment, and they need all the sleep they can get. He’s back in the hallway moments later, leaning against the closed door and blinking at the change in lighting.

He takes one last look through the door’s window, committing the sight to memory before forcing himself away; Carole should be heading up by now anyway.

*_*_*_ *

Carole releases a breath as the elevator doors close in front of her, blocking Burt from view. She takes a moment to just breathe – even if it is stale air, heavy with the scent of cleaning supplies and the hint of medicine unique to hospitals – before hitting the button to take her to the floor with the cafeteria.

She crosses her arms, a futile attempt to ward off the chill of the building, the cool air just as offsetting as it first was hours ago. The doors open – before her floor, of course – and Carole steps back. Two young women, hospital employees, judging by their scrubs, take the offered space, and Carole spends minutes wondering how long they’ve worked that the pall of the hospital has not dimmed their emotions. For a moment, she hates their smiles, their mundane complaints of the early hour and too-tight pony tails. But then she takes in their youthful faces, remembers that it is a *good thing* that the hospital is not a symbol of everything wrong to these girls – young women – that it’s just part of their day, a mundane building.

She wonders when hospitals stopped being that for her.

The elevator glides to a stop then, the automated voice announcing the floor even as the two women leave, having never spared a glance to Carole. She sighs, takes in her blurred, distorted reflection in the sleek doors before looking away, taking a moment to rub a hand across her eyes. She has two more floors before she reaches the cafeteria; idly, she hopes she can keep the elevator to herself until then.

Her hopes are dashed seconds later.

The orderly with the empty bed offers a nod, and Carole politely mimics a reply, but quickly looks away after, hoping he’s competent enough in social cues to get the message that she’s not in the mood for idle chatter.

He leans against the edge of the bed and stays silent.

She exits first, heads down the hallway even as she’s blinking spots from her eyes. Here, the smell of coffee overlays the distinctive smell of cleaner and medicine, and the chatter holds the air of casual conversation, the hum more similar to a high school than –

Carole stops.
Around her, people carry on their business, their voices echoing off the tiled floor and walls that do nothing to soak up sound. On the wall to her left, the emergency exit route breaks the monotonous grey; absently, she wonders what the engineers were thinking.

In the event of a fire, it’s a long line of red to the exit door.

She shakes her head before looking away, forces herself to move away from the sign. She keeps her head forward as she makes her way to the cafeteria, ignores the reminders on the walls to get yearly check-ups and the signs of a heart attack. Minutes later she’s crossed the entryway and is in the cafeteria, and for a moment is overwhelmed by the smell of coffee and eggs.

The cafeteria is more crowded than the hall, though there’s no line, as far as she can tell. The biggest group of people seems crowded around the counter that holds the coffee carafes, and Carole hopes that means the coffee there is better than the barely passable excuse she’s been drinking the past few hours.

She eyes the choices around her, knows Kurt would be shaking his head and complaining about the high cholesterol and lack of nutritional value in the options. A small smile comes to her face as she thinks of her step-son, although it feels awkward on her face, unfamiliar, like wearing a sweater for the first time when the weather changes.

Carole thinks of Kurt, of how he’d snapped at Will, of how all he’s wanted since he arrived at the hospital was to see Blaine, and how he’d frozen – for only a second, but Carole had seen it – when he’d finally been able to do so. Still, her step-son is sitting next to his fiancé’s hospital bed, floors above her, and the least she can do is bring him breakfast.

She sighs before crossing the space, gathering three pre-wrapped breakfast sandwiches, carefully balancing them as she moves to get coffee. The liquid she pours is darker than the brew from the waiting room, and definitely smells like coffee, so she grabs three large cups and heads to register to pay.

The woman at the register takes Carole’s credit card with a smile.

“Those are my son’s favorite, too.”

“What?”

Another smile, along with a nod to the sandwiches. “My son could probably eat all of these and then ask for more. I always have to put a limit when he visits me here.” A pause. “It’s amazing, what a teenage boy can eat.” She hands back Carole’s card. “Would you like a bag?” It seems she doesn’t need an answer, however, given the plastic bag she pulls out moments later. “Still, you must know what it’s like.”

“What?”

“Sorry,” a wave to the bag, “it’s just that it’s a bit much for one.”

“Oh.” Carole agrees as she quickly takes back her card along with the bag and cups of coffee. “My husband and step-son are upstairs.” The comment is short, but luckily the worker seems to have remembered her place of employment then, given how her smile has turned sympathetic.

Carole leaves.

The smell of the coffee mixes with the smell of eggs and cheese from the bag, somehow managing to remind her of breakfasts in a noisy kitchen; she’s shaken from her memories, however, when the
smell of medicine and industrial cleaner overpowers her, reminding her she’s not providing breakfast for her happy family at home.

Kurt isn’t singing while he cooks at the stove, stealing glances at the coffee maker in hopes it will drip faster.

Burt isn’t complaining about egg replacements and turkey bacon, voice alight with teasing humor.

Blaine isn’t offering to help at every turn even while he trades lyrics with Kurt.

And Finn –

Carole shakes her head, pushes the memories away.

She’s not at home: She’s in a hospital, waiting for an elevator.

It hits her then – feels like a punch, forces the breath out of her even as her surroundings blur. She hears the tone announcing the arrival of the elevator, but she can’t bring herself to move, can’t take the steps inside.

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Burt washes his hands, rinsing away the soap before wiping his still-wet hands across his face. The water doesn’t take away the ache of exhaustion, but he feels an ounce cleaner, regardless. The paper towels are rough against his skin, but he keeps them clenched in his fists for a few moments before tossing them in the trash.

He’s waiting for the elevator minutes later, moves to stand in the corner once it arrives even as he keeps an eye out for Carole as the doors open and close, wondering if she got turned around in the crisscross of hallways. She doesn’t appear, though, and so Burt heads for the cafeteria once he’s reached the correct floor.

A glance around the cafeteria doesn’t produce his wife, and Burt resists the urge to simply start shouting.

He passes the cafeteria, walks down the hallway with a briskness that’s haunted his steps since he answered his phone hours ago. Still, despite his searching, Carole isn’t by the second set of elevators, and she’s not sitting at one of many tables sipping a coffee either.

Burt reaches the end of the hallway and debates for a moment before turning and heading back the way he came. He makes it three-quarters of the way back, across from the cafeteria when he finally spots his wife leaning against an alcove in the wall near a water fountain, cups of coffee in one hand and a bag in the other.

It’s only as he gets closer that he notices the rigid posture, the sheen to her eyes that’s barely visible from her ducked head.

“Carole?” He keeps his voice soft, stops a few steps in front of her.

“Burt.” Her voice is soft, and Burt hates that he can’t blame the early hour for her tone, “Oh – I was supposed to meet you after I got breakfast.”

“Hey,” he reaches out, places his hand on her shoulder. “Don’t worry about it. Kurt’s sleepin’ anyway.”
“That’s good. He needs the sleep.” She attempts a smile, and Burt silently thanks Kurt – again – for bringing Carole into their family even as he pulls her into a loose hug, her head beneath his chin. “I meant to go back, I just –” her voice trails off, and Burt leaves the sentence unfinished, but takes a step back, taking the coffees even as he guides her toward the elevator.

Burt keeps his eyes focused on Carole, resists the urge to narrow his eyes in impatience as they wait for the elevator. Luckily the wait isn’t too long, and two floors later they’re exiting, his hand still guiding Carole.

“Blaine’s room is a floor up, Burt.” Her steps are slowed with confusion, hesitant.

“Yup.” He keeps walking.

He stops moments later, forces himself to stay still even when he hears Carole’s gasp.

“Burt.”

“You came here after Finn. I just,” he shrugs his shoulders, looks away from the ‘chapel’ sign, focusing on the ‘Top 10 avoidable illnesses’ poster instead.

“Come in with me?”

The question is quiet, but Burt hears it anyway, over the announcements from various employees and the chatter echoing in the tiled hall.

“Of course,” he leans forward and opens the door, “you’re much better than two sleeping teenagers anyway.” It’s a bad joke, but some of the tension leaves Carole’s shoulders, so he huffs a breath as she precedes him into the room.

He pauses for a moment when he sees the ‘no food or drink’ sign before dismissing it out of hand; they won’t be actually be eating in the chapel, just keeping hold of their breakfast until later.

He doesn’t think God will hold it against them.

He takes a seat beside his wife moments later, carefully setting the coffees under his chair. It’s quiet, and smelling faintly of incense and flowers rather than industrial cleaner, and he takes a deep breath, relishing in the change.

There’s a few others seated in the room, a grey haired man near the front, a young couple leaning forward a few rows ahead of him, a thin blonde woman clutching a rosary to his right.

“I thought it would be okay.”

“What?” Burt matches Carole’s whisper, but he does reach over and clasp her hand.

“Being here. I thought – I thought the circumstances were different enough from before, that it would okay. But I went to get those sandwiches, and that woman kept talking about how much her son eats, and all I could think about was all those trips to the grocery store to keep enough food in the house for Finn.”

Burt tightens his hold on Carole’s hand. “Carole –”

“She couldn’t have known,” she continues, ignoring Burt’s interruption, “I know that. But suddenly I could only think about him and how it was, when we found out.” A pause. “We can’t lose Blaine too, Burt. We just – we can’t lose him too.”
Burt wants nothing more than to reassure his wife, but Carole’s smart, and he can’t lie. Not about this. He wants Blaine to be okay, to be discharged and have Kurt hovering while he monitors his fiancé’s every move. But he knows, better than most, that there’s a difference between what people want, and what happens.

Especially in hospitals.

“You heard Dr. Olt. Blaine’s stable.” The words are calm, not betraying Burt’s hatred of the phrase. Stable. What does that mean, really? “Blaine’s a fighter.”

“Finn was, too.” Burt isn’t sure if he was supposed to hear them, but the words carry in the near-silent room, striking him just as strongly as any blow.

He doesn’t have a response for that.

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The chapel is calming, and Carole tries to focus on that, tries to focus on the present, on the assurances of Dr. Olt about Blaine’s condition. Burt’s hand is a comfort, a warm reminder that she’s not alone.

Carole loves Burt, loves the life they’ve built. She loves Kurt too; Burt was right when he said that “step” had no place in their family.

That didn’t keep their family from being broken, though.

And right now, Kurt is probably curled up in some uncomfortable chair while Blaine is unconscious, beaten.

The fact that Blaine’s alive is a small comfort; she can’t see the boys right now.

Not yet.

She’s in a hospital, again.

And Blaine may be stable, may be strong and a fighter. But right now, he’s stable and broken.

And sometimes, what’s been broken can’t be fixed.

She releases another breath, turning when she notices Burt fidgeting, sees him raise his head guiltily. It’s only when she chances a glance at her watch that she realizes they’ve been here over an hour.

“You should go check on them.”

“You –”

“I’ll be fine, Burt. And I promise I’ll be up soon – twenty minutes, if that.”

“I can wait, Carole; it’s no trouble.”

“I know you could, but,” she pauses, leans over, offering Burt a kiss on the cheek, “I could use a few minutes to myself anyway.” She squeezes his hand. “Go check on our boys,” she turns and nods toward the bag with the sandwiches. “I’ll see about finding a microwave, too.”

She’s alone moments later, and she allows herself to slump forward a bit even as she turns hard
eyes to the altar.

She hadn’t wanted to speak before, hadn’t wanted Burt to hear the bitterness that’s as much a part of her as her need for air. She takes a moment, gathering her thoughts. She leans forward a few minutes later, rests her head on clasped hands, her whisper little more than the movement of her lips.

“I know we’ve never been that religious, we don’t go to church every Sunday; we don’t even always make it on Christmas and Easter. But we’ve raised good boys. They’re good and you already took one. Took one of my boys before he even started his life. And I can’t change that; I hate it, but I can’t change it. But don’t you dare – don’t take Blaine, too. They’ve already been through so much, and Kurt – Kurt wouldn’t recover.” Carole pauses, takes a moment to loosen her fingers. “You gave me this family, I refuse to believe you’d be cruel enough to take it back, now. So don’t. Just – don’t.”

There’s no response, of course. No clash of thunder or booming voice; there’s not even the appearance of a chaplain, and Carole can’t say that she necessarily feels better – that’s impossible, given her location – but she’s had her fill of the chapel, now. She’s said her piece, offered all the prayers and bargains she can manage, and now she needs to be with her family.

She stands, gathering her purse and the bag of the now cold sandwiches as she does, quietly exiting the room and blinking in the bright light of the hallway. It takes a moment for her to get her bearings, but she makes it to the elevator easily enough. She exits on Blaine’s floor with a sigh, and she eyes the bag in her hand for a second before heading for the bathroom anyway, setting it along with her purse on the counter while she washes her hands and face.

She feels more settled as she exits, turning and heading for the hall that leads to Blaine’s room. She stops at the nurse’s station, manages to get directions to the nearest microwave. It’s in the opposite direction of Blaine’s room, of course, in an alcove off the waiting room. She’s heading back the way she came moments later.

“Mrs. Hummel!”

“Mrs. Hudson!”

The shouts catch her by surprise, and she stops in shock for a moment before turning, the bag swinging with the momentum.

Sam and Tina stand in the waiting room.

Carole suppresses a sigh, forces herself to smile as she heads toward them. They mean well, she’s certain.

They meet halfway, and she takes in Tina’s red eyes and Sam’s bitten lip before offering a greeting. They’re huddled in front of a cluster of chairs, but none of them sit.

“How’s Blaine?” The question is rushed, and Carole sees Tina’s cheeks flush in embarrassment. “Sorry, it’s just – Mr. Schue said that he’s in the hospital and we just want to see him. To make sure he’s okay.”

Sam hasn’t stopped nodding since Tina began talking.

Carole’s glad Blaine has been blessed with his friends, but for a moment, she can’t help but hate that they’re here.
Children don’t belong in hospitals.

“He’s stable,” Carole replies, repeating the most general of the information she knows, ignores the frustration she sees growing on the teens’ faces. “It’s not –” Carole stops, lets out a breath. “What did Ms. Pillsbury tell you?”

“She just said Blaine got hurt,” Sam answers, his voice quiet. “She said he was here and that we wouldn’t be able to see him, but – he’s our best friend.”

“I know,” Carole offers a sympathetic smile. “And you’ve both been great friends to Blaine. But she was right; they’re only letting family back.”

She’s certain she wasn’t meant to hear Tina’s mutter of ‘you’re not’ but she does, and she can’t help how her eyes narrow at the comment.

“Sorry!” Tina’s wringing her hands, and Sam’s glaring beside her. “I’m sorry. Just – you’re not, technically. So can’t we see him? Just – say we’re cousins or something.”

“It doesn’t quite work that way.”

“But –” Tina snaps her mouth shut, turns and glares at the room. “This isn’t fair.”

For a moment, Carole’s tempted to remind Tina that life isn’t fair – that there’s no great scale that keeps measure, no action and counteraction for right and wrong.

But then Carole really looks at Blaine’s friends, sees the restlessness in their movements, the sheen to their eyes and is reminded of how young they are. They might be old enough to know that life isn’t fair, but they’re also still young enough that they hold the hope that it should be.

And Carole can’t crush that, not today.

“It isn’t fair,” Carole agrees, “none of this is. But Blaine – Blaine was hurt pretty badly, and they have him on some strong meds right now. He hasn’t even really woken up yet. Look,” reaches forward then, takes their hands, “Blaine’s gonna need you. He’s going to have a lot of recovery and he’s going to need his friends, and you both have always been wonderful friends for him, I know. I can’t help you see him today; you probably won’t even see him within the next week,” she ignores their looks of fear and outrage, “but as soon as it’s allowed, you’ll be the first ones back, I promise.”

“You’re sure we can’t see him? Just for a minute? We can…we can wait outside the door! Or I could get some costumes or –”

“Not right now, Sam. I’m sorry.” Carole hates that she can’t help them in this, but they had to have known that coming here.

“What – what happened, exactly? How did Blaine get so hurt?”

Carole releases their hands at Tina’s question, takes a moment to consider her words. “I need you to listen to me, okay? Listen and afterwards don’t go running off and try to do something. Okay?” She waits for their assurances before continuing. “The police are looking into it. Blaine was attacked in a parking lot last night; we don’t know who did it, or why. It just – it just happened.”

Sam’s face has taken on a look of horror, but it fades quickly, shifts into anger before he ducks his head, hiding his eyes from view.
But Tina –

“Last night? This is my fault! I asked him –”

And suddenly, Carole remembers.

She remembers before that phone call. Remembers Blaine racing down the steps, half-heartedly complaining about how he’d forgotten that he’d told Tina he’d drop off the costumes for her since she had some meeting while Burt had jokingly commented about the size of the costumes in relation to Blaine.

Blaine had still been laughing as he stepped out the door.

Carole shakes her head slightly before grabbing both of Tina’s hands. “This is not your fault, Tina. The only person whose fault this is – the only one – is the…person who hurt Blaine. Do you hear me? This is not your fault.”

Tina nods, but doesn’t actually reply, and she’s stumbling away moments later, offering only a vague comment about needing to leave.

Sam spares Carole a glance before he chases after her.

Carole stays there for a moment, wondering how she’s managed to hate this situation more before forcing herself to focus.

She moves then, finding the alcove with the microwave a few minutes later. She carefully pulls the sandwiches from the bag, eyeing the paper wrapping before placing all three inside and setting the time.

She pulls out her phone while the time counts down; Tina’s parents deserve a call.

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Burt exits the elevator with a sigh, wonders how much more familiar these hallways will be in the coming weeks. The lights are a bit brighter and he idly wonders if all hospitals are so bright, or if it’s just the reflection from the tiled floors.

He pushes the thought away as he passes the nurse’s station, offers a weak smile to the one nurse who looks away from her monitor. He makes his way to 309 with steady steps, and soon he’s peering in the small window, feels some tension ease when he sees both Kurt and Blaine. Kurt’s awake, from what he can tell, although he hopes he’s managed to get a few hours sleep with his most recent nap added to the one earlier; Burt quietly opens the door with his elbow – his hands full of recently reheated coffee – and takes a moment to just take in the sight of Kurt being here, sitting next to Blaine’s bed singing –

He’s quiet, the tune barely audible across the space, but the song is clear, the notes the brightest thing in the room.

Burt pauses just inside the doorway, can’t bring himself to move on the chance that he interrupts –

No one can hurt you now, come morning light, you and I’ll be safe and sound –

He can’t remember the last time he heard Kurt sing.

Hold onto this lullaby, even when the music's gone, gone –
Burt doesn’t recognize the song, but he closes his eyes against the sting anyway, breathes in the smell of antiseptic even while he strains his ears to hear Kurt over the beeping monitors and murmur in the hallway.

Kurt finishes far too soon.

“I know it’s meant for a group, but I meant it, Blaine.” There’s a pause, and Burt manages a step before Kurt starts talking again, “And I know they said you’ll sleep because of the meds and you need to sleep but I really wish you’d wake up again because I need –”

Burt steps fully into the room, clearing his throat and letting the door fall shut behind him.

“I – Dad.” Burt watches as Kurt’s shoulders slump – though one hand stays clasped in Blaine’s – even as he offers a weak half-smile. Burt crosses the small space with sure steps, sets the coffee on the end table and wonders when his son decided he had to be the strong one, when he decided that he needed to attempt a smile for his father even as his fiancé lays in a hospital bed.

Burt can’t pinpoint when his son stopped being his little boy, can’t remember when Kurt started attempting smiles to hide his fear rather than the other way around, and despite the fact that Kurt has a fiancé – Burt spares a glance to the hospital bed – Kurt is still his son, and so Burt does the only thing he can.

He steps forward and pulls Kurt out of the chair and into a hug.

He pretends he doesn’t hear Kurt’s breath catch, ignores the way Kurt’s hands tighten in time with his breathing.

“Sorry,” Kurt sniffs as he steps back some time later, wiping a hand across his face even as he crosses back to Blaine’s bed, adjusting a pair of headphones – picking one up from the comforter – Burt hadn’t seen before. “It’s silly,” Kurt murmurs, smoothing down the blanket, “but I put on songs he sent me – ones he picked for Glee or that we sang or,” Kurt stops abruptly, his teeth clacking together even as he keeps his eyes on Blaine. “I thought it might help him wake up. I just – he needs to wake up, Dad. I need him to wake up.” The last words are whispered, barely carrying across the few feet separating them.

“They have him on some heavy meds, Kurt.”

“I know!” The words are rushed, loud and jarring in the room, and Kurt’s hand flies to his mouth immediately after. “I know – and he needs the rest. I’m being selfish; I know I’m being selfish –”

“Kurt –” Burt takes a step forward, reaching out only for Kurt to step closer to the bed, his focus solely on Blaine.

“He only said my name,” Kurt faces him, and Burt forcibly keeps his arms at his sides despite Kurt’s watery eyes, reminds himself that he can’t protect Kurt from this. “He woke up earlier and said my name but I don’t,” a pause and he watches as Kurt takes measured breaths, as he twists the ring on his left hand. “I don’t know if he knows I’m here. He went through – I just need him to know I’m here.”

“Kurt,” Burt does step forward then, resting one arm on Kurt’s shoulder and the other on Blaine’s wrist, finding a comfort in the steady pulse that had been lacking in the beeps from the monitors. “He knows you’re here. Don’t doubt that, okay? He knows.”

Kurt hums in reply, noncommittal, before resting a hip on the bed, carefully moving until he’s beside Blaine – quiet, unmoving, too-still Blaine – his left hand clasping his fiancé’s. Burt looks
away when he sees Kurt carefully smoothing circles where Blaine’s ring should be.

Burt looks to the monitors then, glad for the monotonous drone in spite of the fact that the spikes and numbers mean nothing to him. He lets out a breath, settles into the empty chair beside Blaine’s bed, and takes a moment to really look at Blaine.

He tries to look past the stitches, past the bruising, past the bandages and wires and see the smiling, charming, exuberant boy his son fell in love with.

He can, but the injuries persist like shadows, and he’s not sure if that’s worse or better, to compare the silent form on the bed with the brightness that is Blaine.

Burt rubs a hand across his eyes, blinks away the starbursts in its wake. On the bed, Kurt has shifted, is carefully pushing the bangs off Blaine’s forehead. Burt watches the gentle movement, sees the echoes of Kurt’s mother even as he turns his gaze away.

“Kurt,” Burt leans forward in the chair, squeezes Kurt’s shoulder. “I’m gonna go see what’s keeping Carole.”

Kurt doesn’t offer a response, but he does lean into Burt’s shoulder, and Burt offers a one-armed hug to his son – and a pat to Blaine’s shoulder – before leaving the room.

He forces himself to ignore how final the sound of the door shutting sounds.

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Kurt clenches his fist around Blaine’s ring even as his right continues to gently push back Blaine’s bangs.

(Thirteen hours and forty-seven minutes).

“Please wake up,” His voice breaks and Kurt ducks his head, rests it on the mattress beside Blaine’s even as he breathes in the industrial detergent and forces himself to ignore the scratchy cotton sheets.

He’ll have to see about switching them later. Blaine deserves comfort.

Kurt sighs, raises his head to shoot a glare at the beeping monitor. He wants – needs – to hear Blaine’s voice, not the beep of monitors and murmur of what seems like every other voice in the hospital.

“I’m going to stay right here,” Kurt moves to clasp Blaine’s hand, “You know that, right? Blaine?”

On the bed, Blaine breathes.

Kurt feels his eyes sting, carefully counts his breaths even as he matches them to Blaine’s.

“They said you can hear me; I don’t –” Kurt pauses, breathes out. “I don’t know if I believe that. But, in the movies – in those movies and stories the person always wakes up…so I sang, earlier. And I know it was silly, thinking that would work, especially after what happened. But I thought there was a chance –” Kurt stops himself, chokes on a breath that’s a cross between a laugh and a sob. “You got half the show choirs in Ohio to get together to propose; if anyone were going to wake up to a song, it would be you.”

The only reply is the continued beeping of the monitors. Kurt resists the urge to scream.
“Blaine, please –”

The door opens and Kurt turns, attempts a smile when his father and Carole enter.

“I brought breakfast,” Carole comments, holding up a bag, “sorry it’s later than planned, but it’s hot.”

Kurt nods, leaning back in the chair even as he reaches for the bag.

“Actually,” Burt comments as he takes the bag from Carole, “why don’t you eat this outside, Kurt. You could use a break from this room.”

“No,” Kurt’s shaking his head even as he narrows his eyes. “I need to stay with Blaine.”

“You want to know what took Carole so long, Kurt?” Burt pauses, and Kurt feels his face wrinkle in confusion, but he stays silent. “She ran into Sam and Tina outside. They were ready to run past nurses and start causin’ a scene to get some answers.” Burt sighs, takes a moment to run his free hand over his head. “I get that you want to stay with him, Kurt. I get it. But you’re not the only person who cares for Blaine; I’m sure you’ve been gettin’ some calls from New York. That’s your world, Kurt, and your friends – and Blaine’s – deserve to hear from you.”

Kurt opens his mouth to reply, feels indignation rising, but then he actually looks at his parents and feels all his arguments leave in a rush.

Sometimes, he hates that his father is almost always right.

“We’ll stay right here with him,” Carole adds, nodding toward Blaine’s bed. “And the waiting room is right down the hall; you can call from there.”

Kurt nods and squeezes Blaine’s hand. “I’ll be right back, okay?” His keeps his voice soft, tilts his head closer to Blaine’s ear. “I’m just going down the hall.” He presses a kiss to Blaine’s cheek and whispers ‘I love you’ as he forces himself to stand, keeps his hand in Blaine’s until he’s too many steps from the bed to hold the connection. Blaine’s hand falls back to the bed and Kurt winces as he steps further away, takes the proffered bag – and his cell phone – from his father.

(Fourteen hours and two minutes).

Kurt stops. His phone makes the bag crinkle where it sits, clutched in his hand, and he keeps his left clasped around Blaine’s ring. Around him, people sit huddled in groups, save for the few off by themselves.

Kurt takes a step toward an empty chair before the thought of sitting makes him nauseated. He moves back toward a wall within seconds, takes steady breaths and closes his eyes to quell the feeling.

When he opens his eyes, the waiting room hasn’t changed, but his hands are steady as he sets down his bag and unlocks his phone.

He ignores his message alerts – 1 new message from Blaine – and brings up his contacts.

And then hesitates.

His ‘favorites’ list is long, too long to be a convenience, really, but the first few names haven’t changed in years, despite his changing locations. He thinks back over his dad’s words, even as his hand hovers over his phone.
He doesn’t know who to call.

All of his friends deserve an update, he knows they do, but Kurt also needs a short conversation and sympathy without twenty questions.

Kurt looks back to the hallway leading to Blaine’s room and sets his shoulders. He presses Elliott’s name before he can second guess his decision. He balances the phone on his shoulder as the call connects, leaning down and pulling the sandwich from the bag with careful fingers.

Elliott answers with a burst of words more reminiscent of his audition than the man Kurt has come to know.

“Hi,” Kurt cuts in, his voice steady. “Sorry I missed our performance.”

“Kurt –”

“Blaine hasn’t woken up, not really,” the words are hurried, flat, and Kurt rushes to continue. “He’s stable, though.”

There’s silence on the other end of the phone and Kurt takes a bite of the sandwich, forces himself to chew to swallow despite not feeling hungry. “I’m glad to hear that,” Elliott’s voice has gone quiet, and for the first time since Kurt’s met him, Elliott’s words hold a touch of hesitance, as if he’s unsure of what to say.

Kurt thinks they should start a club.

“Yeah.” The silence stretches, and Kurt sets the sandwich back in its wrapper, takes a breath to start saying that he has to go – he has to get back to Blaine – when Elliott manages to speak again.

(Fourteen hours and seventeen minutes.)

“And how are you handling things?”

It’s on the tip of his tongue, the ‘I’m fine’ he’d told Jim when he’d picked him up from the airport, the repetition he’d told his father and Carole, the line he’d given the nurse while waiting –

But it’s not there.

“I don’t know.” Kurt lets out a breath. “I just… I need him to wake up so I know he’s okay. He’s stable,” Kurt says the word like a curse, briefly closes his eyes in exasperation. “Like that’s a comfort. All that means is that he’s breathing. He’s breathing and there’s a low chance that there’s going to be an emergency. But just because he’s stable, that doesn’t mean he’s okay. He’s – he’s got broken bones and they took out his spleen and he’s so still. Blaine’s never that still, Elliott. He’s just not. He’s jumping on tables and dancing in hallways and starting flash mobs. I don’t –”

Kurt huffs a slightly hysterical laugh, “I don’t even know that he realizes I’m here. Everyone keeps saying that he does, that he has to but they can’t know that. There’s no test. And since I was in the middle of a damn run-through while my fiancé was getting beaten to hell I don’t have the most faith in their platitudes.”

There’s a beat before Elliott replies. “No one expects you to be happy right now, Kurt.”

“How considerate of them,” Kurt snaps before sighing, dropping his head. “I’m sorry – I didn’t mean that.”

“I think you’re entitled to a little venting,” Elliott comments, and Kurt feels his lips twitch in
response as he takes in Elliott’s words. “No one’s going to deny that.”

And then he notices the change in sound.

Kurt waits, keeps the phone pressed to his ear, and so he hears the whispers, the echoes of another conversation.

“Elliott,” Kurt pauses after he says the name, takes in a steadying breath. “Am I on speaker?”

For a moment, there’s nothing. And then a sigh sounds down the line. “I was on the way to the loft when you called.”

“We made him, Kurt. Please don’t be angry. We were just worried.” Dani’s voice is tight, nervous in a way he’s never heard from someone who normally speaks so bluntly.

“Your note was irritatingly vague,” Santana cuts in, and Kurt tightens his grip around Blaine’s ring. “We actually care about the hobbit too, Hummel.” The words are soft, if quick, and Kurt is suddenly reminded of when Santana sang in the choir room for Finn.

“It –”

“I can be on the next plane.” Rachel’s voice cuts through Kurt’s reply, and his hand tightens further; he feels the ring digging into his palm. “I’ve already starting packing, and I can just –”

“No.” The quiet word brings it all to a stop, and Kurt hates everything. “No,” he repeats, blinking away the sting in his eyes. “Stay in New York. You have the show and –”

“Kurt! Blaine is in the hospital! You think I care about Funny Girl when –”

“Kurt!” Rachel’s shout stalls Kurt’s hand on his phone, and he waits, counts his breaths even as he hears the murmurs of four voices on the line. “Kurt,” Rachel’s voice finally cuts through, “I’m not saying you shouldn’t focus on Blaine; I’m not saying that at all. But,” a pause, and Kurt feels his hand tighten on his phone even as his breath quickens for a reason he’s not yet sure of, “you were there for me when Finn – you were there for me, then. Let me be there for you, now.”

“No!” The word is louder than he planned, and Kurt ducks his head to avoid the curious looks from others in the waiting room. “Blaine’s stable, Rachel. He’s stable and not – he’s going to be fine.”

He hangs up before he can hear a reply.

(Fourteen hours and thirty-one minutes.)

Kurt stares at his phone until the screen goes black, taking measured breaths and slowly loosening his grip on Blaine’s ring.

He knows Rachel was just trying to help, trying to show support, in her way. But this is different.

Blaine isn’t Finn.
He can’t be.

And for all that he brought Rachel tea and blankets, and wrapped her in hugs and assured her that
the world hadn’t ended (even if part of theirs had), this is different.

Blaine will not die.

Blaine is stable, he’s breathing and slightly broken, but he’s alive, and even Dr. Olt knows Blaine’s
a fighter.

Kurt leans against the wall as the treacherous, pessimistic part of his mind reminds him that stable
isn’t a permanent condition.

His phone clatters to the floor then, and Kurt follows, resting his head on his bent knees as he
releases the sob he’d held back during the phone call. Because without meaning to, Rachel had hit
on the one fact Kurt has been ignoring since his dad first called.

Blaine’s in the hospital.

And the last time a member of Kurt’s family was in the hospital, they never came out again.

Kurt tightens his arms around his knees, takes in gulping hitches of air and ignores the steady
dampening of his sleeves.

Blaine could die.

Kurt squeezes his eyes tighter, shakes his head as if the simple negation will make the possibility
nothing more than a nightmare. Because Blaine is stable – currently – but he hasn’t woken up.

Saying Kurt’s name (once, slurred, and without opening his eyes) does not count.

He tries to remember his father’s assurances that it’s just the medication, Dr. Olt’s optimism that
Blaine is a fighter, but superimposed is the image of Blaine in the hospital bed, still but for the
slight rise and fall of his bandaged chest.

Blaine could die, and there’s nothing Kurt can do about it.

It’s not rational, he knows, but Kurt gave up on fairy tales the day he replaced his mother’s hugs
with her old blanket.

He almost started again, when he met Blaine on a staircase, but then Finn’s bedroom became a
shrine.

Kurt raises his head then, stares out through blurred vision at the waiting room.

Around him, impatient friends and family loiter and fetch coffee while the nurses wear the same
placid smile that had haunted him yesterday. The world is still moving, and Kurt is struck by the
injustice of it all.

He just hung up on some of the best friends he could ask for because he can’t handle their support.

Kurt still avoids people wearing letterman jackets, crosses to the opposite side of the street if he
sees members of the McKinley football team when he visits his family.

Because life isn’t fair, and years of behavior don’t just vanish.
Karofsky may have been bullied, may have been outed, but as far as Kurt knows he’s still more likely to make a snide comment about a Pride float than praise it.

He’s moved on from Karofsky, to an extent, made his peace when he visited him in this same hospital. But despite the football player’s coming-out and ill-advised crush (which had given Kurt chills when he’d thought on it later) Kurt can’t say he’s forgiven Karofsky – he took Kurt’s first kiss, and no matter how many times Blaine’s said it ‘doesn’t count, not really,’ Kurt can’t help but think of it as something else that Karofsky stole.

Like he stole Kurt’s feeling of safety, and his sense of belonging.

So when Kurt visits he avoids places he might see Karofsky altogether because his former tormentor may have left his bullying behind him, but Kurt can’t help but remember a forced kiss, hear the echo of ‘You tell anyone else what happened? I’m gonna kill you” when he sees him.

Kurt has the occasional nightmare, too.

And Blaine, Blaine had the courage to ask a friend to a dance, and in return got enough nightmares to last a lifetime.

He still had the courage to take Kurt’s hand.

Yet now, down the hall Blaine is stable – but not awake – after being attacked for the second time, since apparently Kurt’s fiancé dealing with the ghosts of his past attackers wasn’t enough for the universe.

A small, secret part of Kurt can’t help but think that of all the people who could be beaten and put in the hospital, Karofsky is still higher on that list than Blaine will ever be.

Kurt closes his eyes again, focuses on the feel of Blaine’s ring in his hand, forces himself to remember instead their proposals: remembers Blaine in a gorgeous suit and falling rose petals, remembers a magical staircase; remembers Blaine’s surprised face when Kurt had shown up, how Blaine had nearly tripped over the piano bench in his haste to cross the room.

He and Blaine are getting married. They are.

Blaine just has to wake up first.

Kurt opens his eyes and picks up his phone, turning it off before slipping it back into his pocket. He methodically chokes down half of the now-cold sandwich before standing and dropping the remaining bit into the trash and turning for Blaine’s hall.

Blaine’s the strongest, bravest man Kurt’s ever met, and Kurt’s going to tell him so, as soon as he wakes up.

(Fourteen hours and thirty-eight minutes.)
I am so sorry for the delay! Work managed to steal practically all of my time, and, unfortunately it was the same for my betas. However, hopefully this chapter is worth the wait. Thanks to all of you wonderful readers and reviewers for letting me know that you continue to care about and enjoy this story - your continued support still humbles me!

A very special thanks to slayerkitty for allowing me to bounce many, many ideas off her, in addition to putting up with my general craziness. Also, thanks to jessicamdawn for the beta and catching evil typos and general awkwardness. :)

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 28

Burt releases a sigh as the door shuts behind Kurt, reminds himself that his words were needed, that Kurt needs a break from this room.

A break from the monitors and the motionless, bandaged form of his fiancé.

Carole has taken a seat beside Blaine’s bed, and Burt keeps his distance, forcibly doesn’t listen to her quiet words.

Instead, Burt takes a moment, breathing in time with the beeps from the machine closest to him. On the bed, Blaine lays still in his medicated sleep, and Burt remembers Kurt’s comment about Blaine’s unnatural stillness.

It’s just as odd now as it was then.

Without meaning to, Burt’s mind remembers the countless episodes of Dateline and 20/20 where something happens – something horrible, an awful, terrible event – and lives are changed forever.

Someone wakes up, but it’s not the same person who was hurt in the first place.

Burt fists his hands as he wonders if the world is cruel enough for Blaine to wake up, but not be Blaine anymore.

Burt had an aunt who suffered from Alzheimer’s, he’d been a young man at the time, recently married. But he remembers his father’s broken expression when his aunt had been unable to recall her own brother’s name; the confusion when the family had mentioned parties, events Aunt Ann had no recollection of. Slowly, her body had weakened too, a cane replaced with a wheelchair; an assisted living home with around the clock care had replaced her cozy townhome.

And one day, the Aunt Ann who sang to him on his birthday and always sent Christmas cards was replaced with a shadow. A kind, lovable shadow, but a shadow nonetheless.

Burt doesn’t know how Kurt will cope if Blaine isn’t Blaine – the boy who dances on tables and
plays piano and pulls Kurt into impromptu duets – after this.

He knows his son: Kurt has never given up on someone, much less someone he’s claimed as family, but he wonders at what will happen to Kurt and Blaine’s lives if Blaine becomes a shadow.

The doctors haven’t mentioned it in detail, but Burt recognizes the underlying hints with the constant reminders of checking after Blaine wakes up; the reminders that they’ll have more definitive answers after that happens.

Burt furtively hopes the Blaine who wakes up is limited to the injuries already listed in his chart; the injuries he’s certain Kurt has already memorized.

They’re still just kids, after all, and Burt’s supposed to dance with both of them at their wedding.

He prays he still will.

Burt shakes his head, unclenches his fist as he moves to stand beside Blaine. He places his hand on Blaine’s uninjured shoulder, suppressing a sigh when there’s still no reaction.

“Kurt was right, earlier; he’s too still. It doesn’t suit him,” Burt nods in reply to Carole’s words, watches Blaine breathe. He only looks up when Carole continues. “But, I’m not sure I’m ready for him to wake up, either.” A glance to the monitors before she faces him, words merging together as she hurries to continue when she takes in what he knows must be a look of confusion. “I didn’t mean –” Carole sighs, stepping forward and resting a hand on Burt’s arm. “It’s awful, Blaine still being unconscious; it is. And I wish he would wake up, for Kurt’s sake, but as long as Blaine’s here, stable, he’s safe. I can sit here and watch these monitors and count his breaths –” Carole stops, her hand tightening on Burt’s arm while she ducks her head, her breathing quickening.

