Glad You Came

by daftydraw, JWMelmoth

Summary

As Hurricane BLAM blows through Kurt and Blaine’s apartment, Kurt seeks refuge in a cocktail bar. It is here that he bumps into Sebastian. It seems at first glance that his old nemesis hasn’t changed a bit. But Kurt has, and slowly, he starts to realise that maybe Sebastian has too.

Notes

Mid season 5, with minor canon tweaks: Kurt and Blaine moved out of the loft together, and are still trying to make their engagement work. The episode “Bash” does not exist in this universe.

A Tumblr collaboration fic by daftydraw and JWMelmoth.
The Night Off

Kurt leaned over the basin to peer at his reflection in the small bathroom mirror critically. Not as flawless as he would have liked, but acceptable given the circumstances. And he'd be damned if he missed out on his single night off because of some sleepless nights.

Kurt's self-imposed work-, study- and training schedule was ruthless, but every time slot filled had its reasons; after his NYADA classes, he clocked in as many hours as he could at Vogue to keep his internship, as many as needed at the diner to pay for rent and food, and as many at the gym as he had to to compensate for the quality of that food. He did his homework on the subway and studied at night, often at the price of sleep.

One single night a week, he reserved for himself - not that he had much of a choice, as Blaine and his new bff Sam had declared it their weekly 'bro' night and often crowded Kurt and Blaine's small apartment with inane games, loud movies and 'freestyle poetry BLAMs'. Kurt usually made sure he was gone before Sam arrived, and home long after Blaine crashed.

Tonight, he would be trying an Italian bistro he'd found in a New York tour guide book and an LGBTQ cocktail bar he had read about online. Kurt went to a new place every week, enjoying his anonymity and trying to see and meet as many handsome, interesting and free-minded New Yorkers as possible. He'd dance, sing if they had karaoke, flirt a little, pocket and discard phone numbers, and go home feeling a little better about himself. A small concession to the big city dreams of a small town boy; even if nothing else so far had gone as he had imagined it would, at least the community was glamorous.

The alarm on his phone went off, and he knew it was time to go. Blaine's entertainment tonight was something involving masks and capes, and he'd rather not know.

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Sebastian smiled flirtatiously at the two girls sat at the bar and placed two expertly made pornstar martinis in front of them, following quickly with the complimentary shots of prosecco. It was unusual for girls to come to Satire. It was a gay club that mainly catered to men, and there were plenty of other LGBTQ bars around the area that catered for other groups. As such most people kept to their own venues, but once in a while there was the odd tourist or two looking for a night out, who saw Satire as somewhere they could go to have a good time without being targeted. They usually tipped well too.

The girls grinned back and the darker haired of the two slid a $20 bill across the counter to him.

"Keep the change, hot stuff," she said with a wink. Sebastian nodded back at her with a smile and unfolded the money so he could place it in the cash register. He suppressed a chuckle at the sight of the note hidden inside the bill and lifted it up to read more clearly.

"Thank you, Crissy," he said, holding the small slip of white paper between his second and third fingers.

"Use it...if you ever get lonely," she said with a coy smile.

"Thanks," Sebastian said. "But not your team."

"I figured, considering the place, but you never know...give me a call if you're curious." She winked
at Sebastian and she and her friend picked up their glasses and wandered off to one of the booths on the other side of the club.

He glanced over at them quickly to make sure the girls had moved out of sight before pulling out Marc's spare lighter from under the counter and setting fire to the slip, throwing it into the sink. He'd never just throw it away...not in a city like New York.

Sebastian opened the register and slid the twenty into its compartment, counting out the change and dropping it into the collected tip jar. That made $20 in tips so far tonight and he was only 3 hours into his shift.

_I may not like girls, he thought to himself, but if putting on a flirtatious smile and a few winks gets me tips, then I'll do it._

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Two hours later, Kurt was definitely in the right mood to dance. The bistro had been amazing, and he was already a little warmed up from the wine he'd had with dinner.

He looked around the bar, pleased to find it looked just like the pictures on the website. The rhythm of the music set his shoulders in motion. A few people were already dancing. Kurt decided to join them for a bit to allow his dinner to settle before getting a drink - he had to be economic with his funds. In a way, dancing was an extension of his classes and exercise routine, but with one major difference: in a place like this, he didn't need to hold back. Kurt shimmied and spun as much as he liked, throwing in everything he remembered from Sam's brief attempt to teach the Glee club some moves. He wondered if Sam even remembered it was his best 'bro' who told him off for that.

He danced for the next half hour or so, reveling in the attention he received from the people around him. It was a heady feeling, being the object of so much attention. It had been so long since he felt confident in his own appeal that this was a welcome boost. Shortly before midnight, having worked up a bit of a sweat, he headed to the bar to cool off a little.

"Can I get a Cosmopolitan, please?" he asked politely, raising his hand with a little wave in hopes of getting the bartender's attention. Kurt hated it when patrons at the diner just yelled their order at him like it was his name.

Sebastian, having just turned away a couple of kids who had clearly broken out their fake IDs, was scanning the bar for his next customer when he noticed someone waving at him. In the dim light of the club it was hard to make the man out though there was something familiar about him. Then the man spoke in a voice that went straight through him.

He'd know that voice anywhere. With incredulity he slid in front of the man and spoke. "Kurt Hummel, as I live and breathe. Sure you don't want a Shirley Temple instead?" A grin spread across his face.

Kurt stared, his hand still half raised. All the times he had fantasised about seeing Sebastian Smythe again flashed before his eyes. In his fantasies, Kurt was always blindingly successful, academically as well as professionally- and in love. He'd be able to show Sebastian that he _had_ made it out of Lima, with Blaine by his side, despite what the other boy had said when they were still in school.

Yet here Kurt was, all alone at the bar, and none of his rehearsed victory speeches seemed to want to come out of his mouth.
Instead, Kurt felt his cheeks flash hotly, and an odd sense of guilt crept up on him, like he had just been caught doing something naughty. He quickly lowered his hand and tried to regain his composure.

Sebastian grinned at the expression on Kurt's face as he took Sebastian in and could practically hear the cogs turning underneath the perfectly coiffed hair.

"I'm sure," he replied. "A cosmopolitan, please, without steroids. Or STDs, if you can."

At Kurt's remark Sebastian felt the familiar walls rise on instinct, his grin turned into a leer and he winked.

"Sure thing, princess. I'm afraid I'll need to see some ID though."

Kurt frowned. "I am 21. They checked at the door."

"Yes, but we have a policy to challenge people's age if they look like a fourteen year old girl," Sebastian said with a wink. He didn't really mean it, in fact Kurt looked far from it, but he couldn't help bring out the old banter they'd had between them. Kurt had always been able to meet him insult for insult. It was how they communicated. Sebastian trapped the tip of his tongue between his teeth and awaited Kurt's reply, hoping for a laugh.

Kurt felt his cheeks redden, and hated that after all this time, Sebastian still had the power to get a rise out of him. He longed to give back, but that would probably mean he wouldn't get served, and paying the cover fee for another bar just because he couldn't take an insult seemed a waste.

He offered his old nemesis a thin smile, and pulled out his wallet.

"Fine. Here." He held out his ID card and watched Sebastian's face as he looked at it. To block any comments about his picture, he quickly asked: "Are you even 21?"

Sebastian's smile dimmed at the lack of a response and he took the ID off him. He stared at the white card for slightly longer than necessary before handing it back to Kurt.

"That seems to be in order," he said, avoiding Kurt's question about his own age.

Sebastian set about making the requested cocktail, making a point of showing off his mixology skills. He threw the shaker up in the air and caught it behind his back before twisting his arm around and throwing it again.

Kurt saw the flair tending for what it was; a distraction, and bit the inside of his cheek to refrain from laughing. He watched closely as Sebastian mixed his drink, afraid that if he blinked, he might miss what the cook at the diner called a 'special ingredient'. Yet none of that happened. In fact, the skills Sebastian was showing off were actually kind of...impressive, in a young Tom Cruise sort of way.

Sebastian finished by pouring the vibrantly coloured drink into a tall martini glass and topped it with a spiralised slice of lemon. He placed the glass in front of Kurt on top of a small napkin with a smug grin.

Kurt waited until Sebastian was done before releasing his cheek and grinning.

"You're not 21 yet, are you?" he said gleefully. "You can serve me a drink...but you can't have one yourself," he concluded triumphantly.

Sebastian blushed a little but looked at Kurt defiantly.
"So what if I'm not," he started. “You only just turned 21 yourself last month, so don’t act like-” he broke off when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Who’s your friend, Seb?” It was Marc. He was a couple of inches shorter than Sebastian but his presence shut Sebastian up instantly.

“He is not my friend,” Sebastian said affirmatively.

"That's right, I'm not," Kurt agreed. He looked at the handsome man in the Satire apron and concluded he was probably Sebastian's boss. "We just knew each other back in high school."

"Oh, high school sweethearts, huh?" Marc said, winking.

"No!" Kurt protested, at the same time as Sebastian let out a scandalised: "Never!"

"We were in rival school choirs," Kurt explained, "And I had a boyfriend, who is now my fiancé." He raised his chin a little and looked at Sebastian to challenge this brief history.

Marc smiled warmly. "Good for you. I can highly recommend married life." He raised his hand, showing Kurt an elegant gold ring.

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Kurt smiled. He loved hearing stories like that. It gave him hope.

Sebastian yawned in a fake over-exaggerated way and rolled his eyes.

"Relationships are lame." He scoffed. "Only getting to fuck one person for the rest of your life? No thanks."

"That, my dear, depends on the fuck," Marc replied smoothly, winking at Kurt. "A bout of monogamy might do you good, Seb."

Kurt snorted. "I'm not sure Sebastian would even know what that means," he said scathingly. "He always used to brag about his twenty-minute relationships."

Marc smirked. "I hope his stamina improved a little since then..."

Sebastian scowled and stepped away from Marc, crossing his arms over his chest. "My stamina is amazing, thank you very much!"

"Um...can I get a Pina Colada, please?" A tall man said, taking a seat next to Kurt. He nodded at Marc in greeting, who smiled. The man winked at Sebastian. "And you don't have to make it last twenty minutes, honey. It'd make the ice melt."

Kurt, who had just taken a sip of his drink, had to cover his mouth with his hand to stop from spilling it all over the bar.

"Fuck you all," Sebastian said grumpily, stomping off to the end of the bar to grab the right glass.

Marc chuckled at Sebastian's storminess and shook his head.

"Was he like this when you knew him at school?"
Kurt smiled. "I think his fellow students were easier to impress," he said. "A few well-placed tales about Paris, coffee Courvoisier, and fake IDs, and everyone thought he was quite the man." His smile dimmed a little. "Including my boyfriend, actually."

"People can be jerks when they're kids..." Marc said cautiously. Sebastian had told him a bit of what he was like in school and had expressed his regrets. If he had said or done something to undermine Kurt's relationship, Marc was pretty sure it had been a bad joke gone wrong, or a case of misplaced jealousy. Sebastian didn't seem like the kind of person who'd hurt people on purpose. More likely, his behaviour had been a cry for attention- no matter what kind.