Minutes pass, and Burt uses his free arm to pull Carole closer, to wrap her in a hug.

“He’s gonna wake up, Carole.”

Carole nods against Burt’s shoulder.

She pulls back moments later, looks to Blaine’s bed.

“I know he is. And I know this is awful, but this I know how to handle. This moment. For right now, when Blaine’s stable.”

Burt takes in her brittle smile, the sheen in her eyes. “There’s nothin’ wrong with that.”

Carole huffs. “You’ve never lied to me before; don’t you dare start now.”

“Who said I was lying?” Burt keeps his voice low, but crosses the small space between them, reaches for Carole’s hand. “Blaine will wake up, but until he does you do what you need.” Burt pauses, briefly tightening his grip on Carole’s hand, “Just because this is what you need doesn’t mean that it’s something you’re enjoying.”

“No,” a shake of her head, and Carole brings her free hand up to wipe at her eyes. “I just can’t think past this, Burt. I can’t –” she stops, pulls in breaths even as Burt’s hand starts to go numb in her hold. “I can’t think about what happens next. Right now he’s fine, and that’s the only thing that matters, really. As long as he’s…as long as he’s like this,” a wave toward the bed, “the chances of his condition changing are low. And I’d rather – I’d rather be in this limbo of watching monitors than in the hell of seeing a straight line.”
Carole’s fear steals Burt’s words.

“You know,” after the silence – minus the beeping monitors – his voice makes Carole startle, but he carries on, keeps his eyes fixed on Blaine. “I keep worryin’ about when he does wake up. I know they said it’s a small chance, that something was missed, or that somethin’ will show up. But the kid’s got a list of injuries…” Burt cuts his gaze to the white board listing Blaine’s doctor and admitting department before looking back to Blaine, “and, they said he crashed in that ambulance. I’m not a doctor, but his heart stopped, Carole; that’s got to have some kind of effect.” Burt lowers his voice, “Kurt’s so anxious for him to wake up, to talk with him. But what if he can’t? What if Blaine’s not Blaine?”

“Kurt wouldn’t care.”

“No,” Burt sighs, “He wouldn’t. But he shouldn’t have to! This is too much – they’re just kids, Carole.” Burt ducks his head, draws in a deep breath. When he speaks, his words are quieter, rough despite his attempt to regain his composure. “We’re supposed to help ‘em move into that loft in New York, and dance with them at their wedding.”

“You honestly think anything is going to stop them from getting married?”

“I think that they deserve to have the wedding they’re plannin’ in that book they think we don’t know about. It’s one thing if we can’t afford some famous theatre or a three course meal, but if Blaine can’t –” Burt cuts himself off, slowly unclenches his free hand from where it had formed a fist. “They deserve better.”

“Of course they do.” A pause, “And what does it say about me, that I’d prefer for Blaine to stay… like this, even when Kurt has been begging him to wake up for hours?”

“You’re only human.”

“Hm,” Carole turns, folding herself against his chest. “So are you.”

Burt rests his chin on Carole’s shoulder, tightens his hold on his wife. “You’re a smart woman, Carole.”

Carole chokes a laugh and Burt silently thanks Kurt – again – for bringing Carole into their family. When Kurt enters an unknown amount of time later, Burt and Carole have moved to the chairs beside Blaine’s bed, though they’ve kept their hands clasped.

Burt pulls forth a smile and turns to face his son, taking in Kurt’s still-pale face and tired, glassy eyes. “Have a good phone call?”

Kurt just nods, keeps his eyes on Blaine. “How is – I mean, is…”

“I’m pretty sure he was waitin’ for you to get back to wake up; there hasn’t been any change, though.”

Kurt nods again before crossing the scant space, moving to carefully sit beside Blaine.

Burt has never seen such a beautiful sight be so heartbreaking.

He ducks his head, focuses on the feel of Carole’s hand in his, and just breathe.

Across the bed, the monitors beep, a sharp metronome that reminds Burt that regardless of the
silence, of the fact that his family is together, they’re still in a hospital room.

Kurt carefully readjusts his position on Blaine’s bed, wincing when his movements pull a tight muscle by his hip. He pauses, sparing a glance to his parents before tightening his grip on Blaine’s ring – they’re getting married – and moving to carefully lie on the bed, wary of Blaine’s array of bruises and bandages and wires, but needing to be closer.

On his side, inches away from Blaine, his fiancé’s bruises and oxygen cannula stand out in stark contrast to the bleached bedding. Slowly, Kurt reaches out, pushing back Blaine’s bangs with a slightly shaky hand. “I’m back,” Kurt keeps his voice a whisper, swallows past the lump in his throat, “you can wake up now, okay? Please Blaine. I won’t –” Kurt pauses, starts again, “I won’t even tease you about your hair.”

(Fourteen hours and forty-nine minutes.)

The door opens and Kurt tenses but doesn’t move, keeps his eyes fixed on Blaine. He hears his father talking, hears Carole offering a polite ‘good morning’ to the visitor – a nurse – as well.

Kurt stays silent.

Footsteps approach and Kurt forces himself to look away from Blaine, to raise his head and acknowledge the woman standing a foot away. He takes in her scrubs, complete with tiny sunflowers, and her dark hair with a few strands of grey – sparkling, actually – pulled back into a tight bun. She looks more experienced than Kara, the nurse from earlier, and Kurt silently wonders if their attitudes differ as well.

“You must be Kurt?” Kurt gives a slight nod. “I’m Christine; I’ll be Blaine’s nurse during the day. Technically I’m supposed to recommend you not be on the bed with the patient –” she tilts her head toward Kurt, “but I think as long as you move enough for me to check his vitals we can keep it between us.”

Kurt’s shoulders fall as he releases a breath. “Thank you.”

“Patients with support do better; I’m not about to take that away. Now,” she moves forward, pulling a blood pressure cuff from the drawer under the computer and attaching it to one of the various cables, “you’re going to have to at least sit up for this part.”

Kurt nods even as he stretches, moving to the side and letting his right leg dangle off the bed, his left bent under him. He smooths the blanket as Christine moves to the other side of the bed, carefully moving Blaine’s arm and attaching the cuff.

Kurt can’t suppress the flinch when he sees Blaine’s bare hand, tightening his hand around Blaine’s ring. He looks to his own ring, the metal shining but dulled in the dim light of the room.

His ring is still beautiful, still the most precious thing he owns, but for the first time since Blaine put it on his finger the sight fails to make him smile.

“How is he?” Kurt keeps his question soft, dreads the answer even as the words tumble out, harried.
“Well,” she pauses, looks over to where the machine has beeped, displaying a set of numbers, “His blood pressure is a little low, but within normal range.” She pauses, “Has he woken up yet?”

(Fifteen hours and three minutes.)

Kurt bites his lip. “No.”

“Kurt.” Burt’s voice cuts across the space, and Kurt ducks his head.

Kurt blows out a breath and looks up, meeting Christine’s slightly confused gaze. “He only said my name, hours ago. I don’t – he didn’t even open his eyes.”

“Between the anesthesia and the other medication he’s on I can’t say I’m surprised; plus,” she smiles, “teenagers sleep a lot anyway.”

Behind him, Kurt hears his dad and Carole offer murmurs of agreement. He watches as Christine leans forward, runs a thermometer over Blaine’s forehead. She sets it aside moments later, entering information in the computer before moving back to Blaine’s bed and carefully pulling back the blanket. “I have to check his incisions and stitches,” she pauses, “you might want to step out for this part.”

Kurt doesn’t move. “No.”

“Kurt, if Christine thinks you should wait –”

“I’m not leaving him,” Kurt knows his voice is cold, if soft, but he doesn’t care, just like he doesn’t care that he interrupted his father.

He won’t leave Blaine.

“Kurt, sweetie, you don’t even watch the surgery scenes during Grey’s Anatomy.”

Kurt straightens at Carole’s comment, narrowing his eyes. “I’m not leaving him.”

“Well then,” Christine interrupts the tableau, her voice smooth and warm where Kurt’s had been cutting, “why don’t you help me adjust this blanket. But if you do need to step out, it’s okay.” She pulls the blanket with Kurt, revealing the thin blue gown and more of the wires Kurt had only seen glimpses of before. “It can be startling, Kurt; I won’t think any less of you if you ask me to pull the curtain.”

Kurt hums in reply, keeping his gaze fixed on the bandages and wires peeking out from Blaine’s gown.

“Oh, Blaine?” Kurt looks up when Christine addresses his fiancé, sees her gently adjusting Blaine’s oxygen, carefully moving Blaine’s splinted right arm, and double-checking the plastic bracelet on his left wrist. “Blaine, I heard you’ve been sleeping the day away, and that’s fine, but I have to check your incision, okay? So if you’re even slightly awake you need to let me know so you can tell me if something hurts.”

Kurt tells himself that he wasn’t expecting a reply, so there’s no point in being disappointed when Blaine continues to just breathe.

With the gown pushed away from his chest, Kurt brings a hand up to his mouth as he finally sees Blaine’s torso.
There’s a reason he studies theatre and not medicine.

Kurt had known; logically, with the list of injuries and the papers detailing Blaine’s surgery, Kurt had known Blaine was hurt.

But it was one thing to see Blaine’s swollen cheek and eye and stitched brow.

It’s another to not recognize his fiancé’s chest.

Kurt’s intimately familiar with Blaine: He knows about the scar on his left knee from when Blaine fell when he was six while doing a routine with Cooper; about the small bit of weight that refuses to become abs (which Kurt loves) despite Blaine’s exercise routine, and his ensuing (endearing) fear that he’ll no longer fit in his clothes; he knows about the freckles that dust Blaine’s shoulders; he knows the line of muscles in front of Blaine’s ribcage.

The bandaged and bruised chest he sees is foreign.

He swallows his gasp, blinks the sting from his eyes and returns his focus to Christine, who moves her gloved hands to the taped bunch of gauze on the left side of Blaine’s chest.

She starts to peel the tape back and Kurt winces as it sticks – he’ll have to get Blaine some lotion, too.

He jumps when Blaine groans.

“Blaine?”

He doesn’t remember moving, but he’s leaning over the head of the bed, his left hand clutching Blaine’s ring and the railing in a white-knuckled grip even as his right stops scant inches away from Blaine, frozen.

“Blaine, wake up. Please. We – I need you to wake up now, okay?” Blaine’s eyelids twitch, and Kurt winces as the stitches pull even as anxiousness threatens to keep him from staying still. “Blaine. I’m here.” Kurt ducks his head even further, brushes his lips against Blaine’s forehead. “Please wake up – for me, okay?”

A beat, and then Blaine’s eyes blink open.

(Fifteen hours and twelve minutes.)

-*.---*

It’s dark.

There’s a growing ache, distant, disconnected.

Hints of sound reach him, but they’re garbled fragments of nonsense.

And then pain bursts, sharp and brutal.

The sound returns then, closer than before. It sparks something, a hint of memory, but it slips away before he can capture it. Still, he focuses on the sound, forces all his energy on it until the discordant jumbles have meaning.

“– up now, okay?”
The pain is returning, spreading and stealing his thoughts. Sleep beckons, a haven from the encroaching discomfort.

“I’m here. Wake up for me.”

*Kurt.*

The pain is still there, growing, and the darkness is as strong as ever, but Blaine forces himself to try and open his heavy eyes.

Because Kurt is here, and nothing makes sense.

His eyes open to a dim, unknown room.

And Kurt standing above him. Something is wrong, Kurt’s eyes are too watery, his face too pale, but he’s smiling.

“Hey there, sleepyhead,” Kurt’s voice is soft, rough in a way Blaine can’t place, “you had me worried. Don’t do that, okay?”

Blaine feels his face start to scrunch in confusion before pain forces him to stop.

“Hi there,” Blaine slowly looks away from Kurt, sees a woman standing to his right. “I’m Christine; I’m going to ask you some questions, okay? Now don’t worry, there’s no wrong answer.” Against his fingers, Kurt’s hand tightens.

Blaine manages a weak attempt at a nod.

“Alright then; you know my name, can you tell me yours?” If he had the energy, he’d roll his eyes. He settles for looking to Kurt before answering.

Or attempting to.

His voice cracks before he manages to finish ‘Blaine’ – the weak whisper of sound dying with a squeak.

Seemingly moments later a spoon with crushed ice chips is in front of him. “Sounds like you could use some, kid.”

He takes two mouthfuls before he attempts his name again.

Then the questions resume and he ignores the steadily growing pain radiating from his side and arm. He manages his age and birthday and then –

“Do you know where you are?”

Blaine looks away from Kurt to take in the room, the railed bed and beeping monitors, the curtain pushed against the wall, the tiled floor –

“Hospital.”

“Very good; do you know why you’re in the hospital?”

Blaine freezes.

“No…no I –” something is beeping faster, and another tone is going off, adding to the clamor in
“Blaine.” Kurt’s close again, his face taking up Blaine’s vision. “Blaine, it’s okay. I promise it’s okay but you have to calm down. Just breathe.” An exhale. “Just breathe with me.”

The air in his nose is cool, the scent of plastic adding to his headache (and growing nausea), but Blaine does as Kurt says, and breathes.

Exhaustion battles with the pain and nausea for his attention, so Blaine keeps his focus on Kurt, forces himself to match the breaths in and out.

He closes his eyes, takes comfort in the grasp of Kurt’s hand.

He can’t help the gasp and startled blink when the pain spikes, though.

“Blaine?” Kurt’s hand tightens around his fingers even as he looks away from Kurt’s concerned gaze. “I just have two more questions for you.”

Blaine swallows, his whispered ‘okay’ cracking into multiple sounds.

“All right, almost done; right now what’s your pain from one to ten, if one is no pain and ten is the worst?”

Blaine thinks, remembers harsh yells and a stained suit; remembers physical therapy and surgical follow-ups; his head throbs and he remembers falling back, running.

“F-four?”

“You always were an awful liar,” Kurt’s comment holds a swirl of emotion – humor, exasperation, sadness, “how about you try again, and this time use a normal pain tolerance.”

Blaine can’t be sure, he still feels disconnected, but he thinks he blushes. “Six.”

Off to the side, he sees Christine nodding. “And any nausea?”

Blaine hums in agreement.

“Okay, well how about I get you some medicine to help with that,” Christine steps aside, moving toward the door, “I’ll be right back.”

She must be magic, because he blinks and she’s back at his side, putting a syringe into the tube of is IV. “This is Phenergan, for the nausea,” a depression and Blaine feels cold snake up his arm. A pop, and then the syringe is replaced. “Dilauded, for the pain. And, this will probably make you fall back asleep; it’s a pretty strong pain medication. Now Blaine,” she discharges the liquid, “one last question: Can you tell me who these lovely people are?”

“Kurt.”

“And who is Kurt?” Blaine slowly blinks at the silly question – everyone knows Kurt – and the room begins to spin.

“– ‘m soulmate.”

Murmurs, susurrations of sound blend together with the swirl of starbursts behind his eyes before a phrase breaks through: ‘love you too.’
Always. The starbursts fade but the darkness stretches, and Blaine follows.

Kurt keeps his hand on Blaine’s, not moving it even when Blaine’s goes slack, and studiously ignores the beeping of the monitors. Across the bed, Christine is adjusting wires and checking bags, and Kurt knows he should be paying attention, taking notes, filing away information to Google later, but he can’t.

Because Blaine woke up.

Fifteen hours and twelve minutes since the phone call, since his world-view shifted with three words from his father.

But Blaine woke up, and Kurt forces himself to focus on the fact that Blaine called him soulmate, and had reached for his hand –

He pushes away the memory of Blaine’s harsh gasp and winces of pain.

Christine clears her throat and Kurt’s shoulders twitch even as he slowly looks away from Blaine to meet her gaze.

“I’m just about done here; did you need anything before I go?”

Kurt starts to shake his head before a thought crosses his mind. “How –” Kurt swallows and starts again, “how long will he be out?”

“It varies,” her voice seems unduly loud in the small space, and Kurt resists the urge to bring his free hand up to cover one of his ears, “but I’ll be back in four hours for another check and to readminister some of Blaine’s medication. Chances are he’ll wake up a bit then, and, of course, he could wake up on his own earlier.”

Kurt hums a reply and briefly tightens his hold on Blaine’s hand, closing his eyes against the memories of all the times his hand was held in return.

Blaine woke up.

It may have taken fifteen hours and twelve minutes, but Blaine woke up and that’s what matters.

His dad was right.

Absently, he notes Christine giving Blaine one last check before she passes out of Kurt’s line of vision; the door clicks shut moments later.

Hospitals are never quiet, and the murmurs of a dozen conversations ebb on the edge of his hearing, but it’s a steady noise, constant like the beeps from the monitors surrounding Blaine’s bed.

Kurt wonders, again, how he can both hate and be grateful for the sounds.

“Kurt?”

Of their own volition, Kurt’s muscles tense when he hears his father’s voice, but he can’t bring himself to turn away, to look away from Blaine.

Kurt is selfish: He doesn’t share – he never really learned to and he’s given up trying to learn. It’s a fault, and a potentially destructive one at that, but it’s something he’s come to accept about
himself. And Kurt knows he’s the most selfish when it comes to his family.

And within his family, Kurt is the least altruistic with Blaine; he wants his time, his attention, his love, his words –

He wants Blaine to wake up again.

Because he’s selfish, and he wants Blaine awake to hear the ‘I love you’ that’s been Kurt’s mantra ever since the phone call.

And for a moment, Kurt hates himself. Because being awake isn’t necessarily what’s best for Blaine. His fiancé needs to rest, and Kurt knows that the same medication that keeps Blaine unconscious is necessary for Blaine to heal. And yet, he wonders at how he thought he would get by with one conversation from Blaine.

Kurt Hummel is selfish, and he needs Blaine Anderson – alive and coherent – to wake up again.

“Kurt?” The hand on his shoulder startles him out of his thoughts, and he flinches in surprise. “Whoa, sorry. I just –” his father pauses, sighs a breath before continuing, “He woke up, Kurt; I told you he would.”

Kurt keeps his eyes on the slight rise and fall of Blaine’s chest, focuses on the feel of Blaine’s ring trapped between their hands. “Yeah. You did. I just –”

“You kept him calm, Kurt,” Carole’s soft voice breaks in while Kurt is still searching for words. “I know it probably wasn’t what you expected, but you were perfect, Kurt. You said exactly what Blaine needed to hear.”

Kurt stares at his hand still resting over Blaine’s, thinks back to the too-short, mostly negligible conversation. “I don’t – He only said a few words.”

“But he knew you,” Kurt manages a hint of a smile at his dad’s comment, “He’s on drugs I can’t pronounce but he called you his soulmate; focus on that.”

Kurt nods, briefly tightening his hold on Blaine’s hand. “It’s hard.”

“Of course it is,” His father’s agreement has Kurt turning in surprise, his eyes wide. “What, Kurt, you expectin’ to hear something different? Nothin’ about this is easy, and you won’t hear me saying differently; we’re all adults here.”

The moment stops, crystalizing for Kurt. Because for the first time Kurt realizes that his father sees him as an adult, as an equal.

He’s not a child anymore.

He’s still the son of Burt Hummel, but he’s his own person too. And even his father respects that. Kurt wonders what it says about him, that he feels the change now, in Blaine’s hospital room, rather than when he moved out to another state and became responsible for his own decisions.

“– woken up we can run home and pick up some things.” His father’s comment startles Kurt from his thoughts, even as the words have him tightening his grip on Blaine’s hand.

“I’m staying here.” Kurt knows the words are flat, cold, but he’s not leaving.

“Kurt –”
“Why don’t I stay here with Kurt while you run home,” Carole cuts in, and Kurt feels a flare of gratefulness for his step-mother for her interruption. “I put Kurt’s bag in the closet earlier; you can take that home, Burt, and maybe grab us some clean clothes and real coffee, too.”

“Sounds like you have this all figured out.” Kurt hears a touch of irritation in his father’s tone, but there’s a trace of humor too, and Kurt feels his shoulders slump in relief.

His father stands moments later, crossing the room and taking Kurt’s bag from the small closet before moving out of Kurt’s field of vision. He hears murmurs from his dad and Carole, but Kurt keeps his focus on the rise and fall of Blaine’s chest.

He stifles a jump at the hand on his shoulder, rocking forward in his seat. “Didn’t mean to startle you, Kurt.” Kurt nods before his dad tightens his grip on his shoulder, causing Kurt to turn and meet his gaze. “I’m proud of you; you know that, right? You’ve been handlin’ all this…” Kurt’s eyes widen at the words even as his father rubs his free hand across his eyes before offering a small smile. “I’ll be back with some coffee, alright?”

“Yeah,” Kurt leans into his dad’s one-armed hug for a moment before straightening. “Can you get me an iced coffee?”

“You don’t drink coffee,” his dad grumbles, loosening his hold on Kurt’s shoulders. “You get some sugar and cream atrocity, but write it down and I’ll pick it up on the way back.”

With the coffee order stowed in his pocket, and with Kurt’s bag over his shoulder, Kurt offers a half-hearted smile as his father exits, the door quietly clicking shut behind him.

The room is silent again, filled only with the beeps from the monitors and Kurt watches Blaine, hopes – irrationally, he knows – for a sign that Blaine is waking up.

Twenty-two minutes since Blaine last spoke, and Kurt wonders how many more will pass before he can talk with his fiancé again.

*_*_*_*_*

Outside Blaine’s room, Burt stops, leaning against the wall. Blaine woke up, and Burt is grateful, but the relief he knows he should feel remains just out of reach, like a balloon floating further and further away.

Blaine had woken up, but while Kurt had latched onto every word, hadn’t looked away from the moment Blaine had opened his eyes, Burt remembers Blaine’s stuttered words, and how the kid’s voice had faded in and out.

Blaine had woken up, but he’d known Kurt, but Blaine hadn’t been fully aware – he hadn’t even spoken in full sentences – and Burt allows himself to feel the worry he’d kept to himself when Kurt was in the room.

A particularly loud announcement startles Burt from his reverie, and he shakes his head, physically pushing away the melancholy thoughts. He should follow his own advice: Blaine woke up and he recognized Kurt.

Burt sighs again, takes a moment to rub a hand across his eyes before pushing off the wall, sparing one last glance to where Kurt stays seated at Blaine’s bedside before heading down the hall. He nods to Christine as he passes the nurse’s station, and moments later he’s blinking, the sunlight a harsh contrast to the florescent lighting in the hospital.
He manages two steps before he pauses. The sea of cars stands before him, a menagerie of minivans and trucks and money-saving four-doors, and amongst them, Burt doesn’t remember where he parked.

It hadn’t been the most important piece of information, at the time.

He thinks back, remembers rushing with Carole –

The sign for the Emergency Room had stood out, a bright, daunting sign cutting through the darkness.

And it had been on the left.

Burt steps off the sidewalk and ignores the flicker of trepidation as he takes in the rows of cars. He decides to give himself five minutes before he sets off his car alarm.

He walks down two rows before the sound of voices makes him stop.

He knows those voices; four steps later, he sees Sam Evans’ car parked with the windows rolled down.

“– won’t let us see him. It’s not right, Sam.”

“I know! I mean, we’re Blaine’s best friends – we have a right to see him, especially since he got hurt.”

“And if they let Kurt and his parents back we should be allowed there, too.”

“Yeah, but Kurt’s almost married to him.”

“Almost. They’re not married yet! Kurt’s been in New York; we’re the ones who have been with Blaine. And now we can’t even see him? I think you were right earlier – we should sneak in.”

“Really? Do you think we need costumes, too? I could –”

Burt decides he’s heard enough then, and steps past the car separating him from the teens, offering a smile when Tina gasps in surprise.

“There a reason you two are sittin’ in the parking lot?”

“Mr. Hummel –”

“We just –”

Their words trip over each other and Burt waits while the teens glance at each other, deciding who should speak.

“We want to see Blaine, Mr. Hummel.”

Burt keeps his expression calm, taking in Tina’s harsh expression and shrill voice. He understands the sentiment, even if can’t bring himself to agree with it at the moment.

“I get that. But Carole already told you that can’t happen – not yet.”

“We’re his best friends!” Tina’s words echo, the sound bouncing off the surrounding vehicles. “Kurt’s his fiancé, fine, but you’re not related, Mr. Hummel, and they let you see Blaine; we have
just as much of a right to see him as you do!”

Burt takes a moment to just breathe, to remind himself that Tina and Sam are hurting, and dealing with a situation that Burt’s having a hard time handling.

And, they’re still just kids.

“She didn’t mean it like that Mr. Hummel,” Sam rushes to explain, the words slurring together in his haste to speak. “We just really want to see Blaine. He’s our best friend and –”

“He’s your best friend,” Burt cuts in, leaning forward against the car, “but being your best friend, doesn’t that mean you want what’s best for him?” Burt waits a moment, ensures he has both Sam and Tina’s attention. “What happened – nothing about what’s happened is fair, or good, or in any way respectable. You’re adults now, and I hate to be the one to break it to you, but part of being an adult is realizing that you don’t always get your way. You don’t always win, and on top of that, sometimes you have to give up something you want that’s not what’s best for someone you care for. And right now, you seeing Blaine isn’t what’s best for him.”

“But –”

Burt holds up a hand, halting Tina’s protest. “He’ll need his friends later, but right now Blaine needs to heal. And Blaine’s asleep anyway; he’s on some pretty strong meds.”

“It’s my fault.”

The words are quiet, startlingly so after her previous outburst and Burt finds himself momentarily without words.

“Tina! Don’t say that! Even Mrs. Hudson said –”

“He was dropping off our costumes because I asked him to!”

“So? I lost my favorite hat while picking up your coffee last week – was that your fault too?”

“Losing a hat is not the same –”

“Tina,” Burt keeps his voice even, but forceful, ensuring that he’s not interrupted, “what happened to Blaine is no one’s fault but the…person who singled him out. It was not your fault. The police are doing all they can,” he ignores the widened eyes he gets in response, “but I don’t want to hear you blaming yourself.” When Tina refuses to meet his eyes, Burt continues. “Alright, Tina, Blaine dropped off those costumes at night; are you blamin’ him?”

“No! Of course not! How can you –”

“If you can’t blame him, you can’t blame yourself, either.”

Silence greets him, and Burt leans back and takes in the twin looks of shock before him.

“Please, Mr. Hummel, can’t we just see him for a couple minutes?”

Burt sighs. “You’re persistent, I’ll grant you that. But even if it was up to me – and believe it or not I don’t actually control the hospital regulations – seeing Blaine right now isn’t an option. I promise you’ll be the first to know when that changes, though.” Burt smiles and steps back from the car. “Now I’m sure you two have better places to be than a hospital parking lot; you’ll be outta here by the time I get to my truck, right?”
He waits for nods in confirmation before finally stepping away. Kurt’s bag is weighing on his shoulder, and he resists the urge to let out a yell of triumph when he finally comes across his truck; two aisles over and three spots down, slightly crooked, if within the lines of its parking space.

When he drives out of the lot moments later, Sam’s car is gone. Burt lets out a slight sigh of relief and heads for the house. The fresh air and change of scenery are welcome, but despite his aversion of hospitals that’s where his family is, and he needs to return to them as quickly as possible.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Carole watches as Kurt leans forward, his focus solely on the figure on the bed. Absently, Carole wonders if Kurt realizes she’s still in the room, if he has awareness that extends to anything outside of Blaine.

Moments later Kurt moves, carefully moving aside wires before climbing into the bed again, bending his knees to fit his frame on the bed next to Blaine. He’s careful, and once he’s settled Carole resists the urge to take a picture; the hospital room is disconcerting, and Blaine’s injuries are not something Carole wants to commemorate, but the gentleness of Kurt’s hand and the caring – love – evident in his expression has everything Carole could want in a photo.

Carole takes a sip of her now cold coffee as Kurt brushes the bangs off Blaine’s forehead.

“He called me his soulmate.” Kurt’s words are softly spoken, but they break the lull of beeping monitors nonetheless. Carole wonders if he meant for her to hear them, but almost as if he can hear her doubts Kurt turns just enough to catch her gaze before continuing. “I always tease him that I fell for him first, that he has to catch up, but,” Kurt releases a breath that’s a cross between a laugh and a sob and Carole tightens her grip on the chair, “he barely said his own name, but he called me his soulmate.”

“He loves you.”

“And I love him,” a pause, and Carole sees Kurt’s hand tighten, “but I don’t know that I deserve him.”

“Kurt –”

“He’s dealt with so much. Too much, this year, and I haven’t even been in the same state for most of it. It took me *seven hours* just to get here.”

“But you did get here, Kurt, and that’s what matters.”

“Is it? Because while this,” Kurt gestures to Blaine with one hand, “while Blaine was getting beaten – while someone *attacked* him, I was practicing lines. He called me his soulmate, Carole; doesn’t that mean something? Shouldn’t I have known? Because I didn’t. I didn’t have a bad feeling, or some sense of trepidation, or some phantom pain. I *didn’t know* anything was going on until my phone kept buzzing.”

Carole stands and crosses the few feet to stand by Blaine’s bed, leaning over to pull Kurt into a one-armed hug in spite of his prone position. “I thought you didn’t believe in fairy tales, Kurt.”

Beneath her hand, Kurt’s shoulder shakes with a huff of laughter. “I don’t. Why should I? But Blaine – Blaine called me his soulmate when he couldn’t even manage a complete sentence. He cares so much, and I wasn’t there, Carole! I wasn’t there and I *didn’t know* –”

“When Finn’s father died I was at work.” Kurt freezes at her interruption, a statue save for the
slight motion of his breathing. “They left a voicemail,” she pauses, offering Kurt’s shoulder one last squeeze before straightening, “does that mean I cared for him any less?”

“No!” Kurt’s denial is swift, if quiet. “No, of course not.”

“But it does for you?”

“I don’t –” Kurt stops midsentence with a sigh and somehow despite already being down she sees Kurt slump. He even looks smaller in response. “Soulmates are supposed to know.”

And suddenly, Carole understands. Kurt Hummel never does anything by halves: Everything from his unique, unusual voice to his tailored clothes – including the kilt he wore to Prom – shows that.

So of course he meets his soulmate at sixteen, she can’t fault him. Blaine is everything she could wish for him, and Kurt – he deserves that happiness.

But Kurt Hummel doesn’t fall into the norm for anything else, so why should he when it comes to love? If Kurt Hummel has a soulmate, it should fit with the fairy tales and the Reader’s Digest stories; he should know when his soulmate is in trouble – even when he’s separated by almost six-hundred miles.

Carole releases a small sigh and takes a moment to gather her thoughts. “It doesn’t mean you love him any less.”

“He –” Kurt trembles and Carole resists the urge to attempt to gather him up – he’s grown too much for that to be possible, anyway. “I should have known.”

“Says who?”

Kurt shrugs in reply. “It doesn’t matter, I guess.” He turns, puts one hand back on Blaine’s, and his next words have an undercurrent of steel, a conviction Carole knows better than to touch. “I won’t leave him again. I can’t.”

“I won’t try to convince you otherwise,” Carole agrees, even as a small part of her mind remembers tuition rates and the not-yet reached date circled on the kitchen calendar marking the end of Kurt’s semester, “but you can’t blame yourself for not knowing, Kurt.”

“It just doesn’t seem equal; Dr. Olt, all the nurses – everyone kept saying how Blaine is recovering, how I shouldn’t expect too much. But he called me soulmate despite all that –”

“So respect that,” Carole keeps her voice firm, but soft, matching Kurt’s in volume. “Despite the medication and trauma you’re important enough to him that he called you his soulmate. And Kurt, I don’t know your definition for soulmates, but you left New York as soon as possible, and you haven’t let Blaine out of your sight since. You argued with medical professionals, Kurt; you’ve fought for Blaine, just as much as he did for you.”

Kurt nods, though his eyes hold a note of skepticism, and Carole makes a mental note to talk to Burt later.

On the bed, Kurt’s turned to face Blaine again, and though he can hardly be comfortable, curled as he is, he still looks at Blaine with a hint of wonder mixed with sadness. One hand still rests on top of Blaine’s, though the other has resumed carefully pushing aside Blaine’s bangs.

Kurt really is a paradox: his care at the moment is as certain as anyone in a years-long relationship, and yet moments before he had fretted because his storybook definition of soulmate had been in
Carole slightly shakes her head as she steps back, stopping when the backs of her knees hit the chair. She pauses for a moment, but Kurt shows no sign of moving, so she reaches back and picks up her purse slips it on her shoulder. “I think I’ll go freshen up,” she thinks Kurt nods, but she can’t be certain, given the angle, “I’ll get some coffee too; your father could be a while.”

There’s no response from Kurt, but she hadn’t expected one.

She exits the room quietly, catching the door so it shuts with a soft click before blinking in the brighter light of the hallway. The hints of conversations are louder outside of Blaine’s room, and Carole suppresses a wince as a woman down the hall gets particularly vocal.

She heads in the opposite direction of the various conversations, passes the nurse’s stations and eventually makes her way back to the waiting room that had become far too familiar to her hours ago. She makes it halfway through the room before her phone begins to ring in her purse, making her jump even as she drops her purse on an empty table and digs through its contents, finally unearthing her phone.

“Hello?”

“Mrs. Hudson-Hummel?”

Carole doesn’t recognize the voice, and the formality gives her pause; she doesn’t have time for telemarketers today.

“Yes; who is this?”

“I –” There’s a pause, and Carole hears static before the connection clicks back, “– Blaine’s mother; you left me a message?”

Carole freezes. She’d imagined this conversation earlier, gone through scenarios in her head when she and Burt had been waiting for news on Blaine. Had alternated between feeling sympathy for the woman and wanting to scream at her for her lack of maternal care.

But now, with the woman on the other end of the call, Carole finds herself at a loss for words.

She releases a breath and gathers her thoughts. “I did. I –”

“How is Blaine?”

In her mind, a voice that sounds suspiciously like Kurt questions now you care? and it takes her a moment to push the thought aside and muster a placid tone. “He’s stable.”

If the comment holds a touch of judgement, well, Carole has an audience of one.

“So he’s okay.”

It’s not a question, and Carole takes a deep breath, forces herself to loosen her grip on her phone. “Technically, yes. But he’s still listed as serious; he had surgery last night. I don’t think he’d had it when I left my message…” Carole lets the sentence trail off, winces when she gets another burst of static on the line.

“– sorry, even in port the service isn’t the best. But it sounds like Blaine’s doing alright?” Carole takes the question as rhetorical, and waits, imagines Kurt listening in on the conversation to pass
the seemingly endless seconds before Blaine’s mother continues. “It’s just, the cruise lasts another two days, and I can’t get a flight before then. Not that I’d trust a flight from any of the islands’ airports, anyway. But you’re there, and Blaine’s okay.”

Carole bites back the urge to scream. It’s already been over a day, what’s a few more? Carole can practically see Kurt’s eye roll. “We’ll be here; I don’t think Kurt will even step outside Blaine’s room.”

“Oh!” Carole winces as static cuts in, “– done for the summer already?”

“He flew in early this morning,” Carole answers, keeping the unlike you unvoiced. “But yes, we’ll stay with Blaine.”

“– him sleeping? The last time he was in the hospital he didn’t even know when I was there, he was asleep so much. But thank you, for watching him. I’m almost out of time on my phone card, though, so I’m going to have to let you go.”

“I guess I’ll see you in a few days then.”

“I’ll let you know when I land.”

She’s gone a moment later, the screen on Carole’s phone darkening in response. She carefully puts the phone back in her purse, valiantly resisting the urge to throw it against the nearest wall.

She remembers a conversation with Burt, how he commented that if he ever started to empathize with Blaine’s father that Carole had carte blanche because it meant he had lost his mind.

It had been a joke, a respite from the stress of a draining day. And yet, having now spoken to Blaine’s mother, Carole has a new appreciation for Burt’s fear.

Blaine is in the hospital – he was attacked – and his mother was seemingly satisfied with a phone call. If she ever got a call about Kurt, if anything ever happened, she – and Burt, that went without question – would be demanding to know every piece of information.

And they certainly wouldn’t finish a vacation.

Carole steps back, taking a seat and sighing when she remembers how uncomfortable the chairs are, shifting before finally resting her hands on her knees.

She’d gotten the call for Finn too late for it make a difference in her chance to say goodbye, but she’d still left the house sans makeup and Burt had been the one to grab her purse. That day remains fuzzy, a blur, Burt’s hand the only solid thing, a constant pressure by her side.

Carole raises her fingers, watches her knuckles regain color even as the ache in them fades.

She stands then, gathering her purse and heading for the restroom; she wants to get back to Blaine’s room – check in on the boys. She just needs to freshen up and grab some coffee first.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

First, let me apologize for taking so long to post. I had surgery in December, and for a while I couldn't really type or write. That being said, I hope you enjoy this chapter, and hopefully its length at least in part makes up for the long delay. Thanks to slayerkitty for putting up with my post-surgical ramblings and discussing ideas for this chapter, and many thanks to jessicamdown for her fast and helpful beta! Also, as always, thanks to all of you lovely readers - I'm constantly amazed and awed by your support and feedback! :) 

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 29

Burt wrinkles his nose as he makes his way down the hall, his hope that he’d exaggerated the smell of disinfectant and hospital having been dashed as soon as he’d entered the doors. The cups of coffee in his hands only add to the mix of scents, though the coffee is by far the most pleasant. Conversations echo and merge in the tiled hall, the buzz just loud enough to keep Burt alert. He moves to the side as two nurses wheel a gurney on his left, but he looks away as they pass; the least he can do is give their patient some privacy. He manages to make it to Blaine’s room minutes later, but a glance through the window as he reaches for the handle shows only the boys tangled together on the bed, faces lax with sleep.

He quietly steps inside, taking note of the open door to the empty bathroom as he sets Kurt’s coffee on the small bedside table. The boys don’t stir, though Kurt’s hair reminds Burt more of his toddler days than the careful styles of recent years.

Kurt looks less than his usual put-together self, and the stitches on Blaine stand out in stark relief, as jarring as the colorful bruises and nasal cannula.

Burt snaps a picture anyway.

He steps out of the room moments later, balancing his and Carole’s coffees as he makes his way back down the hall.

“Mr. Hummel,” Burt stops, sees the nurse from earlier – Carrie? Kristy? Christine (based on the helpful nametag) – offering a smile. “Looking for your wife?”

“I’m guessin’ you know where she went?”

“Hospitals can be…stressful,” Christine states as she gestures to the hall, “she said she needed some air; I gave her directions to the garden. It’s not much, but there are some flowers, benches too.”