From the young man's attitude, Marc suspected Kurt didn't know that, but it wasn't for him to go about telling other people's stories, particularly to strangers. Sebastian had earned the right to tell his story himself whenever he was ready.

Marc glanced at his newest colleague who was putting on a bit of a show for a group of newcomers and smiled.

"I don't know what history there is between you...but he's not the person he was when he started here a few months back, so I'm guessing that also means he's changed a lot since you last saw him," he said to Kurt.

"Yes, maybe..." Kurt said pensively, watching him talk to his customers while finishing the Pina Colada with a flourish. Before Kurt could blink, bottles were already flying through the air again for a next order. Sebastian's audience cheered and whooped.

Sebastian was good at his job. Charming, attentive. Kurt shook his head a little, amazed at himself using such words for a man he had listed in the Hummel dictionary under 'vile', 'sleazy' and 'selfish'.

So far, Sebastian had treated him exactly like he had in school. But hadn't Kurt jumped on the opportunity to lash back out, too?

"I have to get back to work," Marc said, pulling Kurt from his thoughts. "Should I tell Seb to make you another one of those?"

Kurt looked down on his half-finished Cosmopolitan. He'd definitely had worse Cosmos. Like the ones that Blaine sometimes tried to mix at home.

At the thought, Kurt repressed a shudder. They were sticky, always way too sweet, and no drink was worth the intolerable noise that was Blaine's soda stream. Kurt wondered what would happen if he told Blaine that Sebastian Smythe made better cocktails...the tantrum would almost be worth it.

"Maybe in a bit," he said, non-committantly.

Marc watched him for a moment. "Give him a chance," he said finally. "He's not a kid anymore." And with that he walked back down to his own section.

Sebastian finished serving the sudden influx of customers and made his way back down the bar to Kurt, noticing that he'd almost finished his drink.

"Top up?" he asked reservedly.

"Yes, please," Kurt found himself saying. Maybe Sebastian did deserve another chance.

Then, he nodded at the other patrons at the bar. "It seems you have fans."
Sebastian glanced at the group of customers he had just served and grinned smugly.

"Putting on a show means I'm within more chance of getting tips," he said with a shrug. "You seem to have some fans yourself." Sebastian added nodding behind Kurt to the group of guys blatantly checking him out. "Who knew Kurt Hummel would be such a hot commodity outside of Lima..."

And just like that, Kurt's shields were back up.

A dozen mean-spirited quips about what kind of shows would get Sebastian even more tips filled Kurt's head, and his inner voice sounded eerily like Santana. But Kurt actually counted two men in such professions as his friends, (even if Sam often forgot about him, and Brody avoided Rachel and everyone around her since losing his TA job), and they had taught him a thing or two about prejudices. Most sex workers were just trying to pay rent, just like the rest of them. Kurt sternly reminded himself that Sebastian's personal life, however he chose to live it, was his own business, and not the basis of a joke.

Besides, if Kurt considered Sebastian's words carefully, they hadn't really been that mean. Perhaps he just meant what he'd said. It was true that Kurt hadn't exactly had many admirers in Ohio.

Kurt checked the mirror behind the bar to look at the men behind him. He recognized a few of them from the dancefloor. Some of his confidence returned.

"I've always known I was hot stuff, stuck in the wrong town. Why do you think I was so desperate to get out?" he replied smoothly.

Out he most certainly was. Sebastian observed the man in front of him and couldn't help but admire his lean frame, broad shoulders and square jaw. He was a far cry from the boy he'd known in school. He had grown into his own style, which itself had been tamed slightly - for the better, definitely for the better.

"Well you are definitely out now...speaking of, what is a guy like you doing in a place like this?" Sebastian grinned. He was curious to know what brought Kurt Hummel out to a gay bar on a Tuesday night on his own, but he also knew the line would get a rise.

Kurt rolled his eyes. Sebastian was definitely filling his bartender role well. Kurt could just imagine him asking that same question every night. He wondered how often it 'worked'.

Later, Kurt would also wonder what it was exactly that made him answer truthfully instead of just giving a well-rehearsed line in return. Nostalgia? Curiosity? Morbid self-pity? Whatever it was, it turned a light-hearted chat into...something else.

"I always leave the apartment when Blaine has his best friend over. There's only so many times I can hear the mashup of their names used as a verb before puking."

As soon as the words had left Kurt's mouth, he busied himself with his drink, finishing it and pushing the empty glass over to Sebastian without meeting his eyes.

Sebastian took Kurt's empty glass and put it in the wire rack under the bar. From Kurt's sudden downcast expression, he sensed an underlying issue but knew it wasn't his place to pry - pressing where it hurt was a game of the past. Also, after the little stint of teasing earlier, he wasn't sure if further questioning would be welcome.

"Isn't that what all you Nude Erections used to do? I believe you and Blaine were known as 'Klaine', right?" He picked up a Martini glass. "Same again?"
Kurt let out a small, bittersweet laugh. He hadn't heard that old pun since Finn died. His stepbrother and Puck used to find it hilarious.

Somehow, he didn't feel Sebastian Smythe had the right to use it.

As for 'Klaine'...that had always sounded awful, no matter who said it.

"I guess the others still call us that," he said, making a face. "I never liked that much. I mean, we're not fused at the hip. But hey," he looked up at Sebastian, "at least I'm in a relationship, right? So I already exceeded your expectations."

There. A small part of Kurt's prepared speech 'in case of Smythe' had returned. It didn't feel as good as it ought to. In fact, reminding Sebastian of a taunt between them in Kurt's senior year felt a little pathetic. Petty. He sighed.

"Yeah, I'll have another Cosmo," he added. "Please."

"Coming right up." Sebastian said, grabbing a bottle of vodka and twirling it round his wrist as he picked up a silver cocktail shaker. He poured the vodka into it from a height. As he set to work mixing the cocktail, he watched Kurt stare at the bar, tracing the grain of the wood with a slim finger. He felt like he should say something to break the tension, but what do you say to someone you have a messy history of hatred with?

Though, had it been hatred? If he really thought about it, the answer was no. He'd never hated Kurt...he'd just been...there, in the way of his plans for Blaine.

He scowled at the memory of his past behaviour. He'd worked so hard to forget about that and yet here was a living breathing reminder of his teenage screw ups.

"One Cosmo," he said, placing the glass down on the counter with a napkin. He spoke with a little more force than he had intended to but couldn't help it. He hated being reminded of who he used to be.

He sighed and shook his head, deflating a little.

"The trick about exceeding people's expectations, is to make sure no one has any of you." He picked up his glass of lime and soda water from under the bar and held it up to Kurt. "It's always worked for me...cheers."

Kurt needed a moment to recover, but then something about Sebastian's words lit a spark inside of him.

"You already exceeded mine by getting a job," he said with a pleasant smile that belied the venom behind it, accepted the drink and chinked it to Sebastian's. "Enjoy your sparkly water."

Sebastian smiled despite himself. "See? It's that easy."

He sipped his drink and placed it back under the counter. "I may not be able to drink legally in this place, but I bet I could drink you under the table," he grinned in challenge.

Kurt feigned an excited gasp and clapped his hands. "Oh my god! We should totally have a drink-off at my place!" he said in a preppy voice. "It'd be super-fun!"

He wiped the smile off of his face. "Too bad we're not friends." He shrugged a little. "Oh well. C'est la vie."
"Too bad..." Sebastian mused, slightly stung. "You're just scared I'd win," he volleyed back.

He tried to ignore the jibe. Kurt was right. They weren't friends, and that was his fault.

"We'll never find out, I guess," Kurt replied, and drained his cocktail, making sure to lick his lips.

For a moment, he enjoyed a feeling of triumph.

Then, he noticed the subtle changes in Sebastian's composure, the way he wiped at the same spot of the bar he'd already cleaned, and how he somehow seemed lost in thoughts. Thoughts that didn't look pleasant.

Maybe he had gone too far. He remembered how hollow it used to feel after someone had landed a proper insult. Sticks and stones...but words definitely could hurt.

He pushed his glass towards Sebastian as a peace offering. "Could you make me another? I give you full permission to pick the sleaziest sounding one."

At Kurt's words Sebastian looked up from the cloth in his hand and felt himself smirk despite the intrusive thoughts swimming round his brain. A mirage of cocktails flooded his mind and swept all else from it.

He huffed a laugh as the right one came to him and he began picking up bottles deftly. He made a proper show of mixing the drink, juggling the bottles up in the air and spinning them around his wrists.

He poured equal amounts of each bottle into a shaker and cupped it off, he shook the shaker a little before spin throwing it up in the air and catching it behind his back. He was showing off and he knew it, and only part of it was because it was his job.

He knew what Kurt thought of him, knew what he must think of him working in a place like this, and he wanted to prove him wrong. He was damn good at his job and he wanted to show that.

Kurt had watched Sebastian mix the drink in fascination. Every grip, every spin and throw was accurate, like a well-rehearsed choreography. But the most interesting was how happy Sebastian looked doing something he knew he was good at.

Moments later, he got his drink, served in a short tumbler over ice with a purple umbrella.

"There you are Hummel, that should spice up your sex life. A Cock Sucking Cowboy," Sebastian said with a smirk that was only half forced. "Yee Har."

Kurt's jaw dropped. He knew the worst was coming, but he still felt a little scandalized. "Oh. My. God," he laughed. "Is that a real thing or are you just making that up?"

"It's actually a real drink!" Sebastian replied, pleased that the drink he picked had the desired effect. He slipped Kurt the laminated cocktail menu which was slightly sticky from multiple drink spills.

"I believe you," Kurt said, looking at Sebastian instead of the menu and raising the glass to his lips. "Cheers."

It was good, and Kurt nodded appreciatively, taking small sips to make it last longer. It was going to be the last one for the night, because he couldn't afford another. Tips for juggling ketchup bottles at the diner weren't that great.
Kurt could probably get one or two free drinks from the guys on the dance floor, but something kept him tethered to the bar. He wasn't even sure what.

He couldn't really say he'd missed Sebastian. He could have done without the extra insecurity and upheaval Sebastian had brought into his life back in school, especially when it came to Blaine, but as he was noticing more and more of late, Blaine was perfectly capable of making him feel inadequate without the help of a third party.

Yet seeing Sebastian here, in a neutral place, without Blaine to worry about, made Kurt feel like maybe he was really being given a second chance, like Sebastian's boss had said.

Kurt watched him serve a few other customers, observing how he had an easy, open smile and genuine attention for all of them, a joke or a few flirty words, and it was clear to see that his approach was working. He dropped several bills in the tip jar on his way back to Kurt, but not before separating them from a few handwritten notes and a business card, which he stuffed in his jeans.

As he returned, the alcohol had already begun to give Kurt a bit of a buzz.

"So what do you do during the day?" he asked curiously. "Apart from kicking a few hung-over patrons from your bed?"

Sebastian looked at Kurt apprehensively at his question, searching for a trace of venom or judgement and to his surprise saw nothing but open curiosity. He still felt defensive. He knew he deserved the verbal attack earlier, after the way he'd treated Kurt in the past.