Burt nods, and minutes later he’s outside, grass and flowers replacing concrete and parked cars. He smiles to a young couple standing next to an elderly woman in a wheelchair staring at a row of tulips, walks past a businessman speaking into his cell phone, his suit at odds with his
surroundings.

And finally, he sees Carole, standing near a rose bush that’s seen better days. His wife is still, though Burt doubts the few blooms have managed to capture her attention.

“Carole?” She turns, offering a weak smile.

“More coffee?”

“Yeah,” he jokes as he hands her the cup, “but this is actually worthy of the name.”

“You mean you didn’t bring me more of the…delightful concoction from the waiting room?”

“No,” Burt pauses, looks again at Carole’s clenched hands and distracted smile. “You wanna tell me what I missed while I was picking up clothes and that drink Kurt thinks is coffee?”

Carole continues to stare at the bush, not moving. Finally, just as Burt moves to pull her into a hug, Carole turns around.

“I got a phone call, about an hour ago.” She stops there, and Burt resists the urge to yell in frustration at the non-answer.

He hasn’t had good luck with phone calls, recently, and Carole’s reticence has him worried.

“I thought we already had our quota of bad calls.”

“It was Blaine’s mother.”

The words stop the response on the tip of Burt’s tongue and he searches for words, unclenching his hands as he does so.

“I’m guessing it didn’t go well?”

Carole offers a brittle smile. “Did you know she’s on vacation?” Her voice drips with derision. “A cruise. She still has two days left, apparently. But she should be here sometime after then.” Carole lets out an audible breath and Burt offers her his hand. “I just don’t understand that woman, Burt. Blaine’s in this hospital – he’s hurt – and she’s finishing her cruise?”

Burt thinks back over Carole’s words, takes a moment to push away the anger and attempt to understand Blaine’s mother.

“She out of the country?”

Carole nods. “She called from an island,” the words come out as a question, but Burt waits for her to continue regardless, “I don’t think she mentioned which one. The connection wasn’t the best. Not that it matters. I just –” Carole stops midsentence, looks to Burt. “What kind of parent doesn’t come running when their child is hurt?”

“One that can’t.”

“What?” Carole’s voice is incredulous, and Burt tightens his grip on her hand.

“You said she’s on some island,” Burt hurries to explain, “if the phone service isn’t the best, do you really think she could find a flight back to Ohio?”

“Maybe not,” Carole’s agreement has Burt’s eyebrows rising in surprise. “Maybe she can’t get a
flight, but you didn’t hear her, Burt. She –” Carole stops again, shaking her head before continuing. 
“She didn’t sound upset; some of your customers with a broken taillight have sounded more 
stressed.”

“People deal with pain in different ways.”

“You’re defending her?”

“No – no!” Burt sighs. “I’m not. I just – I have to believe she’s dealing with this as best she knows 
how, Carole.”

“Why? That woman hardly deserves your consideration.”

“Probably not,” Burt looks to the rose bush, “but think about what Blaine’s life must have been 
like if I’m wrong.” Burt glances back to Carole. “If it was different, we’d be trying everything, and 
who knows, maybe she did, too. But if she can’t get here any sooner, what else was she supposed 
to say?”

“She’s supposed to try!”

“We don’t know that she didn’t,” Burt answers, keeping his voice calm, “we can’t really know.”

“Don’t placate me, Burt Hummel.”

“I’m not.” Burt sighs, keeps his voice even despite his own anger at the situation. “I just think we 
have bigger issues than being angry at a woman who’s not even in the country.”

“I think I prefer being angry,” Carole huffs, finally stepping close enough Burt can gather her into 
a hug. “She –”

“She’s not here,” Burt finishes, “but after our last meeting, maybe that’s for the best.”

Carole stills. “A mother is supposed to be there for her children.”

Instinctively, Burt’s hands tighten around his wife and he closes his eyes against the surge of anger 
that sweeps his body.

They hadn’t been there for Finn, had arrived to blank monitors and silence in the too-cold room. 
But they’d arrived, had burst into the hospital as soon as possible after the call.

And now, despite a similar call, Blaine’s mother is finishing a cruise: Maybe she couldn’t get back 
yet, maybe she had exhausted all opportunities.

It’s still a weak excuse, and Burt sighs, looks to the rose bush. It’s still not the most beautiful he’s 
seen, has more thorns and bare branches than flowers, but it’s alive, and Burt manages a smile.

He steps back, looks Carole in the eye, “She may not be here, but we are. Blaine’s got us.”

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The door creaking open and letting in the commotion from the hall has Kurt blinking awake from 
beside Blaine, and as he turns toward the door he sees someone hastily leaving, the door shutting 
with a soft thud behind them. Kurt feels his eyes widen when he sees a pizza delivery person 
through the small window in the door, their hat a sharp contrast to the nurse’s scrubs. He shakes 
his head when people exit from the room next door, their voices loud as they take the pizza and 
head back inside.
“Guess he had the wrong room,” Kurt turns back to Blaine’s still form, “Not that we can blame him; these rooms are eerily similar. Still, pizza in the hospital…although we shouldn’t expect more from Ohio, right?”

Blaine doesn’t answer.

Kurt sighs and takes a moment to rub his hand across his eyes before carefully readjusting Blaine’s blanket and glancing at the clock. “I don’t suppose you’re ready to wake up.”

The beeping monitors and murmurs from the hall are Kurt’s only answer.

“Blaine –” He stops when he hears the door opening – again – and he turns, only to startle at the sight in the doorway.

Two uniformed policemen stand in the threshold.

“We don’t mean to interrupt, Mr…”

“Kurt Hummel,” Kurt forces himself to keep his voice calm. “I’m Blaine’s fiancé.”

“Right,” the older officer offers a small smile. “We met your parents. I’m Officer Randall and this is my partner, Officer Daniels. We got a call earlier; the nurse said Mr. Anderson woke up? We were hoping to ask him a few questions.”

Kurt’s struck silent for a moment, the reality of police officers needing to speak with his fiancé warring with the memories of Blaine’s injuries. He shakes his head slightly, pushes away the thoughts before turning to fully face the officers.

“I’m sorry you wasted your time, then. Blaine woke up a while ago, but he’s sleeping –”

“-s not.”

“Blaine!” Kurt spins even as he feels the smile overtake his face. “You’re awake! Do you need me to call the nurse –”

“-m fine.”

Kurt holds back his initial response, moves to brush back Blaine’s bangs instead. ”Hi.”

“Hi,” Blaine’s response is soft, his voice cracking even on the single syllable.

Kurt smiles anyway and moves to grab the cup of water, offering Blaine the straw. “I’m glad you decided to wake up.”

“Are you up for some questions?” Kurt startles at the question, jarring the cup and offering Blaine a quick apologetic smile before turning to face the officers and setting the cup aside. “Sorry,” Officer Randall continues, “but the sooner we get information the better.”


Blaine doesn’t reply but nods toward the officers, and they step further into the room.

“Mr. Anderson?”
Kurt watches Blaine duck his head at the formal address and tightens his grip on Blaine’s hand. “He goes by Blaine.”

“Right,” Officer Randall offers a smile, “sorry I forgot.” Kurt watches as the officer steps closer, his partner following behind. “So, Blaine. What do you think; are you up for answering some questions for us?” He then looks back to Kurt, “You might want to leave –”

“No.” The refusal is quiet, Blaine’s voice still cracked and barely carrying throughout the room.

Kurt looks between the officers and Blaine before moving to sit back on the bed, keeping his hand locked around Blaine’s. The officers don’t comment, and Kurt’s grateful: he’d rather not get in an argument with the police. Beside him, Blaine manages another nod.

“Okay then,” Officer Randall steps forward, but Kurt glances to his partner, sees Officer Daniels pulling out a pocket-sized notebook. “Blaine,” Kurt tightens his hand on Blaine’s, briefly, when Officer Randall continues, “do you remember what happened Friday night?”

For a moment, Blaine stays silent. Kurt watches as Blaine looks around the room, lingering on the officers before meeting Kurt’s gaze. Kurt manages a weak smile before Blaine looks away, closing his eyes.

“Blaine...” Kurt resists the urge the glare at Officer Randall for his impatience.

“I went to drop off the costumes,” Kurt quickly turns back to face Blaine, watches as Blaine’s free hand grips the sheet in a white-knuckled grip. “I was alone in the parking lot...wait,” Blaine closes his eyes, “there was a truck –”

Kurt’s heart sinks.

Blaine’s still speaking, halting sentences that remind Kurt of painful phone calls and shared nightmares; Kurt forces himself to keep his grip strong, bites back the scream that’s building in his throat.

Blaine finally stops, and Kurt blinks back the tears before briefly tightening his grip on Blaine’s hand.

“– anything else you think we need to know?” Kurt looks away from Blaine at Officer Randall’s question, waits as Blaine shakes his head ‘no’ in answer.

The officers thank them for their time – and Kurt finally hears Officer Randall’s voice – before turning to leave the room.

“Wait –” Kurt releases Blaine’s hand, “I’ll walk you to the waiting room; these halls can be a maze.”

Officer Randall looks like he’s about to counter, but Kurt gives a minute shake of his head, stopping the reply.

Luckily, Blaine doesn’t seem to notice.

Kurt places a quick kiss to Blaine’s cheek before standing and following the officers out to the hall.

“Was there something –”

“Officer Randall!” Kurt turns at the shout, sees his dad and Carole a few steps down the hall, “Did
you find something?” Kurt sees Carole hesitate for a moment, her gait off for a few steps before she self-corrects and comes to stop behind him.

“No,” The officer shares a glance with his partner before turning to face Kurt’s approaching parents, “we actually just finished talking to Blaine.”

Kurt feels his dad’s hand on his shoulder moments later.

“What was Blaine able to tell you about what happened?” His dad’s voice is loud in his ear, but Kurt keeps his focus on the officers.

“He answered our questions,” Officer Randall comments, “We’ll follow up on everything when we get back to the station; if there’s nothing else?”

“Blaine’s mother should be back in town in a couple days,” Carole answers in an even voice, and Kurt feels his shoulders briefly drop in relief at the interruption before he registers the words. “– not sure she’ll have anything to add, but if – if you need to talk to her…she should be here.”

“Of course,” Officer Randall nods, “we’ll be sure to speak with her. Thank you; we’ll call if you don’t have any other questions?” Kurt drops his gaze when the officer pointedly looks at him.

Kurt lets out a breath, turns to look at Carole. “Blaine remembered that he was in the parking lot. And then,” Kurt pauses, swallows and briefly closes his eyes before continuing. “And then there was a truck, and the driver got out –”

He stops when Carole gasps, brings a hand to cover her mouth.

There’s a beat of silence, and then Officer Randall speaks. “Do you know this truck? Or,” he pauses and looks to Carole, “Do you know this person?”

Kurt bites his lip and turns to look to his dad.

“Blaine’s been goin’ to therapy,” Kurt’s rarely heard his dad’s voice so flat, and he leans back for a moment, relishes in the weight of his father. “He was havin’ flashbacks, panic attacks to be honest, about being hurt a few years ago. One of the…one of the people drove a truck – sped past while he was left bleedin’ in the parking lot.”

For a moment, no one speaks.

“Well,” Officer Randall breaks the silence, “we’ll talk to the doctors before we leave. See – see what they think. We’ll follow up anyway, though. Who knows,” Kurt bites back a smile when the officer straightens and meets Burt’s gaze, “maybe we’ll find somethin’ helpful from Blaine’s statement.”

“Maybe.” The sarcasm in his father’s response has Officer Daniels narrowing his eyes, but he stays silent.

“Let us know what Blaine says, too,” apparently Officer Randall doesn’t have his partner’s reticence when confronted with Burt Hummel. “Who knows,” he continues, “maybe after you’ve spoken with him his memories’ll straighten out.”

“I can’t.” Kurt whispers the words, stepping back when his father and Carole turn to face him in spite of his low volume.

“Kurt?”
“He just woke up,” Kurt murmurs, “he’s in pain and yeah, maybe he’s confused. But I’m not – I can’t be the one to question him.”

“Kurt,” Carole takes a step forward, rests a gentle hand on his shoulder, “if he’s confused –”

“I’m not going to make him doubt himself!” Kurt hugs himself even as he looks to the floor. “I’m here for him – I’m not going to be the one to make him question his own memories.”

“Even if they’re wrong?”

“Then they’re wrong,” Kurt answers Carole’s question, “but I won’t be the one to tell him.”

No one speaks, after, and Kurt carefully shrugs off Carole’s hand as his father turns back to the officers, confirming their contact information.

Kurt slowly crosses the hall as the officers begin their polite farewells. He steps back into Blaine’s room as handshakes are exchanged, and he hears assurances of future calls as the door slips shut behind him.

“Hi.” Blaine’s voice still barely carries across the small space, cracking even on the single syllable, but Kurt smiles regardless, giving Blaine a quick kiss before sitting on the side of Blaine’s bed.

“Hi.” Kurt reaches for Blaine’s hand – the one without the I.V. – and holds it in his lap. “Do you need anything?”

“You’re back…” There’s a pause, and Kurt watches as Blaine frowns in confusion. “I thought you were making sure the officers didn’t get lost.”

Kurt nods toward the door. “Dad and Carole showed up; I figured they could give directions.” He leans forward, drops a quick kiss to Blaine’s cheek. “I’d rather spend time with you. Now,” he waits until Blaine meets his gaze, “Do you need anything?”

Blaine manages a slight shake of his head. “No,” he pauses then, offers a weak squeeze of Kurt’s hand before continuing, his eyes wide. “You have classes – finals – in New York! You –”

“Needed to be with my fiancéd.” Kurt interrupts, meeting Blaine’s eyes, “Please don’t tell me you actually think for one second that I was going to stay for some classes when you’re in the hospital.”

“I –”

“Would you have stayed in Ohio, if I were in the hospital in New York?”

Blaine ducks his head at Kurt’s question, staying silent.

“We’re getting married,” Kurt comments, forcing his voice to stay even as he remembers the last time he said the words to Blaine. He takes a moment, swallowing the block in his throat before continuing, “We’re partners, remember?”

Blaine nods, leans into Kurt’s shoulder and brushes a kiss against his cheek. “Partners.”

Kurt turns to face Blaine and uses his free hand to raise Blaine’s still-downturned face. “I love you.”

“Love you too.”
Kurt smiles and can’t resist leaning forward for a quick kiss. “Forever and always?” He keeps his voice light, teasing even as he tightens his grip on Blaine’s hand.

“Forever and always,” Blaine repeats, and Kurt doesn’t mind the pauses or the cracks in Blaine’s voice, he can’t help but laugh before leaning in for another kiss.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Blaine relishes Kurt’s warmth beside him, takes a moment to lean against his fiancé, taking advantage of the strength so few see. Blaine shifts then, leaning more on Kurt even as he winces, pain hinting at the edges of his awareness – it’s there, but despite feeling it, Blaine can’t quite grasp it.

The pain isn’t real. Not like Kurt is – he can’t touch it.

“Are you sure you don’t need me to call the nurse?” Kurt keeps the question soft, but Blaine hears the undercurrent of worry regardless.

Blaine manages a small shake of his head. “–m okay.”

“Blaine –”

“Really,” Blaine interrupts, “jus’ a twinge.”

Kurt’s eyes narrow but he doesn’t comment, instead moving to sit against the headboard before slowly, carefully helping Blaine move so he’s leaning against Kurt’s chest.

“I’m so glad you’re awake I’m not going to call you on that lie,” Kurt teases, and Blaine smiles in response. “But,” Kurt continues, “that was your one allowance. You lie again and I’ll press that call button so fast –”

“No lies,” Blaine leans back, “Promise.”

“I’ll hold you to that.” Kurt just breathes for a moment, his exhales a steady, comforting reminder in Blaine’s ear. “You know how I feel about promises.”

Blaine nods, “They’re forever.”

“That’s right,” Kurt murmurs, “so don’t – don’t you dare break any, okay?”

For a moment Blaine almost laughs; breaking promises is absurd.

But then he takes in the hospital room, the beeping monitors and his I.V., his still limited vision from his (he guesses) black eye.

“Okay.”

Kurt’s fingers flex around his own and Blaine glances down in response before freezing, his thoughts scattering.

“My ring! Kurt –” Blaine can’t catch his breath, his ring is everything – a reminder of Kurt and their promise to get married – and he doesn’t have it. “Kurt I don’t –”

“I have it, Blaine,” Kurt moves his hands so they’re by Blaine’s chest, rising and falling with each breath. “Blaine, they gave it to me; it’s in my pocket, I promise. So take a deep breath for me, okay? I have your ring. You just can’t – you can’t wear it while you’re in here.”
“Oh,” Blaine deflates, dizziness building even as relief eases his grip on Kurt’s hand.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Kurt adds, “It was actually nice to have while I was waiting.”

“I’m glad you had it.”

“Just for a while,” Kurt comments, “and when I give it back to you I expect it to never leave your hand again.”

The door opens then, preventing any response Blaine may have made, and he smiles when he sees Burt and Carole rather than a nurse.

“Blaine,” Carole smiles and moves until she’s standing beside the bed, leaning over and pressing a kiss to Blaine’s forehead. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Blaine shifts his gaze at Burt’s comment, watches as he ignores Carole’s narrowed eyes, “It’s good to see you up, kid. You had us worried for a while.”

Briefly, Kurt’s arms tighten around him and Blaine leans back in response, tightens his own hold on Kurt’s hand.

“Don’t apologize,” Kurt states, and Blaine wishes he had a way to mark that Kurt’s once again read his mind.

Then again, Kurt’s always been special.

“Are you sure you don’t need anything?” Carole’s question interrupts Blaine’s thoughts, and he shakes his head in reply. “Burt brought back some of your things earlier, and…your mother should be here in a few days, if you need anything from their house.”

Blaine loses his words.

The last time his mother personally brought him anything he was left with ill-fitting clothes and a postcard. Blaine closes his eyes for a moment, makes his breathing match Kurt’s before opening them and looking to Carole.

“I’m fine.” Blaine manages a small smile, “Kurt’s here.”

He sees Burt duck his head and mutter something to Carole; the words don’t carry, but Carole laughs in response.

“No teasing,” Kurt chides, his voice a touch too loud next to Blaine’s ear, “Aren’t you always saying something about how if there’s nothing nice to say it’s better to stay quiet?”

“I also seem to remember tellin’ you to not exaggerate,” Burt replies, his smile taking any sting out of his words as he steps forward. “Anyway, Blaine,” he continues, shifting his focus, “you just let me know if you need somethin’ else; I just grabbed a few things.”

Blaine nods. “Thanks, Mr. Hummel.”

“It was no problem, Blaine. Like I said – we’re all just glad you’re up.” A pause, and then Burt’s expression turns serious, “I gotta say, kid, gettin’ that phone call had us worried. And then when the cops didn’t have anything….”
“But I talked to them,” Blaine meets Burt’s gaze, “earlier – they came by. And I talked to them.” Burt sighs in response and Blaine feels his shoulders tighten, wincing at the motion. To his right, the monitor is beeping more often.

“Blaine,” Kurt’s voice is even, steady even as his hand rubs circles on Blaine’s arm. “Blaine. Just breathe, okay? Breathe with me.”

Blaine closes his eyes and follows Kurt’s directions.

When he opens his eyes, it’s to Burt standing barely a foot away, eyes tight with concern. “You sure you don’t want that nurse?”

“I’m fine,” Blaine chances a look to Kurt, “Promise.”

Kurt just shakes his head before pressing a quick kiss to Blaine’s cheek. “Just keep breathing for me.”

Blaine nods.

“You sure you’re okay?” At Blaine’s nod Burt steps even closer, “And I – we – know you talked with them Blaine.” He pauses, rests a hand on the mattress beside Blaine’s leg, “We spoke with ‘em on their way out earlier; they told us about your statement.”

Blaine lets out a breath, leans more against Kurt. “Oh.”

It seems bigger now, his words known to people outside of Kurt and the police. Blaine focuses on Kurt’s hand, on the quiet tic of the clock and the beeps from the monitors to focus on right now, pushing away the memories of before.

“Yeah,” Burt sighs then, and Blaine looks up from where he’s been staring at Kurt’s ring, “Blaine – your statement; that’s everything you remember?”

Blaine frowns at the question, ignoring the pull from the stitches in his lip. “Yeah. I – I told them everything.”

Behind him, Kurt tenses.

Burt and Carole share a glance, too, and the pain grows a fraction stronger even as he wonders what he’s missing.

“Blaine,” Burt’s voice has gone soft, “You told ‘em everything from Friday night? You’re sure?”


For a moment, no one speaks.

“You told the police you remember bein’ in the parking lot. That there was a green truck and the… driver was the one who –” Burt stops then, choosing instead to gesture to Blaine’s bed.

“He did. Steve –”

“Blaine,” Burt’s voice has gone quiet, “Blaine, think about what you just said. About who was there…” Burt rubs a hand across his forehead, “Are you sure that’s what happened on Friday?”

And suddenly, it makes sense.
“I –” The words get stuck in Blaine’s throat, caught. He’d been certain, earlier. The memories scattered but there, the fragments broken with darkness.

But he’d seen the truck.

He can’t remember what happened after the initial car door slam and the shout, but he remembers the truck, remembers recognizing that voice –

Weeks’ worth of nightmares have Blaine clutching for Kurt’s hand.

He remembers the truck, the fear –

What if he’s wrong?

“It’s not uncommon for traumatic events to cause memory loss and confusion,” Carole adds from the foot of the bed, “honestly I’m surprised you’re awake right now.”

Blaine turns slightly, burying his head in the juncture between Kurt’s neck and shoulder. “Kurt?”

“Hm?” The response to his whisper comes out more of a hum than words, but Blaine draws comfort all the same.

“Do you think –” he pauses, takes another breath, “What if I got it wrong?”

Kurt stills, the finger that had been circling Blaine’s wrist stopping its movement even as Blaine hears Kurt let out a breath.

Blaine counts Kurt’s breath as he waits.

“It’ll be okay,” Kurt finally whispers, “We’ll – we’ll figure it out. But for now just focus on feeling better – on getting better.”

As if to counter Kurt’s command, Blaine feels a swell of pain from his stomach, and he winces, sucking in a breath when the movement pulls his stitches – it’s a circle: The pain making him wince, the movement pulling stitches and causing more pain to repeat the process.

Kurt’s hand moves then, pushing the button on the railing to call the nurse. “I told you –”

He’s interrupted by the connection going through, and Blaine listens as Kurt asks for someone to come to the room, preferably with medication.

After assurances that she’ll let Blaine’s nurse know the call ends, and the room seems too quiet once the echo of static fades and only the beeping monitors fill the silence. Blaine leans more fully into Kurt, and starts to bite his lip to distract himself from the aches building throughout his body.

He stops when he feels a stitch, a flash of pain blooming and making him hold back a flinch.

“Burt,” Carole’s voice has Blaine looking up, watching as she rests a hand on Burt’s arm, “why don’t we go see what’s keeping Blaine’s nurse.”

Blaine ducks his head, hiding his eyes from Burt and Carole, embarrassed at the swell of gratefulness he feels. He feels like he’s gone back in time, laying in a hospital bed with pain steadily taking over his senses. He hates how the pain medication makes him feel – how it makes him sleep – and the fact that he’s obvious enough with his discomfort that Carole’s willing to step outside just to find his nurse has Blaine focusing on Kurt’s hand, steadily blinking and ignoring the sting in his eyes.
Behind him, Kurt begins to hum.

Blaine focuses on the notes even as the door closes with a quiet click, sounds briefly filtering in before being muffled once again by the door.

Blaine lets his eyes close again and leans more fully against Kurt, the steadiness and heat of Kurt’s body worth the flash of pain he gets in response. He takes comfort from the smooth, quiet sound of Kurt’s voice; Kurt can’t physically take away Blaine’s pain, but Blaine feels safer all the same.

“Kurt?”

The humming stops, and Blaine misses the tune even though he prompted its end. “Hm? Do you need some water? Or another blanket –”

“No. I –” Blaine pauses, turning to face Kurt’s profile, “No – just…can I ask you something?”

“You can ask me anything,” the words hold a world of sincerity, but Blaine feels threads of fear growing nonetheless.

“Is it wrong –” Blaine stops, considering his words before starting again. “Earlier, Carole said my mom was coming.”

It’s not the question he meant to ask, Blaine’s words are shifting, changing between his thoughts and what he says, but the idea is close enough that Blaine just waits, matching his breaths to Kurt’s.

“Yeah,” The word is softly spoken, barely more than whisper by Blaine’s ear, “Carole mentioned a few days – two or three, I think.”

“I –” Blaine lets out a breath and looks away from Kurt, “Do I have to see her?” His voice cracks, and the rest of his words are lost, trapped.

“Blaine,” Kurt’s voice is just as calm as before, “you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, and that includes seeing your mother.”

Blaine sighs and leans more fully against Kurt. “I should want to see her, right? I’m –”

“You’re not going to do anything you don’t want to,” Kurt voice is firm, if quiet, with a thrum of anger under the words. “Your mother – she hasn’t been here, Blaine. You don’t – you don’t owe her anything.”

“She’s Mom but she never really…” Blaine pauses, looks down and stares at Kurt’s ring and wishes he was wearing his own. “She’s not bad. She’s just –”

“You don’t have to defend yourself Blaine,” Kurt interrupts, “not to me.”

He doesn’t have to, but Blaine wants to – wants to try, anyway.

“’s not like all the movies. I – I know she loves me, but after Cooper…” Blaine stops, tightens his hand on Kurt’s as the pain briefly swells across his chest and stomach. “People are supposed to want their mom, Kurt.”

“Sometimes,” and Kurt’s voice is even, calming, “sometimes some people – even mothers – aren’t naturally parents. They can try, but it’s just not part of their nature.” Kurt pauses for a moment then, presses a kiss to Blaine’s temple, “You know how I feel about your parents, Blaine, I’ve
never been one to not share my opinions,” a quiet laugh and Blaine feels his lips twitch in response, “but your mom – she wasn’t there for you, before. So there’s nothing – absolutely nothing – wrong with you not wanting her here now, okay?”

“I should though,” Blaine whispers, “she’s…she’s still my mom, right?”

Kurt sighs. “Just because she has the title of mother doesn’t mean she’s earned it, Blaine. And I’m sorry she can’t see that you deserve the world, but you don’t owe her anything. You don’t, Blaine.”

Blaine still can’t find the words he wants so he just nods against Kurt’s neck, ignoring the increase in the number of beeps from the monitor to his right.

“Blaine –”

Kurt’s comment is interrupted by the door, “Your nurse is getting your meds right now, Blaine. She should be here in a minute.” There’s a pause, and a glance shows Carole standing beside Burt just inside the door. “Sorry,” Carole adds, “did we interrupt?”

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For a moment, neither of the boys move and Carole shares a glance with Burt, wondering what they missed. Blaine’s heart rate has increased slightly, but given Kurt’s tight expression she doubts it’s due to pain.

She steps further into the room then, moving to the foot of the bed as Burt follows her lead.

“Dad,” Kurt’s voice breaks the silence, “you have Blaine’s paperwork, right?”

Beside her, Burt tenses. “Yeah, Kurt; we wouldn’t be in here without it.”

Kurt nods, keeps his eyes on Blaine even as he finally starts to speak again. “Does it –” He stops then, looks up, “Do we have to let Blaine’s mom here, too?”

Carole bites her tongue.

Beside her, Burt lets out a breath and rubs a hand over his face. “There a reason you’re askin’, Kurt?”

Kurt looks up, but it’s Blaine who answers, “I – I don’t want to see her.” Carole can barely hear the hurried words, soft as they are, and she takes a step forward, her knees hitting the foot of the bed. “I know – I know I should but if I don’t have to – if –”

“You’re an adult, Blaine,” Burt interrupts, “legally, you don’t have to let anyone in this room you don’t want to see. And even so I’m your medical power of attorney, kid.” Burt offers a smile, “For now I’m the boss.”

Kurt murmurs something then, and Blaine’s eyes brighten, but he doesn’t smile, stays still against Kurt’s chest.

Carole thinks back to her conversation with Blaine’s mother, tightens her hands on the bedrail in response. The nurse enters then, unknowingly breaking the tableau and offers a smile as she crosses to stand by Blaine.

“Hi, Blaine. You remember me?” At Blaine’s panicked glance she continues, “I’m Christine, don’t worry – you were still pretty groggy when I was here earlier.” She keeps talking, asking Blaine’s
pain level while checking his vitals, offering a smile to Kurt before having him move just enough that she can check Blaine’s incision.

Burt takes Carole’s hand when the bruises and incisions are exposed, and Carole swallows the gasp that rises in her throat. She sees Kurt swallow as well, but he keeps his hand on Blaine’s, keeps Blaine’s focus on him rather than where Christine is adjusting bandages and checking stitches.

Moments later the blanket is readjusted, and Christine has attached a syringe to Blaine’s I.V. port, double checking Blaine’s bracelet and confirming the medication – and the probability of Blaine feeling tired – before pressing the plunger. Two more and then she’s stepping back, throwing away the syringes and stopping by Carole.

“His vitals look good,” she shares, “and he’s a charmer; I can see why Kurt’s so smitten.”

“He’s a good kid,” Carole agrees, “talented too. When – when he’s out of here you’ll have to come to one of their performances; Blaine sings. Plays the piano, too.”

“Talented boy,” Christine nods, and Carole looks over, sees that Blaine’s already fallen back asleep. “He’ll probably be out for another few hours, now, if you want to get a late lunch.”

Christine crosses to the computer and there’s a minute or so of typing before she leaves, the room seeming to expand in her absence. The monitors continue to beep and Kurt carefully pushes back Blaine’s bangs even as Carole steps back from the bed and moves to stand beside him.

“Kurt?” Kurt continues to brush back Blaine’s bangs, his only acknowledgement a slight tilt of his head. Still, Carole rests a hand on his shoulder before continuing. “Did something happen with Blaine’s mother? Did she call you or –” she stops, reconsiders, “Is there a reason we don’t know about for why Blaine doesn’t want her here?”

For several minutes Kurt doesn’t answer, continues to push back Blaine’s hair, seemingly content to just watch him breathe. Finally, Kurt seems to come to a decision, dropping a kiss to Blaine’s forehead before carefully moving to the side, still next to Blaine but no longer supporting him.

“Cooper was supposed to be an only child. Blaine overheard his mom on the phone once – maybe she forgot he was home, maybe she didn’t care he heard, I don’t know. But they planned for Cooper. And Blaine’s mom she…she gave up everything – her clubs and trips and meetings – all of it, to take Cooper to every child-friendly event in town. She planned to be there for every minute of Cooper’s childhood, and then when he was older she’d go back to visiting tourist traps and attending whatever club meeting she wanted. But then right after Cooper started middle school,” Kurt pauses and reaches to take Blaine’s hand, “they had Blaine.”

“No, Blaine’s always been good at surprises.” Kurt gives her a half smile as he stands, dislodging her hand and crossing his arms before glancing back to Blaine. “She missed a few of his recitals, some plays. Blaine always told me he didn’t care, but…” Kurt lets the sentence trail off before shrugging again and continuing in a low, cold voice, “Once when her friends were visiting Blaine overheard her say she’d forgotten what it was to be herself rather than ‘Cooper’s Mom’…” Kurt pauses, and Carole sees his knuckles turn white, “Blaine’s gotten used to not having a mother; I think he’s too tired to deal with learning, now.”

Carole bites back the curse she’d like nothing more than to shout, clenching her hands instead. She remembers when Finn was first born, how she’d been terrified by the small blanket-wrapped bundle in her arms, how she’d known her life would change (but underestimated just how much),
how savings was spent on diapers and onesies (and later drum-sets and CDs) instead of salon appointments and the latest blockbuster.

But she’d relished every moment, even when the ongoing percussion concerts had only added to the headache she’d brought home from work.

She can’t imagine she’d have ever sat at a school play, or been the chaperone for a field trip while wishing she was anywhere else –

She’d gladly give up her job and her savings account be attending one now.

And if her own child ever even thought he was second to a trip, or some meeting –

Carole lets out a breath. “Blaine has a mother.” The sentence is clipped, but the fact stands, and Carole looks to Kurt. “He’s a member of this family; it’s changed now, but your dad, me, you, and Blaine – we’re a family, and I – Blaine has a mom, Kurt.”

The force of Kurt’s hug has her stepping backwards to keep her balance, her arms coming around his back even as he drops his head to her shoulder. For a moment Carole’s frozen: Kurt isn’t open with his affection; she can count the number of times he’s initiated a hug on one hand.

She ignores the sting in her eyes, tightening her hold on Kurt instead even as she ignores the hitch in his breathing.

“She’s right,” Burt breaks the silence, “Blaine’s a member of this family, and we look after our own.” Carole looks over Kurt’s bent head and meets Burt’s gaze. “And if that means not lettin’ in people he doesn’t want to see, we’ll take care of it.”

Kurt mutters something then, the words muffled against Carole’s shoulder.

“Kurt?”

“He feels guilty,” Kurt repeats as he raises his head. “He shouldn’t – but since he’s the one saying ‘no’ this time…”

“We’ll deal with that when Blaine wakes up,” Burt answers, “We’ll talk to him, Kurt.”

Kurt nods and eases his arms from around Carole, stepping back.

“Well,” Carole looks to Kurt, silently grateful her voice stays steady, “now that we’ve got a plan, what do you say to getting some food?”

“I’m not –”

“Blaine’ll be out for a while, Kurt,” Carole keeps her voice soft, “and you’ve been in this room for hours; I’ll stay with him. Why don’t you go join your dad for a sandwich.”

Kurt looks torn, anxious, but finally he nods, brushes a kiss to Blaine’s cheek – and murmurs something too low for Carole to hear – before moving to stand by Burt. After promises of the ‘most appetizing sandwich available’ Carole’s left with Blaine, the sleeping teen and the beeping monitors her only company.

Carole moves to the abandoned chair and takes Blaine’s hand.

“Looks like you’re stuck with me for a while,” Carole takes a moment, adjusts the blankets covering Blaine. “I can’t sing for you like Kurt can, but I can keep you company.”
The monitors answer, as expected, but Carole briefly tightens her grip on Blaine’s hand anyway – she won’t let him worry he’s alone.

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The cafeteria practically bursts with noise, countless conversations echoing while the occasional announcement blares from unseen speakers. Burt holds back a sigh, resists the urge to complain and live up to the ‘old man’ stereotype.

A glance to his right shows Kurt critically eying the layout.

“You still can’t get a cheeseburger.”

Burt shakes his head and walks further into the cafeteria, “I shoulda known you just wanted to limit my options.”

“No cheeseburgers.”

Burt eyes his son, sees the tension around his eyes, the unkept sweep of his hair, the pallor that’s a shade off from normal. “Alright, no cheeseburgers,” Burt looks to the salad bar with its limp lettuce and slim options, “but I’m not just gettin’ a salad, either.”

“You did promise Carole a sandwich,” Kurt teases. “I’m sure they have some with more than just meat and cheese.”

The prepackaged sandwiches lack both variety and any appeal, and after a glance around Burt settles for joining the line for subs. There are still limited options, but at least the shredded lettuce is green.

By the time they’re seated at one of the small tables – after Burt won the small argument about immediately returning to Blaine’s room – Burt finds himself at a loss; across from him Kurt carefully unwraps his sandwich, approaching the paper with the same intensity Burt usually associates with Kurt’s music.

Conversations hum around them, but Burt can’t find the words he wants in the moment. He finally has time alone with Kurt, and yet all the comforts and questions that had surrounded him earlier have vanished.

Silence graces the table until Burt sees Kurt still fiddling with the paper, folding and refolding the edges while his sub sits in the middle, untouched.

“You know,” Burt comments with a nod toward Kurt’s meal, “generally food has to be eaten for it to be helpful.”

“Generally for food to be eaten,” Kurt responds with a glance to the sub, “it needs to be appetizing.”

“You haven’t even tried it,” Burt nods again toward the food, “You need to eat, Kurt.”

Kurt sighs, but picks up the sandwich nonetheless, taking a bite with a pointed look. “Just because it’s not horrible doesn’t mean I’m hungry.”

“Tough,” Burt counters, “you’re gonna eat it anyway.”

Kurt manages to convey exasperation and acceptance with a single glance; Burt offers a smile in
“There,” Kurt comments, setting down half the sub a few minutes later, “I’ve eaten; happy?”

“Kurt,” Burt sighs, takes a sip of his drink as he gathers his thoughts. “I don’t wanna fight with you; I just don’t want you passin’ out because you’re too stubborn to eat a sandwich.”

“I wouldn’t pass out,” Kurt mutters from across the table, but he takes another bite regardless.

Burt waits a moment, watches as Kurt slowly eats small bites of his sub, his movements methodical. A clatter has Burt turning, sees a toddler looking far-too-pleased while a tired-looking mother picks up a juice box and plastic tray from the floor.

“You used to do that,” Burt comments with a nod, “loved to make everythin’ a mess except yourself; you’d drop pasta on the floor, spill your drinks all over the table and just laugh. Unless you got something on you – first time that happened I thought you’d fallen, but you just had sauce all over your onesie.”

Across from him, Kurt’s stopped eating. “I did not.”

“You did,” Burt smiles, “You’ve always been a special kid.”

Finally, a smile. “I’m going to take that as a compliment.”

“You should,” Burt agrees. He sighs then, taking in Kurt’s still-pinched look and wrinkled clothes. “How’re you holdin’ up, Kurt?”

Kurt freezes, his sub halfway to his mouth. He blinks, lowers the sandwich before straightening in his chair, and Burt watches in wonder as Kurt changes before him: a breath and the tiredness around his eyes and mouth lessens, a tilt of his head and suddenly anxiety is replaced with indifference; if Burt didn’t know better he’d think Kurt was simply tired after a long day at work.

Sometimes, Burt forgets just how good Kurt is at acting.

“I’m fine.”

If he had missed the previous twelve hours, Burt would be tempted to believe him. “Kurt –”

“I am,” his son’s words stay clear, if a touch cold. “I’m not the one –” a pause, and Kurt lets out a frustrated breath before continuing, “What did they say, when you asked about Blaine’s memory?”

Burt takes a moment to rub a hand over his eyes. “Dr. Olt wasn’t in yet,” Burt starts, “so we didn’t get anything specific. But,” he continues when Kurt narrows his eyes, looks ready to object, “I did manage to talk with one of the residents; he said they can do some tests, even bring in a neurologist if needed, but since the rest of Blaine’s memory seemed okay he didn’t sound too worried. Blaine’s memory might be jumbled; he did go through a trauma.” Burt pauses then, looks Kurt in the eye before finishing. “But there’s also a chance Blaine might not ever remember exactly what happened.”