But he'd changed dammit, he'd grown up and sorted his life out. He was working and paying his own bills, he'd made friends and a whole life for himself in the city. He'd finally started to let go of his past when Kurt fucking Hummel showed up and threatened to up end it all with a few choice words. Here of all places.

But he could also see that Kurt was trying, so he reluctantly met Kurt halfway with his answer.

"I'm studying Literature and History at NYU, so when I'm not here I'm either in class or studying," he shrugged. "Or if there's a good exhibition on somewhere me and my friends might check it out."

Usually, Kurt tried to keep an open mind and give people the benefit of the doubt. But after their past, and the way Sebastian had attacked him right from the start, Kurt had a hard time seeing him as anything but the villain in his story.

A backstory with a night time job, alcohol and easy hook-ups fit the narrative. Sebastian as a student, working hard and spending his downtime contemplating works of art...did not.

In fact, it was so unlike the Sebastian Kurt used to know - who might have only been interested in art if it had naked people in it, or was something expensive he could brag about- that Kurt snickered.

"Right," he said, more than a little ironically.

Sebastian felt Kurt's snickering response like a slap to the face, which he guessed he deserved too. But that didn't mean he had to take it lying down.

He glanced around the bar and saw Marc talking to a couple of guys over the other side. He turned back to Kurt with a scowl.

"You know what, fuck you Kurt," he spat. "I know I was an ass to you back in school but I was sixteen. Whether you want to believe it or not, I have changed, and I do actually have a life outside
of the one you've probably created in your head for me." He placed his hands on the bar, arms straight, and glared at him. "Just as I'm sure you have a life that's different to the one I've created in my head for you, or do you actually live in an ivory tower with cellophane wrap on all your furniture and sing Doris Day songs out of the window?"

Kurt's cheeks burned. He refused to consider what Sebastian had said, blocking out his words except from a few filtered phrases.

He knew he should be above petty insults by now, after having to listen to them for the larger part of his life. But he had come to this bar specifically to be away from such taunts, to be himself among like-minded people. And right in the middle of it was Sebastian, echoing the words of his bullies. So what that he'd only been sixteen? Kurt had already heard a lifetime of such words before his twelfth birthday.

He put his glass down on the bar, no longer thirsty. "Tell yourself whatever helps you sleep at night, Sebastian," he said, with a calm he did not feel.

Just at that moment, Marc looked their way and saw the exchange. He excused himself on his side of the bar and walked over.

"Is everything okay here?" he asked.

"Fine," Kurt said coldly. "I was just leaving. I'd like my check please."

Sebastian and Kurt were glaring daggers at each other.

Marc surveyed Sebastian and saw the subtle signs of distress. He was shaking silently and trying very hard to breathe calmly and not lose his temper. Kurt wasn't faring any better.

"Seb, why don't you go take your break and I'll ring this young man up."

Sebastian looked at Marc, who raised his eyebrows. Sebastian deflated a little and nodded. He took off his apron, threw it down on the floor and left the bar without acknowledging Kurt.

Marc turned around to ring up the till and printed off a receipt. He placed it on a silver tray and handed it to Kurt.

He looked at Kurt, who appeared to be on the verge of tears. He subtly slid a napkin across the bar to him.

"You alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine," Kurt said again, though his shaky voice belied his words. "He said nothing I hadn't heard before."

Marc nodded, glancing in the direction of the break room. "And what did you tell him?" he asked neutrally. He looked back at Kurt.

Kurt paled and swallowed. "Nothing he hadn't heard before," he said crossly, but then corrected himself, feeling awful under Marc's scrutinising eyes. "I guess I made a few assumptions." He shrugged awkwardly.

Marc sighed. He nodded at Kurt's drink. "Aren't you going to finish that?"

Kurt shook his head. He handed Marc a few bills, rounding up his check with a moderate tip. Not
much, but he didn't want to be the guy who took out his issues through other people's wages, not even to Sebastian. He'd worked in such professions too long himself.

Marc took the money and counted off the tip to put in their jar. "Thanks," he said. He paused.

"Look, it's none of my business, but...first impressions can fool you."

"Yeah," Kurt said quietly, and slipped off the bar stool. Maybe if he went home on foot instead of taking the subway, BLAM night would be over.

Marc watched as Kurt left and sighed. His eyes swept the club and was pleased to see it was quieting down a bit.

He picked up the radio behind the bar and clicked it on.

"Danny, how's it going over there?" He asked his colleague who had been manning the smaller bar area on the other side of the club. It wasn't normally open mid-week but there had been a private function booked.

"It's pretty much died out, I was just restocking and cashing up," came the smooth voice on the other end.

"Can you leave it for now and just lock it all down? I need you to come man the main bar," Marc asked.

"Sure thing, I'll be right over."

"Thanks."

Marc put the radio down and shook his head. Kids. He did not miss his youth in the slightest.

He served another customer and by the time he was done, Danny was walking along the bar towards him.

"Everything okay?" He asked as he approached.

"Yeah, I just gotta go check on Seb, he had a run in with an old school-...whoever he was and he's pretty wound up."

"I can go see him if you want?" Danny offered.

"Nah it's cool, just man the bar please," Marc said, already walking towards the staff room.

Inside, he saw Sebastian stomping around the room, throwing cushions and cursing under his breath.

Marc stepped into the room and shut the door softly behind him.

"You okay?" He asked evenly.

"That fucking asshole..." Sebastian started the instant he had someone to vent to. "It's been nearly two years since I saw him and he's still walking around as if he owns the fucking joint...all holier than thou and as if everyone else is beneath him...he hasn't changed at all, but I have Marc, I have and he just waltzes in here..."

"...looking for a place to dance and have a good time with his peers, like the others who come to this bar?" Marc finished. "I don't think he came here to give you a hard time. He seemed friendly
"Oh yes he *seems* friendly enough but he's still a judgemental ass. The second he saw me, he attacked, he didn't even give me a chance."

"And knowing you, you gave as good as you got," Marc replied, raising an eyebrow. "He looked pretty upset when he left."

He took off his glasses and ran a hand over his face and through his hair. "Look, I'm not gonna tell you he wasn't out of line. Just...maybe you both were?"

Sebastian huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. "I've changed, Marc...I'm not the kid I was back then. But seeing him of all people, here, made me feel like I was. Made me feel like I had something to prove..."

"Prove what? That you can make a grown man cry?"

Marc shrugged. "I'm sorry if I encouraged him. But you *were* acting a bit childish. Which is *not* -" Marc stressed, walking up Sebastian to put a hand on his shoulder, "the way I know you are. I know you've changed. And you can show him that too, when he comes back."

"If he ever comes back, you mean..." Sebastian sighed, his shoulders slumping. He'd really fucked up, again.

Marc smiled. "He'll be back."

He squeezed Sebastian's shoulder. "And next time, you'll be prepared."

Sebastian bit his lip and awkwardly shrugged out of Marc's grip.

"We should probably get back out there and help Danny..."

"Danny's fine. You know he loves it to play the boss around there," Marc said fondly. He wanted to say something to make Sebastian feel better.

"Don't beat yourself up about it, ok? I think it happens to everyone. People from our past just...remind us of it. When Paul has his buddies from med school over, I always ask for the double shift here. I mean, the guy's almost fifty but around them, he's like a frat boy. It drives me crazy." He smiled. "Paul says I'm different too, when my mom comes over. I don't notice it, but... I'm sure he's right."

Sebastian smiled a little despite himself.

"I never even thought I'd see this guy again...and whatever you say, I probably never will, and I shouldn't care what he thinks...I don't care what he thinks. But I hate the reminder of who I used to be...it's like I can't shake it."

Marc gave him a sympathetic look. He couldn't help but feel that Sebastian protested a little too much. He clearly cared what Kurt thought about him; and the rest of them too.

"You have a choice though. You can let him make you that guy again, or just be you."

He grinned. "The world's worst kept secret: we all fuck up when we're young. And when we grow up, we make up a presentable version of it to tell our kids." He chuckled. "Well, someone’s kids, anyway...Now come on. Before Danny thinks he *really* runs the bar."
Sebastian chuckled. "Thanks Marc."

"Don't sweat it kid." He said cupping the back of Sebastian's neck.

They headed back out into the club and Sebastian mused over the events of the evening.

*If I do see him again, Sebastian thought to himself, I'll try harder.*
By the time Kurt got home from Satire, it was past two am. He’d done a lot of thinking on the way back.

He’s not a kid anymore.

No. They were adults now (even if Sebastian was only twenty, Kurt thought with a vindictive smile), and yet Sebastian had taken one look at him and had treated him like a child. Carded him!

If Kurt was honest to himself, he knew this would have happened at any other bar too. He simply looked young. He always had, and apart from wearing a t-shirt with his ID printed on it, there was nothing he could do about it. But Sebastian had carded him on purpose, just to be nasty. It made Kurt feel like he didn't belong there, like he was somehow trespassing into the world of adulthood. An outsider once again.

He opened the door to his apartment quietly, in case Blaine was already asleep. The TV was still on, flickering on a repetitive DVD menu. On the couch, dressed in a lurid superhero costume and a face mask, lay his snoring fiancé. On top of his best friend.

Sam looked like he’d just fallen asleep watching TV. Blaine was somehow curled up against him, face mashed against Sam's chest, hand splayed on his thigh. Kurt clenched his jaw. He knew how Blaine felt about Sam. He just wished...Kurt shook his head. There was no point.

Kurt made his way to the bathroom, but stumbled over a Pringles can on the floor. He hit his knee and cursed.

Blaine stirred at the sound and looked up at the intrusion.

"Kurt?" he asked, seeing the frame of his fiancé. "Is that you?" He stayed in his position against Sam's chest, reluctant to move away from the warm body.

"No," Kurt said quietly, rubbing his knee. "Just a clumsy burglar here to steal your heart."

"What time is it?" Blaine asked, ignoring Kurt's joke. "Where've you been?"
Kurt sighed, picking up the Pringles can and putting it on the coffee table. So much for his attempt at romance.

"Out," he deflected.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Blaine said irritably, sitting up.

"The opposite of in," Kurt said dryly, and started to make his way to the bathroom. After Sebastian's insults, he had no patience for one of Blaine's tantrums.

Unfortunately it didn't look like Blaine was going to let him off the hook this easily.

"Kurt," he said plaintively, and rose from the couch. A shower of crumbs fell from his costume. He rounded the furniture, cutting off Kurt's route to the bathroom.

Kurt sighed. "I went out for a drink," he admitted. Maybe it would be over faster if he just let Blaine get it off his chest.

Blaine raised his eyebrows. "Without me," he stated.

Kurt shrugged. "You didn't want to come."

"It's my night with Sam...You know that!" Blaine reminded him, trying to keep his voice down so as to not wake his sleeping friend. He really was adorable when he slept.

"Plus, I'm not old enough to go to clubs...you know that too." Blaine widened his eyes and looked at Kurt hurt. "I thought it was something we were going to do together...how could you go without me?"