Kurt stares at the table. “It must have been awful,” he finally comments, voice soft and barely audible over the echoing conversations surrounding them. “I know it had to be horrible. And part of me doesn’t want Blaine to remember. He doesn’t need those nightmares. But Dad,” he looks up then, and Burt sees the shine in Kurt’s eyes even if there are no tears, “whoever did this…they can’t – they can’t get away with it.”
“They won’t.”

“Even if Blaine doesn’t remember?” The question is cutting, harsh in its honesty.

“The police are looking –”

“And they helped so much last time.”

“Kurt.” Burt waits, watches Kurt take even breaths and unclench his hands.

“He has to remember,” Kurt finally answers, “He has to! The monster who did this doesn’t deserve to live outside of prison!” Kurt’s anger is palpable, but in a still fury, the calm before the hurricane. “The police have to catch him! And what does that say about me, Dad, that I’d rather Blaine remember everything, the pain and how scared he must have been – have even more nightmares – just to ensure that happens?”

“You want Blaine to be safe,” Burt counters, meeting Kurt’s stare, “we all want that, Kurt. And the best way to ensure that happens is for whoever did this to be caught. And Blaine remembering enough to tell the police is the quickest way for that to happen. You don’t want Blaine to have more nightmares, Kurt, you just want him to stay safe.”

“He’s hurting either way,” Kurt snaps back, dropping his gaze to the table.

“He’s hurt now,” Burt leans forward, “And there’s no quick fix, Kurt. No perfect win.” Burt sighs, takes a quick sip of his drink, “These next few weeks, Blaine’s gonna be struggling either way. But I know how much you love Blaine, Kurt. And he’s family, focus on that; you’ve always been great at support.”

Kurt’s gaze stays glued to the table, but slowly his shoulders relax, and finally he leans back with a drawn-out, shaky exhale. “He deserves better.”

“Of course he does,” Burt shakes his head, “no one deserves what he’s been though. And I wish you didn’t have to deal with it either, but it’s done. Just keep bein’ there for him, Kurt, and you can’t go wrong.”

Kurt finally looks up. “I can –” he stops, looks over Burt’s shoulder before starting again. “You’ll make sure the police catch him, right Dad?”

Burt blinks. Because across from him Kurt’s no longer his legally adult, college-student son, he’s the little boy who believes him when Burt says he’s scared away all the monsters under his bed, the boy who thought Burt was the strongest man in the world as he followed Burt around in the shop, too small to work on cars himself.

Kurt isn’t asking Burt Hummel, Congressman and small-business owner to do the right thing.

Kurt’s asking his father to ensure the monster who hurt his fiancé is found.

Logically, Burt knows he shouldn’t – he doesn’t have any pull at the police station, doesn’t have super strength or the ability to find wayward criminals.

And Kurt must see something because he’s already leaning back in his chair, brushing off the question and turning away, looking to the strangers and their conversations instead.

Burt wants to yell, to throw everything from the table while promising Kurt that of course the monster who dared to hurt their family will be caught.
But he can’t.

And worst of all, Kurt knows it.

“Kurt,” Burt releases a breath, “Blaine’ll be safe.”

He can’t promise retribution, or justice, but he can promise that.

Kurt nods, and begins gathering up the trash. “We should get back to Carole; I’m sure she’s anxiously awaiting her five-star cafeteria sandwich.”

Burt shakes his head, but gathers his and Kurt’s drinks for refills anyway – Carole may not be the first one Kurt wants to see, but Burt’s not going to hinder him.

Besides, he did promise Carole a sandwich.
I'm horribly late. I know I keep saying that, and I truly do feel bad every time I do so. In my defense, since the last update I've moved, gotten laid off (a whole week after signing my new lease), fought with unemployment, and one of my uncles had a massive stroke and was in hospice for the past week (he passed away early this morning).

It's been a tough month. However, this chapter is long (20 pages in Word) so hopefully that somewhat makes up for this horrible delay. As always, your reviews make my day, and I hope you continue to enjoy the story. Also, thanks to jessicamdawn for her quick and helpful beta and to slayerkitty for talking me down from deleting everything.
“I didn’t mean to snap. I’m not really a morning person, as I’m sure Blaine can tell you.”

“I’m not sure anyone is a morning person at three in the morning.”

Kurt hums a reply before looking back to Jamie, “Probably not. And,” he carefully runs his thumb over Blaine’s finger, his touch taking the place where Blaine’s ring should be, “I know we’re young. But we both just knew – there’s not going to be anyone else. And knowing that, it seemed wrong to put off showing that to the world just because of some arbitrary thing like age.”

“You’re lucky to have found each other, then.”

“I know, and sometimes it still doesn’t seem real, that we met in Ohio because of show choir, of all things. But we did, and I can’t imagine the world without this, now.”

“Show choir?”

“I may have gone to spy on him before a competition.”

“Seriously?”

Kurt ducks his head in a nod. “In my defense, it was more a dare for me. But then I met him and –”

“So he sings too?” At Kurt’s agreement she continues, “I can see why you wanted him off the market.”

Kurt hopes the dim lighting hides his blush. “He asked first, though. Proposed to me on the staircase where we met.”

“And I felt lucky when my boyfriend got me flowers on my birthday.”

Kurt gives a small smile. “I proposed to him on his birthday,” Kurt ducks his head, “He had no idea I was even visiting. He almost fell off the piano bench.”

“I should have you give Ben some advice.” Jamie moves then, turning from the computer. “But now I actually need Blaine to answer a few questions; think you can wake him for me? I get the feeling he’ll prefer your wake-up call to mine.”

Kurt shakes his head even as he leans over the bed’s railing, gently pushing back Blaine’s hair before dropping a kiss to his cheek.

“Blaine. Blaine can you wake up for a minute?”

For a moment Blaine just continues to breathe, so Kurt repeats his request – slightly louder – until Blaine finally blinks awake, sleep-hazy eyes meeting Kurt’s.

“Hey there sleepyhead. Jamie,” Kurt nods toward the opposite side of the bed, “just needs to ask you a few questions, okay?”

Blaine’s face starts to scrunch in confusion before he stops with a wince.

“Hi Blaine. Sorry to wake you up, but I just need you to answer a few things for me, okay?”

Kurt keeps his left hand on Blaine’s even as Blaine turns to face Jamie, answering in a cracked, soft voice. “Okay.”
“Great. You might want to close your eyes for a minute though; I’m going to turn on the light above your bed, so I can get a better look.”

Moments later Kurt’s blinking back starbursts, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the change in lighting. He listens as Blaine states his name and birthday, as he briefly says why he’s in the hospital – and if Kurt’s hand tightens on Blaine’s when he hears attack they’re the only ones to know – before finally admitting that he doesn’t know the date.

“Don’t worry,” Jamie replies, “time can blur in hospitals, I know. But as of three hours ago it’s Sunday, March nineteenth. Now, I have to check your incisions and feel around your ribs; just let me know if I make it hurt too much, okay?” She turns to Kurt, “Do you want –”

“I’m staying,” Kurt interrupts, offering Jamie a quick nod before looking to Blaine. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Alight then – I’ll try to be fast.”

“Not the best reason to be woken up in the middle of night, I know.” Blaine musters a weak smile at the joke before his eyes tighten in pain. “Hey,” Kurt leans further over the bed, brings his right hand up to Blaine’s cheek. “Just focus on me, okay? You know how much I love being the center of attention.”

Blaine breaths what could almost be a laugh. “…deserve it.”

“What?”

“You’re ‘mazing. Deserve the attention.”

Kurt ignores the sting in his eyes and tightens his grip on Blaine’s hand. “Only you would flatter me while in a hospital bed.”

Blaine opens his mouth to reply only to snap it shut seconds later, his breath leaving him in a hiss. It’s almost a minute of controlled breaths before he looks back to Kurt. “Have to – ‘m your number one fan.”

“Of course you are,” Kurt agrees, following Blaine’s lead and ignoring the reactions to Jamie’s exam.

“All done!” Jamie comments, stepping back and readjusting Blaine’s blanket, “Now Blaine, I know that wasn’t any fun at all, so can you tell me your pain level?”

“Ei – Eight.”

“Well how about I get you something to help with that.”

“Is it the same one from earlier?” Kurt’s question has Jamie stopping, looking to him.

“Yes – the order hasn’t been changed.”

“Could,” Kurt pauses, glances to Blaine before continuing, “Could you change the anti-nausea med or give him more, this time? After they gave him the Dilauded earlier he was sick when he woke up – even though all he’d had was some ice chips.”

“Did the Dialauded help with the pain, Blaine?”

“Yes.”
“Okay,” Jamie goes over to the computer then, “Your order’s still the same, and they probably won’t want to change your pain med since it’s working, but I’ll see if the on-call physician can order a different anti-nausea med for you.” She pauses then, and her voice has dropped when she continues. “Although, since I’ll have to call to get the order you’ll have to wait for it to go through before I give you anything; I’ll have to give you both of them together.”

Kurt feels helplessness swell then as he takes in what Jamie is saying: Until she gets that order, Blaine will just have to deal with the pain.

Kurt hates hospitals.

“Okay,” he lets out a breath, looks to Blaine, “I’ll just have to keep you distracted, then. Just for a little while.” The latter sentence sounds a bit like an order even to his own ears, but he doesn’t regret it; Blaine deserves the best care as quickly as possible.

“Sounds like you have it all sorted out,” Jamie comments, “so I’m going to go check on getting this changed.”

She’s gone moments later.

“So,” Kurt keeps his voice soft as he lowers the railing and carefully climbs into the bed beside Blaine, positions himself so Blaine can use his hip as pillow, “now that it’s just me, how about you tell me how you’re really feeling – no numbers involved.”

Blaine lets out a loud breath and Kurt reaches down to fix the nasal cannula automatically. A small part of Kurt hates that it’s an involuntary action, now, that he knows the placement of the myriad of tubes and wires attached to his fiancé.

Kurt forces himself to focus on the feel of Blaine’s hand in his, instead.

“‘m fine, Kurt.”

Kurt swallows the bubble of hysterical laughter he feels in response. “We have very different definitions of the word ‘fine’ Blaine.”

A beat, and Blaine tightens his hold when the pain builds, and Kurt glances away so Blaine won’t see the shine in his eyes. “Sorry,” the apology is whispered, but Kurt hears it regardless and he quickly turns back to meet Blaine’s gaze.

“What have I told you about –”

“Sorry,” Blaine repeats, offering a small smile before looking down, seemingly focusing on the rough hospital blanket. “Kurt?”

“Hm?”

“Can your dad –” an exhale, a weak squeeze before he continues, “Can he really make my mom leave, if she shows up?”

Kurt’s breath catches. He takes a moment, brushes back Blaine’s hair while he organizes his thoughts. “Dad won’t let anyone in here you don’t want to see.”

“It’s funny,” Blaine continues, his words soft, “any other time I would have loved for her to be coming to see me. To watch a performance or just ask how I’m doing because she cared, but…” Blaine’s sentence trails to nothing, and Kurt closes his eyes, tightens his grip of Blaine’s hand.
“I should want her here,” Blaine continues, and Kurt hates the small part of himself that’s grateful for the words, since he was unsure of how to break the silence. “I know – I just.” Blaine pauses again, and Kurt glances to the clock when he feels Blaine tense with pain. “She didn’t say anything before. I know she heard us arguing…she has to know what he –” another stop with a careful exhale, “She didn’t choose me, Kurt. Not after Cooper moved out, and not after he – after I moved in with your parents.”

Kurt takes a moment, mentally finishing the stops in Blaine’s previous comment, sorting through the information before settling on the one truth he knew for certain. “There’s nothing wrong with you not wanting to see her, Blaine.”

“Hm.” Blaine nods in weak agreement, but keeps his gaze focused on the hospital blanket.

“Hey,” Kurt waits for Blaine to look up at him before continuing, “I mean it; there is nothing wrong with what you want right now. Okay? Nothing.”

“I remember when I was four –” his breath hitches and Kurt reaches to run a hand through Blaine’s hair in comfort, “four or five, Cooper was in high school. There was an accident, I think, or he fell playing basketball or soccer or whatever sport he was into that year.” Kurt hopes Blaine hasn’t noticed how he’s frozen, struck still and silent by this insight into Blaine’s childhood. “I remember Mom rushing to the hospital and I was in the waiting room for hours. Well, it seemed like hours – I remember coloring with those cheap crayons that never work as well as Crayola while Mom and D-Dad were somewhere. And then Cooper came out and had a cast and made all the nurses sign it.” Blaine stops again and Kurt resists the urge to interrupt his story, knows Blaine’s just as likely to leave it there – unfinished – as he is to continue if Kurt breaks the silence. “I remember we stopped for ice cream on the way home and he got his favorite dinners for a week. And now I can’t…I can’t help but wonder if it’s because he got hurt doing a straight activity.” Against the blanket, Kurt feels his hand clench into a fist. “You’re here,” Blaine whispers, “you and Burt and Carole – even though you’re supposed to be other places,” he continues before Kurt can counter with just how wrong that statement is, “you’re here and she’s not.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Kurt glances to the clock again – nine minutes – and briefly tightens his hold on Blaine’s hand. “You’re right: me and Dad and Carole are all here for you, and they’ll tell you as much when come back in the morning.”

“When she visited last time,” Blaine begins and his voice holds a trace of hesitance that has Kurt wishing he had something to throw, something hard that would satisfyingly break as it hit the tiled floor. “She just kept telling me how strong I was, and she always brought some pointless statue or fake-flower from the gift shop. She didn’t mention – we didn’t talk about what happened; she just told me I’d be transferring, eventually. But once I was just recovering she went back to her meetings and trips – I was okay then, I guess.”

Absently, Kurt thinks that one of those ‘pointless statues’ would make a wonderful crack! if thrown against the tile.

“Well I’ll be staying here until you get to leave with me.”

“Kurt –”

“Nope,” Kurt interrupts, “we’re partners, remember?”

Blaine stays silent for a moment before closing his eyes. “It’s stupid. I know it’s stupid. I don’t want to see her, but part of me still wishes she was here – that she at least made the effort. I just – I want to know she cares. And it’s not like she’s the one who…but I don’t want to see her.”
“You don’t have to, and it’s not stupid, Blaine.” Kurt quickly assures, “Didn’t Jamie tell you? Hospital patients are like royalty; they get whatever they want. Be grateful I’m sharing my crown for a while.”

Against his thigh Blaine lets out a breath of air that Kurt knows held a laugh. “I love you.” The words are slightly slurred and Kurt leans down to drop a kiss to Blaine’s forehead.

“I love you, too.” Kurt leans back a little, wary of the small space and multitude of wires, but needing a better angle to look at his fiancé. “Just focus on healing, okay? Nothing else matters.”

“Kurt –” Pain has Blaine leaving the sentence unfinished, and Kurt looks to the clock again in annoyance.

“She’ll have your meds soon, Blaine.” Kurt promises (because if Jamie isn’t back in five more minutes the nursing staff are going to face the wrath of an irritated and sleep-deprived Kurt Hummel).

“I –” The door opening interrupts Blaine’s reply, and Kurt turns to see Jamie grabbing a pair of gloves from the dispenser on the wall. “Sorry about the wait,” she quickly crosses to Blaine’s bed and checks his ID bracelet. “I had to wait for the on-call doctor to forward the script to be filled. Now,” she scans the bracelet before turning to the computer, “I know it’s annoying but can you tell me your name again?” At Kurt’s incredulous look she continues, “Hospital policy.”

After Blaine’s repeated his basic information and Jamie has explained the two medicines in the vials in her hand – with Blaine clenching Kurt’s hand twice – she finally administers the drugs, and Kurt sighs when Blaine slumps against him.

“Thank you.”

“Just doing my job,” Jamie replies, “and I’m sorry it took so long, but hopefully this works better than the last.” She moves to the trash can by the door, quickly stripping off her gloves. “Let me know if you need anything else, okay?”

She’s gone before Kurt finishes his nod, the door clicking shut behind her. Kurt looks down to Blaine, taking in the slightly glazed eyes and how his hand has loosened its hold. “Feeling a little better?”

Blaine hums in agreement before settling, a mumbled “Love you” barely reaching Kurt’s ears.

“I love you too,” Kurt reaches and finds the button to turn off the light, leaving the room in the orange glow seeping in through the blinds and the faint blue light from the monitors. “Go back to sleep, okay? I’ll be here when you wake up.”

Blaine doesn’t respond, and Kurt cards his fingers through Blaine’s curls as he stares at where Blaine’s still holding his hand. Blaine’s words from earlier echo in his mind – I don’t want to see her – and Kurt almost wishes Mrs. Anderson were here, if only so he could finally give in to his desire to shout.

He focuses on Blaine instead, on how before they’d left for the night his dad and Carole had made Kurt promise (four times) to call if he needed anything. He remembers Carole’s hushed promise earlier – Blaine has a mother – and wonders what it will take for Blaine to fully understand those words.

Kurt sighs and then slowly shifts his position, only settling once he’s lying down with Blaine’s head on his chest. Kurt takes comfort in the warmth of Blaine, in the barely-there exhales he only
hears due to proximity.

Kurt tightens his hold on Blaine and counts his heartbeats until sleep claims him.

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Burt stops halfway down the hall, frozen.

At the opposite end of the hall, Carole’s motionless in front of a closed door.

Burt takes in Carole’s rigid posture and clenched hands before sighing and crossing to stand beside her.

“Carole?”

“It’s funny,” she starts, and Burt leans closer to hear the quiet, flat words. “His room is just as empty today as it was on Friday, but I couldn’t just walk by, this morning.”

Burt takes a step closer, pulls Carole into a hug. “It’s too quiet.”

Carole nods against his chest, “We’re going to be horrible empty nesters.”

“Why do you think I had Kurt put Skype on both our computers?”

The laughter is weak, but there, and Burt feels relief sweep over him at the sound. “Thank you, Burt.”

“Anytime,” he gives her one last squeeze before stepping back, “Now, how about we get the boys’ things so we can go see them.”

“I’ll get Kurt’s clothes,” she takes a step further down the hall. “Can you start the coffee?”

“A whole pot,” he confirms, “I’ll even put yours in that fancy travel mug you like.”

“I knew I married you for a reason,” she pauses outside Kurt’s room. “Oh! Don’t forget the throw from the sofa, too; it’s Blaine’s favorite and those hospital blankets are awfully thin.”

Ten minutes later and Burt’s shoving the hastily folded blanket into one of Carole’s reusable grocery bags, eying the remaining space before reaching for the throw on his chair too; he’s sure Kurt won’t mind a piece of home.

By the time Carole comes down the stairs, freshly showered and with a bag of Kurt’s clothes in hand, Burt has two travel mugs filled and sitting on the counter, and two pieces of toast with peanut butter on a small plate off to the side.

“Quickest breakfast I could think of,” he comments with a nod, “and this way you can eat in the car.”

“It’s like you read my mind,” Carole smiles, and they’re out the door moments later, bags and toast and coffee in hand. Burt leaves the radio off, and when Carole finally speaks it startles him from the lull of driving, has him glancing away from the road.

“What was that?”

Burt sighs, focuses on the truck a car-length ahead whose driver, so far, appears allergic to their turn signal. “I don’t know. The kid’s been through Hell; anyone’s memory would be a little banged up.”

“What if,” she pauses, and Burt tightens his grip on the steering wheel, “what if his statement keeps the police looking in the wrong place? What if they can’t find the monster that did this?”

“They will,” Burt glances over, “Blaine’s memory is what it is, but the kid’s trying. And the police’ll catch whoever did this. I’ll go to the precinct every day if I have to.”

“I just worry about them,” Carole continues, “If Blaine’s memories are mixed and he can’t positively ID…They’ll need evidence, Burt, and I’m so scared they won’t find it.”

“They will,” Burt repeats, “We won’t give them any other option.”

Carole hums in agreement and takes a sip of her coffee. “I just can’t stand the thought of Blaine being left without closure again. Whoever did this deserves to be in jail, and Blaine should get to see it happen.”

“I’m not disagreein’ with you,” Burt replies as he takes the exit for the hospital, “and I hope Blaine’s memory clears up, but we’ll be there for him either way.”

“I never doubted that,” Carole murmurs, “he’s family, after all.”

“And family takes care of each other,” Burt finishes, pulling into a drive-thru to get Kurt’s breakfast. “We’ll do whatever it takes, Carole.”

Carole nods but stays silent, and Burt runs a hand across his eyes to push away the building tension as he moves forward in the line. The silence holds the rest of the drive to the hospital, and Burt hates it. It’s the silence of fear, and Burt can’t combat it.

The stress builds the closer they get to Blaine’s room, and even though he knows Blaine hasn’t gotten worse, he also remembers the feelings of helplessness from Friday, remembers the stitches crisscrossing Blaine’s body and the hours of waiting in an uncomfortable chair while doctors cut Blaine open two halls away.

When he opens the door to Blaine’s room and sees Kurt sitting beside Blaine on the bed, some of the tension eases from his shoulders.

“And here I thought you’d still be sleeping,” Burt comments as he steps forward, handing Kurt the still-hot specialty coffee and McMuffin.

“We’ve been up for a while.” Kurt comments before taking a sip of his coffee. Burt resists the urge to ask just how long, to attempt to find out how little sleep Kurt actually got the night before.

He turns to look at Blaine then, grateful for his open eyes even as the bruises and stitches stand out more against the pale sheets. “Well,” Burt leans forward over the bed’s rail, meeting Blaine’s limited gaze, “You feelin’ okay, kid?”

Burt’s fairly certain Blaine’s ‘fine’ is only partially true – especially with Kurt’s narrowed glance – but it settles his nerves regardless, and Burt drops a hand to Blaine’s shoulder, glad for its solidity and slight movement as Blaine breathes.

“We brought the blanket from the living room,” Carole adds from beside him, “hospital blankets are always so rough, I don’t know how –”
The smile Blaine offers looks painful, but it’s still a hundred times better than the slack unconsciousness from the day before, and Burt feels himself smiling in response, grateful for the sight.

“We thought –”

“Good morning!” The greeting cuts Burt off midsentence, and seconds later Dr. Olt and two more doctors – interns? Med students? – are standing beside him, offering bland smiles. “Dr. Harrow and Dr. Jones,” Dr. Olt offers a nod toward the doctors to her right, “they’re keeping me company today; they’re just going to observe. Now Blaine,” she turned from Burt then, facing the bed, “How are you feeling this morning?”

The questions continue, and Burt pushes away the anger that rises with each stutter from Blaine, and he forces himself to take a step back when Blaine’s voice cracks as the questions continue.

Beside him, Carole stands still.

“Hey,” Burt keeps his voice low, “He’s awake and has the good meds.” Burt pauses before leaning closer to Carole, “Personally, I just want to hear him while he’s on the good meds.”

“Burt Hummel!” The admonishment is obvious despite the whisper, but the undercurrent of humor has Burt ducking his head to hide his smile regardless.

– about those tests, okay?

Burt looks up to see Kurt looking annoyed, eyes narrowed and shoulders tense.

“How long will it take?” Kurt’s voice carries across the small space despite its lack of volume, and Burt hopes the doctors in the room missed the edge of impatience in Kurt’s tone.

The answer of ‘it depends’ has Burt mirroring his son’s stance, shoulders tensing as he takes in every nuance of the doctors’ expressions, listens to every word.

The tests sound little different from when Blaine had been taken for testing the day before, but Burt’s medical knowledge is limited to what he’s heard on various news stories and his limited Google search the night before.

But that search really had only reiterated what Burt already knew: Blaine’s stubborn, and a fighter.

After handshakes and polite smiles – and Dr. Olt promising Blaine another dose of painkillers before moving him for tests – the room is back to holding only four people, and Burt takes the few steps to bring him closer to Blaine’s bed.

“Hey kid,” Burt still hates the stitches that cross Blaine’s face, hates how Blaine’s eyes are slits of their usual openness and have the sheen of confusion that comes with narcotics, hates the nasal cannula and the IV and the splint holding Blaine’s arm – but Blaine is awake, and Burt smiles.

“Glad you’re awake.”

Blaine offers a thumbs up, and Burt looks away from the now-taut IV, focuses on Blaine’s face, “–nks for the blanket.”

Burt can’t help it – the laugh startles out of him, overly loud in the room. He sees Carole stare, bringing one hand to her mouth while the other touches his arm, and he wants to tell her that he hasn’t lost it.
He hasn’t.

But the kid is laying in the hospital bed, covered in stitches and bruises and a damned nasal cannula and thanking them for a blanket.

Only Blaine.

Burt takes a breath, holds it until he feels steady. “You got nothin’ to thank us for, Blaine. No,” Burt holds up his hand to stop Blaine’s comment, “No thank-yous.”

Blaine blinks in confusion for a moment, and Burt glances to the IV bags before taking a step closer. “’m glad you brought t’blanket.”

Blaine looks proud that he found a way around Burt’s mandate, and Kurt leans forward in response, although Burt only catches a murmured ‘dork’, the rest of the words inaudible despite the short distance.

“Would you like anything else from the house, Blaine?”

Carole’s question has Kurt leaning back even as Blaine gives a small shake of his head. “No.”

“Well if you think of anything you just let us know, okay?” A pause, and Burt feels his face scrunch in confusion as Blaine and Kurt have a conversation without words. The moment stretches until Burt feels forced to break it. “Blaine?”

“Will you –” Blaine stops, looks to Kurt before starting again. “If Mom shows up can you…I don’t want t’see her.”

The latter part of the sentence is mumbled, and Blaine’s eyes remain on where his and Kurt’s hands are clasped on the bed.

Burt shares a look with Carole before turning back to Blaine. “You don’t have to,” he keeps his voice steady, pushes away the anger he feels building at the mention of Blaine’s parents. “We’ll do whatever you want, Blaine.”

The door opens then, and Burt huffs a breath as nurses move to Blaine’s bed, rearranging the IV bags and tubes as they get ready to move him. Kurt’s looking stressed again, lines forming around his eyes as the nurses share more information about where they’re taking Blaine, the tests that will be done.

“You said it could take an hour?” Burt keeps his eyes on the boys as he asks the question, absently takes in the answers while Carole asks for more details from beside him.

They’re gone moments later, leaving a gaping space for Blaine’s bed and Kurt looking to the door with clenched hands.

“Kurt,” Burt moves, dropping his hand on Kurt’s shoulder. “You heard them – it’s just some routine tests. How about we go to the cafeteria while we wait, okay? You can finish that sandwich and I’ll be able to –”

“Dad,” Kurt’s voice cracks, and then he’s turning, hastily setting his cup and sandwich on the small table before burrowing into Burt’s shirt as words rush out him – stories about Blaine’s childhood, Blaine’s guilt, sharp comments about Blaine’s parents.

And Burt just wraps his arms around Kurt, keeps his eyes locked with Carole’s.
The stories (only half-told, interrupted by hiccups and pauses) have Burt clenching his hands against Kurt’s back.

He’ll never understand the Andersons, and as Kurt continues to talk Burt stops trying to reconcile Blaine with the stories of his childhood.

He can’t continue to picture Blaine growing up in the shadow of an older brother, can’t continue to see Blaine, young and alone in a hospital room. So he focuses on Kurt instead, tightening his arms around his son even as Carole steps forward, her gentle touch to Kurt’s shoulder a contrast to the anger he sees in her eyes.

Eventually Kurt stops talking, and his breathing evens out until finally he steps back – into an impromptu hug from Carole – before rubbing a hand across his face.

“No apologies,” Burt comments before Kurt can say a word, “none.”

A pause, and then Kurt’s offering a small smile before stepping toward the door. “I’m – I’m just going to go to the restroom,” he opens the door before turning back, “I’ll meet you in the cafeteria, okay?”

He’s gone seconds later.

*-*-*-*

The water from the public restroom across from the nurse’s station can’t hide the medicinal scent of the space, but the cool water serves its purpose, taking away the tackiness that seems etched into his face.

The paper towel is less than ideal, rough despite him patting his face dry.

The hallway light grates his eyes, and Kurt blinks for a moment before stopping, steps outside the door to the restroom.

His phone feels heavier than usual in his hand, but it chimes just like usual after he enters his passcode, and against his ear the tone rings clear and strong.

“Kurt! Is everything okay? I mean –”

“Hi, Dani.” And then he pauses, unsure of what to say next.

“Kurt; did something happen? Did Blaine –”

“Blaine’s fine. He’s getting an ultrasound. Or a CT or bloodwork, something. The nurses gave a whole list of tests.”

“Okay,” Dani draws out the word and Kurt smiles at the hint of normalcy.

“I don’t actually know why I called,” Kurt comments as he leans against the wall, “nothing’s really changed.”

“Talk to me anyway.”

Kurt stares at the wall before glancing down the hall toward Blaine’s room, taking in the harried nurses, the couple hugging by the window, the family with two boys arguing over a balloon.

“When Cooper showed up I acted like one of those fans we make fun of.” Kurt watches as the
family turns the corner, leaving his sight.

“Who’s Cooper? I thought it was just you and your parents at –”

“Cooper is Blaine’s brother.” Kurt quickly adds. “And it was last year – he showed up at McKinley and I acted star-struck because of a commercial.”

“Kurt.” Dani’s voice stays firm, calm across the line. “What’s going on?”

“Blaine’s parents always chose Cooper and now – now he just expects it. It’s common.” Kurt exhales, briefly closing his eyes as he braces his left arm across his chest. “I love Blaine, Dani. We’re partners! But last year I wasn’t any better because Cooper showed up and I acted just like them! I didn’t put Blaine first.”

For a moment Kurt just listens to Dani breathe. “You know,” a pop and Kurt can practically see the bubble from Dani’s gum, “when I first met you I was insanely jealous.”

“Dani –”

“Nope, this is my story. I’d just met this amazingly hot girl, and I actually got some decent tips and even the weather was perfect. Life was good. And then, then that amazingly hot girl introduces me to her roommates, and there you are. And you can sing and are going to this elite school and you already had your soulmate. And yeah, you had arguments but Santana’s right about your heart-eyes. Visible from space, Kurt. But what really got me was that even if you were mad at him, you still said his name every other sentence.”

“I’m not following,” Kurt sighs, “so –”

“You couldn’t stop thinking of Blaine and saying his name even when you were ticked, Kurt. So yeah, I fully believe you were momentarily distracted by Blaine’s brother because anyone related to your guy must be gorgeous, but I refuse to believe that you still didn’t put Blaine first. You wouldn’t be in Ohio right now, otherwise.”

“I treated him like his parents, Dani. I rattled on about his brother! Cooper got ice cream and visits and Blaine gets gift-shop clichés and the occasional email. But I was too infatuated by a commercial to listen to what Blaine was saying.”

“This was a year ago?” Kurt hums in agreement and Dani continues, “A year ago, Kurt, where you maybe were infatuated by Blaine’s brother for a few hours. Why are you bringing this up now?”

“I didn’t know,” Kurt stares at the wall, “Blaine didn’t – doesn’t – talk about his family. But his mom called Carole – did I tell you that? She should be here in a day or two.” Kurt exhales, “Blaine doesn’t want to see her. He doesn’t want my parents to let her in and I can’t blame him because the last time – the last time he was in the hospital his mother gave him pointless statues and his father didn’t talk about it. And Cooper,” Kurt lets out a strangled laugh, “Cooper sent him a narcissistic motivational bear.”

“How are motivational bears narcissistic?”

“Trust me – if anyone could manage to find one, it would be Cooper.”

“…you didn’t buy him some narcissistic bear too, did you?”

Kurt smiles. “No.”
“Good. And Kurt? I get that you’re upset. I can’t imagine if –” A breath, and when she continues her voice is slightly higher and the words are rushed, “Kurt, you haven’t done anything wrong. You’re Blaine’s family and from what you’ve said you’re a hell of a lot better than the people that share his last name.”

“I just –” Kurt rubs a hand across his eyes, “I can’t understand it, Dani. How can they not see him?”

“Well, obviously they’re idiots.”

“We’re in agreement,” Kurt laughs, “They’re the worst kind of idiots,” he adds as he finally stops the laughter, “Thank you, Dani.”

“No problem. I’m an expert in recognizing idiotic parents.” Another pause and when Dani does speak her voice has lost its humor. “How’s Blaine doing, Kurt?”

“He’s still stable.” Kurt winces even as he says the words, hating their flat tone. “He’s covered in stitches and bruises and he’s not allowed to sit up on his own, but he’s stable. They switched out his pain killers, so hopefully his nausea won’t be as bad; he’s still mostly out of it though. And,” Kurt pauses, lets out a breath, “and I don’t know if it’s the meds or if his memory –”

“I thought you said you were talking with him.” Dani interrupts, “What’s wrong with his memory?”

“Because of what happened the police had to talk to him,” Kurt begins, forcing his voice to stay even. “They had to take his statement.” Kurt fights down the hysterical laugh building in his throat. “He doesn’t remember everything – that’s common, apparently – but he told the police there was a green truck. That the driver caught him in the parking lot –”

“Wasn’t that –”

“Yeah.” Kurt interrupts, “It was.”

Silence.

“Kurt? I’m not – I’m thrilled you called, really, I am. But why did you call me?”

He startles at the question, takes a moment to count his breaths before answering. “I knew you wouldn’t push me, Elliott would probably have me on speaker again. Santana,” Kurt sighs and blinks the blurriness from his eyes, “You know how Santana is – she’d just push and push and I know she means well, but I don’t think I can handle her at the moment.”

“Fair enough. And Rachel?”

“She wouldn’t mean to, I’m sure. But earlier she mentioned Finn –” Kurt forcibly relaxes his hold on the phone, “She was trying to relate, I think, by mentioning him. But Blaine – my fiancé won’t end up like my brother. Blaine may be drugged and confined to his hospital bed but he’s stable, Dani. I have to focus on that: he’s alive. He’s alive – and I can’t…I can’t focus on that if Rachel keeps reminding me about Finn.”

Kurt stares at the wall, counts the seconds until Dani responds.

“I’m glad you called me, Kurt.”

“I’m glad you answered.”
“Just keep me updated, okay?”
Kurt agrees and seconds later he lowering his phone, slipping it back into his pocket before heading down the hall toward the elevator.
Hopefully his coffee isn’t cold.
*_*-*_*-*_*

“Mr. Hummel?”
Burt turns at the question, sees a familiar nurse standing in the doorway. “If you have more paperwork for me I’m passin’ it on to my wife.”
She holds out her empty hands. “No paperwork, but there’s a man in the lobby asking for you. Once I reminded him he wasn’t allowed on this floor he asked if you would be willing to see him.”
Burt feels his face scrunch a bit in confusion and he shares a look with Carole. On the bed, Blaine and Kurt have fallen silent.
“Did you recognize him?”
“No, but his name started an ‘S’ – Sutter or Shul –”
“Schuster?”
“That’s it. I can tell him you’re busy –”
“No,” Burt stands, “I’ll go talk to him.”
Moments later Burt’s pausing at the entrance to the lobby. He spots Will sitting in one of the chairs by the far wall, running a hand through his hair.
Burt lets out a breath and crosses the room. “The nurse said you were lookin’ for me?”
“Burt! Yeah. I brought you some dinner.” Will holds out a fast-food bag, “Grilled chicken sandwich. Sorry; I forgot to get something for Carole and Kurt. But,” Will smiles, “I was hoping you could give me an update on Blaine?”
Burt accepts the bag with a nod, “Not much has changed since Carole last called; Blaine’s still pretty out of it.”
“Of course,” Will smiles, “I was just wondering – hoping – you could share a few more details?” Burt waits, and Will takes a bite of his chicken sandwich before continuing. “It just – it came from nowhere.”
And Burt realizes Will’s looking for more than the latest update. “You hopin’ for something specific?” Burt holds up a hand to stall Will’s response. “I can tell you some, but I won’t break Blaine’s privacy.”
“I wouldn’t ask you to,” The words are hurried, but Burt hears the faint trace of defeat under the tone, watches as Will’s shoulders slump. “You said – earlier…Blaine’s been living with you?”
“For a few months,” Burt confirms, “I was thinkin’ we should get a sign ‘Home for Wayward Glee Boys’ but Carole said no.”
Will huffs a laugh. “Right. But…Sam moved out –”

“It was difficult for a while, after.” Burt briefly closes his eyes. “By the time we felt comfortable in the house again Sam seemed settled at the Lynns.”

“And Blaine?”

“It’s a decent drive, goin’ from Westerville to McKinley.” Burt comments, sticking to the edges of the truth. “And the kid was working at the shop most days; it didn’t seem right to send him on an hour drive just to go to an empty house.”

“No,” The word is quiet and Burt watches as Schue sighs before continuing. “But I’m guessing that’s not the whole reason?”

“Not entirely,” Burt comments as he reaches up to run a hand across his hat, “but that’s as much as I can share.”

Schuster hums in agreement, taking another bite of his sandwich and swallowing before turning a bit in his chair to better face Burt. “I’m guessing the rest has to do with why Blaine’s been seeing a therapist?”

“Partly,” Burt sighs, “He’s been havin’ a difficult time.”

“Do you know when I – when the kids will be able to see him?” Will sighs. “They’re having a difficult time too.”

“They haven’t given us a timeframe,” Burt comments as he glances to the hall. “I know it won’t be til he’s on a different floor; they only let family in this unit.”

“His parents –”

“They’re out of town,” Burt interrupts, his voice flat. “And we don’t mind stayin’ with him. I have his MPA anyway.”

“You have his –”

“They travel a lot.”

Will’s gaze makes it clear he knows that’s only part of the story, but Burt sighs in relief when Will lets the matter drop. “You’ll keep me updated?”

“Of course,” Burt affirms, “Carole or me will give you call.”

“Thanks. But,” Will stops and Burt watches as he twists a paper napkin. “Is he really okay? You said he woke up earlier, but how’s he doing, really?”

“He’s a fighter,” Burt answers, “He just has a lot to work through; he’s been through Hell.”

“And I didn’t know,” Will mutters. “I’ve seen him at school for months and no one told me –”

“He didn’t want people to know.” Burt interrupts, “He just wanted to have a normal senior year.”

“I’m trained to notice when my students are struggling,” Will adds. “I’m supposed to help them but I didn’t even know one of them was having panic attacks!”

“How –”
“Emma told me,” Will answers the unfinished question. “Blaine’s having panic attacks and I just thought he froze because of stage fright or some half-forgotten memory.”

“Will –” Burt thinks back to that performance, to Blaine’s scattered words and anxiety over a misstep.

“If I’d known,” Will continues, voice tight, “I could have talked with him about it. I could have –” Will lets out a pent up breath and Burt wonders just what Schue said to Blaine; the kid never mentioned having spoken with his teacher.