"I don't know, maybe the same way you went to see the Statue of Liberty without me," Kurt replied, too tired to keep himself in check. "You're nineteen, Blaine. Was I supposed to just...what...wait for two years?"

Blaine rolled his eyes. "I just don't think it's fair if you're off drinking when you know that I'm not allowed...and I already apologised for the Statue of Liberty," he added annoyed. "Why do you keep bringing that up? Sam suggested we go and it was our day...I couldn't say no."

"Well, you didn't miss anything tonight," Kurt replied. "I'm sure you and Sam had a better time than I did."

He couldn't completely keep the bitterness out of his voice. If Blaine had just come with him, to keep him company, Sebastian wouldn't have dared to be so mean. He had always been all smiles around Blaine. Then again, Sebastian might have tried to steal Blaine away again, and after the Eli C. debacle, Kurt wasn't completely sure he might not succeed.

And even if Sebastian hadn't, Kurt knew Blaine would have complained about not being able to drink all night. His presence might have shielded Kurt from Sebastian Smythe, but not from Blaine Anderson. Even worse, if they had brought Sam along, the two of them would have probably gone in their capes and tried one of their BLAM "fight choreographies" on the dance floor, embarrassing Kurt.

"We had so much fun!" Blaine let out excitedly, missing Kurt's tone completely. "We watched Batman Begins and re-enacted the fighting scenes." He bounced on his feet. We ordered pizza and Chinese...there's loads left over so we won't have to worry about cooking for a few days."
Kurt smiled listlessly, mentally adding another two hours at the gym to his routines for the week.

"I'm glad you had fun," he offered.

Kurt knew it was healthy for couples to spend time apart on different hobbies, but there was a time when Blaine would talk with such enthusiasm about their activities. It had been a while since then.

We'll get there again, Kurt reminded himself. Tonight was just another reminder not to remain stuck in the past.

"I'm going to shower and go to bed," he announced. "I have class in the morning.

Kurt looked over at the couch and wondered if they had enough breakfast cereal left to feed someone with an almost Finn-sized appetite. "Do you want to wake him or fetch him a blanket?"

Blaine looked back at his sleeping friend. He looked so peaceful and comfy, it seemed a shame to wake him.

"Let him sleep, but maybe we should take his jeans off so he's comfortable..."

Kurt looked from Sam back to Blaine, who was giving his friend a tender look. Something about it sparked Kurt's worry.

"I'll help," he said, and did not miss the fleeting look of disappointment on Blaine's face.

They made Sam a makeshift bed on the couch before heading to bed together. As they climbed under the sheets, Blaine decided that he wasn't in the mood for sleeping right away and Kurt, never one to turn down an opportunity, complied.

As usual, Blaine fell asleep almost the instant that it was over, leaving Kurt lying awake to rehash his conversation with Sebastian over and over.

- It took Kurt a week to go back.

The day after his visit to Satire, he was mostly just trying not to nod off in class. His double shift at the diner after that didn't go much better. He nearly fell asleep on his feet when one of the girls got asked to do a Streisand ballad, and Gunther threatened to keep his tips if he didn't look more alive. In the evening, he only managed the bare minimum at the gym, and he was glad he had skipped breakfast to let Blaine and Sam have the last cereals.

But Blaine was already asleep when he came home, and so Kurt got a good night's rest in as well. The next day, he felt positively awake, his class flew by, and he found himself at the Vogue office finishing all the calls on his list while the others were at lunch. With nothing else to do, he idly opened a browser on his laptop and typed in Sebastian Smythe.

Kurt wasn't even sure what exactly he was expecting to find - an embarrassingly public Facebook profile with a picture of a tramp stamp (he smiled at the thought), public records from the police, something about the steroids scandal at Dalton, a very explicit Tinder profile...? In comparison, what he found was almost disappointing.

Sebastian's name first came up on class listings from the history department of NYU, and a mention of a collaboration research project he had apparently been in.
The Satire website listed him on their staff page, but unlike the others, who had simple headshots on the page, he was only listed by name. Kurt had only looked at the rooms and the cocktail menu on his first visit, and now took his time reading through the other pages.

Apparently Marc wasn't Sebastian's boss, just his senior. His boss was an older, kind-looking man called Joe, who used to co-own the bar with his brother until the brother's death in 1985. There was a picture of the two of them on the bar's bio page. Kurt bit his lip. There was a list of helplines and HIV info centres on the page, and Kurt got a sinking feeling he knew what happened to the brother.

Sebastian's profile on Facebook was friends-only, but he'd commented on a few of the videos on the Warblers' page. Nothing crude or even impolite... just a few comments wishing some of his old friends luck in the competition or congratulating them on a good choreo. His comments got plenty of likes, too.

But the most interesting find had to be Sebastian's blog. It was the next thing to pop up after facebook, and Kurt spent quite some time browsing it, with ever growing curiosity. It had a simple Wordpress design, and held entries about historical sites in New York, some restaurants and bars, and reviews of art shows and museums he had been to. Kurt scrolled through them until he found something he had actually been to himself. After Blaine and Sam visited the Statue of Liberty without him, he'd gone with Mercedes on her last visit from LA, and they had checked out the immigrant museum on Ellis Island. Kurt could easily understand why the museum would interest a history student, and as he read through Sebastian's descriptions and comments he could only conclude that he'd actually been there.

Linked through the blog, Kurt found an Instagram account, which mostly seemed to hold pictures of dogs Sebastian had encountered on walks through the city, and a Twitter account where Sebastian posted a 'quote of the day' from works of literature on a nearly daily basis. Kurt scoffed a little when he saw the quote for Wednesday was missing. Probably a late night at the bar and a hook-up afterwards then.

He had just clicked back into Instagram to look at yet another picture of a dog, this time with Sebastian holding it up like a baby, when someone spoke behind him.

"Hmmm, cute," Chase said, giving Kurt a little start. "The dog's nice too." He chuckled a little.

Kurt quickly closed his laptop. "I was just..." he started, but Chase shrugged it off.

"Honestly, Kurt, there are a lot worse things I could have caught you looking at than a hot twink with a dog.' He raised an eyebrow and lowered his voice. "We once had an intern who online-shopped at GAP. I mean..." He rolled his eyes.

Kurt offered him a small laugh, still feeling very embarrassed and unprofessional.

He didn't go back online to look at Sebastian's blog for days. Still, he couldn't stop thinking about the things he had seen. After much soul-searching, he could only conclude he had made a mistake insinuating that Sebastian had no interests beyond his sex life, and that an apology was due.

Not incredibly eager for the verbal smack down he'd likely receive, Kurt decided to give himself the weekend to think of some good comebacks, and made his mind up to go the next Tuesday.

When Sebastian had woken up on Wednesday morning it took him a moment to remember why he felt so awful. Then he remembered the night before and Kurt's visit to Satire.
He groaned and rolled over onto his stomach, stretching out his long limbs and sighing in defeat. The sleeping body next to him grumbled at the loss of his warm skin but Sebastian ignored him. He looked around the room and noticed the time on the alarm clock. 7:30. He had a class at 8:45 and still had to go home and change.

With a final sigh, he rolled out of bed and pulled his clothes on from the night before, scribbling a quick note for his companion. He checked his pockets for his wallet, keys and phone, grabbed his jacket and left the apartment.

The rest of his day had been relatively uneventful. His classes, which were usually interesting, had seemed to drag and his best friend Alice had bailed on their regular coffee date. Apparently, there was a pop up sale somewhere in The Bronx and they had that season's hottest items at a staggering 70% off. Of course, she'd invited him along and any other day he might have accepted, but being surrounded by screaming chicks wasn't very appealing at the best of times and he was not in the mood. He'd declined and taken the opportunity to have a quiet night in with his laptop and a paper for a competition one of his professors had suggested he enter.

The rest of his week had passed in usual fashion; classes at school, work at the club and an interesting art exhibition that had been advertised around campus. On Sunday night, his friend Steph entered an open mic poetry evening at one of the coffee shops on campus and their little group had gone to support her.

"What's the matter, Seb?" Alice asked him as they sat and listened to one contestant’s poem about her dead cat. "You've been off-kilter all week."

Sebastian shrugged. "I'm okay," he replied, avoiding her gaze. "Just some old ghosts that resurfaced a few days ago...but it's okay. I've put them to rest."

Alice bit her lip and frowned. "I don't need to go kill anyone, do I?"

Sebastian grinned and shook his head. "You can't kill a ghost, Alice, they're already dead. And I can handle this one myself."

At that point, dead cat girl finished her set and Steph took to the stage, so conversation ceased. Steph's poem had been far superior to all others and she won free coffees for a month.

By the time Tuesday rolled around again and Sebastian was pulling on his apron, his mood had picked up and he was almost back to himself. He couldn't help but wonder if he'd see Kurt again that night. He'd mentioned that Blaine's 'bro night' was a weekly occurrence and that he always made a point of getting out of the way. Maybe he'd give Satire another chance. Sebastian didn't know whether the feeling inside of him at the thought was hope that he wouldn't show, or hope that he would.

Kurt was stalling. He'd taken a very long time to dress, still at his closet long after Sam had picked Blaine up to go to some kind of comic thing, ("you wouldn't understand." "no, probably not."). looking for something that said "responsible (but attractive and fashionable) adult". He had ended up wearing a jacket Chase had given him a few months back, but once he had thought about Chase, he was reminded of Sebastian's Instagram picture and what Chase had said about it.

In a way Chase had been right. It had been a cute picture (no, a cute boy, was what he'd said, Kurt corrected himself). Sebastian looked genuinely happy just to be holding some stranger's dog, and he was wearing a taupe Henley that accented his arms and chest without making him look pale.
Combined with dark rimmed glasses, he looked every bit the part of a student.

But cute pictures didn't insult people.

And now Kurt was stalling at Satire. He'd taken the long way there, checking his reflection in every shop he passed, and had only gotten there around midnight. He'd spotted Sebastian at the bar right away.

Feeling both relieved that Sebastian was working and nervous at the prospect of talking to him, Kurt had stayed out of sight for a while, watching Sebastian with the other patrons.

Finally, as he saw that Sebastian had finished serving a larger group, Kurt straightened his back, lifted his chin, and walked up to the bar. Sebastian had his back turned towards him and was putting glasses away.

"I'd like a Shirley Temple, please," Kurt said, bracing himself.

At the sound of Kurt's voice, a cocktail of emotions flooded through Sebastian's body from head to toe. He'd been on edge all night wondering if Kurt would show. Every time a crowd dispersed, he'd searched for a sign of the familiar hair or eyes and had been both disappointed and relieved when Kurt wasn't there.

Despite the growing anxiety inside of him, Sebastian couldn't help the small smile that made its way onto his face at the sound of Kurt's voice and the particular request.

He straightened his face and turned to face Kurt, still holding a couple of empty glasses. "Sorry, we don't actually have those on the menu." He set the glasses down and bit his lip.

"Oh," Kurt said, pretending to be disappointed. He'd already checked the menu at home, but hadn't been sure if they didn't sometimes take requests. On to his next line.

"Then maybe you should pick one for me. What do you think I'd like?"

It had worked last time. Sebastian would pick something sleazy-sounding, he'd have a laugh, and Kurt had hopefully put him in the right mood to accept his apology without going all out on him.

Sebastian smiled at the show of trust. "I've got just the thing...you're not allergic to passion fruit are you?"

When Kurt shook his head Sebastian smiled and bounced on his feet a little.

Now that Kurt was here, Sebastian was determined to be on his best behaviour. He wanted to prove that he'd changed. He wasn’t even sure why it mattered so much. He just felt like he owed it to Kurt.

He made the drink, adding his usual flair and served it in a tall martini glass, adding the half a passion fruit at the very end.

"This is actually my favourite cocktail," he said, placing it in front of Kurt. "A Pornstar Martini."

He placed a shot glass of prosecco next to the cocktail. "This one's on me...call it a peace offering," he added timidly, those pesky nerves rising up again into his throat.

Kurt eyed the drink. It looked beautiful.

"I can't accept that," he said, looking determined.
Sebastian's heart sunk.

Kurt paused, looking at Sebastian and trying to see the man from the blog instead of the boy in the Dalton blazer.

"Not until you accept my apology." Kurt pressed his lips into a smile. "I was rude and immature, and I am sorry."

He licked his lips nervously.

Sebastian's heart settled back into its correct location, the nerves also settling temporarily at the chance for redemption.

"We both said some pretty awful things...so accept this drink and I'll accept your apology."

Kurt picked up the martini glass and held it up. "Just this once, I shall let myself be bought with alcohol," he joked. "Go on," he added, with a nod at the counter, "I know you've got your soda under there. Let's have a toast. Warbler to Warbler."

Sebastian picked up his glass and bumped it against Kurt’s.

"Cheers," he said quietly and took a sip. He looked at Kurt and suddenly the pool of nerves turned into a tidal wave that threatened to suffocate him.

"Look, Kurt," he said hurriedly, setting his glass back down on the counter. "I'm the one that should be apologising...I don't blame you for the way you behaved the other night. I was a jerk to you and your friends at school and you have every reason to hate me."

His heart was beating wildly in his chest and his hands started to feel clammy. "I honestly am so, so sorry for everything I did. I was in a really dark place back then. It's no excuse but I didn't mean any of it. I swear I'm not that person anymore and I wish that he'd never existed." He swallowed nervously, realising he'd been rambling. He wanted to make sure that Kurt knew he meant every word. He took a deep breath and continued. "And I know that no amount of apologies will make up for what I did, but I am truly so sorry."

He blushed a little and bit his lip, looking at Kurt with pleading eyes.

Kurt watched him, his drink forgotten. It was clear that Sebastian was trying to say as much as he could before his courage ran out. Apparently, Kurt hadn't been the only one who'd given their first encounter a few thoughts this week, maybe even rehearsed a few phrases. Seeing Sebastian's troubled expression, Kurt felt even more contrite for his hostile attitude of the week before.

The way he looked reminded Kurt of the morning Sebastian had called them to the Lima Bean, after word had gotten out about David Karofsky. Sebastian had been so anxious to say everything he needed to say, even if none of them were ready to accept his apologies. Kurt had even been openly dismissive. After spending most of his night crying and fighting his own demons after the news, Kurt had taken in one look of Sebastian's pale face, his tired eyes, and the way he was holding on to his coffee to hide his trembling hands, and rejected the idea that maybe they had both been kept up by guilt that night. That could not have been it. Kurt remembered looking down on him in disdain, assuming that the other boy had been out partying and drinking on a school night again, with his fake ID, seducing other people's boyfriends and having sex.

Maybe, even back then, he'd been wrong. Had any of that really ever been true?

"One apology is enough if you mean it," he replied quietly. Somehow, he no longer doubted that
Sebastian did.

Sebastian felt his heart rate start to calm down and he let out a shaky breath. "I really do...I have no excuse for the way I was...but I do really mean it."

"I believe you," Kurt said. He didn't say it was okay, couldn't say it. Sebastian's apology could not make years of hurt okay. But it was a start.

Sebastian closed his eyes and slumped back against the unit that ran along the back wall, breathing shallowly as the tension and nerves finally started to recede.

"Can I ask you something?" Kurt asked.

Sebastian looked at Kurt and bit the corner of his lip nervously. "Of course," he replied after a second. It was the least he could offer.

"Were you ever really in Paris, or did you just want to impress Blaine?"

Kurt had wondered about that for years. Suddenly, he wanted to know. How much of the things he had made up in his mind about Sebastian were really true?

The pang of something else hit Sebastian this time and he swallowed a lump in his throat.

"Um...no I really did live there, for fourteen years...it was - it is my home."

Something was off. Somehow Kurt had expected more...either a flustered smile for being caught in a lie, or more grand stories like Sebastian used to tell Blaine. Kurt was basically giving him an opening into a brag, and Sebastian had just left it.

"Why did you move?" he asked.

Sebastian gritted his teeth at the memories flooding his brain as he thought about how much he wanted to divulge.

"Because they found out I was gay and shipped me off to boarding school abroad so they didn't have to think about it. They could never be seen to kick me out completely...imagine the talk!" He spat out bitterly. "You can see the flaw in the plan of course..." he added with a sly grin. "Sending me to an all-boys school with an open tolerance policy..."

Kurt wanted to laugh at Sebastian's joke about Dalton, but the rest was too horrible. He only pulled up the corner of his mouth a little. A dark place indeed.

He found himself at a bit of a loss for words. Who would do that to a kid? If Sebastian moved to France when he was two, he'd have had no recollection of the country he'd been sent back to. They hadn't just sent him from the only home he knew, but to another country, to another continent, with an ocean between them. His family had literally sent him as far away as they possibly could have without shipping him off to the moon.

Kurt looked out over the club-goers on the dance floor. How many of them had a similar story?

Kurt thought about his dad. They had their differences, but he knew he was lucky. His father loved him, and he knew he would always be welcome back at home.

He turned back to Sebastian. "I'm sorry you had to go through that," he offered sincerely. "I wish...-" He hesitated a few moments, then continued, looking into Sebastian's eyes.
"I would have liked to have been your friend instead of your enemy back then."

Sebastian pursed his lips and looked back at Kurt.

"Looking back on it now, I'd have liked that too," he said quietly, eyes tipping down to look at the bar. "If I could, I'd go back and do things very differently. But such is life that I can't. In all honesty, I wasn't emotionally ready for friends back then, not real friends anyway."

Sebastian swallowed. It was a bit more than he'd wanted to say, but now that he had said it, he didn't feel so bad about divulging a little more.

"I had a great life in Paris, some great friends, did well in school...had a great social life. Okay, so I'll admit some of the stories I told when I got to America were exaggerated, but it really was fantastic."

"Then I got here, and everyone around me had known each other forever, they'd had years of building trust and knew each other's quirks. And I just didn't want to get to know them, you know? I already had a group of friends and I wanted to go home to them, not stay and make new ones."

Kurt listened, and for the first time, he thought he understood. He knew what it had been like starting fresh at Dalton, even if he was accepted fairly quickly. It was hard being the new kid.

"But when I realised that that was never going to happen," Sebastian continued, "I started trying to manipulate people into liking me rather than actually being myself...it was stupid and idiotic and downright tragic…" he took a deep breath and looked at his feet. "After Dave Karofsky, I tried turning over a new leaf. I actually managed to make a couple of friends at school and when I moved to New York for college I finally got to start over and do things differently."

The more Sebastian spoke, the worse Kurt felt for him. But it seemed all the more impressive to him that Sebastian managed to turn his life around.

Sebastian grinned for the first time since starting his story and felt his heart lighten at the thought that popped into his head. "And then I met Alice and well...she wouldn't have accepted any of my old crap if I'd even dared to try it and she whipped me into shape."

Kurt blinked. "Alice...? Is she... your girlfriend? I thought you said relationships were lame." He was trying really hard not to judge Sebastian, but he was about the last person Kurt would have pegged as bi.

Sebastian looked at Kurt in bewilderment for a second before shuddering violently. He threw his head back and laughed out loud, shuddering again.

"No, no...God no." He laughed shaking his head. "Ugh, could you imagine?"

He continued laughing for a minute or two, unable to stop himself.

Kurt couldn't help but laugh along a little. As he waited for Sebastian to calm down, he sipped his cocktail and the prosecco in turn. They were delicious.

Sebastian looked nice when he was laughing, Kurt mused. Younger, less jaded.

Eventually Sebastian was able to calm himself enough to wipe his eyes and he looked at Kurt with a massive grin on his face

"Alice is my best friend. We met on our first day at NYU. She moved into the room opposite me in the dorm. She was this little loud thing that barged into my room, sat on my bed and declared herself"
my friend. I was so shocked that something so tiny could fill up so much space that I kind of had no choice but to go along with it and by the time I caught up I was stuck with her, but I realised how incredible she was and now she's like my sister."

"She sounds great," Kurt said fondly. She made him think about Mercedes.

"She is," Sebastian said. He looked at Kurt and smirked. "And yeah, I'm definitely gay, always have been, always will be and have never had any interest in seeing if the grass is greener on the other side."

Kurt chuckled. "Me neither. I kissed a girl once, and unlike Katy Perry, I did not like it."

Sebastian smirked. "I've never kissed a girl," he added, puffing his chest out. "Gold star for me."

**Good for you**, Kurt thought, feeling more than a little awkward. He longed to explain why it had happened, that he wasn't out yet, that he was trying to please his dad- but at the same time, he resented being made to feel like he needed an excuse. He'd been excluded enough; if his own community was divided up into ranks and hierarchies now, he'd always be an outcast.

But he didn't want to blame Sebastian for using the term. They'd only just reconciled. So instead, he put on a smile and raised his glass. "To boys!"

"I'll drink to that," Marc said, walking up to them. "Hey Kurt, good to see you, man." He glanced at Sebastian and gave him a small nod.

Sebastian grinned openly at Marc as he walked over and nodded back at him. He felt lighter than he had in days. He raised his glass again and chinked it against Kurt's. "To boys." He sipped his drink and put it back down.

Marc, who had been observing them for a while and had overheard some of their conversation, saw the light not quite reach Kurt's eyes as he raised his toast and he thought he knew what the cause was.

"Seb, why don't you go do some work and serve that group of guys down there."

Sebastian, who was too happy at that moment to notice much else, agreed and swanned off down the bar to greet the new additions.

When he was out of earshot, Marc turned to Kurt.

"You know...speaking of gold stars...I was married before I met Paul," he said quietly.

Kurt cocked his head. "To a woman?" He was unable to keep the surprise out of his voice.

"Yeah," Marc said. "Isabella. She was my best friend since kindergarten. For as long as I can remember, everyone was always telling us we were cute together and that we'd get married someday. You know, encouraging us to play house-"

Kurt wrinkled his nose, but Marc shook his head. "They didn't mean anything by it. They just assumed we were straight." He offered Kurt a small smile. "And so did we."