“You were his teacher,” Burt comments, “You did your job, Will.”

“Did I?” Will questions, “I missed so much with him. What else did he go through alone because I didn’t see?” Will’s voice drops, and Burt wonders if he meant to say the latter sentence aloud.

Burt lets the silence stretch: That’s one question he can’t answer.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Thanks to everyone for your lovely replies and support! As always, your kind words have left me in awe. Sorry I'm posting so late in the day, but between some medical issues and then going to vote and dealing with drama with my online job it's been a day. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this chapter, such as it is, and a special thank you to teachgleek and dlanadhz for their beta and to slayerkitty for the many, many discussions and pulling me back from hating everything.

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 31

Three days and Kurt still finds Blaine too still when he sleeps. He knows it’s the medication, but the small part of him grateful for the knowledge that Blaine is without pain is eclipsed by the strangeness of Blaine being still.

His chest moves with each breath, but his hands don’t twitch, his head doesn’t turn, his arms don’t pull Kurt close as he dreams.

Blaine just breathes.

Kurt counts the breaths.

It’s soothing, in a way. He counts as he waits for Christine to return – she’d promised a new warmed blanket after taking Blaine’s vitals.

Kurt assumes she got waylaid as his counting crosses into the triple digits.

He stops counting when the door opens, offering an absent wave to Christine as she enters. “Sorry that took longer than planned. Here,” she says as she passes him a heated blanket, “I’m guessing you’re still chilled?”

Kurt nods, “A bit.” he drapes the blanket over his shoulders like a shawl, “Thanks.”

“Heated blankets are one of the few perks hospitals have; I think it’s a way of subtly apologizing for the low temperature.” Christine nods toward where Blaine continues to sleep in the bed. “It’s still early, Kurt, and I know you’re tired. Why don’t you take a nap until your parents get here.”

Kurt looks to the floor. “I can’t sleep,” he keeps the words soft, “not for more than a few hours, anyway.”

“I could ask the doctor on call to write you a script – you’d have to have a quick exam – but –”

“No!” Kurt’s hurried interruption sounds too loud in the small space, and he looks up, “Sorry. I just – I don’t want to be medicated.”

“Okay,” Christine smiles, seemingly uncaring of Kurt’s sharp refusal, “That’s fine.” She moves
and sits on the stool by the room’s computer. “So why can’t you sleep, Kurt? It’s kind of important, you know.”

“Don’t you have patients you’re supposed to checking?” Kurt winces, offers a slight smile in apology. Sorry, I –” Kurt sighs, “That came out wrong; I’m sorry.”

Christine laughs. “Don’t worry about it, Kurt. That’s hardly the worst I’ve heard, and I actually just finished checking on my patients; I’ve got a few minutes, unless I’m called. Now,” she leans forward, “why can’t you sleep?”

Kurt looks to Blaine. “Isn’t it obvious?”

“Maybe, but I’ve been a nurse for almost thirty years. So,” Christine glances to Blaine’s monitors before looking back to Kurt, “what’s really bothering you?”

“Blaine doesn’t sleep on his back,” he starts, gesturing to the bed. “He – he sleeps on his side, and he’s never this still. Really. He jumps on tables and dances down the stairs and taps out beats while singing to the radio. This,” Kurt glances back to Blaine, “it’s just wrong.”

“Believe it or not,” Christine begins, “he’s doing better. But it’s only been a few days, Kurt. His injuries – it will take him a while to heal.”

“I know,” Kurt murmurs, looking to Blaine. “I know that. In my head, I know. But I was running lines when I got the call; I didn’t know. And now I just keep thinking about what it must have been like – he was alone and it took me seven hours to get to him.”

“And you haven’t left him since,” Christine offers Kurt a smile, “He’s not alone now, Kurt.”

“But he was,” Kurt counters, “he was attacked and left –”

“And now you can’t sleep,” Christine finishes.

“No,” Kurt reaches for Blaine’s hand. “I can’t.”

“You can.” Kurt tightens his hold on Blaine at her comment. “Kurt, look at me.” She continues once Kurt meets her eyes. “You didn’t betray him.”

“I –”

“You’re here and have given Blaine one of the best support systems I’ve seen.” She smiles and rests a hand on Kurt’s shoulder. “He feels safe with you; and you both are safe here.” Christine moves and sits beside him on the bed, wraps the red throw from his parents’ living room around his shoulders.

“What –”

“Sleep, okay? I expect to see you and Blaine curled up and dreaming when I come back in two hours.” She stands before Kurt can think of a reply, makes it to the door before pausing. “I already told you I don’t mind; don’t tell me I’m breakin’ the rules for no reason.”

A smile and she’s gone, shutting off the dim light and leaving Kurt staring at the door.

“You know,” Kurt comments as he carefully climbs onto the bed, “we should start a quote book, for advice from Dad and the other too-smart, well-meaning adults in our lives.”

Kurt settles along Blaine’s side, maneuvering the blanket until it’s evenly spread across them both.
and rests his head inches away from his fiancé.

Blaine breathes.

Kurt counts the breaths until his eyes close.

*_*_*_*_*

Burt hesitates outside Blaine’s door, sighing.

“Burt?”

He turns at Carole’s question, “Yeah?”

“Are you okay?” Her hand on his shoulder has him briefly closing his eyes. “You seem a bit tense.”

“Have you heard from his mother again?” Burt questions instead, ignoring his growing frustration and glancing to the door – inside, Kurt appears to be animatedly telling a story, given the hand gestures.

“Not since the other day.” Carole comments in a clipped tone, “Why?”

Burt can practically hear Kurt’s ‘of course she hasn’t called back’ and he lets out a breath, taking a moment to relax the hand at his side. “With everything –” Burt pauses, pushes down the anger. “When we were at home and Blaine was watchin’ tv or up in his room…I could forget why he was staying with us. But with Kurt tellin’ us about what it was like for Blaine –”

Burt stops, finds himself remembering being at the store with Kurt’s mother years before. A couple at the end of the aisle had been arguing, their ignored toddler crying in response. He still remembers his wife’s look of anger and hissed ‘Some people just aren’t meant to be parents.’

Carole tightens her grip on Burt’s shoulder, telling him to relax and to focus on the present – and Burt leans back, remembers placing a hand on his then-wife’s pregnant stomach with a smile: Some people aren’t meant for parenthood, but some are.

“Alright,” Burt turns, offers Carole a smile.

In the room moments later, the tension in Burt’s shoulder lightens as his son offers a wave and Burt blinks in his direction.

Kurt’s shirt has more wrinkles than Burt’s used to seeing, and while it’s obvious Kurt’s made use of the of the shower in Blaine’s bathroom, Burt sees the traces of exhaustion around Kurt’s eyes.

“You boys feelin’ okay?”

Blaine manages a weak nod and Burt ducks his head to hide his smile at Kurt’s narrowed eyes.

“Are you sure, Blaine?” Carole questions, “There’s no need for you to pretend.”

Blaine hesitates and Burt steps forward, moving to stand next to the bed. “Blaine?”

“–’m okay. Really,” Blaine looks down briefly before turning to face Burt. “Mr. Hummel? How are things at the shop?”

The blatant change in topic has Burt leaning back in surprise, but then he takes in Blaine’s hopeful
expression and can't help but offer a smile in response. “According to Jim things are fine.” He glances to Kurt as an idea forms, “Unlike when Kurt was helpin’ out when he was ten.”

“Dad!” At Kurt’s shout of indignation Burt laughs, glad to see Kurt’s cheeks red from embarrassment rather than tears.

“What?” Burt chances a look to Blaine and gives a smile. “It’s a good story!” He ignores Kurt’s mumbled ‘it’s certainly not’ and continues. “Anyway, Kurt was helpin’ out in the office, organizing papers or something while I was out in the garage. By the time I got back to him he’d snuck out to the parking lot and was attemptin’ an oil change on the truck. By himself.” Burt pauses, glances over to see Kurt with his head down, seemingly entranced at the sight of his and Blaine’s joined hands resting on the bed. “Apparently some of his…classmates had said that a boy with his taste couldn’t possibly know how to fix a car, even if he had a mechanic for a father. Well,” Burt steps forward, drops a hand to rest on Blaine’s blanket-covered leg, “I get outside and Kurt’s managed to get oil all over the engine and disconnected half the sparkplugs.”

“I’d only ever watched you.” Kurt mumbles, “At least I got the hood up.”

“Right,” Burt agrees. “I still don’t know how you managed that; you were barely tall enough to be lookin’ at the engine – you’re lucky the hood didn’t fall and crush your hand. Anyway, I get outside and as soon as he sees me Kurt starts crying, afraid I’m gonna ground him forever.”

“Obviously you didn’t,” Carole comments from beside him, “although most ten-year-olds seem to think any punishment lasts for an eternity.”

“I didn’t ground him at all,” Burt counters. “Didn’t seem right to. I let him watch as I fixed up the engine – he even put on a spark plug – and then I taught him how to change the oil.” Burt looks up and catches Blaine’s slightly hazed gaze. “No-one makes a member of this family feel insecure. The next week I convinced Kurt’s teacher the kids needed a field trip, and Kurt changed the oil in front of his whole class as part of the demonstration.”

“Please tell me there are pictures I somehow missed,” Carole murmurs, “Kurt must have been adorable.”

“No pictures!” Kurt hurries to answer, “Dad got rid of them.”

Burt meets Carole’s eyes and subtly shakes his head; there’s a reason he keeps his personal photo album in the end table in his room.

Carole smiles but turns to Kurt. “I’m sure you were adorable, regardless.”

Blaine nods, and Burt silently laughs when Kurt counters with an annoyed look. “And here I thought you’d be on my side.”

“– always…your side,” Blaine murmurs.

Kurt smiles and drops a kiss to Blaine’s cheek, and Burt can’t help but smile. “He may be on your side Kurt, but I’m sure he won’t say ‘no’ to more stories.”

“More?” Kurt sounds scandalized, “You wouldn’t.”

“– like stories about you,” Blaine mumbles, speech slurred but honest.

“You’re supposed to be resting,” Kurt responds with a tight smile, “and it’s almost time for your meds.”
As if on cue, the door opens and Christine walks in; Burt laughs.

“How I want to know?” The question carries and Burt turns, facing the amused nurse.

“Apparently Kurt’s psychic,” Burt comments with a smile. “Knows when you’re coming before you even open the door.”

Christine smiles, and Burt resists the urge to offer a handshake. “Sure you haven’t just memorized my schedule, Kurt?” Kurt ducks his head, but Burt sees the blush. “Anyway,” Christine continues. “You’re due for some meds, Blaine. How are you feeling, on a scale of one to ten?”

Burt stays still as Christine moves forward, keeps his eyes on her even as he focuses on Blaine’s responses, holding back a laugh when Kurt’s not-so-subtle glare has Blaine changing his pain rating.

Burt watches as Kurt takes Blaine’s hand, leans down and whispers in Blaine’s ear as Christine adjusts Blaine’s gown to move bandages, looking over the stitches and incisions.

Burt clenches his hands.

By the time she steps out to get the medication Kurt’s looking more angry than annoyed, and Burt silently wishes Christine speed.

Blaine winces and Kurt’s on the bed moments later (the practiced move and adjustments for wires have Burt worrying – and angered – at the familiarity even as he stifles a smile at the end result) and then Kurt settles with Blaine’s head in his lap. “I thought I told you to not lie to the nurses.” Kurt mutters, “You don’t have to downplay your pain.”

“Go easy on him, Kurt.” Burt comments, “Nobody likes talkin’ about pain.”

“Meds make my head fuzzy,” Blaine mumbles.


Blaine pouts – a feat given stitches in his lip and brows, not to mention the black eye hindering his movement – and moments later Burt’s joining in Carole and Kurt’s laughter.

“Just let them take care of you kid,” Burt adds once he has his laughter under control, “and while you do that Carole and I are gonna get some lunch. Kurt,” he turns to face his son. “You comin’ with us or should we pick out something for you?”

“Whatever is fine,” Kurt answers. “I was going to practice for my Voice final anyway.”

“We’ll get you something,” Carole comments before Burt manages to reply, and at her glare he stays silent, letting her take the lead. “Any requests, Kurt?”

Five minutes later Burt’s in the elevator with Carole. “There a reason you didn’t want me askin’ Kurt about his plans?”

“I know you Burt Hummel; you were going to try and get Kurt to join us.”

“I –”

“You were going to try and sweet-talk him into coming with us, and he would have resented you. He wants to sing anyway. So I decided to skip the inevitable argument.”
Burt laughs.

-_*-_*-_

“Any requests for my warm up?” Kurt asks as he cards his fingers through Blaine’s hair. “Nothing from La Boheme though; if I hear one more piece from that opera I may scream.”

“Can’t have that,” Blaine whispers, “no screaming.”

“Generally that is frowned upon,” Kurt agrees.


And Kurt does.

He makes it to the first chorus before the door opens, and he finishes the line as Christine moves to the computer. “You don’t have to stop on my account,” Christine comments. “I don’t usually get to hear live music in the hospital.”

“Thanks,” Kurt murmurs, “but I was just warming up; I have to Skype my instructor later.”

Christine nods as she moves closer to Blaine, double checking his pain level and offering Kurt a smile. “Well I think you deserve an A, Kurt. You have a beautiful voice.”

“Let’s hope my professor agrees.” Kurt adds as Christine moves aside Blaine’s blankets, “He gave me a ‘B’ on my last assignment.”

“That doesn’t seem right, does it? Now Blaine,” she comments as she adds the medication to Blaine’s IV, “just let that medicine do its job; I bet Kurt’ll even sing you to sleep.”

“The best songs,” Kurt agrees, “and then if you’re still up I’ll fill you in on all the latest New York gossip.”

“In that case I’m sorry I have other patients,” Christine adds as she strips off her gloves, “that sounds like more fun than I’ll get to have.”

“You’ll just have to come back and visit,” Kurt teases, “that way you can get all the gossip from your favorite visitor.”

“My favorite?” Christine comments from the door, “Nurses don’t have favorites, Kurt.”

She’s gone before Kurt can reply, but he leans toward Blaine’s ear. “Don’t worry, Blaine. We’re definitely her favorite.”

“You promised…singing,” Blaine mumbles. “Finish your song?”

“I suppose,” Kurt sighs, keeping his voice light. “And since you asked I’ll even start from the beginning and keep the changed pronouns.”

Kurt closes his eyes as he sings, focuses on Blaine’s breaths and keeping his voice smooth as his voice rises and falls with the notes. He opens his eyes when he finishes, but a glance shows Blaine still awake. “That was ‘mazing,” Blaine comments looking up with bleary eyes, “You win.”

“Oh?” Kurt recognizes the slightly slurred speech and slow blinks. “What do I win, Blaine?”
“You won th’showcase,” Blaine mumbles, “already won.”

“I think I won when you proposed,” Kurt counters, “but you’re not wrong, Blaine.”

“Love you.” Blaine smiles.

“I love you, too.” Kurt loosely hugs Blaine’s shoulders. “Now, do you want another song or the latest gossip?”

Blaine breathes and just before Kurt thinks he’s fallen asleep he finally answers. “Gossip,” he whispers, “sing later.”

“Okay, let’s see,” Kurt drops a kiss to Blaine’s hair, “I called Dani yesterday. She didn’t have much gossip to share, but Santana texted later. Apparently Dani and Elliott have been competing for the most difficult guitar solo, so she’s been hearing runs and variations of songs by CCR.”

Kurt keeps talking, sharing second-hand stories about the diner and Dani’s more interesting customers until Blaine slumps against him, finally asleep. Kurt carefully slides down the bed until he’s beside Blaine, and adjusts the blankets.

Hospitals are horrible for sleeping, but they’re not bad for naps.

*-*-*-*-*

“So Kurt,” Burt leans forward in his chair, “You mentioned a final?”

“Yeah,” Kurt looks over, “Voice I – my professor is letting me sing over Skype. He even said if the connection isn’t the best I can send a recording, later.”

“That’s nice of him,” Carole adds with a smile, “What are you singing?”

Kurt sighs. “I have a portion of Che Gelida Manina and I’ll get an email with something to sight-read, later.”

The song isn’t something Burt recognizes, but Blaine’s eyes have gone wide and he’s leaning forward – in spite of the stitches – combined with the foreign title Burt assumes the song is challenging. “Sounds difficult,” Burt replies, “but I’m sure you’ll wow that professor.”

“I’ll –” The knock at the door stops Kurt from finishing his sentence and seconds later the door opens.

“Officer Randall!” Carole comments, voice a touch too high, “Did – did you need us something?”

“We just spoke with Dr. Olt,” Officer Randall answers as he steps into the room, Officer Daniels a step behind. “She said Blaine was doing well enough for us to talk.”

“Did you find something?” Kurt’s question has Burt stepping forward, stopping at the railing on the right side of Blaine’s bed and taking Carole’s hand.

“Blaine,” Officer Randall asks, ignoring Kurt’s question, “I have your statement from the other day. I’m going to play it back for you and I need you to tell me if you have any changes, okay?”

At Blaine’s nod the officer produces a recorder from his pocket, and moments later Blaine’s cracked monotone fills the room. Beside him, Carole stifles a gasp behind her free hand, and Burt clenches his jaw as he listens to Blaine’s fragmented sentences between lengthy pauses. A glance shows Blaine staring at his and Kurt’s joined hands, and Kurt glaring at the recorder.
Burt resists the urge to take the recorder and throw it against the wall to end the retelling, hates that he wasn’t in the room for the initial statement.

It’s too much: too strained, too painful.

Too horrific.

And Kurt, his son who shies away from colorful Halloween masks and loathes all things horror, is now hearing the nightmare for the second time.

A nightmare years old.

Finally the recording ends and Burt lets out a breath he’d forgotten he was holding. Still, silence blankets the room until Officer Randall asks Blaine if he would like to add anything to the statement.

Blaine’s whispered ‘no’ has Officer Randall pocketing the device and briefly meeting Burt’s gaze before turning back to Blaine.

“Blaine,” Burt wants to stay silent, wants to stay balanced on the precipice of knowledge, but he has to know. “I believe you,” Burt sighs, “no one should have to remember that. But that recording – that sounded similar to what you’ve told me before. Are you sure that’s what happened this time?”

The officers stay silent, and Burt forces himself to keep looking at Blaine.

“–s what I remember,” Blaine replies, determinedly staring at the blanket.

And Burt hates that his family had to listen to the details of crime that may already be cold, hates that Blaine has enough pain to merge memories, and that he may have hindered the investigation by trying to help – wonders what it says that a small, silent part of him wishes Blaine’s story happened days ago rather than years.

“Okay. Well, we got the security recordings from every building in the area,” Officer Randall begins, shaking Burt from his thoughts, “and then we looked over what we had.” He pauses and Burt resists the urge to yell for him to hurry up. “Based on what Blaine told us, we had a rough idea of what to look for.” He pauses again, shifting a little on his feet before he turns and Burt watches as the officer determinedly meets Blaine’s eyes. “Blaine, we have a couple pictures for you to look at, okay?”

Burt’s breath catches. Because if the police have something for Blaine, then there’s the possibility there’s evidence. Hard, indisputable evidence outside of Blaine’s memory –

“O-okay.” Blaine’s voice cracks and Carole’s grip threatens to cut off the circulation to Burt’s hand; across from him Kurt has a white-knuckled grip on the bed rail.

“Do either of these trucks look familiar?” Burt looks at the pictures placed on top of the familiar throw from his living room: Both older model forest green pickups, full of angles and worn and slightly blurry on the page.

“Left. The left one.” Blaine’s whisper has Carole bringing her free hand to her mouth, and Burt fights the urge to yell.

“Thank you, Blaine.” Officer Randall picks up the photos, and behind him Burt sees Officer Daniels flipping through a notebook before showing it to his partner. “Blaine,” he comments as he
turns back, “That truck’s registered to a Stephen –”

To Burt’s left, a monitor starts beeping with alarming frequency.

Kurt has pulled Blaine into some kind of one-armed hug, whispering words Burt can’t make out while Officer Randall seems frozen a foot from Blaine’s bed.

Burt stares at the picture dangling from the officer’s hand –

“Green trucks are pretty common…”

“I keep seeing the cars, Mr. Hummel.”

Bile rises in Burt’s throat.

The monitor still beeps beside him and Burt glances to his left before turning back when the door opens and Christine enters, face tight despite the smile. “Blaine, if you wanted to see me all you had to do was press a button; setting off alarms is just lazy. Officers,” she pulls on a pair of gloves and shoots them a glance, “You’re not upsetting my patient, are you? Don’t worry,” she adds when it looks like Officer Randall is about to answer, “I’m sure you didn’t mean to do whatever it was.”

Burt suddenly remembers all the medical dramas where nurses are the ones in charge.

“Blaine’s –”

“Blaine’s going to talk with me while all of you wait in the hall,” Christine interrupts Kurt and looks to the door, “it shouldn’t take long.”

“I can –”

“You can join everyone in the hall, Kurt.” Despite her words, Christine’s tone stays gentle, and Burt releases a breath when Kurt leans down to murmur in Blaine’s ear rather than argue.

Burt follows Carole and the officers from the room – Kurt exiting last – and he reaches for Carole’s hand when the door shuts, leaving the monitor inaudible.

Across from him, Officer Daniels appears to be showing his partner something in his notes.

Kurt stands next to the door, glancing from Blaine’s room to the officers.

“He’ll be fine, Kurt,” Burt adds with a nod toward the room, “Christine’s good at her job; you know that.”

Kurt hums a weak agreement.

“Kurt, your dad’s right. I’m sure Christine –”

“It’s not that,” Kurt mutters, glancing to the officers.

“Are we missin’ something, Kurt?” Burt takes a step forward, waits for Kurt to meet his gaze. “You seem anxious. And I get the feeling it’s not just because we were asked to wait out here.”

Kurt sighs. “No. I don’t…It’s not –” Kurt stops midsentence with a hiss of frustration, and Burt looks to Carole.

Kurt isn’t one to struggle with words; he’s always known precisely what he means – and he’s
shared those views since he was four.

“Kurt?”

“The truck,” Kurt mutters with a weak wave toward the photos Officer Randall still holds, “it looked familiar, somehow.”

Burt remembers conversations over coffee, Blaine’s harsh worry after a misstep, the whispered words after nightmare. “I’m sure Blaine talked to you more than he did to us, Kurt, and I could picture the thing pretty well after hearin’ from him. You just have a picture to go with it, now.”

Kurt shakes his head. “No…that’s not it.” Kurt looks to the officers again before dropping his gaze, looking instead to where he’s begun to twist his engagement ring; Burt resists the urge to tell him to stop, looks to the officers even as Kurt seems to tire and reaches for his phone instead.

“I was thinking we could get tacos for dinner,” Carole comments from beside him, “take a break from sandwiches.”

“Sure,” Burt agrees as he keeps his eyes on the officers, “that sounds –”

“Oh my God.” Kurt’s exclamation has Burt turning, and he’s dropping Carole’s hand and crossing the few steps moments later as he registers Kurt’s wide eyes and shaking hand.

“Kurt?” Burt drops a hand to Kurt’s shoulder. “You okay?”

“I knew it was familiar,” Kurt murmurs, words tripping together in his haste, “I knew it wasn’t just because of Blaine’s calls. I’d seen it, somewhere. I knew –”

“Kurt slow down,” Burt briefly tights his grip on Kurt’s shoulder, only relaxing when Kurt – finally – looks up and meets his gaze. “What’s goin’ on?”

In answer, Kurt hands over his phone.

It takes a moment for Burt to recognize what he’s seeing. For him to connect Kurt’s reaction with the display:

Text message from Blaine:

[photo] And it’s just muggy here – can you send some of the rain?

Burt recognizes the parking lot in front of his shop, sees his tow truck off to the side. It takes a moment, but then he sees it –

At the edge of the frame, parked near the end of the lot and close to road, a familiar green pickup –

“…I thought I saw his – um Steve’s – truck at the mall a couple of weeks ago.”

“Blaine said he saw a truck at the gas station, Dad. He sounded worried…”

“I keep seeing the cars, Mr. Hummel.”

“…There was a dark haired waiter, and then – then I saw a truck and I messed up.”

“There were some…cars, and I thought I heard Steve and Mitch at the mall…and I got a little freaked out.” –
Burt hands the phone to Carole before he breaks it, clenches his hands until his blunt nails dig into his palms.

“Officer Randall!” The officer startles at Burt’s call and he knows the man doesn’t deserve his anger, but Burt can’t bring himself to care.

“Yes?” He stops in front of Burt, and were the circumstances different Burt would have laughed at causing an officer to look tense.

“Kurt found…” Burt sighs, starts again. “Blaine sent Kurt a text on Friday. That truck,” Burt spits the word because it had been near his garage, “looks like it was sittin’ in my parking lot.”

Carole wordlessly passes the phone.

“Okay,” Officer Randall says after a moment, looking up from the picture. “I’m going to need to take this for evidence, have the picture enhanced –”

“Take Blaine’s phone,” Kurt interrupts, voice clipped but quiet, “it’ll have the original.”

“It’s broken,” Carole counters, looking apologetic, “won’t even turn on. I think it got damaged when Blaine…It hasn’t worked since Friday.”

“We’ll get the techs to look it over,” Officer Randall states, “they should be able to get what we need off it.”

“They’re good,” Officer Daniels adds with a small smile.

“Of course.” Carole’s already digging through her purse, producing the cracked phone moments later and handing it to Officer Daniels, who promptly drops it into a clear evidence bag.

“You should keep your message too,” Officer Randall comments to Kurt as his partner writes on the bag. “Just in case we need it.”

“I already locked the message,” Kurt answers, “and I sent a copy to my email, too.”

“Looks like you have us covered then.” Kurt doesn’t respond to the comment or accompanying smile, continuing to stare at his phone rather than the officer.

“You’ll keep us updated,” Burt states, “let us know if there’s anything else you need?”

“I’m sure we’ll be seeing you again soon,” Officer Randall confirms with a nod. “Seems like we’re done for now, though. If there’s nothing else, we’ll head back to the station.”

A round of handshakes and then Burt’s left with his family and strained silence. Carole musters a wan smile when he looks to her, but Kurt’s still intent on his phone, his hands the only movement.

The moment holds; anger keeps Burt silent. He wants to rage, to shout at the audacity of someone to violate the safety of his home. He wants to drive until he finds the green truck, wants to use his knowledge of engines to break it until it’s nothing more than scrap metal.

But he can’t.

So he slowly unclenches his fists, shaking them to restore the circulation.

“Kurt?” Carole’s question gives him pause and he watches as Kurt slowly, reluctantly, looks up from his phone. “Why don’t we go sit in the waiting room; Christine might still be a while, and I’m
sure she’ll get us when we can go back in.”

Burt feels some of the tension ease when Kurt nods, and he flashes his wife a half-smile as they make their way down the hall. The waiting room remains just as bland as before, but he sinks into the chair with a sigh.

“Blaine doin’ alright?” By the time Christine appears Burt’s able to ask the question without the undercurrent of anger, although a glance shows Kurt staring at the floor.

“He’s drowsy; I gave him something to help him calm down.”

Burt nods, moving to stand before offering Carole a hand. “I’ll have to ask him about his ‘super-secret wedding plans’ then,” Burt comments with a smile. “Blaine’s always the most honest – and hilarious – when he’s tired.”

“I can’t even criticize you,” Christine adds, “anything ‘super-secret’ has me intrigued.”

“Blaine’s quite the expert planner,” Carole agrees. “You should ask Kurt about the proposal.”

Burt turns when Kurt doesn’t comment, stops when he sees Kurt still sitting, apparently in no rush to get back to Blaine’s room.

“Kurt?”

Finally, he looks up from the floor. “Sorry,” he shrugs, “I just need a minute – might grab some coffee. I’ll meet you there.”

“You better,” Christine replies, “now I want to know about this proposal.”

“I’ll tell you all about it,” Kurt affirms, “complete with pictures.” The smile seems brittle to Burt, but he accepts it with a nod regardless.

Kurt asked for a minute – Burt’s not about to deny him.

_*_*_*_*_*_*

Kurt startles when the doors to the ICU close with a clack! – the sound seemingly louder on this side. Still, he can’t bring himself to move; not yet.

(Sixteen minutes).

He needs to see Blaine – needs to count his breaths and see him calm after the harsh breaths and frightened look from before – but he refuses to go into Blaine’s room when he can’t give his fiancé all of his attention.

And all he can think of right now is that truck, so he stays.

He closes his eyes, tries to remember his response to every tense phone call and whispered nightmare.

Had he questioned what Blaine saw?

Logically, Kurt knows Blaine can’t have been followed at school. Or in Los Angeles. And his dad and Carole would have seen a truck hanging around the house.

But the other times – how many were there? – had Kurt casually dismissed Blaine’s fear? Blaine
had already worried he was going crazy, and for all of Kurt’s assurances he hadn’t voiced the possibility of Blaine having seen the same truck (or car), either.

It seemed impossible.

And while Kurt hadn’t been the one to point out the parallels of Blaine’s story, he still remembers Blaine’s tense features, his fear as obvious of a reminder as the nasal cannula and beeping monitor –

“Do you think – what if I got it wrong?”

He hadn’t assured Blaine he was right. Blaine had doubted himself, and Kurt had offered soft words rather than support for Blaine’s memory.

And now he has proof – in a text about the weather of all things – but still, actual proof that the horror from Blaine’s past had been at his dad’s garage.

Where else had past demons haunted his fiancé?

Kurt unlocks his phone, pointedly scrolls through screens-worth of texts from Blaine, searching.

Because if there’s one piece of evidence, maybe, maybe there’s two.

He missed the signs before – he refuses to allow it to happen again. He already has ‘Deep Jewel Green’ ingrained in his mind (and any items even close to the color have been added to is “Not to Wear” list) but as he reads through old complaints and flirtations his initial determination wars with anger.

Nothing stands out.

Nothing to help eviscerate his target, anyway.

Kurt tightens his hold on his phone and keeps scrolling.

“Kurt!” The near-shout has him jerking forward in his chair, his legs twitching with the effort of keeping him seated.

Sam and Tina take the chairs previously occupied by his parents, and Kurt futilely wishes for the former occupants, rather than the current.

A blink shows his wish unanswered.

Of course.

“Hi.” Kurt stifles a sigh and glances back to his phone.

(Eighteen minutes).

“That’s it?” Tina questions, voice almost shrill despite its lack of volume. “We see you for the first time in months in the hospital because Blaine was attacked by someone and you just say ‘hi’?”

“Tina –”

“No,” she continues, ignoring Sam’s interruption. “We deserve more than a barely there greeting from you, Kurt. Mr. Schue only told us that Blaine’s recovering; we don’t even know how hurt he is, since apparently only family is allowed to see him! And we’re his family too, Kurt. Glee Club is
part of his family; we’re the ones who have seen him – spent every day with him – while you’ve been in New York!”

Kurt lets out a breath and sets his phone in his lap, starts spinning his ring: ‘One. Two. Three…’

“Dude,” Sam leans over with a smile. “We just want to see him, you know? I’m sure he wouldn’t mind seeing his friends.” A pause, and his voice loses a touch of its warmth. “And Tina’s right too – I mean, Glee Club’s family.”

“Just tell the nurse we’re with you so we can see him.”

(Twenty-one minutes).

“No,” Kurt holds up a hand to stall Tina’s response. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but this is the waiting room for the ICU. It doesn’t actually work that way. I can’t just –”

“Sure you can,” Sam interrupts, “just say we’re some out of town cousins.”

“I can’t just get you approval,” Kurt finishes. “It’s not like getting back stage passes.”

“You could add us to the list, or paper – whatever it is.” Tina comments in a voice that reminds Kurt of Mr. Schue’s almost-wedding. “You just won’t.”

“No,” Kurt agrees, “I won’t.”

“What –”

“How dare you,” Tina hisses, leaning forward so her knees touch Kurt’s, “We have just as much of a right to see Blaine as you –”

“You don’t, actually.” Kurt holds out his hand so his ring reflects the awful florescent lighting. “I’m Blaine’s fiancé! Hummel is the name of his emergency contact,” he continues, letting his former classmates infer what they will. “We’re planning our future together – we’re just going through the ‘for worse’ part a little early! He’s my soulmate, Tina, the love of my life. So I think I have a bit more of a right to be here than you do!”

“You’ve been in another state!” Tina counters, “We’re the ones who’ve seen him – helped him – every day –”

Kurt laughs.

“You’ve helped him?” Kurt hears the slight hysteria in his question, but he continues anyway. “You think – You have no idea, neither of you. You think you’ve been there for him? I’m the one he calls when he can’t breathe. When he wakes from a nightmare and our playlist isn’t enough. Did you know that after his misstep at that performance for the hospital volunteers he ran through every step of the routine for hours? He had a panic attack after Nationals and not a single one of you noticed!”

Tina’s leaned back, mouth open in shock, seemingly lost for words. Beside her, Sam’s gone tense.

He feels a hint of sympathy for them; they really hadn’t known.

“Kurt –”

He shakes his head and stands, shoving his phone in his pocket. “No. I get that you want to see him.” He takes a step away before looking back. “Tina, I guarantee you that what happened wasn’t
your fault. It wasn’t. And Sam? You’ve been a good friend. But you both want to see him for yourselves. You want to see him so you can feel better, and that’s not what’s important right now. Blaine’s in the ICU and still regularly taking narcotics. Do you really think for one second that I care at all about what you want right now? The nurses and the doctors and the law are all saying that right now Blaine’s company should be limited to family so he can have the best possible recovery. I won’t do anything to jeopardize that – especially something so petty as to soothe your egos or make you feel better. Just…go home, or back to McKinley. Dad and Carole are keeping Mr. Schue updated; I’m sure he’ll tell you as soon as Blaine’s up for seeing friends.”

He picks up the phone by the locked doors and he’s barely given his name before they click open. He doesn’t look back as he crosses the short distance and steps through, focuses on matching his breathing with his steps.

He was right through: the doors shutting isn’t nearly as unsettling from this side.

_ _ _ _

Carole ducks her head to hide her smile as Blaine whispers about reenacting Teenage Dream – at least that’s what she gathers amid the slurred and fragmented sentences.

“Your husband was right,” Christine comments from beside her. “He certainly has no secrets right now.”

Blaine’s imparting the importance of roses to Burt.

“Normally I’d feel guilty,” Carole reaches out to smooth the blanket covering Blaine’s legs, “but at least this way I won’t be so surprised I drop the camera.”

“You’ll have to send me a copy,” Christine comments as she steps back to the computer. “But now that I know the ‘super-secret plan’ I should really get back to doing what earns me my paycheck.”

A few gentle questions – which Blaine answer through barely-there nods and sparse words – and then she’s gone. Carole stares at the door for a moment, the contrast from the last time the door closed reminding her how unsettling hospitals can be.

“– sure Kurt’ll be back soon, kid.” She startles out of her thoughts at Burt’s comment, catches his eye over Blaine’s bed.

Blaine’s still valiantly fighting to stay awake, although his increasingly slow blinks and pauses show a losing battle.

“Why don’t you get some sleep, Blaine,” she adds while pulling the blanket up to cover his sling-covered arm. “Kurt will be here when you wake up, I’m sure.”

For a moment, Carole’s sure Blaine’s going to refuse, but then his eyes close, and she releases a sigh before sitting back in her chair.

“He wanted to show me Kurt’s ring,” Burt murmurs in a tone Carole doesn’t recognize, “that’s why he asked about Kurt. Blaine seemed proud he’d picked it out himself.”

“It suits him,” Carole looks to Burt. “It’s a lovely ring, I mean.”

“You know when Blaine first talked to me about proposing I told him he shouldn’t? Not yet, anyway.” Burt hurries to continue, “I said somethin’ about how if he trusted that he and Kurt were supposed to be together it wouldn’t matter if he waited a while.” A sigh and Burt adjusts his hat,
“They’re still just kids.”

“They are,” Carole agrees, “and I can’t say I would have told him anything different.”

“I was wrong,” Burt mutters, “which is probably why I told Kurt marriage was the best thing, just a few days later. But,” Burt looks up with a slight shake of his head, “I don’t think I ever told him I changed my mind.”

“Burt –”

“You’ve seen him light up when we tease him about his fiancé, Carole. He stares at that ring like it’s some kind of lifeline because ‘Kurt gave it to him.’ Can you imagine him goin’ through all this without something tangible?”

Carole looks to her own wedding ring, remembers the comfort she feels at the reminder of not being alone. “Don’t question yourself, Burt Hummel. Besides,” she nods toward Blaine, “he went and proposed anyway.”

Burt huffs an agreement and Carole lets the matter drop, fairly certain it’s not a discussion from months ago that’s unsettling him.

The door opens then, and Kurt enters with focused steps.

“No coffee?” Carole questions, taking note of his clenched hands.

“Oh – no,” Kurt crosses to sit on the edge of Blaine’s bed, reaches for Blaine’s free hand.

Burt shrugs at Carole’s questioning look. “Kurt, you okay?”

A choked-off breath of frantic laughter has Carole leaning forward in slight alarm. “I ran into Sam and Tina in the lobby,” Kurt flatly murmurs, not looking away from Blaine. “They wanted me to sneak them in since apparently they have just as much of a right to be here as I do, since they’ve been in Ohio for past year.”

“I’m sure they’re just worried, Kurt. They didn’t mean –”

“I told them no,” Kurt interrupts. “I don’t…I told them I’m sure Mr. Schue will let them know when they’re allowed to see Blaine.”

Carole knows the stark words only tell half (or less) of the story, and after a glance to Burt she’s standing, gathering her purse from the table. “Well, since you were busy, why don’t I go get you that coffee.”

She hears Burt softly questioning Kurt as she exits the room, and she takes a moment to gather her thoughts before heading for the waiting room.

Sam and Tina sit in the chairs she and Burt had claimed not that long ago. She shakes her head as she takes in their ducked hands and clasped hands; when angered, Kurt’s vast vocabulary becomes a veritable arsenal of weapons he wields with expert precision.

“I thought you two went home,” Carole comments as she takes the seat beside them, “but I guess I should have known better.”

“He’s our best friend,” Tina challenges, although the defeated tone takes any argument from her words. “We just really want to see him, Mrs. Hudson-Hummel.”
“I know you do,” Carole reaches and pulls Tina in for a loose hug. “I know you want to see him. But right now,” Carole releases her and leans back, “Right now the best thing you can do is wish Blaine well and wait for him to recover enough for company.”

“It’s not right,” Sam comments as Tina nods in agreement. “Can’t you let us see him for just a few minutes?”

“Sam –”

“Why aren’t you helping us?” He questions, “It’s not like we’re gonna do anything.”