He shrugged. "I loved her more than anyone in the world, and I never looked at any other girl in high school. I figured that meant it was true love. So we moved in together, and after a while, I asked her to marry me."
Kurt looked at Marc and tried to understand. "Were you happy?"

"I was. For a while. We had fun, we supported each other." he paused and smirked as he saw Kurt's expression. "I know you wanna ask. It's ok. Yes, I slept with her, too. And I liked it, because I loved her and she made me feel good."

Kurt blushed heavily. It had been the first thing on his mind, but he hadn't dared to ask.

"But Isa had two sisters younger than her, and when they had babies, she wanted to start a family too."

Marc licked his lips and frowned. "I...wasn't ready. I didn't even know why. It felt like I was waiting for something, like a sign, or maybe I'd just wake up one day and want to be a dad? But it didn't come, and our relationship suffered. It got difficult. We argued a lot and I could tell I was making her unhappy." He sighed. "So we decided to go on a holiday. A trip to unwind and find each other again." Marc smiled self-consciously. "I found Paul instead. And it was like: Oh. I hadn't been waiting for a sign. I had been waiting for him. Suddenly, everything made sense."

Kurt smiled. It was almost the same thing Blaine had said right before their first kiss. "Oh. There you are. It made him feel warm inside. At the same time, Kurt felt a little afraid for what was coming. "Did you...have an affair?" he asked quietly. He couldn't help but feel sorry for Marc's wife.

Marc shook his head. "No. I couldn't do that to Isa. I loved her, and I tried to forget about him. For months, I tried. But Isabella knew me better than anyone, and one night she sat me down and asked. So I told her. And I apologised, and told her over and over I would try harder to make her happy."

Kurt bit his lip, feeling a lump form in his throat. "What happened?"

Marc smiled. "She told me to go and find him. See, all I knew was his name, and that he worked at a hospital in Boston somewhere. So I did. She helped. And it turned out he hadn't forgotten about me either."

The lump in Kurt's throat slowly melted. "And Isabella?"

"We got divorced, and she met this great guy at work. They now have three beautiful daughters, who made the loveliest flower children at our wedding, and they asked Paul and me to be their godfathers."

Marc smiled. "You see, this whole gold star thing... I don't know. Some of the guys here act like girls have cooties. They hardly even talk to them, let alone get close to them. Seb isn't like that, by the way. I think it's just a term he throws around because others do too. I know he has several female friends."

Kurt looked over to Sebastian. "Yeah, he told me."

"But in my experience," Marc continued, smiling at Kurt, "the percentage of those that have experimented vs those that haven't is about even. And not everyone who wants to experiment might have the opportunity to do so at a young age. We come from different backgrounds, upbringings, religions, political systems...everyone discovers things at their own time and pace."

Kurt nodded. He knew Marc was right, and that it was how it was supposed to be. But Marc's case was so different from his.

"I've always known," Kurt said quietly. "But my dad was having a hard time with it. For a while I thought it might make things easier if I had a girlfriend." He looked down on his drink. "I even tried
thinking of someone else while we kissed, but it felt so wrong, to myself and to her—"

Marc covered Kurt's hand with his, giving it a soft squeeze. Kurt looked up at him. He'd never told anyone about how he felt about it; not even Blaine.

"I just wish I'd never done it. Then, I could— I could say—" He broke off, thinking about the proud look Sebastian had given him, even if it had been just in jest. He'd never have that.

"It's not an actual medal, you know," Marc said gently. "In fact, it's pretty misogynistic, and we do the women of this world and ourselves injustice by pretending someone is somehow better or untainted if they never touched a girl."

Kurt nodded. He knew what Marc was trying to say, and he was pretty sure Mercedes had a lot to say about that as well.

"I know I am lucky," Marc continued. "Paul never once made me feel like I had done something wrong, or shameful. Just because it took me till I was twenty-five to realise what some people know at five, doesn’t make me any less gay or any less a part the community."

He grinned at Kurt. "In fact, I personally like to think that because I did experience life on the other side, it makes me more qualified. I know exactly what I like." He winked at Kurt to let him know that he was joking. "At the end of the day, no matter what route we all took, the direct or scenic, we all belong and are welcome here."

"Thanks," Kurt said, feeling better. "I am lucky too. My fiancé has pretty much done the same, well—he was very drunk and didn't really know what he was doing, but...anyway, he'd never hold it against me if he knew."

Marc smiled. "That's good!"

Sebastian wandered back over with a smile. "What's good?" He asked nosily.

Kurt exchanged a look with Marc. He wasn't ready to share this with Sebastian yet. He hoped the man would understand.

"I was just telling him about Blaine," he said.

With a nod at Sebastian, Kurt told Marc: "Sebastian was there when he proposed, you know. Blaine had three show choirs as back-up."

Kurt's smile faded a little. He looked down at the ring on his finger. "I hope the wedding will be a bit more...private," he confessed. "I felt like I was in the middle of a flash mob."

"It was a pretty spectacular show." Sebastian mused. "Maybe a bit OTT."

"Show choirs?"

Sebastian grinned. "Yep, we were in rival choirs back in school, but his fiancé used to be in my choir...so was Kurt actually, before I was there. And when he wanted to propose he asked us to help..."

"That sounds very romantic," Marc said. Turning to Sebastian he added, "I didn't know you knew his fiancé."

"They went to boarding school together," Kurt explained. "I was only there for a few months." He
glanced at Sebastian, not sure how much Marc knew about his past. "We kind of lost touch after the proposal..."

Now that he thought about it, he didn't know if that was true for both of them. Blaine hadn't mentioned Sebastian in a while, but Kurt didn't know if they still talked. Blaine claimed nothing had ever happened between them, yet he refused to delete Sebastian from his contacts and Kurt knew for a fact they were still friends on Facebook too. Not that that meant much...Kurt also had all of the New Directions on there, and yet hadn't seen any of them in months- not counting Mercedes' visits, seeing Rachel at NYADA and the diner and Sam every Tuesday.

Sebastian looked at Kurt, unsure why he was glossing over their past so much, but grateful at the same time.

"It was...romantic," Sebastian agreed. *If that's your thing*, he added in his head.

"Have you set a date for the wedding yet?" Marc asked.

Kurt shook his head. "We're holding out for marriage equality in all States," he said. "Or at least that's what Blaine keeps telling everyone. The truth is we just haven't managed to agree on anything yet. The venue, the date, the guests...the napkins." He rolled his eyes. "Between my jobs and school and Blaine...doing his thing, we haven't gotten very far."

"Which school are you at?" Sebastian asked. "I've not seen you around campus."

Kurt smiled bashfully. "Oh, um. I go to NYADA." He turned to Marc. "New York Academy for Dramatic Arts. It's-

"It's only the best, with Juilliard," Marc finished. "I may be just a bartender but I do know a few things..." He winked at Kurt, who blushed a little.

Sebastian smiled at Marc. The smile turned into a grin as he turned to Kurt.

"I didn't realise you went to NYADA too!"

*Ah. Of course.* Kurt remembered Blaine's Facebook post after he got accepted. He'd tagged all the Warblers and cross posted it on several groups, congratulating himself on getting in with just one audition. Kurt had been happy for him. They'd celebrated for a week.

When Kurt had gotten in, Rachel had bought him Chinese food, and then asked if this meant she'd get no more Vogue makeovers.

So Sebastian had seen that post - it would have been hard to miss. But it stung a little. If they still had contact, had Sebastian never asked, or even wondered what Blaine's fiancé was doing? Did he think Kurt was just...hanging around idly? *In his ivory tower,* Kurt added bitterly. He suddenly felt the need to explain.

"Yeah, I didn't get in straight away. I had to wait and re-audition for the winter semester, so I got an internship at Vogue in between. Mostly PA work, though I do get to sit in at meetings about the themes and spreads and I help organise shoots sometimes. But that's unpaid, so...I'm also a singing waiter. Not as glamorous as this." He gestured at the bar and pretended to spin a bottle up in the air.

*There. How was that for ivory towers?*

"When do you sleep?" Sebastian blurted out without thinking.
Kurt laughed. "Who says I sleep?" He shook his head. "To be honest, I don't know. My schedule is pretty full. But I have to work to make rent somehow, and I want to stay on at Vogue in case NYADA doesn't work out, and somewhere in between I need to squeeze in my homework and the gym, and buying groceries and - I do need to make some time for Blaine as well. Some of our classes overlap due to my late entry, but his schedule mostly differs from mine. Oh god, don't remind me of sleep." He hung his head for a moment. "Tuesday's my night off though." He put on a brave smile and drained his drink. "Cheers."

Sebastian shook his head and looked at Kurt as if he was seeing him for the first time.

"Shit Kurt...that's...that's pretty intense," he said in awe. And rather impressive, he added in his head. Something else Kurt said registered in his mind. "Oh yeah, you mentioned last week that tonight's boys night," he said. "Is that a regular thing? Same night each week?"

"Yeah," Kurt said, pressing his lips together. "Once a week, hurricane Sam blows into town and I need to seek shelter from the storm."

Kurt sighed. Boys' night. He was a boy, but not man enough for BLAM, apparently. He took a deep breath and let it out, pushing away the hurt he felt at not being included. Even if it was usually completely inane stuff he had no interest in, they never even asked if he wanted to stay.

Then, Kurt shook it off. He didn't want to be like one of those guys who got married but complained about their partner every chance they got. No one was forcing him to go through with it. Getting married was a dream of his ever since he found out it didn't have to involve girls (what a revelation that was!). He and Blaine just needed time to work things out, to learn to live together, to be a real couple. Or so Kurt told himself. Once they were married, things would get better.

"You gotta factor in sleep, kid," Marc added, and Sebastian blinked, realising Marc was still there too. He had been staring at Kurt as he spoke. He quickly nodded along with his colleague.

"God, if Paul heard you were neglecting sleep, he'd drag you round to our place and force you to sleep..." He looked at the circles under Kurt's eyes and felt like wrapping the kid up and taking him home regardless. How on Earth could his fiancé not see that Kurt could do with a good night's sleep and have his boys' night somewhere else?

"Can't you ask them to go out one evening? Or go to his friend's house? Let you have the place to yourself so you can get some shut-eye?"

Kurt shrugged. "I don't want to kick them out. It's Blaine's place too. And Sam doesn't really have a place of his own. He used to room with some models but then he lost that job and the apartment, and now he just sort of rotates between our friends and their friends. He sleeps on our couch a lot, too."

Kurt couldn't help but think of the week before, and the way he had found Blaine on the couch, curled up against Sam.

"They sometimes go out, but I usually just take that time to clean up the place." Not tonight though. Apologising to Sebastian had felt more important than doing dishes.

Marc eyed him critically. For all of his talk of romance, it sure didn't sound like his school choir fiancé took very good care of him.

"Surely he works too, though?" Marc paused. "Sorry, tell me if I'm stepping over the line. I know we only just met. But you gotta look after yourself, and by that I mean sleep!"

Sebastian watched the conversation between them with a sinking feeling of dread that grew deeper
with every word. How wrong he’d been about the perfect fairy tale that was Blaine and Kurt. He bit the inside of his lip. In the past, the knowledge that Kurt and Blaine’s relationship wasn’t going swimmingly would have pleased him, particularly as Kurt always held it over his head as a sign of superiority. But now, even if he didn’t do relationships, it felt cheap to take a stab at it.

Kurt frowned. "Blaine's...in between jobs right now," he said. He was beginning to feel like they were trying to steer him in a direction he didn't want to go.

"I think your section has a customer," he said, nodding at the other side of the bar. It felt awful and dismissive, but as nice as Marc was, Kurt needed at break from his scrutinising eyes.

"Yeah," Marc replied, taking the hint. "Thanks." He nodded and walked over to the customers, leaving the two of them in silence.

Sebastian shuffled his feet awkwardly for a moment at the sudden silence but noticed Kurt's empty glass and used it as an in.

"Sooo...can I get you another drink?" he asked, more resolved than ever to make more of an effort. "It’s on me again."

"No, you'll have to let me pay you back for all of this," Kurt said, shaking his head. "Come by the diner some time and I'll buy you breakfast. I'll give you the address. I usually have the morning shifts. The menu is pretty good, and there aren't too many sing-alongs."

Sebastian grinned at him, "That first drink was my peace offering. You can pay me back for this one with breakfast...I like waffles." He took Kurt's empty glass and put it in the wire rack.

Kurt couldn't help but return Sebastian's smile. It was infectious. "Thanks. We do great waffles, if you steer away from the strawberries. They're canned." He wrinkled his nose and shook his head. "Blueberries is what you'll want. And I'll take another one of those, if that's okay." He nodded at the glass Sebastian had just cleared away.

Somewhere deep inside, a little voice was asking him what was going on. He’d come to apologise and then close that chapter of his life...not to invite Sebastian Smythe to breakfast! But Kurt couldn't help it. Despite everything, he felt more welcome at Satire than he had anywhere in New York, except maybe from Vogue.

"I'm actually allergic to strawberries...so that saves me from that." Sebastian grinned back as he set to work on making the cocktail. He didn't worry about the fancy mixing this time, just worked on making the drink.

"Blueberries sound good...or plain waffles covered in a shit ton of syrup and ice cream." He winked and set the drink down in front of Kurt.

He never thought it would be the case, but he was actually enjoying Kurt’s company and looked forward to spending more time with him. The thought scared him a little.

"What’s your favourite breakfast?"

Kurt considered it. "I usually just make a smoothie for breakfast, but if I have the time and I don't have dance class...probably French toast or pancakes..."

He smiled. "Blaine used to cook me breakfast on weekends after he just moved in. I had to tell him to stop because it was always enough to feed an army, but I really do love it if I don't have to cook it myself. I'd be like...unstoppable."
Sebastian smiled. "I make pretty good French toast," he said conversationally. "Why'd he cook so much if it's just the two of you?"

Kurt thought about Blaine and smiled fondly. "I think he just wasn't used to cooking by himself. I mean, how could he, with Dalton's cafeteria?"

He took another sip of his cocktail, licking his lips. "I guess I also reduced my portion sizes a little since Ohio," he said self-consciously, glancing down at his toned stomach. "I mean, I kind of had to, after checking out the competition at NYADA. You have no idea of the nicknames my dance teacher makes up for everyone without an identifiable ribcage."

Sebastian gave Kurt a very obvious once over and smiled at him. "Well, you look fantastic so I think you're giving them a run for their money!"

Kurt pressed his lips together and waited for the punch.

After a few moments, he realised it had been a compliment, and felt his face flush.

"Um. Thanks," he mumbled.

Sebastian grinned at Kurt's obvious flustered expression and shrugged. "I only comment on what I see... and from where I'm standing I'd be surprised if you had any competition at all. But don't let it go to your head, Hummel." He winked.

Kurt felt like he had fallen down the rabbit hole. Was Sebastian actually flirting with him?

Kurt opened his mouth to reply when his phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out and saw he had a new message from Blaine, asking where he was. When did it get so late? He quickly typed a reply and took up his drink, drinking the rest in a large sip. It was better if he stopped drinking now, too. He was beginning to feel it, and Kurt preferred being in control of his senses, especially on 'BLAM' nights. It wouldn't be the first time he'd have to clean up after them.

"I'd better go before I turn into a pumpkin," he joked.

Sebastian grinned at him. "See," he said fondly, "I always knew you were a princess."

Kurt winked, pleased that Sebastian had taken the opening for a joke. It was easier if he knew what was coming.

He opened a new contact in his address book, and slid it over the counter. "I'll text you the address of the diner," he offered.

Sebastian took Kurt's phone and typed his number in. Smirking slightly, he set the number to P. Martini, somehow guessing that if Blaine saw his name in Kurt's phone, it might cause Kurt unnecessary grief.

"I'll see you soon, Kurt," he said, sliding the phone back across the bar.

Kurt chuckled a little. "First pornstar in my address book," he said with a smirk, and pressed dial. Maybe it was paranoid, but he didn't want to text the diner's address to a proctologist, the pizza place, or someone's unsuspecting neighbour.

Sebastian felt his phone vibrate in his pocket and forgot that he had it set to loud. A second later, Justin Bieber's voice rang out of his pocket. "Baby baby baby oh!"
Sebastian pulled his phone out, turning it off quickly.

Kurt laughed out loud, clasping a hand over his mouth. Gasping for breath, he let out: "Bieber, really?" He chuckled and put his own phone away. "You know that underwear ad was photo shopped, right?"

Sebastian blushed a little but couldn’t help but admire Kurt as he laughed. He had a musical laugh that lit up his face.

"Yes I know," he said defiantly, scowling a little. "I put it as my ringtone ages ago as a joke and never bothered to change it..."

"Whatever helps you sleep at night, Bas," Kurt said, without the venom his words held the week before. "I'll see you at the diner."

With that, he slipped off the bar stool, held up his hand to Marc in goodbye, and left.

Sebastian faltered at the nickname and watched Kurt walk away with a mixture of happiness, satisfaction and something else he couldn’t quite put a name to swirl around inside him.

"Good night, Kurt," he said softly.
A bit 'Friends'

Chapter Summary

Sebastian pays Kurt a visit at work and discovers some of his hidden talents.

True to his word, Kurt had texted Sebastian the following day with the address of the diner where he worked, along with his rota for the next week. He'd also included a joke about Sebastian's ringtone which had made Sebastian chuckle and hurry to change it to something less embarrassing.

Due to conflicting class schedules it wasn't until Sunday that Sebastian had been able to get down to the diner at a time that Kurt would be at work. It was with a light spring in his step that he pushed open the door to Spotlight and was hit with the overwhelming scent of food. He saw Kurt wiping cutlery at the bar and wandered over with an easy grace, hands shoved into the pockets of his jacket.

"So…this is the Spotlight Diner?" he said by way of greeting and hopped up on to a stool at the bar.

"It sure is! Good morning! I'm Kurt, your chorus boy waiter-" Kurt said, loudly and sounding very chipper.

Sebastian bit his tongue to refrain from laughing at Kurt's overly enthusiastic manner.

"They make us say that," Kurt added under his breath. He handed Sebastian a menu and glanced at the large clock on the wall. "It's almost time for Gunther's break, though. That's my boss. On Sunday mornings, his mother calls him to remind him working on Sundays is a sin." He rolled his eyes. "It takes her about 20 minutes to tell him so but it gives the rest of us a bit of a break- or 'intermission', as we are supposed to call it here." He added air quotes with his fingers as he said the word.

"Your boss is called Gunther?" Sebastian grinned. "That's a bit Friends don't you think?" He glanced across at the balding middle-aged man in the corner and shook his head slightly before smiling at Kurt.

"Between us," Kurt whispered, leaning over, "I'm not really sure that's his real name. It might be an homage..." Kurt looked over his shoulder and Sebastian chuckled.

Gunther took out his phone, sighed, put on a fake smile, and answered it.

"There he goes..."

Kurt grinned. After their talk at the bar, he couldn't help but look forward to Sebastian's visit to the diner. He had told Sebastian that he wanted to pay his debt before his next evening off- which was partly what this was. But if Kurt was honest with himself, he was also just simply curious about Sebastian, and what he was like when he wasn't trying to sabotage a school choir.

"So...waffles, right?" Kurt asked, "with, um, a shit ton of syrup and ice cream? Coffee, too?"

Sebastian grinned. "Sounds perfect, and yes, can I have a latte please?"

Kurt nodded and jotted the order down on to his notepad. "Sure thing. I'll be right back with your
Kurt followed Gunther to the back to put the food order into the kitchen. He came back out and proceeded to make Sebastian coffee, making one for himself at the same time. He set them down on the bar in front of Sebastian and walked around to join him.

Kurt looked at Sebastian a little nervously. He'd done his best on their lattes, topping them off with milk foam and a cinnamon stencil, picking one with decorative swirls and a calligraphy S for Sebastian.

His own only had a little star, because he had been anxious to get Sebastian's coffee over to him before the pattern sank.

It wasn't a cocktail, but it was the best he could do.

"Thanks," Sebastian said smiling at his coffee. He was touched at the effort Kurt had gone to, though he supposed it was a requirement of his job.

He quickly whipped his phone out and took a picture, uploading it to his Instagram with the caption 'it's the personal touches'.

Kurt bit his lip. There'd be a picture of his latte on Sebastian's blog. No one had ever done that before, as far as he knew. Spotlight was not the usual haunt of bloggers and hipsters, but old school Broadway fans and people old enough to get Friends references.

Kurt wanted to blurt out he'd already looked at Sebastian's blog, but he was afraid it might sound like he'd been stalking Sebastian. Which he had, but he didn't want Sebastian to know that.

"So...how long did it take you to learn all of those bartending tricks?" Kurt asked, swiping a finger through his foam to scoop some up and lick it off.

"It was a couple of months to really get the hang of it!" Sebastian said honestly. "And I'm always learning new tricks."

"Wow." Kurt nodded to himself. "It took me a few months to teach myself sai spinning as well. You should have seen my arms at the beginning, I was always slamming them against my wrists or my elbows. But pain is a fast motivator to get better." He winked at Sebastian.

Sebastian, who had been mid sip of his drink, spluttered a bit at the image of a Kurt twirling sai swords.

"You can spin sais?" He asked wiping his mouth on a napkin. "Of course you can...that's...really fucking hot."

He realised what he'd said and blushed.

Kurt had narrowed his eyes, despite all apologies still a little afraid any positive word from Sebastian's lips would somehow turn out to be a cruel joke. As Sebastian seemed genuinely impressed, he relaxed a little.

"What made you want to learn?" Sebastian asked, trying to smooth over his blunder.

Kurt shrugged. "I've always liked spinning things. Pencils, spoons, batons...it takes my mind off things. Then I saw them used on TV and thought they looked cool, so I ordered them online. I had to use my dad's credit card because I was under age and they fall under special weapon regulations,
even though they're blunt. Then I found instruction videos on YouTube and practised until my arms felt like they'd fall off." He involuntarily flexed his biceps under his uniform shirt.

Sebastian listened to Kurt's story and couldn't help but stare at his arms as he talked. *Who even is* *this guy?* He thought to himself.