“I can’t,” Carole sighs. “It doesn’t –”

“– work that way?” Tina finishes with a sickly sweet smile. “Kurt told us. But even if…even if we didn’t know everything we still deserve to see Blaine. He’s our family too.”

Carole wishes she’d gotten the coffee first.

“Look,” Carole pauses, takes a moment to ensure she has both Tina and Sam’s attention. “I don’t know what exactly Kurt said – I’m not sure I want to. But I do know he’s dealing with the worst few days of his life so chances are he didn’t mean to say things the way he did. And I know you two care for Blaine; you’re both wonderful, loyal friends. But part of being a good friend – part of growing up – is realizing that sometimes awful things happen and you can’t help the way you want. I know you hate this, I do too, but right now the best thing you can do for Blaine is give him time to recover.” Carole sighs. “Sometimes stepping back – putting yourself second as much at it hurts– is the right thing to do.”

“This sucks,” Sam mutters, “All of it.”

“I agree. It sucks but it’s what we have.” Carole stands, “Now there’s no reason for you to loiter in an uncomfortable hospital lobby, so why don’t you two head home; I promise we’ll keep Mr. Schue updated.”

Sam stands with a sigh, and Tina joins a moment later, frowning but resigned to not getting her way. “We’ll be back later, I guess.”

Carole watches them head for the elevator, hating that she did nothing to help their slumped shoulders and wary steps. Once they’re out of her sigh she turns, heading in the opposite direction for the alcove holding the coffee carafe.

She leans against the wall once there, takes a moment to just breathe. She hates that before Kurt’s abrupt return to Blaine’s room she’d forgotten about Blaine’s friends. She’d been so focused on the pain in her family, on the shadows haunting room 309 that she hadn’t spared a thought about the group of teenagers who share Blaine’s weekdays.

Her family isn’t the only one struggling through a tough year.

Still a small, selfish part of her can’t help but resent that it’s her family – again – at the center of the nightmare.

Carole shakes her head, dispelling her melancholy thoughts and steps away from the wall. She fills three paper cups with steaming coffee before dumping a handful of sugar packets and individual creamers into her purse.

Gathering the cups she turns back, steadily making her way across the waiting room.
“Did you have t’brew it yourself?”

Burt’s question startles her enough that the coffee sloshes against the side of the cups. “You should know better than to sneak up on someone carrying hot coffee.”

“I thought you saw me,” he replies as he takes one of the cups from her, “I wasn’t hiding.”

“But you were quiet,” she counters, taking a sip from the cup in her right hand. “You’re lucky I didn’t spill this all over your shirt. Kurt would have…” She lets the sentence trail off because beside her, Burt’s gone tense. “Burt?”

She follows his gaze to across the room to where a couple has just exited the elevator.

Burt’s free hand reaches out, takes hold of her left arm in a tight grip.

Carole almost drops the coffee cup. “What –”

“Carole,” Burt comments from beside her, voice flat, “Meet Mr. and Mrs. Anderson.”
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Thank you to all of you lovely readers for taking the time to review! They never fail to make my day. Also, and I realize I should have mentioned this sooner, but all locations and doctors actually do exist in Lima. However, my knowledge of them is limited to what I found via Google and a few friends who live in the area, so the people in no way are representative of their namesakes ;) As for this chapter, thanks to slayerkitty for talking me through bits and pieces and to teachgleek for her beta!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 32

Beside him, Burt hears Carole gasp, feels her clench his hand in a grip that would have him wincing in any other situation. But he can’t bring himself to move, not to ease the tension in his hands or to release the anger that’s been building since he first arrived at the hospital three days ago.

“– see both of them.”

Carole’s comment forces him to act, though, and he looks away from the Andersons to face his wife, carefully setting his cup on a nearby table. “What?”

“I didn’t –” Carole stops, sighs before starting again. “When she called…she only said she would be here.”

“Can’t say I’m surprised,” Burt adds, releasing a hint of his frustration. “From what Blaine’s said it seems like they’re best at talkin’ about what’s not important.”

“How lovely,” Carole mutters, setting her cup beside Burt’s. “But they’re here now, so what are we going to say? Blaine –”

“Blaine isn’t dealin’ with any of this.”

“Burt –” Carole’s sentence dies as raised voices distract her. A glance shows the Andersons at the nurse’s desk, and Burt clenches his free hand as Mr. Anderson leans further over the counter, as his voice rises above the murmurs of the others in the waiting room. That’s when Mrs. Anderson turns away, eyes circling the room.

Burt stifles a sigh when she meets his gaze.

Moments later Mrs. Anderson has crossed the waiting room, her husband a step behind. “Mr. Hummel,” she comments, relief coloring her tone, “I’m glad I found you. And you must be Mrs. Hummel,” beside him, Carole straightens. “We spoke on the phone,” Mrs. Anderson smiles and offers her right hand. “It’s a pleasure.”

“It’s nice to put a face with the name,” Carole replies, tone clipped. Burt hopes the Andersons take no notice.
“Likewise. And thank you so much for looking after Blaine.”

“He’s a good kid,” Burt interjects, “it’s no trouble.”

“How is he,” Mrs. Anderson questions. “I’m afraid the nurse wouldn’t give us any information.”

Burt thinks of the signed paper resting in his pocket, of Blaine’s reluctant request to not see his parents. “He’s recoverin’ – was asleep when I stepped out.”

“He slept a lot before.” Mrs. Anderson adds, “I guess he needed it.”

“Or the nurses kept him on too many damn pain killers,” Mr. Anderson counters with a hint of derision, “that many meds would keep anyone out.”

“He was injured,” Burt snaps. “I’m sure he needed them.”

“Maybe he did,” insincerity negates the words, however, and Burt tightens his free hand into a fist.

“We’d like to see him, even if he is sleeping,” Mrs. Anderson adds, seemingly ignoring her husband’s comment. “What room is he in? That nurse wouldn’t tell us, for some reason or another.”

Burt glances to Carole. He’s been dreading that question since he first spotted the Andersons across the lobby.

“The nurse couldn’t tell you,” Burt replies, “and I won’t.”

“Excuse me?” Incredulity wars with anger and Mr. Anderson takes a step forward. “You won’t?”

“No,” Burt confirms, “I won’t tell you what room Blaine’s in.”

“He’s our son!” Mr. Anderson counters, voice raising with each word. “You have no right –”

“I have every right,” Burt interrupts, pulling out the piece of paper that’s claimed residency in his pocket. “Blaine named me his medical power of attorney, and he’s eighteen. I think you’ll find you have no rights, here.”

“We have every right! We’re his parents –”

“That,” Burt comments with a step forward, “means nothing.”

From beside him, he hears Carole muttering about the difference between being a parent and being a genetic contribution. The Andersons don’t appear to have heard, however, and for a moment Burt wishes they had if only for the chance to give in to the itch and berate them for their lack of paternal instinct.

“Look,” Mrs. Anderson starts, pulling Burt’s focus from his thoughts “we’re thankful that you’ve been looking after Blaine, and I’m glad Blaine has such a great friend –”

“Fiancé,” Carole corrects. “Kurt is Blaine’s fiancé.”

“He’s eighteen.” Mr. Anderson counters, “He doesn’t know what he wants!”

“You don’t know him at all,” Burt answers, “if you believe that.”

“He’s a teenager! No teenager has their life planned out! Fiancé,” Mr. Anderson continues,
mumbling with a shake of his head, “like that means something.”

“It means *everything* to Blaine!” Burt snaps, “But that’s not the issue, is it. You just can’t reconcile the fact that Blaine’s gay. You don’t approve of it, won’t even try because what, it’s not something you like? It’s part of who he is. You’re the parent; you’re supposed to support him!” Burt takes a step forward, feels a small thrill when Mr. Anderson leans back in response.

“We *always* provided for him!” Mr. Anderson’s indignant shout has Burt taking another step forward, closing the space between them to mere feet rather than a yard, even while his shoulders tighten with anger.

“You think giving Blaine access to money and an empty house makes you a decent parent?” Burt turns to briefly glance to Carole before turning back and pointing an accusing hand to Mr. Anderson. “Where was your emotional support? He’s already gone through Hell for just being himself. He’s layin’ in a hospital bed – for the second time – because some bigot took offense! I don’t understand how you can side with them, how you could show Blaine anything less than pride and care.”

“We didn’t side with anyone,” Mr. Anderson counters, “Blaine’s made his own life choices. Has since he asked that friend to accompany him to that dance years ago.” The last sentence, muttered but still audible has Burt curling his hands into fists before loosening them, exhaling to prevent the shout he wants to release.

“The only thing Blaine chose was to be himself,” Burt quietly counters, “and when he and Kurt get married I’ll be honored to count him as an official member of my family.”

“I –”

“You should feel privileged to know Blaine,” Burt interrupts, not caring to hear more of Mr. Anderson’s justifications. “I can’t understand how him being gay takes that away. But right now I don’t care. That kid has enough to deal with without you makin’ him feel worse!”

“And I don’t care what that paper says. You don’t get to talk to me like you know more about my son than I do! I’m his father!”

“Really,” Burt questions, voice cold. “You think you’ve been acting like a father? What’s Blaine’s favorite color, or favorite song? When’s the last time you actually *listened* to what he had to say? And as his *father,*” Burt hisses the word, “where were you when he was havin’ panic attacks and nightmares? He’s endured more pain than anyone his age should; there’s no chance in Hell I’m letting you anywhere near him!”

“It’s not up to you!” Mr. Anderson shouts, “You can’t keep us from seeing our son!”

“The police have been talking to Blaine,” Carole calmly states from beside Burt, “asking questions about what happened Friday night. I wonder what they’d say if we told them precisely why Blaine’s been staying with us.”

“That has nothing –” Mr. Anderson stops midsentence, his lowered voice a contrast from his tone moments earlier. “It doesn’t matter,” he continues, though Burt feels a grim satisfaction when the man takes a step back. “It was months ago! And even with *that,*” Mr. Anderson nods toward the paper still held in Burt’s hand, “I’m sure Blaine wouldn’t say ‘no’ to seeing his parents!”

“He would actually,” Burt snaps, “so I’ll give you updates, if you ask. But you’re not setting a foot in his room!”
“You –”

“You –” Burt turns, sees a nurse standing a few feet away. “I’m going to have to ask you to keep your voices down. I’m afraid you’re disturbing the other families.”

“I’m sorry,” Burt narrows his eyes at Mr. Anderson’s surprisingly polite tone. “I just want to see my son; he was admitted a few days ago. If you can give me the room number my wife and I will get out of your hair.”

“They’re not approved for visitation,” Burt comments before the nurse can reply, “and Blaine’s eighteen.”

“I don’t give a –”

“Sir,” the nurse interrupts Mr. Anderson, “only family is allowed to see patients in the ICU. And,” she continues when Mr. Anderson looks about to speak, “adult patients have the right see – or not see – whomever they wish. Now, you can accept these terms or I can call security.”

Mr. Anderson glares for a moment and then turns, heading for the elevators with forceful steps.

“We deserve the chance to see him,” Mrs. Anderson comments as she steps away. “You shouldn’t keep us from seeing our own son.” She meets Burt’s gaze with a glare before turning, following her husband’s steps to the elevator.

“Do you think they’ll return?” Burt startles at the nurse’s question.

“I’m not sure,” Burt answers with a glance to the nurse’s I.D. “They might, Becca.”

“I’ll make a note,” Becca offers a quick nod and turns, heading for her desk.

Burt stares after her for a moment, lost for words.

“You’re a good man, Burt Hummel,” Carole comments, breaking the silence.

“What?”

“You heard me,” Carole answers as she moves to face him. “Don’t pretend you didn’t.”

“Did you notice?” Burt questions instead, ignoring Carole’s comment. “He never contradicted me; just keep sayin’ he had a right to see Blaine.”

“He was…focused,” Carole agrees, “and opinionated.”

“That’s one word for it.”

Carole hums in agreement. “It is.” She moves then, releasing Burt’s hand and reaching to get her paper cup from the table beside him.

She lowers the cup seconds later with a wince.

“Carole?”

“Our coffee’s gone cold.”

Burt can’t help it; he laughs.
“What happened?” Kurt’s turning to face the door as soon as it opens, asking the question before his dad and Carole even make it past the threshold.

“What?”

His father looks confused – distracted? – and Kurt waits for him to cross to sit in the chair closest to where Kurt’s perched on Blaine’s bed before repeating his question. “What happened? You were gone a while…and I thought I heard yelling?”

Kurt spins his ring, resists the urge to demand an answer as his dad looks to Carole rather than providing a response. So Kurt spins his ring – six, seven, eight – until his father finally speaks.

“We ran into some…company in the lobby.” His dad pauses, letting out a breath and leaning closer to Kurt before continuing. “Blaine’s parents are in town.”

Kurt freezes.

“His parents,” he repeats, voice clipped. “Not just his mom.” He must have heard incorrectly, or his dad misspoke.

Because it’s not within the realm of possibility for both of Blaine’s parents to have shown up: He wouldn’t dare, after what happened.

“Kurt…” His father stops, letting the sentence die and Kurt catches the blanket in a fist. He knows that tone from his father, and he’s hated it since he was seven.

“Tell me they’re gone.”

“They left,” his dad confirms, “and they know they can’t get in to see Blaine. But that doesn’t mean they won’t be tryin’ again later."

“They can try,” Kurt hisses, “but that’s all they can do.” As soon as he says the words Kurt winces though, fear rising in a rush that leaves his words hurried. “Right? They’ll just try? There’s no way -”

“They won’t be allowed in,” his father affirms. “They can’t even get on the floor.”

“You’re sure.” Kurt hates how the statement sounds as a question.

It’s Carole who answers, her voice carrying across the small space despite its low volume. “They can’t get in, Kurt.”

Kurt lets out a breath, turning back to face Blaine even as he adjusts the blanket covering his fiance’s legs and chest. The color throws Blaine’s bruises into stark relief, with the black stitches seeming even more startling, but Kurt feels a thread of comfort regardless; Blaine’s resting comfortably.

“I –”

The opening door stops Kurt midsentence, admitting Dr. Olt and two other doctors Kurt recognizes but can’t name.

“Good afternoon!” The greeting seems abnormally loud after Carole’s comment moments before, but Kurt manages a nod in response. “I hope I’m not interrupting,” she continues, “but I just got
Blaine’s test results, and I thought you’d like an update.”

“Oh, is…” Kurt pauses, starts again. “Is everything okay?”

“He’s recovering.” Dr. Olt steps closer to the bed – and to Kurt – and offers a smile. Kurt forces himself to stay still and listen, even as reaches for Blaine’s lax hand. “He’ll need to stay here for at least another week, but his kidney function is improving, and he doesn’t have any signs of infection, which is good. We just have to keep an eye on his incisions and lung for a while longer. He should be able to get off the all liquid diet within the next day or two, as well.”

“He’s doing well then,” Carole states, her voice a sharp contrast to Dr. Olt’s measured tone.

“He is,” Dr. Olt confirms, “although he still has a long recovery ahead of him.”

“His memory?” Kurt speaks the question without thought, tightening his grip on Blaine’s hand.

“Partly,” Dr. Olt confirms. “He may not ever remember everything from that night - that’s to be expected. He’ll have some cognitive therapy to make sure his concussion has no lingering effects, but that will be his shortest therapy; only a couple of weeks, I’d guess. Once he’s able to eat and a bit more mobile we’ll move him to a step-down unit, and once there he’ll start physical therapy. Ortho will give you more details, but between the breaks and strains he’s due for at least a couple of months of work.”

Kurt drops Blaine’s hand, counts the spins of his engagement ring instead. One. Two. Three. Four –

“He –” Kurt swallows and starts again. “Graduation is in June; will he...He’s supposed to walk and get his diploma.”

Seven. Eight.

Dr. Olt steps forward, and Kurt forces himself to look up and meet her gaze. “That’s a question for Ortho,” she starts, “but that’s far enough out that he might be able to…he might need a little help, though.”

Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen.

“He’ll get all the help he needs.” Kurt feels a swell of gratitude at his father’s comment, but can’t bring himself to look from Blaine’s doctor; she had paused when answering Kurt’s question, had kept her voice soft, flat. Kurt wants to trust the doctor, wants to believe Blaine will be able to walk across the stage and get his picture taken, but Kurt also remembers futile wishes and platitudes from the well-intentioned.

Steps away from him, Dr. Olt remains silent.

“Well,” a glance shows Carole stepping forward, coming to a stop at the foot on Blaine’s bed. “Blaine’s always been studious; he’ll do any therapy you recommend.”

“As long as he doesn’t try too much,” the low voice startles Kurt, the timbre not what he expected from the short, still-nameless doctor. “If a patient tries too much too soon it can lead to damage, undo healing rather than promote it.”

Kurt looks to Blaine, remembers Blaine’s relentless dance rehearsals, and hours spent in front of the piano. “We won’t let him work too hard,” Kurt affirms. “He usually listens to me anyway.” His dad and Carole try to stifle a laugh before Kurt’s finished the sentence, and he casts a half-hearted
glare in their direction. “What?”

“Kurt,” his dad pauses, laughter breaking his sentence to pieces. “I’m pretty sure you could ask Blaine for the moon and he’d try to get it for you.”

Kurt hopes his ducked head hides his blush.

“It’s good Blaine has such a strong support system,” Dr. Olt comments. “People who have suffered trauma like Blaine’s have extensive recoveries and they do better when they’re not alone, but it can be hard on their loved ones, too.” Twenty-four. Twenty-five. “Therapy can be tough, and Blaine will get frustrated at some point, either due to his own limitations or the pace of his recovery.”

“We’ll be there for him.” Kurt promises, silently adding to do better than the Andersons had years ago.

“I’m glad to hear it,” Dr. Olt replies, “but don’t forget to be there for each other as well. Blaine may be the one with the physical work, but it won’t be easy for you either.”

Kurt resists the urge to glare at the doctor: Nothing has been easy since he answered his phone three days ago, and after a glance to the multitude of bruises and stitches scattered across Blaine’s body Kurt can’t bring himself to believe that anything he has to deal with will be comparable to Blaine’s struggles.

Thirty-seven. Thirty-eight.

“– said he’ll probably be startin’ therapy soon?”

Kurt pulls himself from his thoughts at his father’s question, chances a glance to the doctors.

“Hopefully by the end of the week,” Dr. Olt answers, “for some of it, at least.”

Kurt looks back to Blaine before sighing, swallows past the lump in his throat as he faces Dr. Olt. “Will…” Kurt sighs, starts again. “You said the therapy will be difficult. Will…Is it going to hurt him?”

Dr. Olt looks to the doctor to her left, and Kurt hates that she chose to use his question as a teachable moment.

“Physical therapy isn’t meant to cause pain,” the doctor begins, casting a quick glance to Dr. Olt. “But, working weakened or damaged muscles can cause some discomfort. And, given Mr. Anderson – Blaine’s injuries, he’ll have several different areas to work on.”

“So he will be in more pain,” Kurt confirms, not bother to hide the anger in his voice.

“It won’t be like now,” Dr. Olt counters. “His Ortho will be able to give you more details, but it will be soreness, Kurt. There might be some pain at the beginning, but his therapists won’t push him too hard. It’s necessary…especially for someone as active as you’ve described Blaine.”

Kurt thinks back to competitions and surprise performances in the McKinley courtyard, remembers Blaine jumping on furniture and dancing down hallways, feels remembered awe as Blaine managed a particularly difficult set of measures on the piano.

Fifty-two. Fifty-three. Fifty-four.

He hears his father talking, getting more detailed information from Dr. Olt. Kurt can’t focus on the
details though, wonders instead how he’ll ever be able to help Blaine with his therapy. He knows Blaine will need the exercises, understands that for Blaine to be the energetic, flexible (and Kurt hopes the others in the room are too distracted to notice his brief, ill-timed blush), whirlwind boy Kurt fell in love with he’ll have to work hard. But every instinct he has is already on edge when Blaine so much as winces while awake.

He doesn’t want to picture Blaine attempting to hide his pain – because there’s no doubt Blaine would – until he couldn’t.

He doesn’t care that it’s something necessary for Blaine’s recovery, doesn’t care that it will be different from the pain that currently steals Blaine’s breath and leaves him pale. In less than a week the doctors will want Kurt to support his fiancé, to whisper encouragements and squeeze his hand – and ignore everything else.

Sixty-six. Sixty-seven.

Kurt’s never been one who deals well when a loved one is in pain.

And Blaine – Blaine makes Kurt feel things stronger than he thought possible.

Seventy-one –

Kurt startles when a hand halts his spinning, jerking in the chair even as he looks up and sees Dr. Olt offering a smile.

“Kurt. How are you feeling today?”

“I’m fine.” The response is automatic, the two words as much as part of his day as brushing back Blaine’s hair and ensuring the blankets don’t get tangled among the countless wires trailing from Blaine’s bed.

“Christine mentioned you’ve been having a bit of a hard time sleeping,” the doctor continues in a quiet voice and Kurt silently curses Blaine’s well-meaning nurse. A glance shows his parents talking to each other, and Kurt hopes they missed Dr. Olt’s comment. “I’m not surprised, given the weekend you’ve had. Anyway, I just was reminding your parents that we have an excellent group of therapists, here.” She pauses, and Kurt feels his mouth tighten in confusion before she continues. “Blaine will get all the help he needs, but you’ve all suffered a trauma.” For a second, Kurt wants to wrench back his hand, shout that Blaine’s the one who was left bleeding in a dark parking lot. “– was seeing a therapist before, if I remember correctly? I’d be more than happy to approve her visitation, if Blaine – or any of you – would prefer to speak with someone more familiar.”

“I’m fine.”

Dr. Olt stays silent, continues to simply look at him and Kurt ducks his head to avoid meeting her gaze.

And then Kurt remembers assuring Blaine that seeing Dr. Schamp wasn’t a sign of weakness. That getting help through therapy showed strength, and a desire to get better.

“I –” Kurt stops, offers a weak smile. “Sorry. I think I’d prefer to speak with Dr. Schamp, though, assuming she agrees.” Blaine had liked her, after all, and Kurt can’t imagine speaking with a stranger – someone who doesn’t know him or Blaine at all – about everything that’s happened.

Dr. Olt briefly tightens her hold and nods before stepping back, and Kurt turns back to Blaine while she speaks with his parents.
Blaine continues to sleep, remains too-still minus the slight rise and fall of his chest while he breathes. Kurt fits the tube for the nasal cannula back behind Blaine’s ear and runs a hand through Blaine’s curls.

He pulls it back when he can’t stop his hand from shaking.

Blaine’s bruises and stitches seem more prominent, the sling and IV and bandages stark reminders he can’t look past since Blaine’s not awake to distract him. Each wound requires recovery, and Kurt absentely wonders where the physical therapist will choose to start –

The arm that wrenched out of socket?

The bruised muscles around the kidney?

The twisted knee and sprained ankle?

The door shutting pulls Kurt from his thoughts, and he looks away from Blaine, notes the absence of Dr. Olt and her two students.

Carole’s standing though, adjusting her purse on her shoulder. “I was thinking I’d go for a walk, Kurt, if you’d like to join me. Your dad’s going to stay here, so Blaine won’t be alone.”

Kurt’s nodding even as he stands; he needs to focus, needs to be able to look at Blaine – to touch him – and see the Blaine he fell in love with.

He leans down to whisper his assurance of his quick return in Blaine’s ear, and drops a kiss to his cheek before joining Carole by the door.

In the hallway moments later Kurt follows his step-mother, stifling a sigh when it seems the elevator is coming to every floor but theirs.

“I know it’s not your thing,” Carole begins, and Kurt turns away from the still-closed elevator doors, “but I was going to go the Chapel. Eventually, I mean. You don’t,” she pauses, “I don’t expect you join me. Unless you want to, of course. But it is a decent walk to get there.”

Kurt wonders when his presence started to make his step-mother nervous.

The elevator chooses that moment to arrive, and he waits until Carole’s selected the floor before responding.

“I don’t have a problem with you visiting the chapel,” Kurt takes a step closer to Carole. “It’s not really my thing though; you’re right.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t really avoid it,” Kurt finally answers. “I just don’t see the point.”

Kurt sighs. “Even when my mom was alive, we didn’t really go to church. I vaguely remember
attending on holidays, but I was more excited about my Easter suit than whatever was being said.” He offers a rueful smile and continues, “The last time, I remember she let me pick my tie out myself. It was striped, blue and lavender.”

“I’m sure it was lovely.”

“It’s still in a box in my old room, I think. I kept it, after…” Kurt shakes his head slightly, reminds himself he’s supposed to be answering Carole’s question. “The funeral was in the church, but that’s the last time I entered one of my own volition. Mercedes tried, when Dad had his heart attack, and I ended up going to appease her, but I still don’t see the point.”

“Just to appease her?”

“I got to wear a pretty fabulous hat, too. But I didn’t get anything out of going there with her. There wasn’t any special sense of peace, and I didn’t feel differently after. I just –” Kurt stops, lets out a breath as he searches for the right words. “My mom died. And Dad’s amazing, but it was hard, those first few years. And now, with Finn and what’s happened to Blaine…I know people say that ‘everything happens for a reason’ and that there’s some ‘bigger picture’ but I find it hard to believe in a God who took my mom and brother and has let the love of my life get beaten and left to bleed alone in a parking lot twice.”

In front of him, Carole stops and before he can manage to ask why she’s pulled him into a hug, her arms tight across his back. Kurt blinks, takes a moment to rest his head on her shoulder and breathe in the faint hint of her perfume.

It’s a comfort.

By the time she loosens her hold the tension has left Kurt’s shoulders, and he offers a smile in thanks before they continue down the hall.

“I understand why you feel that way.” Kurt feels his eyes widen in surprise. “I’m angry too,” she continues, “and I hate that this has happened to our family. But, as angry and upset as I am, I still find the thought of God comforting.”

Kurt shakes his head, glances to his ring. “How? After everything…how can any God be ‘comforting’ to you?”

“Because – because Finn’s in a place without pain, and his father finally has the peace he couldn’t find while alive.”

“It’s not enough,” Kurt counters, words sharp. “Maybe they are in some halcyon heaven, maybe there’s angels with harps and everything is perfect for them. But we’re still here. And Blaine –” Kurt breathes out, counts his steps until he feels comfortable speaking. “Some homophobic bastard attacked Blaine. Hurt him badly enough that his heart stopped –” Kurt briefly closes his eyes, reminds himself that Blaine’s sleeping just a few floors away. “A monster left Blaine bleeding in a parking lot. We have prisons all across the country filled with criminals, but the three small minded idiots who hurt Blaine the first time were never even arrested. What kind of God allows that to happen? And to Blaine!” Kurt pauses, forces himself to lower his voice when he continues, “I’m glad your faith helps you, Carole. I am. But I can’t share it.”

“That’s your choice,” Carole answers, slowing to stop beside the ‘chapel’ sign on the wall. “I would never pressure you, Kurt. But just remember that I do understand where you’re coming from, so if you ever want to talk…’
“I’ll keep that in mind.” He will, and Kurt pulls Carole into an impromptu hug to show his sincerity before stepping back.

“You’re still welcome to join me, you know.”

Kurt musters a small smile and shakes his head. “I think I’m going to head back to Blaine. I’m glad you can find peace in there, but to me it’s nothing but a room.”

“Fair enough,” Carole nods. “And Kurt? I’m so proud of how you’re handling all this. You’re a good man; never think less of yourself, okay?”

Kurt manages a weak nod in reply before Carole enters the chapel, the door softly shutting behind her. Kurt stares for a moment before turning back the way he came, heading for the elevator.

He needs to see his fiancé.

*_*_*_*_*

The chapel hasn’t changed from Carole’s last visit, although the flowers look slightly less vibrant than they had when she first entered the room with Burt. Still, she’s grateful for air that smells more of flowers than industrial cleaner.

She slowly steps forward, taking note of the elderly man sitting to her right and the woman with a young daughter sitting a few rows ahead of him. On her left, a woman sits near the aisle – Carole stops mid-step.

Ten feet away, Mrs. Anderson sits with perfect posture, the only occupant not bent forward in prayer.

Standing in the aisle, Carole considers her options. Dr. Olt’s talk of therapy hit too close to memories of Finn for Carole to feel comfortable returning to Blaine’s room, and she doesn’t think the hospital’s excuse for a garden would prove helpful, either.

Mrs. Anderson hasn’t moved, and Carole feels a touch of anger replace melancholy as she looks at the woman. For a moment, as she takes in the woman’s well-made clothes and indifferent expression, Carole relates to Kurt’s words from minutes before.

*What kind of God would give Blaine absentee parents?*

Carole releases a breath and takes a step forward, claiming a seat and slipping her purse under her chair. She refuses to let that woman take away her attempt at finding peace. Carole slowly lowers her head, closes her eyes as she thinks of therapists and healing and the boy in the room upstairs.

When she opens her eyes an interminable time later, she’s alone with Mrs. Anderson. Carole hopes her decision to sit behind the woman means she hasn’t been seen. She carefully gathers her bag and stands, heading for the door.

“You must think I’m a terrible mother.”

Carole freezes. “I –”

“I know I’ll never win ‘Mother of the Year’, but I’m not some monster.”

“No –”
“Blaine was a surprise,” the woman continues, interrupting Carole. “We hadn’t planned…I mean, I’m an only child, and when we discussed our plans for family we decided one was enough. And Cooper,” she pauses, and Carole slowly moves back, taking a seat in the row behind Mrs. Anderson even as the woman turns to face her. “Cooper was exhausting,” another pause, this time with a small smile Carole can’t bring herself to return. “It was dance practice and soccer games and gymnastics, and then plays at the local college once he was older.

“It was one thing after another, and Cooper always needed my support. Blaine…Blaine was such an easy baby, in comparison. He was content to bang on the piano or play with his toys in his room. Or to play the piano when the neighbors asked. When Cooper graduated and left home I got my life back; I was able to be me.”

“And Blaine?” Carole makes no attempt to hide her judgment.

“Blaine didn’t need me,” Mrs. Anderson answers, voice soft. “Not – not like Cooper did, anyway. He’s always been independent. I mean, he went to that dance with his friend, after all. Even after we warned him –”

“You warned him?” Carole interrupts, she knows the question is harsh, her voice a touch too loud in the otherwise silent room. She can’t bring herself to care.

“I read the news,” Mrs. Anderson comments. “I know what happens to people who choose that…who live that way. And last time, he had so much to recover from.” She pauses, and Carole forces herself to remain still when the other woman’s voice takes a cutting edge. “I can’t gauge the difference this time, though, since you won’t let us see him.”

“No,” Carole confirms, “we won’t.” Carole pauses, gathering her thoughts. “You know, the first time I met Blaine, I remember thinking that I’d never met such a polite boy. It was obvious even then he thought the world of Kurt, but he made sure to thank Burt and me, too, even brought back the Tupperware from the leftovers we gave him. And it wasn’t an act, some manipulation to endear himself: Blaine simply is good.”

“Blaine’s always been a good boy,” Mrs. Anderson confirms, “even when he was little.”

“And that’s why I can’t understand you,” Carole answers. “Did you actually listen to what you said earlier? None of this is about you. This is about that wonderful boy upstairs and how he’s remained one of the sweetest people I know in spite of you. You continually say that Blaine’s ‘good’ while you simultaneously deny part of what makes Blaine who he is. Your son is gay; that’s part of him, just as much as his amazing singing voice and talent on the piano. But because that didn’t fit with some plan you and your husband had for him you just ignore him? You’re his mother! Mothers are supposed to stand with their children, no matter what. I lost –” Carole stops, takes a breath. “My son died. Did you know that? Half of my world is gone and I can’t get it back. And I’d give anything to see Finn again. To listen to him bang on his drum set and empty my pantry. But that’s not possible. And yet you, you have this brilliant, talented, genuinely good son and instead of cherishing that gift, you leave him vulnerable –”

“Blaine’s always had access to the best –”

“He’s not a plant,” Carole snaps. “You can’t just give him food and money and hope for the best. So he didn’t demand your attention like his brother; that doesn’t mean he didn’t need you. You’re supposed to nurture him, to put him first every day. Sometimes that means working overtime so he can go on the school fieldtrip and sometimes that means staying home so your son feels wanted. Every day, I wake up and for a few seconds – just a few – I forget that Finn won’t be arguing with his alarm, or eating everything in the kitchen. It’s Hell when I remember, but having Blaine in the
house helps. But tell me…When Blaine came to live with us; how did you rationalize that?”

“I’m sorry you lost your son,” Mrs. Anderson answers, “truly. But that doesn’t mean to you get to have mine.” She stands, moving to leave.

“Did you know,” Carole begins, forcibly keeping her words soft, “that Blaine specifically asked not to see you? He felt awful about it, still does, actually. But that’s been his only request since he’s been in here. So you can try to make me feel guilty, but there’s no way in Hell Burt and I will let you anywhere near Blaine.”

The shutting door is Carole’s only answer.

Alone in the chapel Carole lets out a breath, looks to the altar before lowering her head.

She came to the chapel to find peace; she plans to stay until she finds it.

*_*_*_*_*

Burt stands as the door closes behind Carole and Kurt, crosses the small space to claim the chair he’s come to view as Kurt’s. On the bed, Blaine continues to sleep, oblivious to the additional turmoil of the day. Burt sighs, thinks back to hours ago, when he thought the worst part of his day was seeing that dammed truck on Kurt’s phone.

Sometimes, Burt hates the world’s ability to take a stressful day and somehow, infuriatingly, make the day worse.

“Seems like you just can’t catch a break, kid.”

Blaine, of course, doesn’t answer.

The monitors do, their beeps steady and constant; Burt reminds himself that the beeps are a good thing, a sign of health and not an annoyance. Burt wonders how long the medication will keep Blaine asleep, wonders what he’ll say to him once Blaine’s awake.

Burt runs his hands over his face and pinches the bridge of his nose in frustration, hating that the information the officers had shared earlier had left Blaine so panicked he couldn’t calm down on his own. Burt had frozen earlier, tense and anxious while the monitors had blared in response to Blaine’s distress; the harsh breaths had reminded Burt too clearly of finding Blaine on the floor in that hotel room in California, and the same feeling of helplessness had crept in, stealing Burt’s strength. Only Christine’s order had managed to break his stupor, and even then Burt had related to Kurt, had felt – if only for a moment – the need to stay.

Now, alone with Blaine, Burt watches the slight rise and fall of his chest. Blaine’s a strong kid, has already fought harder than men twice his age. But Burt can’t forget the fear Blaine had shown earlier, can’t forget that while Blaine looks peaceful it’s not due to his own volition.

Burt can’t help but wonder if today’s occurrence will repeat itself when Blaine hears that both his parents have arrived.

He doesn’t know how he’ll tell Blaine, knowing there’s a chance he could cause such a painful reaction.

“I gotta say, Blaine, I thought agreein’ to let Kurt go back to McKinley would be the hardest decision I’d have to make when it came to choices with family. I should have known you’d somehow manage to put me in a similar position.”
Burt weighs his options: Blaine deserves to know his parents showed up (late, a voice suspiciously like Kurt’s reminds him, they can’t care too much) even if they can’t see him. And yet Burt also remembers Blaine’s fear, remembers answering a phone call from a panicked Kurt and rushing to his truck before finally finding Blaine, bruised and lost, huddled in the driver’s seat of his car. The father in him wants to avoid the cause of Blaine’s distress, to protect him and simply not tell Blaine and therefore not allow for possibility of Blaine experiencing even more turmoil.

There’s no risk of Blaine’s parents getting onto the floor; between Blaine’s age and Burt having Blaine’s Medical Power of Attorney the Andersons have no legal standing.

Burt couldn’t protect Kurt from that phone call, couldn’t protect Blaine from his nightmares or a monster in a parking lot.

He can protect Blaine from this.

But for the first time in his life, he doesn’t know if he should.

“Y’know a week ago I would have said I had a pretty good handle on you, kid. Maybe I did. But I know more now and I am so proud of the man you’ve become – you’ve been there for Kurt since the day you met him. And you’ve always shown respect to me and Carole. So don’t you be feelin’ guilty for standing up for yourself, for once.” Burt pauses, looks to the monitors before continuing. “You didn’t win the lottery in the parent department, I’ll give you that. But they’re not your only family.

“I don’t want to start lying to you, Blaine. But I also know you need to heal, and I don’t want a repeat of what happened earlier.” Burt lets out a breath, pushing away the memory of Blaine struggling for breath as the monitors changed from a steady reminder of Blaine’s health to blaring alarms. “You just focus on gettin’ better, kid. I’ll –” and Burt freezes midsentence, unsure of what exactly, he will do.

Finally, he settles on the one thing that won’t change.

“I’ll be right here. Kurt and Carole too.”

The monitors continue their metronome of beeps and Burt sighs, runs a hand across his face to pull the sleep from his eyes.

Burt Hummel is nothing if not patient.

He watches Blaine sleep, lulled by the steady hum of the machines and patterned beeps. So, of course, the door opening startles him, has him jolting in the chair and turning –

“Sorry,” Kurt says around a weak smile.

“I just got used to the quiet,” Burt comments as he waves off the apology. “Carole still takin’ a walk?”

“She’s in the chapel,” Kurt answers, shaking his head when Burt moves to stand. “I don’t think she’ll be too long, though,” Kurt comments as he crosses the room, taking a seat on the edge of Blaine’s bed.

Burt hums in acknowledgement as he adjusts to face Kurt. “You feelin’ better?”

“I never felt bad,” Kurt quietly counters, “I just needed some…perspective.”
“It’s been a hell of a few days, Kurt.”

“Before,” Kurt begins, seemingly oblivious to Burt’s comment, “I forgot. I forgot about Blaine’s recovery. I don’t know how I managed that. I really don’t.” Kurt pauses, letting out a humorless laugh that leaves Burt clenching the sides of the chair. “I think…I think I was just so glad Blaine woke up, that he spoke to me…I forgot that there’s more. Blaine deserves to walk at graduation, Dad, he does! And I know I need to support him. But I don’t know if I can. Dr. Olt said the therapy could make him hurt. He already –” Kurt stops, breathes out. “There’s microchips in prosthetics and skin can be grown in labs, but Blaine has to go through more pain to get better? He’s been through so much – how do I stand by while they hurt him, even if it is needed? How do I watch and do nothing if he’s hurting, Dad?”

“You won’t be doing nothing.” Burt leans forward, “You’ve been helpin’ Blaine since you got here, Kurt. Are you tellin’ me that you’re gonna suddenly stop?” Burt sighs, reaches out to place a hand on Kurt’s shoulder. “You’ve both been through too much and I wish you weren’t going through this now. I hate that this happened. But from the moment you’ve gotten here I’ve been nothing but proud of you. You’ve been put through something no man should ever have to endure, and you – you and Blaine – are still just teenagers. I don’t know that I could have handled this at your age. Really,” he affirms at Kurt’s incredulous stare. “So you stop your worryin’ okay? Because if nothing else this…situation has shown me that you’ll do anything for Blaine. Or,” Burt pauses, waits for Kurt to meet his gaze, “do you think I’m wrong?”

Kurt doesn’t immediately answer, but he does turn away, looking to Blaine and carding his fingers through Blaine’s curls.

“You’re not wrong,” Kurt finally murmurs, still facing away, “But I’ll hate it. I can’t – I can’t stand knowing he’s in pain.”

“The downside to loving someone,” Burt finally replies, “but we deal with it. Makes us that much more grateful for the good times.”

“Whoever’s keeping score sucks, then,” Kurt mumbles, “since Blaine’s had more than his fair share of bad times, recently.”

“He has,” Burt agrees. “Hell Kurt, we all have. But we’ll get through it.”

Kurt doesn’t look away from Blaine, and Burt sees Kurt’s hand clench around the blanket draped over Blaine’s legs, but he nods.

Burt’s always loved strongly; he knew he wanted to marry Kurt’s mother within a day of meeting her, knew Carole (and Finn) were meant to join his family of two as soon as they all were in a room together.

Most of the time Burt sees it as a blessing for the Hummels.

But there have been times – after Kurt’s mother died, after Finn – when Burt wondered if it’s a curse, instead.

When Blaine first came into their lives, Burt saw the blessing in each smile Kurt gave, in the stories that ended in laughter, in the confidence Kurt gained. And later, the blessing seemed to grow as Blaine shared Kurt’s smiles, and looked at Burt’s son the same way Burt had looked at Kurt’s mother, the way Burt now looks at Carole.

Now, watching his son carefully climb into the bed so he’s lying beside Blaine, both boys
somehow managing to look small despite the confining hospital bed, Burt can’t help but wonder at the balance of blessings and curses.

The boys found each other young, have the type of romance Burt had secretly wished for his son since the moment Kurt came out. And yet, now, he can’t get Kurt to leave a hospital room, and his future son-in-law has a list of injuries Burt can’t begin to name.

Burt shakes his head, pushes away the uneasiness he feels at the sight of the boys in the stark hospital bed. He closes his eyes, remembers Blaine’s smile at his birthday party, Kurt’s blush and sense of pride whenever he has a chance to show off his ring.

The boys’ utter joy whenever they sing a duet.

The happiness – the strength they find in each other – will get them through this. Burt’s certain of that, just as he’s certain Blaine will downplay any discomfort he has during therapy, and Kurt will help Blaine through every minute no matter how much it pains him.

Burt still wishes he could spare them the struggle.

Then again, Burt hasn’t much luck with wishes lately. Involuntarily, he remembers Mr. Anderson flushed with anger and his wife’s cold words.

Burt has a new appreciation for the general population’s hatred of Mondays.

And, unfortunately, the day isn’t over. A glance shows Blaine still asleep, and Kurt halfway to joining him, given his closed eyes.

They may be adults, but at the moment Burt only sees the teenagers.

‘We can’t protect them from the world’ Carole had said, and Burt hates that she continues to be right: The world is full of ill-fit parents; of small-minded, homophobic assailants; and angry, unrestrained teens.

And Burt couldn’t – still can’t – protect Kurt and Blaine from them.

But now, fitting with the world’s seemingly ironic sense of humor, Burt has the opportunity to do so – with a lie.

Blaine’s on enough medication as it is, and Burt doesn’t want to be the catalyst for Christine needing to ‘calm’ Blaine down for the second time today.

Burt stifles a sigh. His mother was right: a catch-22 really can make a bad day worse. Still, with the boys asleep Burt has time to reach a decision.

He just hopes he makes the right one.
Chapter 33

Kurt watches Blaine sleep, grateful at least one of them is able to rest. The dim lighting hides the worst of Blaine’s bruises, and for a moment Kurt can pretend more healing has occurred than is possible given when Blaine sustained the injuries.

Exhaustion has Kurt rubbing his eyes, but he can’t bring himself to lie down beside Blaine. He knows that if it tries he’ll end up in the position he is in now, staring at Blaine, just with the added worry that he’ll wake up his fiancé as he attempts to find sleep. Kurt sighs, leans back in his chair to pull Blaine’s ring from his pocket. He stares at the silver band in his palm before closing his fingers, hiding it from view.

The ring is a promise, and one he can’t wait to make with Blaine, and yet the reality of beeping monitors and wires leading from Blaine make it hard for Kurt to focus on their hopes for the future –

“I can’t wait to take you to Guitar Emporium, Blaine. It’s so much better than Between the Sheets, and –” Kurt stops, taking in Blaine’s intent gaze on the blanket. “You’re not listening to a word I’m saying, are you?”

Silence reigns for a moment before Blaine jolts out of his thoughts, turning to Kurt with a contrite expression. “Sorry I – sorry. What did you want to do in New York?”

“Blaine,” Kurt sighs, leaning forward, “don’t be sorry; I’m not upset. Just…tell me what you’re thinking about?” Kurt has a suspicion, but he doesn’t want to voice it on the chance he’s wrong.

“’m stil rn’n.”

“What?” Kurt likes to think he’s fluent in all things Blaine, but the mumbled response tests even his skills.

“I’m still running.”

“What?” Kurt repeats; unfortunately, the enunciated words still don’t make sense.

Blaine sighs. “I ran after Sadie Hawkins… I ran and I don’t think I ever really stopped.” Kurt reaches for Blaine’s hand, hopes the connection reminds his fiancé that he’s not alone. “They
showed up Kurt,” Blaine continues in a quiet voice. “They showed up and I hid behind your parents.”

“You didn’t hide,” Kurt snaps, giving voice to his anger as he stresses the last word. “You didn’t! You stood up for yourself and don’t you dare begin to feel guilty. The only thing you’re supposed to focus on is getting better. And your parents,” Kurt hisses the word, “wouldn’t help with that. One day you’ll – we’ll – make them see what they’ve missed, but you have other priorities right now.”

Blaine gives an absent hum of acknowledgment before turning, facing Kurt. “I know you’re right. I do. I just…” Blaine pauses, and Kurt briefly tightens his hold on Blaine’s hand. “They’re my parents,” Blaine murmurs, “and I don’t…I can’t see my dad,” Kurt looks away the name, hopes Blaine missed the way his jaw clenched in anger. “I can’t,” Blaine continues, “but Mom showed up; that counts for something, doesn’t it?”

Kurt lets out a breath and turns back to Blaine. He waits a moment, searching for words beyond the anger clouding his thoughts. “It doesn’t outweigh the fact that you don’t want to see her,” he finally answers. “And honestly? That’s the only thing I care about.”

“You’ve always been single-minded,” Blaine half-heartedly teases. The humor is short lived, though, vanishing even as Blaine continues speaking. “Part of me wants to ask her why,” Blaine pauses, and Kurt wonders which ‘why’ Blaine’s considering, “just to know. But even that – it’s not enough.”

“No,” Kurt agrees, “it’s not.”

The door opening startles Kurt from his thoughts, has him lurching forward in his chair before he catches himself on the bedrail.

“Sorry,” Jamie comments from by the door, her soft voice barely carrying across the small space. “But in my defense, most people are asleep at this time of the morning.”

“You’re awake.”

“You’re awake.”

“That I am,” Jamie answers as she begins typing on the computer. “But I also slept all day since I’m supposed to be awake right now. I’m guessing,” Jamie continues as she moves to stand on the opposite side of Blaine’s bed, “that you didn’t have my schedule, though. So what has you up at this hour?”

For a moment, Kurt’s tempted to simply point to Blaine, to gesture to the monitors and IV bags and all things hospital and answer the question with an exaggerated wave that leaves Jamie wondering why she bothered to ask. But a glance shows Jamie standing still, obviously waiting for his response.

“Too many thoughts in my head,” Kurt finally manages, going for a vague truth.

“Hate it when that happens,” Jamie replies, “and sadly there’s no ‘off’ button.”

Kurt manages a half smile. “It would be so nice if there were.”

“Hm,” Jamie hums in agreement. “I’m guessing you don’t want to talk about it, either. Well,” she continues once Kurt’s shaken his head, “in that case, do you mind waking Blaine up for me?”

Despite the location Blaine looks peaceful, and for a moment Kurt wants nothing more than to let Blaine sleep. A glance shows Jamie looking expectant, however, and Kurt turns back to Blaine
with a sigh.

“Blaine,” Kurt leans forward and adjusts Blaine’s blanket. “Blaine. We need you to wake up, okay? Just for a minute.” Kurt continues to murmur soft words, tracing the outline of Blaine’s chest beneath the blanket before Blaine finally blinks awake.

“K –” Kurt smiles and Blaine tries again. “Kurt?”

“Still here,” Kurt murmurs, “and I know it doesn’t really count as morning yet, but Jamie needs to talk to you for a minute, okay?”

Blaine nods but Kurt ignores his fiancé’s words to the nurse, focuses instead on the way Blaine’s free hand clutches the blue throw, the way his mouth tightens as Jamie checks his injuries. Kurt smiles when Blaine turns to face him after Jamie’s stepped away and briefly tightens his hold on Blaine’s hand.

“What,” Kurt questions when Blaine continues to just stare. “I know sweatpants and a t-shirt aren’t the epitome of my fashion sense, but –”

“You’re perfect,” Blaine interrupts, “but why’re you up?”

“Couldn’t sleep,” Kurt answers with a shrug. “Rumor has it hospitals can make it difficult.”

“You could’ve gone with your parents –”

“No, I couldn’t,” Kurt comments as he leans forward. “I told you I’m not leaving here til you come with me, and I keep my promises.”

“Kurt –”

“Now,” Kurt interrupts as he stands, “Why don’t we try and catch up on sleep, okay?”

“Goin’ to tuck me in? Blaine questions as Kurt reaches for the blankets Burt had brought earlier.

“I’m going to tuck us both in,” Kurt smiles as he eases onto the bed beside Blaine and pulls up the throws, adjusting them so they don’t become tangled in Blaine IV and monitors.

“You’re –” Kurt studiously ignores the pause and Blaine’s tightened grip on his hand. “You’re the best,” Blaine finishes moments later from Kurt’s shoulder.

“Of course I am,” Kurt answers, hoping his light tone hides the anger/worry/fear at Blaine’s pain. “Just breathe, okay?”

“’s not that bad.”

“I think we have differing definitions, Blaine.” Kurt murmurs as he drops a kiss to Blaine’s hair.

“Why –” A breath before Blaine continues, “Why couldn’t you sleep?”

For a moment, Kurt thinks of how he answered the same question minutes earlier, wonders if Blaine’s tired enough to believe the same half-truth.

“I was just thinking about how strong my fiancé is,” Kurt finally replies.

“Kurt,” Blaine shifts, looks up and meets Kurt’s gaze. “Really. Why were you up?”
“I was thinking about you,” Kurt affirms. “About how you’ve overcome so much and I was wondering.” Kurt sighs and tightens his hold on Blaine’s hand. “I was wondering how it is that you can’t see it.

“Even before…” Kurt lets the sentence trail off, gesturing to the room instead. “Sadie Hawkins, your parents. You’re the strongest man I know, and I can’t wait to be married to you.”

Blaine stays silent, his only response to lean further against Kurt’s shoulder. He stays there even after Jamie returns so Kurt merely offers her a nod when the nurse approaches the bed and adds the medication to Blaine’s IV. Kurt ignores the blush he feels heating his cheeks when Jamie winks at him; he may not be used to showing his affection for Blaine in public, but he’s not ashamed.

“Well, that’s certainly a better position for sleeping,” Jamie comments as she discards her gloves. “You’re lying down and everything. I’ll keep ignoring that little bend in the rules as long as you actually do sleep, okay?”

“I’ll do my best,” Kurt murmurs as he straightens the blankets. “It’s not like I actually want to stay up all night.”

“Well I can’t give you what he got, but if you really are having trouble I could talk to the on-call doctor…”

“No,” Kurt’s shaking his head before she finishes the sentence, “thanks though.”

“Alright, then I’m off to finish rounds; just do me a favor and be sleeping when I come back, okay?” A smile and then Jamie thoughtfully turns off the lights as she leaves; Kurt focuses on how the shadows play across Blaine’s face before exhaustion settles, and he follows Blaine into sleep.

*B_-*_-*_*

Burt runs a hand over his hat and pinches the bridge of his nose. The hospital hasn’t changed in the ten hours he’s been gone, but the sharp smell of antiseptic cleaner and harsh lighting seem a touch more grating than usual.

“– not listening to a word I’m saying, are you.”

“What? Sorry,” Burt turns to face Carole. “You were saying?”

“I was wondering,” Carole questions, “if you’d heard from Greg?”

“No,” Burt stops. “Why would I be hearin’ from Greg?”

Carole sighs. “I’m glad you haven’t. I was just…worried. After yesterday.”

Burt pauses, takes a moment to rub the exhaustion from his eyes. “Did she say somethin’ else to you?

“She didn’t need to,” Carole comments as she steps closer, “since I think they were pretty clear in the waiting room. I just keep remembering how adamant they were about talking to a lawyer.”

“They can talk all they want,” Burt mutters, “but they’re not gonna get anywhere. I don’t want to go against Blaine’s wishes, but I still have those photos from March, and I have no problem tellin’ those officers exactly why Blaine named us as his contacts.”

“I hate this,” Carole responds, “I hate that they’re making us consider breaking our word. This isn’t
a white lie about the pain from a shot because the benefits outweigh the discomfort: This is rebreaking a bone to prevent damage. All of it is painful."

“It sucks,” Burt agrees, “but I’ve heard that’s the hardest part of parenthood.”

“Blaine deserves better.”

“Well,” Burt turns and offers Carole a smile, “I have it on good authority that he’s getting the best in-laws anyone could ask for.”

“I can’t believe I ever thought you were a humble man, Burt Hummel.” The response holds a hint of amusement though, and Burt feels a rush of relief at the sound.

“No reason to be humble about family,” Burt says with a nod, “especially ours.”

Carole hums in agreement as Burt picks up the phone to gain entrance to Blaine’s floor. “We do have some pretty great boys,” Carole comments as they head down the hall. “I still don’t know how they do it, really, with all they’ve been through. And now,” Burt reaches for Carole’s hand at the catch in her voice, “I was so relieved when he woke up – so happy. But now….Kurt’s right: Blaine has a long road ahead of him.”

“He does,” Burt agrees, “but he won’t be alone.”

“No,” Carole draws out the word even as she stops in the middle of the hall. “He won’t; we won’t let him be. But how do we do this, Burt? How do we help him when I’m torn between keeping him away from all of this and demanding he make another statement that will keep that – that will force the police to lock up the person who did this?”

“We do it the same way we did when he came to stay with us,” Burt answers as he steps aside, leading Carole so they’re leaning against the wall. “And we’ve been worryin’ since we became parents.”

“This is different, and you know it.”

Burt hums in response before tightening his grip on Carole’s hand. “It is. But that’s why we’re going to take Dr. Olt’s advice and talk with the experts to get the help we’ll need.”

Carole nods.

“When I was pregnant with Finn I think I read every parenting book in the library,” the slight change in topic leaves Burt blinking in surprise, but Carole’s soft, flat voice keeps him silent. “I wanted to be prepared,” she continues, “and I thought I was, until I was actually holding my baby. All the knowledge in the world wasn’t enough, then. And Finn,” Carole pauses, takes a breath. “Finn was good; I know he was. But I still went to bed every night wondering if I should have done something differently. And Blaine’s been through so much – I can’t risk saying the wrong thing. I don’t want to remind him of her, Burt.”

“We’re not the Andersons,” Burt answers, “and you’ve stayed. You gave Kurt a mother again and I have no doubt you’ll continue to do the same for Blaine.”

“I hope so,” Carole whispers before clearing her throat. “But I think you could give that therapist a run for his money.”

Burt laughs. “Still a mechanic, and as one I say we stop focusing on something that might not happen. There’s no need for us to go borrowin’ trouble, so why don’t we go check on the boys.”
At Carole’s nod Burt steps away from the wall, keeping hold of Carole’s hand as he leads the way to Blaine’s room. He pauses outside the door though, letting out a sigh even as he steps to the side.

“Burt?”

“Just need a minute,” Burt answers, eying Blaine’s room number. “I don’t wanna go in there thinkin’ of anything other than them.” The hall echoes with the always-present announcements and the steady hum of countless conversations serve as a reminder of his location, but Burt’s unfortunately well accustomed to the hospital.

He’s not accustomed to remembering the harsh words from Mr. Anderson while crossing the waiting room, or feeling the need to double check with Blaine’s nurses about the approved visitor’s list.

And he can’t enter Blaine’s room when all he can remember is the way Blaine had impersonated a statue when he’d heard of his parents’ arrival.

Burt blinks, stares at the 309 until he’s focused on the present.

“Better?” Carole questions as he steps away from the wall.

“Just reminding myself it’s a new day.”

“That it is,” Carole comments as she takes Burt’s hand, “so let’s go see our boys.”

_*_*_*_*_*_*

“Thank you,” Blaine murmurs as Burt moves the rollaway table against the wall.

“No problem kid,” Burt answers as he moves to the chair beside Blaine’s bed. “So how’re you feeling?”

“I’m fine,” Blaine leans further into Kurt’s side and offers a smile. “And thanks again for the blankets.”

Blaine closes his eyes as Kurt shares his opinion of the hospital issued blankets, content to let the sounds of conversation drift over him. He can almost pretend he’s curled up with Kurt on the sofa in Burt and Carole’s living room.

The burst of pain as he shifts shatters the illusion.

His hiss stops the hum of conversation, and when he opens his eyes he has the gazes of the entire Hudson-Hummel family.

“Do you want me to get Christine?”

Blaine shakes his head in answer and turns his face into Kurt’s shoulder. “I’m fine,” he mumbles, “just turned the wrong way.”

“Hm,” Kurt turns slightly and Blaine looks up to face him.

“Kurt?”

“I believe you,” Kurt quickly answers, the words slurring, “but I also know we disagree on ‘fine’ so don’t –” Kurt sighs. “Don’t pretend, okay?”
“I think what Kurt means,” Burt cuts in before Blaine can think of a reply, “is that we all want you better, kid, so there’s no sense in sayin’ you’re fine if you’re hurtin’ right now.”

“I –” Blaine stops, stares at the blanket and swallows, taking a moment to listen to the beeping of the monitors and relish the feel of Kurt’s solid warmth against his side. “I am okay, promise, but… thank you.”

To his left, Burt nods and steps forward, giving Blaine’s uninjured shoulder a reassuring squeeze. “Glad to hear it.”

Blaine feels his lips twitch, attempt a smile that can’t form due to stitches and bruising. He glances away moments later, though, unable to look at Burt as the worry from the night before returns. “Mr. Hummel?”

Blaine leans more into Kurt’s side as Burt leans forward. “Blaine?”

“Are –” Blaine loosens his grip on Kurt’s hand, loosely fiddles with Kurt’s fingers. “Are my parents still here?”

Kurt catches Blaine’s hand.

Silence stretches until Blaine forces himself to turn, sees Burt glance to Carole before sighing. “I don’t know, kid. I – we haven’t heard from ‘em since they left yesterday.”

Blaine closes his eyes.

“They can’t bother you, Blaine.” Kurt murmurs, “I won’t let them.”

“He’s right,” Burt agrees. “They can’t even get on the floor, remember?”

Absently, Blaine nods against Kurt’s chest. “I know.”

“Do you?” Blaine startles at Carole’s question, and a glance shows her stepping forward and resting a hand on his blanket covered leg and the other on the bed’s rail. “When Kurt called that day, it wasn’t a question. You know that right?” She sighs but when Blaine looks up he only takes in Carole’s profile. “We didn’t –” she sighs and Blaine sees her knuckles bleach white against the rail. “You’re Kurt’s fiancé, but that’s not all you are. You’re part of our family and it doesn’t matter if your last name isn’t Hummel. And we look after each other. So don’t – don’t worry about your parents, okay?”

Blaine takes a moment, leans further into Kurt so he can breathe in the light scent of Kurt’s cologne and the Hummel’s laundry detergent over the plastic, medicinal air from his nasal cannula. A blink and he turns away to face Carole.

“Th –” Blaine swallows, “Thank you, Mrs. Hummel.”

“It’s Carole,” she counters as she moves to stand to Blaine’s left. "You’re family – going to be my son-in-law and everything – so call me Carole.” Blaine nods even as Carole leans forward, carefully taking his free hand. It’s not enough, though, so Blaine eases away from Kurt with a slight hiss of pain as Carole draws him into a gentle hug.

It’s different from the hugs he remembers receiving from his mother. It’s not the polite pat after he’s received an award; it’s not the lingering, don’t-forget hugs before he’s left alone in the house; it’s not the tight, relief-filled hug after he’d heard a gunshot at school.
It’s gentle, comforting in a way he vaguely remembers from his childhood: it’s a mother’s hug.

Blaine ignores the sting and pain in his eyes and the growing discomfort in his side, keeps his face against Carole’s shoulder as he finally cries.

*---*

“Are you sure you’re okay with moving?” Kurt ignores the pauses in Blaine’s question, focuses instead on the hand in his.

“Of course,” Kurt smiles, tightening his hold on Blaine’s hand. “Once we can afford it I can’t wait for our own place.”

“I –” Blaine stops, winces before carefully moving on the bed. “I just wanted to check; I know you love the loft.”

Kurt hums in agreement before turning slightly, waiting until Blaine’s met his gaze to continue. “The loft will be even better once you’re there for the summer,” Kurt adds, swallowing his worry that their plans may change. “But that’s only for a few months, and then we’ll have our own place. Besides,” Kurt continues, studiously ignoring the beeping monitors, “I don’t want to deal with Santana’s comments about our private life for a minute longer than necessary.”

Blaine laughs, just once before it’s stopped by a wince, but the sound has Kurt smiling regardless. “I’m guessing Santana would have some…interesting statements?”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Kurt answers, glad he and Blaine are alone in the room; silently, he hopes they take their time finding lunch. “She already comments and you’ve been in Ohio; I don’t want to think about what she’ll say when we’re sharing a room.”

“Well,” Kurt looks up at the teasing note in Blaine’s voice, “if she’s going to make comments regardless I guess we’ll have to make it worth her while?”

“Blaine Anderson!” Kurt drops his gaze, silently cursing his pale complexion as he feels his cheeks heat with a blush. “I’m beginning to think those meds have made you shameless.” For a moment after his response Kurt freezes, second guessing his teasing.

“Maybe,” Blaine smiles as best he can given his stitches, and Kurt lets out a breath. “But,” he pauses, and when he speaks again the teasing is gone, “do you really think she’d be that bad?”

Kurt bites back the ‘yes!’ that immediately comes to mind. “I don’t know. Maybe? But even if she’s not…I’d like to have our own place. Somewhere for just you and me…not a wall-less loft with multiple roommates. And,” Kurt smiles, “don’t you want our own space? Where we can decorate however we want, and we don’t have to worry about nosey roommates?”

“Course I do,” Blaine answers, “but can we afford it in the fall? New York’s expensive.”

Kurt leans forward, looks to his and Blaine’s clasped hands and smiles at the sight of his ring. “It is,” he agrees, “but I can save any extra tip money, and I’m sure you’ll find something part-time too so we can save up for a deposit.”

“Then we will,” Blaine replies. “We’ll find the perfect place.”

“Dad said we can take some of the furniture from my old room at the house, if we need it.”

“They’ve already helped so much –”
“They want to, Blaine,’’ Kurt interrupts, “you know they do. Hey,’’ he continues when Blaine looks away, “what’s wrong?”

“It’s not –” Blaine stops as the door opens, and Kurt turns to glare rather than yell in frustration.

“I hope I’m not interrupting,” the voice is kind, and Kurt takes a moment to appreciate the woman’s taste in clothes (grey pantsuit, with a turquoise button-up for a pop of color) even as he bites back a ‘you are’ in response to her comment. “One of the nurses told me you were awake,” she continues, “and I wanted to introduce myself. I’m Valerie Whitmore,” she smiles.

“Kurt Hummel,” Kurt replies as he accepts her handshake. “I’m Blaine’s fiancé. It’s nice to meet you, Ms. Whitmore.”

“Please,” she comments as she hands Kurt a business card, “feel free to call me Val.”

“What exactly,” Kurt questions as he stares at the card, “is a victim advocate?”

“They help victims of crime,” Blaine whispers from beside him. “She’s here to discuss our options.”

Kurt turns back. “You had one before.”

“Julie,” Blaine confirms with a nod. “She was nice. I think she first suggested I switch schools.”

Kurt makes note to find out Julie’s last name; he’ll need to send a gift basket later.

“Well,” Valerie comments from Kurt’s vacated chair, “even though it sounds like you have an idea of my job, how about I explain it to you both anyway. I’m not a lawyer, and while I work with the prosecutor and the police department I’m not employed by them. But,” she lowers her voice, “I have spoken with Officer Randall.”

“What did he say?” Kurt questions as he reaches for Blaine’s hand.

“Nothing he hasn’t shared with you already; I just wanted to let you know since I’ll reference it when we talk about what happens next. But,” Kurt suppresses a sigh as he glances at his and Blaine’s joined hands, “is there anyone else you’d like to be here before I do?”

Kurt looks to Blaine. “My parents went to get lunch. They should be back soon, I think.”

“Well I don’t mind waiting. But in the meantime,” Valerie leans forward, “why don’t we get to know one another?”

Kurt shifts a bit on the bed as Blaine leans a bit more of his weight against him. Kurt knows Blaine’s reached the stage where he’s feeling the beginnings of pain; the drowsiness wearing off and leaving lucidity comes with a price.

Blaine tightens his hold on Kurt’s hand and Kurt squeezes back. “So,” Kurt starts as he turns to face Valerie, “what would you like to know?”

“How did you two meet?”

“A dare,” Kurt smiles. “I went to spy on his acapella group.” At Valerie’s widened eyes Kurt continues the story, pausing only when Blaine interjects with his own additions.

Kurt’s describing the thrill of Regionals when the door opening stops him midsentence.
“Got you that chicken teriyaki thing you like, kiddo. And don’t worry, my turkey was on wheat and Carole replaced my mayo with mustard so –” Burt stops halfway in the room. “Sorry, I didn’t realize someone else was here. Burt Hummel.”

Kurt watches as Valarie stands. “It’s no problem,” she comments as she shakes his dad’s hand. “I’m Valarie Whitmore; I’m a victim advocate and work with the prosecutor’s office.”

“Do you have some new information?” Carole’s question has Valarie taking a step to the left so she’s face Kurt’s stepmother.

“I know as much as you do,” Valarie answers. “I’m here to talk about Blaine’s options; my job is to help him – and all of you, really – with what happens next.”

“And what is that?” Kurt winces at his father’s harsh tone, but stays silent when he sees Carole’s subtly shake her head.

“Why don’t we all take a seat,” Valarie answers, “and I’ll explain.”

His parents nod and moments later Kurt takes the bag with his sub as his dad crosses the room to take the seat in the chair closest to Blaine’s IV pole. “How’re you feelin’ kid?”

Blaine turns at the question, and Kurt subtly shifts his weight at the change. “I’m fine, Mr. Hummel,” Blaine answers.

Kurt feels the hitch in Blaine’s breathing, though, and tightens his grip on Blaine’s hand in response.

“I know you’re not fine,” Kurt murmurs near Blaine’s ear, “but I know it’s not too bad yet, either and you have another hour before Christine’s back. So just remember that I’m here and I’ll never say no to holding your hand, okay?”

“Okay.”

“I mean it,” Kurt whispers, “and if it does get worse, I don’t care about the timetable; I’ll call the nurse’s station so fast –”

“I love you,” Blaine interrupts, “and –”

“Boys,” Kurtstartles slightly at his father’s voice. “You can flirt later; I believe Ms. Whitmore was goin’ to give us some information.”

“He thinks he’s funny,” Kurt mumbles as he lifts his head and turns to the left, ignoring his blush even as Carole offers him a smile from her seat in the fold-out recliner.

“So,” Val comments from her reclaimed seat, “I spoke with Officer Randall. He and Brian – sorry, Officer Daniels – are working on your case, okay Blaine? But, if you feel up to it, can you tell me what happened in our own words?”

Kurt freezes.

Blaine’s hand tenses under his, but Kurt keeps his own steady and refuses to let Blaine pull away. Kurt looks away from Val then, keeps his eyes on Blaine as Blaine begins to speak (haltingly, quiet in a way that leaves Kurt’s free hand white-knuckled on the bed) and retell the nightmare that Kurt hates is reality.
“Take a breath, kid.” His dad’s comment pulls Kurt from his thoughts, and he pushes away images of Blaine bleeding in a parking lot. The Blaine in front on him isn’t bleeding, but the lines of tension around his fiancé’s eyes have Kurt leaning forward.

“Dad’s right,” Kurt murmurs, “just breathe, okay? Breathe with me.”

“Thank you, Blaine,” Val’s tone echoes that of his father and Kurt appreciates her professionalism. “I know that must have been difficult; I’m sorry you’ve had to go through that.”

“What happens next?”

“I don’t have a definitive answer for you,” Val answers Carole, “a lot of that will depend on both the police and the D.A. But I can tell you what I’ll do next: I’m here to help Blaine – all of you – and whether that’s through helping with counseling, or discussing the possibility of compensation, or going with you to court I’m there.”

“Going to court?” It takes a moment for Blaine’s question to register, for Kurt to realize the question was voiced, that it wasn’t still circling in his head.

“It’s a possibility,” Val answers, “but that will ultimately be up to the D.A. So,” she quickly continues, “we’ll discuss that if that comes up. For now, I’d like to focus on what I can do for you today: Do you have any questions? Is there anything you’d like me to do to help you right now?”

The beeping of Blaine’s monitors fills the silence following the question.

“Blaine’s been seeing Dr. Schamp,” Carole finally answers. “And Burt and I –” Carole takes a breath, “we’ve spoken with someone in the past. Thank you for the offer, though.”

“It’s my job,” Val comments with a smile. “I –”

The door opens and Kurt watches Christine enter with a wave. “Sorry. I hope I’m not interrupting, Val, but I have to check on our superstar.”

“I can step out –”

“If Blaine’s okay with it,” Christine interrupts Val, “I can just pull the curtain?”

“I don’t mind,” Blaine replies. “She can talk with Mr. and Mrs. Hummel?”

Beside him, Carole’s already standing, moving aside as Christine reaches to pull the 80s inspired curtain behind the recliner. By the time the curtain created makeshift wall Kurt’s parents’ voices are murmurs, recognizable but indistinct.

“Hi Blaine, Kurt,” Christine nods as she logs into the computer. “Busy day?”

“Informative,” Kurt answers.

“Val’s good at what she does,” Christine comments as she turns away from the computer to face the bed.

“You know her?”

“Mhm,” Christine hums in agreement to Blaine’s question. “We have lunch sometimes, when we’re here at the same time.”

“She seems nice.”
“She is, but I’d like to talk about you, Blaine.” She scans his ID bracelet, “So remind me again; what’s your name and birthday?”

Kurt ignores Blaine’s sigh as he answers, focuses instead on carefully moving so he’s standing beside Blaine’s bed in preparation for Christine’s exam.

“D’you have the ‘ntinausea med, too?”

“You’re feeling sick? Why didn’t you tell me –”

“I wasn’t gonna throw up,” Blaine interrupts, “promise.”

“That’s not the point –”

“I can get the anti-nausea med when I get your painkiller, Blaine. I’m just going to check your incisions first, okay?”

“Just let me pull focus,” Kurt musters a smile and reaches for Blaine’s hand, purposefully keeps his eyes away from where Christine’s moving blankets and Blaine’s hospital gown. “Santana texted me earlier and I’m supposed to tell you ‘hi’ by the way.”

“She – she said that?”

“I’m paraphrasing,” Kurt replies as he leans forward. “Christine deserves better than to be subjected to quotes from Santana.”

“Who’s Santana?”

“She’s one of my roommates in New York,” Kurt answers. “We were all in Glee in high school, though.”

“And that warrants your paraphrasing her words for me?”

“Santana likes to ignore conventional conversational etiquette.” Kurt answers absently, tightening his hold on Blaine’s hand and forcibly not acknowledging Blaine’s pained hiss as Christine adjusts Blaine’s bandages.

“Sounds like someone I should meet,” Christine comments as she fixes Blaine’s hospital gown. “And you were great, Blaine. I’ll just step out to get your meds now, okay?”

She steps around the curtain and Kurt moves the wires and IV line before carefully sitting next to Blaine and catching his trembling hand. “She’ll be right back, but until then I’ll tell you what Santana actually said, okay?”

Blaine nods.

*-*-*-*

Carole turns away as the pulled curtain hides the boys from view.

“You said you’ve spoken with Officer Randall?” Burt’s quiet question has Carole taking a step closer to her husband.

“I have,” Ms. Whitmore - Val – confirms. “I spoke with him earlier today, actually.”

“Do they have him?”
“I’m sorry?”

“Blaine identified his attacker to the officers when they took his statement. Do they have Stephen Parsons in custody?”

“I don’t know,” Val answers. “They were still reviewing evidence this morning.”

“Right,” Carole looks to Burt, takes in his clenched jaw and reaches for his hand. He unclenches his fist and clasps her hand before continuing. “When they were reviewing evidence while you were there…did you happen to see that delinquent’s address?”

“Burt!”

“Technically,” Burt comments as he stares at the curtain, “I’m his representative in Congress; I’m supposed to speak with my constituents.” The flat tone has Carole tightening her grip on Burt’s hand.

“I don’t know his address, Mr. Hummel,” Val answers, “but even if I did you know I couldn’t tell you.”


“This is a difficult time,” Val carefully answers. “And traumas like this,” she makes a vague gesture around the room, “affect people differently. Each trauma is different, just as every person is different. Now I know you said you have a therapist, but I have some pamphlets, or if you ever just want to talk I’ve been told I’m a pretty good listener.”

“Thank you,” Carole smiles. “I’m sure we’ll take you up on that…eventually.”

“It’s what I’m here for,” Val shrugs.

Christine emerges from the curtain then, offering a smile as she heads for the door. “I’ll be right back.”

“Mr. Hummel,” Val comments as the door shuts, “I’ll have some paperwork and informational letters for Blaine later – for all of you, really. I only mention it because I want to make sure I bring enough copies; will I need some for Blaine’s parents, too?”

Carole holds in a wince as Burt’s hand clenches in hers. “They got into town yesterday,” Burt mutters, “but Blaine’s requested not to see them.”

If the admission startles Val, she doesn’t show it. “It’s good he has you, then.”

Burt hums in agreement and Carole takes a step closer. “It’s no trouble. Burt was right earlier; Blaine’s a good kid.”

“And his parents?” Carole drops her gaze at Val’s question. “I don’t mean to pry,” Val continues, “but I’d like to help in whatever way I can.”

Christine enters then, offers a quick wave before disappearing behind the curtain.

“He’ll be out soon,” Burt comments with a nod toward Blaine’s bed. “Those medications are pretty strong. I don’t mind tellin’ you about his parents, and you should know since you’re gonna be
around for a while. But Blaine doesn’t…” Burt lets the sentence trail off, sighs and meets Carole’s gaze before starting again. “Let’s wait til he’s sleeping to talk about his parents.”

“Unless you have to leave,” Carole adds. “We’re not keeping you from something, are we?”

“No,” Val shakes her head. “I’m here for as long as you need me.”

“Well then,” Carole comments as Christine begins pulling back the curtain, “let’s get comfortable.”
Chapter 34

I know this is repetitive, but is has been forever; sorry for the horrible delay, all of you wonderful readers! Between job hunting (still) and my two part-time jobs that keep me at work 12 hours a day I've had limited time and energy to write. However, I hope you enjoy this chapter, and thanks to slayerkitty for dealing with my writing-induced rants, and mad-madam-m for the read through! As always, thanks to you readers, too, for your continued support!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 34

Burt raises his coffee cup as he enters the hospital, breathes in the steam so he smells coffee rather than industrial-strength cleaner and medicine. It’s a quick, short-lived delay, but Burt relishes the scent nonetheless; the announcements, the walls, and the tiled floors all serve as a reminder of his location, but it’s always the scent that hits him the hardest.

And that scent overpowers the coffee, then.

Burt sighs and resists the urge to shake his head at the reminder, chooses instead to pause in the waiting room. He takes a moment before crossing and claiming an empty chair. He knows Carole could use the coffee in his left hand, but he sets it on the small table beside him instead.

It’s been three days since the officers took Blaine’s phone, three days since Officer Randall said a name that left Blaine panicked and Burt seeing red.

And – as of an hour ago – Officers Randall and Daniels had Stephen Mullins at the precinct for questioning.

Burt had hesitated before answering the call from Rob half an hour ago, somehow doubting he was calling about his troublesome Sienna at 10 AM on a Monday, especially when Rob’s shift at the station started three hours earlier. Still, Burt had accepted the call, quickly swiping his phone before Incoming Call had faded to Missed Call from Rob Fenner.

Burt would never lie to his constituents like Sue had, and he prided himself on his integrity, but not even he could ignore a call from a long-time customer who happened to be a cop. Not when Blaine still slept in the ICU. But now the resulting information feels like a beacon, its signal demanding he see the results himself.

An announcement over the intercom jerks Burt from his thoughts.

He stands then, reaching for the two coffee cups even as he pushes away thoughts of retribution. It’s the officers’ job to find justice for Blaine, not Burt’s. His responsibilities lay down in the hall.

But a small part of him (the one that had him storming into Figgin’s office and paying for ads to keep a musical) still itches for release.
Burt closes his eyes for a moment, copies Carole’s yoga breathing for longer than he’ll admit before heading for the doors separating Blaine from the rest of the world. By the time he reaches Blaine’s room, Burt feels focused on the task at hand, and a glance through the door’s window releases the last of the tension from his shoulders.

“Everything okay?”

Burt turns and offers Christine a weak smile. “I –” Burt sighs, glances to the coffee in his hand before looking back to Christine. “Got a phone call a while ago. They think…the police are questioning someone.”

“About…” Christine doesn’t finish the question, instead nodding toward Blaine’s room.

“Yeah.”

“Good.” Burt hums in response, but Christine continues when the silence stretches. “You can’t kill him, you know.”

“Never said I was goin’ to.”

“That frown you’re wearin’ says otherwise.”

“You understand Blaine’s chart better than me,” Burt mutters. “All I know is the kid has more bruises and stitches than I care to count and he was in surgery for over two hours. From what Dr. Olt said, Blaine’ll have months of recovery!” Burt takes a moment, letting out a breath as he looks to Christine. “He’s supposed to walk at his graduation.”

“Bad things happen to good people – to children – everyday. You know how many kids come through this department every year? You think any of their loved ones were any less pissed off than you? Whoever did that deserves the best our justice system has to offer: prison, no chance of parole, throw the damned book at them. But don’t make your family worry about you, too.”

“You saying you’re not angry? Kurt keeps joking, sayin’ he and Blaine are your favorites…but having been a patient myself I know you spend more time in that room than is technically required.”

Christine smiles before dropping her gaze to the floor. “Blaine’s a charming patient; I can see why Kurt’s so taken with him.”

Burt nods at the quiet comment, accepting her evasion of his question. “Given how Kurt talked, I think Blaine’s been charming since the day they met.”

“I’d imagine so. Now,” Christine adds as she steps closer to the door, “go spend time with your family.”

She’s opened the door before Burt can comment, and he follows her into the room. He crosses to stand next to Carole. “Am I interrupting?”

“Never,” she answers as she takes the coffee cup from his left hand. “We were just celebrating the fact that Blaine’s been approved to drink some juice; there may even be Jell-O later.”

Across from him, Blaine sighs.

“Not a fan of Jell-O, kid?”
“He’d prefer coffee,” Kurt replies with a smile, “but it still is better than IVs and ice chips.” The sharpness of the latter words has Burt looking to the right, and he sees Kurt’s hand bunching the blanket near Blaine’s leg.

Burt forcibly reminds himself that he needs to follow Christine’s advice.

“Did something happen?” Kurt’s voice has gone flat, quiet. “Dad? Did –”

“Knock. Knock.” Christine stands in the now-open door, and Burt musters a smile as she moves further into the room, stopping beside Kurt.

“So, how are you this morning, Blaine?”

Burt looks away as she begins talking to Blaine, hating that her questions and the cadences of Blaine’s answers have become routine, that there’s a macabre familiarity in the act.

“Burt?”

Carole’s questioning voice has him turning, looking away from the bed. “Yeah?”

She takes his hand then, leading him toward the back of the room. “Kurt was right, wasn’t he?” There’s no question in the tone, and Burt sighs.

“I got a phone call this mornin’.” Carole’s hand tightens around his wrist. “You remember Rob Fenner? He wanted to let me know they got…that Mullins was brought in this morning.”

Silence.

“Did he –”

“I don’t know.” Burt interrupts, “I don’t –” Burt lets out a breath and drops Carole’s hand. “That’s all he told me.”

A beat, and then Carole reclaims his hand. “I’m glad you stayed,” she murmurs.

“What –”

“I know you, Burt Hummel,” Carole interrupts. “You protect this family with everything you have, and it must be killing you to be here and not at the station.”

Burt manages half a smile and shakes his head. “Smart and pretty; I really did luck out.”

“You did,” Carole agrees, “but so did we. Now,” she turns and Burt follows her gaze to where Christine is slowly unwrapping the bandages across Blaine’s chest. “Are we gonna tell them?”

“You thinkin’ we shouldn’t?”

“They’ve been through so much,” Carole murmurs, “and since we haven’t heard from Valarie…”

“I don’t like keepin’ things from them.”

“Neither do I,” Carole nods toward the bed, “but we don’t really have anything to tell them at the moment.”

Burt stares at the boys, and while Blaine’s injuries has Burt clenching his free hand, Carole’s hold reminds him of why he stayed. Burt turns back then, faces his wife, and nods.
Kurt keeps his hold on Blaine’s hand as he watches Christine move around his fiancé, looking at stitches and bruises before carefully covering them with bandages. They may be slightly less red, and the bruises may be shifting shades since Kurt’s first glance days ago, but the sight still has Kurt swallowing and clenching his free hand.

He looks away.

Across the room, he sees his dad murmuring to Carole, and he remembers his earlier question; he remembers his father’s brief look of panic and his relief when Christine had entered.

Kurt knows his father; something has happened.

It’s obvious, evidenced in the tight shoulders and pinched expression on his father’s face. And yet, Kurt recognizes the expression: his father is angry, yes, but anxious too.

Memories, flashes of past instances when his father wore the same expression pass through his mind, and Kurt feels his shoulders drop.

His father has made a point of never keeping secrets from him; Kurt chooses to trust in that fact now.

“Kurt,” Christine’s voice snaps him from his thoughts. “Think you can distract Blaine for a minute?”

Guilt rises as he quickly turns.

“I don’t –”

“You do,” Christine overrides Blaine’s protest. “You don’t want to focus on me, especially since you’re not due for more meds for another hour.”

“Then why not wait?”

“Sorry, no can do,” Christine answers. “I have to check to make sure we don’t have to send Blaine for some more tests; the earlier we can get him scheduled for any potential tests, the better.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“Trust me, Blaine. Focus on your incredibly handsome fiancé. Besides,” she continues, nodding toward Kurt, “surely you’re not implying you prefer my company over his?”

Blaine freezes.

“He would never,” Kurt answers, keeping his voice light and saving Blaine from answering. “And,” Kurt smiles and tightens his grip on Blaine’s hand, and drawing his attention, “you owe me an opinion.”

“Oh?”

“Yup,” Kurt confirms, ignoring the hitch in Blaine’s breathing. “What do you think of just telling the guests to sit where they like at the wedding, instead of choosing a side?”

Blaine manages a shadow of a smile along with a weak nod and Kurt returns it before hurrying to continue the conversation. “Okay then. And –”
Kurt stops when Blaine draws in a breath and winces, involuntarily jerking away from Christine’s touch. A quick glance shows the nurse offering an apologetic smile even as she returns her focus to an incision on Blaine’s side.

“Hey,” Kurt stands and leans over Blaine’s bed, blocking Christine from Blaine’s view. “Just breathe, okay? Breathe and look at me.”

Blaine’s grip on his hand tightens, and Kurt can see that he is trying, pulling in breaths even as his eyes dart from Kurt to the space behind him. Kurt does his best to hold Blaine’s gaze while he keeps his breathing even. “Remember how you told me to keep calm?” Kurt moves his free hand to rest lightly on Blaine’s chest. “Count and breathe. Okay?”

It takes two minutes – twenty-seven breaths – but finally, Blaine does.

“Sorry about that,” Christine murmurs, “but I think I can spare you some tests. You’ll still have to get your IV switched, though, and Dr. Olt will want to take a look when she stops by, later.”

Kurt gives a hum of acknowledgment but keeps his focus on Blaine.

“You have an idea of when she’ll be stoppin’ by?”

His father’s voice pulls Kurt’s attention, and a glance shows that his father and Carole on the other side of Blaine’s bed.

“It’ll be some time before lunch,” Christine answers as she throws away her gloves. “She has follow-ups this afternoon.”

“I look forward to seeing her then,” Carole comments as she steps forward. “Do you think...” His stepmother pauses and when she continues her voice barely carries across the small space. “Do you think she’ll move Blaine to the step-down unit?”

“I can’t say,” Christine replies as she reaches for the door. “Switching units is a bit outside my purview as a nurse.”

“Surely you have a guess, given your experience.”

“One the legal department won’t let me share,” Christine quips. “But I can say that hypothetically – statistically – patients with injuries like Blaine’s are usually in ICU for another week.”

Kurt pushes down the disappointment that rises at Christine’s words and smiles at Blaine instead. “Looks like we get to keep making Christine’s day, Blaine. She just can’t let go of her favorite patient.”

“I do have other patients,” the nurse comments from the door, “and I’m sure they’re anxiously awaiting my questions. So just let us know if you need anything before I’m back with your meds, okay Blaine?”

A nod of confirmation and she’s gone, the door closing behind her.

Beside him, Blaine stays silent.

“So,” Kurt begins, adjusting the blanket around Blaine, “what do you think of joining Pamela Lansbury on stage once we’re in New York? Elliott and I were talking, and you’d sound wonderful for when we decide to perform Flight Song.”
Thirty seconds.

Leaning back, Kurt bunches the blanket beneath his hand.

Forty-three seconds.

One minute.

One minute and twelve –

“Kurt,” Blaine finally murmurs, “the band is yours. I can’t –” He stops, and Kurt only manages to focus on Blaine when his fiancé entangles their fingers. “I don’t want you to feel like you have to do everything with me.”

“No!” Kurt winces when his objection comes out a touch louder than he intended. “That’s not… I want to sing with you. And if you don’t want to that’s okay.” He pauses before starting again. “But, I – we – would really like for you to join us, at least some of the time. You could be our special guest.” Kurt keeps his last sentence light, a contrast from his first stilted response.

Ten seconds.

Nineteen –

“Well,” Blaine finally answers, tightening his hold of Kurt’s hand. “I can’t say no to being a special guest.”

Kurt knows his smile is wide, overly large for Blaine’s quiet response, but the thrill of imagining Blaine on stage with him (and the rest of the band) in New York, the daydreams becoming closer to something actually happening overrides any potential embarrassment.

“I’m sure those will be some great performances,” his father comments, and Kurt refocuses on the present. “So I expect recordings for when we’re not visiting.”

“Dad,” Kurt ducks his head and rolls his eyes, “the band’s just for fun.”

A glance shows his father smiling, “So?”

Kurt shakes his head. “I’m sure Carole could find some uploads on YouTube afterwards.”

“What,” his father teases, “we don’t warrant a personalized recording?”

Kurt huffs a laugh even as smiles in response, grateful his father has distracted Blaine from Christine’s comment minutes before.

“Ignore him, Kurt. And you,” Carole turns then, facing his father, “stop giving them a hard time.”

His father raises his arms in mock defense, and Kurt feels the last of his tension ease when Blaine manages a weak laugh from beside him.

Kurt relaxes, moves to half-sit on the bed beside Blaine, and lets the casual conversation lull around him.

*_-*_-*_-*

Blaine carefully shifts on the bed, suppressing a wince at a flare of pain from the stitches across his side. Luckily his slip appears to be unnoticed, with Kurt’s attention still across the room.
Despite the heaviness in his head, Blaine forces his attention to Val as she answers his fiancé’s question, focuses on her voice rather than the moving clock. “I’m afraid I don’t have an answer for you, Kurt. I know that the officers working Blaine’s case are following some leads.” She briefly pauses, and Blaine takes the opportunity to close his eyes. “But,” she continues, “as soon as anything new comes up they’re going to share it with you. And I’ll be here, too.”

“For how long?” Kurt sounds sad, and Blaine runs his thumb over Kurt’s hand; Kurt shouldn’t be sad.

“I’m sorry?”

“Kurt—”

“They’ll be here ‘as soon as anything new comes up’?” Kurt’s voice shocks Blaine, sharper than Val’s and Burt’s. “When might that be? A week from now, a month? Longer? And you seem nice, Val, really.” Kurt pauses, and Blaine looks at the pattern on his fiancé’s shirt, the stripes the brightest thing in the room. “–know you have other people to meet with,” Kurt’s still talking. “I know other people suffer, too, but that means you can’t stay here forever.”

“You’re right.” Beside him, Kurt startles, and Blaine follows his example and looks to Val. “I can’t stay with you forever, but I will be here for you during any legal proceedings. Regardless of how far in the future that may be.”

“And in the meantime?”

“There’re other support systems,” Val answers.

“Blaine’s got a therapist,” Burt comments from by the window. “She’s stoppin’ by sometime this week.”

“Then I look forward to meeting her, if possible. But I meant support in other ways. There’re support groups for survivors and their loved ones. What do you think, Blaine?”

Blaine mentally replays Val’s words, carefully putting the words of his answer together into clear sentences.

“Blaine?”

He’s taking too long, judging from the looks from everyone in the room. “I—” Blaine stops and looks at his and Kurt’s entwined hands before starting again. “You want me to talk in a group.”

“Only if you feel comfortable,” Val replies as she moves to the foot of his bed. “They’re not for everyone, but it can be helpful to hear from people who have been through difficult situations, too. It doesn’t make what you went through any less or more harrowing than someone else’s experience, but it can help remind you that you’re not the first to survive something like this.”


Blaine pulls on Kurt’s hand until Kurt looks at him, only then carefully shifting until there’s empty space between him and railing.

He smiles when Kurt moves to sit beside him, and Blaine rests his head against his side.

“I’m sorry for what you’ve been through,” Val finally says. “Think about the support groups, though, okay?” She looks away then, toward Burt and Carole. “All of you; like I said…there’s
groups for loved ones, too.”

“We’ll keep that in mind,” Carole answers. “Thank you.”

“I’m on to you,” Kurt quietly murmurs over Carole’s response. “Stop fighting and let those meds Christine brought you do their job.”

“Kurt?”

“Go to sleep, Blaine.”

“But –”

“Dad and Carole can get any other information from Val, and I’ll even take notes. But for now,” Kurt tightens his hold on Blaine’s hand, “close your eyes and go to sleep.”

Kurt looks content, but Blaine recognizes the hint of exasperation in his tone.

Blaine closes his eyes.

Voices blend together; Burt and Carole, Val, Kurt. The words don’t make sense, half sentences and questions, but the tones are peaceful.

He’s safe.
Chapter 35

I'm not dead! Sorry I'm late with updating but life happened (update: I've moved into a new apartment and plan on starting my PhD in the fall) and I'll be teaching a couple classes over the summer. Regardless, I hope you enjoy this chapter (it's long!) and a special thanks to slayerkitty for talking me through several scenes and betaing all 17 pages faster than I thought possible.

Thanks to all of you for the comments and support - you still brighten my day!

Remind Me to Forget

Chapter 35

Carole ends the call and places her phone in her purse with a sigh. After days spent only with family and medical personnel she’d forgotten how draining it was, talking to others. Describing Blaine’s condition, focusing on keeping the details of his recovery clear while respecting his privacy – Carole had chosen her words carefully. Luckily Emma had accepted the pauses and been grateful for the update, her tone carrying only the slightest hint of unease when she first asked about Blaine (and if Carole had breathed out a sigh of relief when Emma had let it slip that Will wasn’t home, Emma hadn’t seemed to notice).

Across from her, Kurt seems intent on his own phone, tapping hurriedly, although the angle keeps her from seeing if he’s sending texts or checking his online wish list. She’d hoped, when he’d joined her as Blaine was wheeled away for more tests, that Kurt would give her some insight into his thoughts.

She should have known better.

Kurt hasn’t looked up from his phone in the half an hour they’ve been in the waiting room.

“Everything okay?”

Kurt quickly looks up, surprised. “Sorry?”

“I didn’t mean to startle you. But,” Carole nods toward the phone now held in Kurt’s lax hand, “you seemed pretty intent. Everything okay in New York?”

“I guess.” Kurt offers a weak shrug. “Elliott said things are okay, anyway, and Santana thanked me for her getting extra hours at the diner. Her way of being supportive: my shifts are covered and she gets some extra money.”

Carole gives a small shake of her head even as she manages a small smile. “That sounds like Santana.”

Kurt offers an absent hum of agreement and refocuses on his phone.

Carole takes a breath – and the reaches across the foot separating them and takes Kurt’s phone,
“Carole –”

“Those texts you described aren’t what’s keeping you so attached to this,” she comments as she holds the phone. “So, why don’t you tell me what’s really bothering you.”

“Blaine’s –”

“Blaine was taken for testing,” Carole interrupts, “and he’s getting better each day he’s here. I didn’t ask about Blaine, Kurt, I asked about you.”

Kurt looks to the floor and Carole resists the urge to give Kurt an out, holds in the nevermind, Kurt and the need to immediately comfort.

“s’d it.” The mumbled sounds leave Kurt with a sigh, barely louder than a whisper.

“Kurt?”

“I missed it.” The sharp words carry across the small space, but make no more sense than Kurt’s previous mumble. “Blaine did see the truck,” Kurt continues before Carole can manage to form a response. “It was there…that monster followed him, Carole, was parked by the shop! And I didn’t – I just told him everything was okay. I didn’t –”

“Kurt!”

Kurt stops midsentence, surprise and annoyance crossing his features before he leans back in his chair and refuses to meet Carole’s eyes, stares instead at a point just over her shoulder.

“You couldn’t have known,” she continues as Kurt keeps his silence. “None of us could have known. Blaine didn’t know, Kurt. You didn’t let him down.”

“I –”

“You have been there for Blaine, Kurt. So don’t you dare sell yourself short. I won’t have it, okay?”

Kurt nods, mumbles a quiet, “Okay.” But Carole recognizes the distant look in his eye, the slight downturn of his mouth.


“No! Of course –”

“It was at the shop, we know that. Your dad didn’t see it. Should he be feeling guilty?”

“He was inside! He couldn’t –”

“No, Kurt. He couldn’t have known. So what makes it different for you?”

Across the room, a tired father is attempting to get a toddler to play with a set of blocks; an older couple appear to be having a quiet argument, judging by their body language; the nurses type away on the computers behind the desk.

“You know,” Kurt finally replies, “if I were a different person I’d resent being surrounded with
adults who are right all the time.”

Carole ducks her head to hide her smile. “It’s a gift.”

And for the first time in days, Kurt looks up with something akin to a real smile. “I don’t suppose you’d share your supplier?”

“I would,” Carole replies with a nod, “but unfortunately clientele are limited by age. You’ve got a while to go, I’m afraid.”

Kurt shakes his head. “I should have known.”

“Hm,” Carole agrees as she stands up. “Come on, Kurt, I think after that we’ve earned some stellar dessert from the cafeteria.”

Kurt stands even as his voice betrays his confusion. “At 10 in the morning?”

“I said we’ve earned it, Kurt.” Carole offers him her arm, “And are you really going to turn down dessert?”

Carole ignores his mumblings about the quality of said dessert as they head for the elevator.

*-*-*-*

Burt sighs and leans back against the worn seat of his truck, staring at the building before him. He had intended to grab a coffee and head to the shop, just like he’d told Carole, but without him realizing he’d ended up here.

And he can’t bring himself to turn around.

The structure before him reminds him of an office building with its tan exterior and small windows. At this time of the morning few cars are out, so his view remains mostly unobstructed.

Burt clenches his hands around the steering wheel.

Releasing a breath – or ten – Burt finally releases his hands, reaching down to undo his seatbelt.

Moments later he double checks that he’s locked the door before reaching up and adjusting his hat. There’s a bite in the air, but the glare from the sun has him squinting, and he briefly ducks his head to shield his eyes.

A glance and then he crosses the street, pausing only once he reaches the front doors.

He can’t rush in and demand information, can’t make his way to the cell or interrogation room and personally question the homophobic monster who dared to hurt a member of his family.

He can’t.

But stopping by to thank Rob for his phone call is something he can do, and if he can manage an invitation for some – probably poorly made – coffee for the chance to ask some questions, there’s no law against talking to a friend.

Squaring his shoulders, Burt opens the door.

He’s struck by the sound, first. The shows Carole watches always have precincts buzzing with noise, but while there is a steady hum of distant conversations, there’s no thrum of immediate
urgency.

“Can I help you?”

The officer behind the desk looks young, and Burt resists the urge to ask him when he graduated from high school.

“I was hopin’ to see a friend. Officer Rob Fenner? He should be on shift, as far as I know.”

“I can call back and see if he’s free…is this regarding a case?”

“Yeah,” Burt reaches up and runs a hand over the bill of his hat, unable to stay both silent and still.

Five minutes later Burt’s seated in an uncomfortable chair (smaller and less-padded than even the chairs in the hospital waiting room), staring at the steam rising from the Lima PD mug in front of him on the desk.

“So Kurt’s enjoyin’ the big city?”

The question startles Burt out of his reverie. “Yeah,” Burt reaches for his coffee, “he loves it. Made the Dean’s List last semester too.”

“That’s good. Kurt’s a good kid.”

“Yeah,” Burt agrees, “I lucked out in the kid department.”

Silence.

Burt reaches for his coffee.

“Okay,” Rob leans forward in his chair. “Kurt is a talented, smart kid. But I’m guessin’ you’re not here drinking department coffee because of that fact.” A beat, and Burt sets down his mug. “How’s Blaine doing, Burt?”

“He’s improving.” Burt thinks back to that morning, right before he’d left the hospital. Kurt had been beside Blaine on the bed, distracting him as Christine had checked Blaine’s incisions.

“I heard he woke up.”

“Yeah,” Burt readjusts his hat. “A few days ago.”

Burt remembers Blaine’s barely audible, half-formed sentences; Kurt’s palpable rush of relief; Carole’s hand clenching his own. Blaine had woken up, but his stitches and bruises – Blaine still doesn’t look like himself.

For a moment, it’s all Burt can see, his imagination filling in the blanks in what it would take to leave Blaine with the injuries that still have him in the ICU.

Injuries Stephen Mullins had caused.

His hands clench, and he pictures meeting the monster who dared to hurt his family.

Ten minutes.

Ten minutes alone and Burt could release the anger he’s kept at bay since that harrowing phone call.
A ringing phone shatters his imaginings. Burt glances up, sees Rob patiently taking a sip of his own coffee. Abruptly, Burt remembers the gutted look on Kurt’s face when he realized Burt couldn’t promise Mullins would be caught.

And Burt knows, with sudden clarity, that Rob would tell him. Burt could get his ten minutes.

But Kurt would have that look again, and Blaine – Blaine would never receive justice for the hell he endured.

“Burt?”

“I should get going,” Burt answers, catching the flash of relief on Rob’s face. “Gotta get back and check on the boys, you know? Besides,” he continues as he stands and pushes in his chair, “I promised Carole a real cup of coffee.”

“Ah,” Rob comments as he stands. “You’d better get on that, then. It never ends well if you make the wife wait.”

Burt nods and reaches forward to shake Rob’s hand. “Thanks again.”

“Ah,” Rob comments as he stands. “You’d better get on that, then. It never ends well if you make the wife wait.”

Burt nods and reaches forward to shake Rob’s hand. “Thanks again.”

“It was good seein’ you, and let me know how Blaine’s doing, too.”

“Of course.”

Burt is steps from the door when a shout as him turning. “Mr. Hummel!” Seconds later Val stands next to him, offering a smile. “Sorry, I probably shouldn’t have shouted, but I saw you and –”

“It’s fine.” Burt interrupts, “It’s nice to see you somewhere other than the hospital… but,” he gestures to the station, “I’m guessin’ this is still work for you.”

“Sometimes,” Val nods.

“Not now?”

“No, actually,” Val comments with a smile. “I was just having breakfast with a friend before heading to the office…” The sentences dies and she takes a step forward. “Is there anything I can help you with?”

Burt looks to the floor in embarrassment. “I –” He sighs and starts again. “No, but thanks for asking.”

“Well then,” Val nods toward the door. “Were you leaving, too?”

At the words Burt involuntarily looks back toward the hall he’d left moments earlier, absently wondering if Mullins is scared.

He should be.

“Yeah,” Burt finally answers, slightly shaking his head. “I’m done.”

Stepping out into the parking lot beside Val Burt pauses for a moment, blinking in the intensely bright morning light.

“All that florescent lighting and I still can’t see when I step outside.”

Burt hums in agreement and futilely adjusts his hat. “At least it’s not raining.”
“I’ve always liked the rain,” Val comments from beside him. “Everything seems better…cleaner, afterwards.”

“Too bad it only happens outside,” Burt murmurs, glancing toward the station.

“You know,” Val begins, “You strike me as a pretty smart man. Maybe you can help me with something.” At Burt’s questioning look she continues, “I always wondered…as kids we’re taught what’s right and wrong: be kind, help others, don’t lie, or cheat. But despite the tale of the forbidden fruit, I was never told that temptation is wrong. In fact, I was also told my curiosity was a good thing. But temptation seems much more dangerous than cheating on a math test, or lying about a party. Temptation has far worse consequences, don’t you think?”

Burt freezes.

“I do,” Burt finally answers, turning to face her. “And I thought through all of them, about fifteen minutes ago.”

“Like I said,” Val smiles, “you’re a smart man.”

“And you’re very good at your job.”

“I try to be, but it certainly helps when the people have support. Especially the younger ones,” Val pauses for a moment, pushing a piece of hair behind her ear. “Parents are important.”

“I’m not Blaine’s –”

“And yet here you are, Mr. Hummel.”

Burt drops his gaze and thinks back to the fear that had eclipsed his thoughts when he’d answered the phone and heard Blaine Anderson and Lima Memorial Hospital in the same sentence.

He hadn’t just worried for Kurt’s sake.

“Blaine’s a good kid.”

This time Val’s the one to look away. “They’re always good kids.”

Burt takes a step forward. “Then it’s a good thing they have you lookin’ out for them.”

Val offers a hum of agreement before seemingly shaking herself out of her stupor. “I should get back to doing that then. I’ll see you at the hospital later?”

Burt nods. “I’ll be headin’ back right after I get Carole and Kurt their coffee.”

Val smiles and glances to her watch. “I’ll see you in a few hours.”

A wave and Burt’s turning, heading for his truck two spaces down. Once inside he only spares the station a glance before pulling out of the parking lot.

He has coffee to buy.

*_*_*_*_*

Blaine closes his eyes, fighting dizziness as Christine lowers the rail on his bed and takes his proffered arm. To his left, Kurt adjusts the blanket and Blaine murmurs a ‘thank you’ while leaning into Kurt’s shoulder.
“You’re a pro, Blaine,” Christine comments as she withdraws his IV, seamlessly replacing the needle with a square of gauze. “There’s no medal for you, sadly. But I might be able to get you some Jello for lunch.”

“Dr. Olt already told us,” Kurt teases, “so I think you’ll need to think of another prize.”

“Of course she’d beat me to it,” Christine replies as she deftly applies a tourniquet further down Blaine’s arm and reaches for his hand. “Well,” the alcohol swab is cold against his hand, “how about flavor? Any particular kind you prefer?”

Blaine glances at the water pitcher on the table to his left, imagines having something with taste for lunch.

“How about flavor? Any particular kind you prefer?” Christine leans forward and Blaine forces himself to meet her gaze. “I can work with that. But Blaine,” she continues as she rubs over the tape on his hand, “is there a reason you’re letting Kurt do all the talking today?”

“Sorry,” Blaine mumbles around a swallow, fighting to keep down the water Burt had brought him earlier. “I’m dizzy.”

“Nauseated, too?” Blaine nods and leans back against Kurt. “Is there a reason,” Christine continues, “that you didn’t mention this earlier?”

Blaine freezes.

“No –”

“You’re not in trouble,” Blaine ignores the way Kurt has tensed behind him, the hiss of breath his fiancé had released moments before. “But I can’t get you the good meds without your input, Blaine.”

“Sorry.” Blaine murmurs, “I –” he stops, looks down to the newly placed IV. “…’m sick of water.”

“Okay?”

“He didn’t want to risk losing permission to have Jello.” Kurt comments, answering the confusion in Christine’s tone. “And I,” he continues, voice tight, “was under the mistaken impression that he wouldn’t lie to the medical professional.”

“Kurt.” Kurt’s jaw brushes against Blaine’s hair as he turns to face his father, but Blaine keeps his head down and blinks.

A sigh, Kurt presses a kiss to Blaine’s cheek. “I’m not mad,” he murmurs, adjusting the blankets. “I just don’t like the idea of you hurting.”

“’m just dizzy.”

Kurt opens his mouth before he closes it again, lips pressed in a thin line.

“So,” Christine comments as she turns toward her computer, “how bad, on a scale of one to ten?”
Blaine breathes for a moment before leaning back more fully into Kurt, ignoring the spinning room. “Seven.”

“Okay,” Christine taps something on the computer. “They changed your meds since you’ve been upgraded from your liquid diet, but I’ll check in with Dr. Olt. Probably,” a glance shows her looking to Burt in Carole, “she’ll switch the meds back.”

Blaine sighs. “Make me tired.”

“You need to sleep,” Kurt responds. “And,” he glances to Christine, “it’ll just be when you need it.”

“Kurt –”

“Blaine,” Christine interrupts, “don’t worry about it. I get that meds aren’t the greatest, but none of us want you dealing with dizziness and nausea. Besides,” she offers a smile, “don’t you want to feel like eating the delicious Jello I’ll be bringing you in a few hours?”

Blaine nods.

“See?” Kurt comments as he tightens his grip on Blaine’s hand, “You’ll feel better and you’ll get Jello.”

Blaine nods and closes his eyes, letting himself drift, absently listening to Christine’s assurance that she’ll be back soon and the quiet conversation of Burt and Carole.

His head continues to spin, however, and the usual hospital smell seems stronger than usual.

Blaine swallows. “Kurt.”

“Hm.”

Nausea builds and Blaine winces in pain. “’m gonna b’ sick.”

“Blaine?!” Kurt’s voice holds a note of panic.

“Kurt –” but Blaine can’t continue, bile rising in his throat.

“Dad!” Kurt’s voice has gone shrill. “Dad where’s the bowl?!”

Blaine takes a deep breath, wincing when it pulls his ribs. Bile burns, and Blaine opens his eyes in the hope of distraction.

Burt and Carole are rummaging through the tables in his room; behind him, Kurt continues rubbing his hand and keeps a stream of quiet, if tense, assurances.

It’s too much.

Blaine lurches forward, crying out even as his eyes burn. His stomach clenches and water and bile hit the floor.

The room still spins, but it’s eclipsed by the pain radiating from side. “Sorry,” Blaine mumbles, sucking in breaths, “’m sorry.”

“No.” Kurt hisses even as he moves to stand next to the bed. “You don’t apologize for this. Okay?”
“I’ll go find Christine,” Blaine hears Carole but can’t focus on her, her image a blur as she exits the room.

“Just breathe,” Kurt murmurs. “It’ll be okay; Christine will be here soon.”

Blaine tires to follow Kurt’s advice.

He does.

But breathing is agony, the fire spreading from his side to lungs. And his nose. And his eyes. The room blurs, but the tears don’t put out the fire and Blaine fights the urge to scream.

Bile rises in its place.

Kurt’s still murmuring, rushed words that Blaine can’t answer; he cries into Kurt’s shoulder instead.

“It’ll be okay, kid.” Burt’s hand on his shoulder is grounding, and Blaine swallows.

And then the door opens.

“Blaine,” Christine comments as she enters, a custodian and Carole following behind.

“Sorry.”

“No need for that,” Christine answers as she pulls on a pair of gloves and grabs a set of sheets from a cabinet. The comforting hand on his shoulder vanishes, and Kurt moves to the other side of Blaine’s bed.

Christine takes their place.

“Blaine. I know it hurts, but how bad is it, between one and ten?”

“He’s in pain,” Kurt snaps, “just give him something.”

“Blaine,” Christine pulls his attention, “just give me a number.”

It still hurts to breathe, pain spreading from his ribs and side. “Ni–” A swell of pain steals his breath and Blaine bites his lip. “Nine.”

“Okay,” and Christine’s already moving his arm and reaching for his I.V. “Let’s get you feeling better then, okay?” Cold snakes up his arm. Another, and then Christine sighs. “Alright Blaine, I’m going to need to change your gown, and the bedding. Just let me do all the work.”

Blaine looks down, tries to ignore the hitch in his breathing. “Sorry.”

“None of that,” Christine comments as she takes a step down the bed, “and these needed changed, anyway. We’re just doing it a bit early.”

Blaine can’t keep in the hiss as she reaches for the blankets, adjusting his legs as she does.

“Hey,” Kurt’s there, reaching for his hand. “You –”

“Kurt,” Christine interrupts, “Blaine’s going to need to roll a bit so we can get these sheets, so you keep hold of his hand, okay? Burt, Carole,” she turns and Blaine eyes her ponytail. “If you
wouldn’t mind helping me with the corners we can make this go a bit faster.”

And then Blaine’s surrounded, Kurt still holding his hand even as the room blurs a bit.

“– relax, kid. After this I bet Christine will even find you more of those warmed blankets.”

“As many as he likes,” Christine confirms.

The pain still there, but Blaine doesn’t care.

Kurt is more important.

Until Blaine tries to turn so they can pull the sheets to the right of his head.

Pain explodes and Blaine can’t stop the choked cry in response.

“Blaine!” Kurt tightens his grip but turns to face Christine. “Can’t this wait until he’s asleep?”

“Unfortunately,” Christine murmurs as she pulls the sheet, “he needs to be awake. Believe it or not it’s easier – for all of us – when he can help. So,” Christine steps back and moves the wires over the bed rail. “Blaine, we’re almost done, okay? Just focus on that wonderful fiancé of yours.”

“Kurt.”

“Still here,” Kurt whispers. “And even Christine wants you pay attention to me. So just…just follow her advice, okay?”

Blaine nods.

He has to move twice more, once with Burt’s assistance as Carole pulls off the sheet from beneath him and Christine pulls up the sheets to the head of the bed. Kurt keeps a steady stream of conversation through it all, tracing patterns on Blaine’s hand.

By the time Christine has pulled the curtain and deftly switched Blaine’s gown with a clean one, Kurt has adjusted the pillows and Blaine leans back with a sigh.

The fire is gone, but the room still spins and Blaine blinks, looking to Kurt.

“It’s done, Blaine. Go to sleep.”

The room blurs and Blaine gives in.

*_*_*_*_*

Kurt adjusts the blankets covering Blaine and looks to the monitors. Blaine’s sleeping, finally, and Kurt knows he’s staring, but he can’t look away.

He pushes back a piece of Blaine’s hair, tries to replace the image of Blaine crying in pain with the current scene of him sleeping. Kurt unclenches his left hand and moves to sit on the bed, one leg hanging off the edge.

“Kurt.”

“Hm?”

“He’s okay.” A sigh. “Why don’t we step out for a minute, get some air.”
“No.”

“No,” his father moves to the chair next to the bed. “Blaine’s sleeping, and judgin’ by the meds Christine gave him he’ll be out for a while. You’ve been in here all day; take a break.”

Kurt counts Blaine’s breaths and pointedly adjusts his position.

“No,” Carole agrees, “we couldn’t. But you held his hand, Kurt, and I’m pretty sure he cared more about that than the lack of a bowl.”

“It’s awful,” his dad comments from beside him, “when someone you love is hurting. But you can’t control it, Kurt.”

Kurt turns back to Blaine, watches the rise and fall of his chest.

Two

Three

Four

Blaine’s too still.

It’s a contrast from earlier, when he’d been smiling.

Because Dr. Olt approved Blaine for Jello –

Kurt steps back and Carole’s hand drops from his shoulder. “You were right, Dad. I’ll – I’ll be back.”

The light of the hall seems harsh, glaring on the tiled floor. Kurt blinks and heads for the waiting room, nodding to Christine as he passes the nurse’s station.

He stops in the waiting room, leaning against the wall.

Across the room, a toddler starts crying and Kurt watches as a tired looking man move to sit on the floor.

“Hey,” Kurt jumps and offers his father a half-hearted glare. “Sorry,” his father continues, “but you left pretty fast.”

“I took your advice.”

“You did,” his dad moves to stand beside him, “so quickly you forgot your phone.”

“Oh.” Kurt takes his phone, staring for a moment before turning it on.

A flash and then Kurt almost drops the phone when it starts to vibrate in his hand.

Incoming Call – Cooper Anderson
“Important call?”

“It’s Cooper.”

Kurt stares at the phone, unsure if he has the energy to answer and deal with Blaine’s brother. His father is suspiciously silent. For a moment, Kurt debates handing back the phone, letting his dad handle the call.

But his dad never met Cooper.

Kurt sighs and accepts the call. “Hello?”

“Kurt! How’s my favorite brother-from-another-mother?”

“Cooper –”

“See what I did? Because you’re marrying my little bro!”

“Yes,” Kurt sighs, “that is the plan.”

“Great!” A pause, “So, how is Blaine doing?”

Kurt closes his eyes, and pushes away the memory of Blaine crying in pain half an hour earlier. “He’s recovering.”

“That’s good. So…he’s up for visitors?”

“He’s in the ICU.”

“Oh,” Cooper’s breath is loud through the phone. “Yeah, I think Mom mentioned that.”

“I bet she did.”

“What?”

“Did you need something, Cooper?”

“Mom said her and Dad couldn’t see Blaine? But I must have heard her wrong, right? No way would my awesome almost-bro keep family from Blaine.”

Kurt freezes.

“Cooper,” Kurt turns to face his dad. “You didn’t – there wasn’t a misunderstanding. Your parents can’t get in to see Blaine.”

“But,” Cooper continues in a flat – if confused – voice, “they’re our parents, Kurt.”

“No,” Kurt counters, “they’re not.”

“Kurt –”

“You know what they did!” Kurt hisses, “You know why Blaine was staying with my parents. You know what your dad –” Kurt breathes out and steps away from the wall. “You know he did,” Kurt continues, “you know, and you still think they should see your brother? Especially when he’s in the hospital because of some homophobic monster put him there! Again!”
“Which is why he should spend time with his family, right? It’s like when I reading through that script for the While You Were Sleeping remake. The whole family is there for support!”

“This isn’t a movie!” Kurt snaps, “And Blaine’s family is here, Cooper. We just happen to have a different last name.”

“I –”

“I thought you’d grown up, Cooper. I thought after you visited…but now you’re asking me to put your parents’ wants before Blaine.”

“They just want to see him, Kurt.”

“He doesn’t want to see them!” Kurt shouts in exasperation. “And I can’t believe you’re calling me to ask for them!” The couple in the chairs across from him look up and Kurt ducks his head. “Just…go back to reading your scripts, Cooper.”

And he ends the call.

“Interesting conversation?”

“What gave it away?”

“Kurt.”

“What?!” Kurt turns to face his father. “Are you going to lecture me for yelling or something?”

“No.”

“Really.” Kurt makes no attempt to hide his sarcasm.

“It would be a bit hypocritical.”

Kurt manages a half smile. “It would?”

His father stays suspiciously silent for a minute before stepping forward. “I’ve had some choice words for the Andersons,” he comments. “But how about some coffee?” He questions, blatantly changing the subject. “I figure you could use some caffeine.”

“I –”

“Mr. Hummel!”

Kurt turns as his father does, stands frozen as Officers Randall and Daniels approach.

“Dad?”

“I don’t know, Kurt.”

“Officers.” Kurt takes a step closer to his dad as the officers stop in front of them.

“Mr. Hummel, Kurt,” Officer Randall glances around the room. “Do you mind if we…” He gestures to the ICU doors and lets the sentence die.

“There’s a conference room –”

“Did something happen?” Kurt interrupts. He trips over the words in his haste to ask, crosses his
arms to keep himself from stepping forward.

“I think we should –”

“What happened?”

Officer Randall shares a look with his partner. “We need to talk about Blaine’s case.”

“I figured that when you showed up,” Kurt bites out.

“Kurt –”

“No!” Kurt snaps at his father before turning back to the officers. “What happened?”

“We have a confession.”

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