Kurt smiled a little, oblivious to Sebastian’s thoughts "It was a good way to reduce stress from school. After being pushed around all day, I'd go home and pretend to be some kind of action hero. I'm glad I kept it up, because it helped me get a pass to advanced stage combat class at NYADA."

"Advanced combat?" Sebastian asked with his eyebrows raised. "Remind me to never piss you off!"

"Advanced stage combat," Kurt corrected him, but felt very pleased all the same.

"You know, it's a bit like dancing. You have your moves, and your opponent, who is like your dance partner, has contra moves or blocks. Sometimes the whole fight will be choreographed, like 'strike-two-three-parry-two-three-drop to the knee-four-five-six-"' Kurt counted, accentuating each count with his hand like a conductor, "but at advanced level, fights are improvised. Each individual move is rehearsed and has its own cue to let the other party know what is coming, but you don't choreograph their sequence. All you need is the cues. That way, you can adjust your fight to the surroundings, size of the stage, obstacles, extras. It looks more spontaneous and alive."

Kurt took a deep breath and checked if Sebastian was still with him. He wasn't used to getting the opportunity to explain what he did for more than a few words. But Sebastian looked interested and hadn't interrupted yet, so he continued.

"Different weapons have different cues, so there's a few things to remember. For example, if I had a knight's sword," he picked up a ketchup bottle from the bar and held it to the side by the neck, "and I'd come at you and spin it back," he turned his wrist, "you'd know there's an underhand cut coming."

He thrust the bottle forward at hip level, lengthening the move smoothly.

"But if I pulled it up over my left shoulder," he twisted his torso, raising his elbows to lay the bottle flat over his forearm like he was holding a baseball bat, "it's a long slash to the neck."

He let the bottle move towards Sebastian's shoulder in slow motion, softly tapping his clavicle before putting the bottle back down on the bar.

"The long staff has a lot more spinning in the air, less footwork. Each attack has a parry, and there are a few victory moves to each fight."

Kurt stopped talking and put the bottle back on the counter. "I'm boring you," he concluded, not sure how to interpret Sebastian's look.

Sebastian was far from bored. He listened to Kurt talk with honest interest. Kurt lit up when he was talking about something he was passionate about and Sebastian couldn’t help but be captivated.

"Not at all!" Sebastian said honestly. "I was just listening! I didn't know how that worked, I thought you just trained martial arts for shows like that. It's really interesting."

"No...I can't really fight," Kurt replied modestly, and chuckled a little. “But I can make-believe, and most times, that's enough."  

Kurt smiled. "It's a fun class," he added, "and useful. Our instructor often gets enquiries for extras,
you know, for Shakespearean theatre or other period pieces, renaissance fairs, re-enactments, even music videos! The most important thing we learn is how to handle the weapons safely...and still make it look good."

He hadn't done any extras work yet, but that was mostly because of his schedule - his instructor had already asked twice. "I still prefer singing, but in the end, anything that gets you a job and the opportunity to network in the theatres is a good in."

He sipped his coffee. Blaine had flunked out of combat class about a month ago and since then, kept going off about how useless it was. Kurt didn't think it was useless, but he knew a lost fight where he saw one and picked his battles. In the end, a successful engagement was also all about reading cues.

"It sounds like a great school!" Sebastian said, "if you get the opportunity to get cast as extras as students..." He smiled at Kurt.

Sebastian's smile was actually a lot nicer when it was genuine, and not the result of a mean jape, Kurt mused. "There's a lot of such work to be had, if you have the time for it," he said. "Students are cheap and eager for the experience."

"What other classes do you take?" Sebastian asked.

Encouraged by Sebastian's interest, Kurt told him about his classes, about vocal training and the theoretical courses, drama class, screenwriting and about Cassandra July. "She's amazing," he said finally. "But also extremely demanding. I've heard some of the others say she doesn't have a soul, but I doubt that. She actually paid for one of my flights to Ohio in my first year with her air miles, because I couldn't afford the trip."

"She sounds like one of my professors," Sebastian mused. "He's hard as nails on his students, but only because he wants us to succeed. If you've got any personal issues or need a quick chat he's nice as pie...though I don't think he'd use his air miles on a student."

Kurt smile dimmed a little as he thought about the trip itself. He and Blaine had been broken up, and it had taken all of his courage to go back to New York and not just take him back right then and there. That he had done so anyway later had been inevitable, but he was still grateful for their time apart after the cheating. He had insisted on at least six weeks - so Blaine could get tested.

"What about NYU?" Kurt asked, to take his mind off that awful time.

"NYU is an amazing place, for my sins I'm doing a double major - don't ask me why, I ask myself that at least once a week..." Sebastian cut off and smiled. "I'm a complete nerd, not even gonna try and hide it, I just love learning. I'm doing English Literature and History...I try to study the same era's at the same time in each section. So for example, I'm currently taking a class on World War Two for history, and I also I found a class that studies novels, poems and texts from the same time frame. It really works because learning the facts and dates gives weight to the poems and texts. And vice versa."

Kurt nodded. That made sense.

Sebastian took a sip of his latte, humming pleasantly at the taste of cinnamon. "My favourite poem is 'Involuntary Spies' by Marion Strobel. Do you know it?"

Kurt shook his head.

"We with divided heritage see either side,
Involuntary spies who are upheld by pride,

Tasting the bitter powder, under fire,

Who work, along with soldiers, who like they,

Though overhead the rockets turn the night to day,

Ram down the iron stake, spool off the wire;"

Sebastian recited, and Kurt idly palmed his coffee cup, cocking his head as he listened to the words and the melody of Sebastian’s voice.

"Whom do we fight? What are we fighting for?

Wipe off the goggles, clear the mask of breath:

Salvage the head, the brain is spreading death...

Or end inner with the outer war," Sebastian finished reciting the poem and blushed.

Kurt stared at him, milk foam dripping off his finger, which hung forgotten halfway between his cup and his mouth. He didn't snap out of his trance until Sebastian finished.

"Sorry…" Sebastian said coughing slightly. "I can get carried away sometimes."

"Don't be sorry," Kurt said, finally remembering to lick the foam off his finger. "That's a pretty powerful poem." He wasn't sure he knew enough about the background to fully appreciate it, but he knew a little something about inner war. He wondered if that was the reason Sebastian liked it too.

Sebastian smiled at Kurt a little. "It is. I'm currently working on a comparison between the portrayal of Axis and Allied forces of World War Two. Looking at works of fiction, prose and poetry from both sides but also things like propaganda and news articles throughout the war. It's fascinating, and heart-breaking I guess, how perspective changes, from optimistic to nearly fatalistic."

"Wow…" Kurt whispered. It sounded complicated and like a lot of work, but Sebastian seemed very confident. Kurt wished he had something intelligent to say about the subject, but the only history background he had was from McKinley, so that was near to nothing. Ms Holiday dressing up as caricatures from US history hadn't been very educational.

But he knew about timing and diction and Sebastian's delivery of the poem was pretty sound for an impromptu recitation.

"So do you ever recite anything on those poetry nights at the coffee shop? I bet you could win." Kurt said, He didn't realise his slip-up until he saw Sebastian look at him with raised eyebrows.

"I mean, I heard there are coffee shops that-" Kurt started, but then gave up. "I read your blog," he confessed. "You...actually go to a lot of things like that, don't you? It...Looks like fun."

Sebastian's smile turned into a grin. "Kurt Hummel, did you stalk me?"

"What? Me? No, of course not," Kurt stammered, laughing a little. "Why would I do that?"

Sebastian just waited, and the longer the silence lasted, the more nervous Kurt got.

"Okay, don't look so smug. Yes, I did. I wanted to know if you were serious about NYU and the
Kurt hesitated, but decided to push ahead. "And when I found out you were, I came to the bar to apologise."

Sebastian's smile softened and he chuckled. "I don't blame you..." he said honestly. "And no, I don’t read at those events. They’re for people to read their original work and I don't write my own...I study it but don’t write it."

"I saw that exhibition at the Ellis Island museum too!" Kurt said, relieved that Sebastian didn't use the opportunity to tease him some more. "With Mercedes Jones. She lives in LA now, but she sometimes comes over."

He thought about what else he had seen on Sebastian’s blog. "I didn't make it to that special anniversary Andy Warhol exhibition, I wish I had. Blaine kept saying he wanted to come with me but then we didn’t find the time." He sighed. "It was good, wasn’t it? Too bad you weren't allowed to take pictures inside." Sebastian had taken a picture of himself holding his ticket in front of the poster outside.

"Oh, it was fantastic!" Sebastian said nodding. "It's a shame you didn't see it! Ellis Island was good too, though if you read my blog you already know what I thought of it." He grinned.

He knew Kurt's reasons for looking him up online weren't initially flattering, but he couldn't help but be pleased that he remembered enough to comment.

"I definitely prefer paintings and photography to sculptures," he mused out loud.

Kurt thought about it. "I don't know," he replied. "A nice Michelangelo man..." He grinned. "Of course, the originals are all in Italy...country of fashion, fabulous ice cream and real cappuccinos."

He finished his coffee, swirling the cinnamon around in the last dregs.

"Ah, but the originals are also no longer intact," Sebastian reminded him. "They’re all missing a vital organ, though they were so small anyway they can’t be missed."

Kurt swallowed his coffee with a small cough. Blushing a little, he got up.

"I'll check on your waffles."

He walked over to the kitchen, trying hard to banish the thought of marble fig leaves from his head. As his order was almost up, Kurt took out his phone and checked Sebastian's Instagram, smiling at the caption. It already had several likes. Maybe he should get an account too.

Sebastian watched Kurt hurry off and chuckled. It was fun making him blush, and in a way that felt a lot better than picking the words that hurt the most.

"Here you go: 20 minutes elliptical and 50 crunches...or as the Spotlight menu calls it Show Boat Waffles," Kurt announced, putting a plate in front of Sebastian and smirking.

Sebastian grinned. "I'm sure I can figure out another way to burn off the calories in twenty minutes," he said with a wink.

"I'm sure you can." Kurt replied. He looked into Sebastian's eyes for a moment, then pretended to be very interested in brushing invisible lint from his uniform shirt. Kurt felt his ears go hot at Sebastian's words.
These days, he was lucky if being intimate with Blaine lasted 20 minutes (including a shower after). They were in one of those phases again (Kurt read about that in a magazine, apparently it was normal for established couples, though it made him sad that this was already the second time they were going through this, and they weren't even married yet). He felt like he was in his prime, on the top of his physical game - yet the lack of intimacy was making Kurt feel like he wasn't attractive. His outfits, the gym - it wasn't 'enough'.

Maybe that was why he needed his club nights so badly. To feel eyes on him once a week, to be assured that there were still people around who did find him sexy. He'd never act on those invitations - he was engaged, after all! - but getting them was a little boost for his self-esteem.

Flirting in broad daylight however, with someone who owned his sexuality as freely as Sebastian, felt like a step too far towards temptation. *What am I doing?* Kurt asked himself. It was an all-around bad idea.

"You could always help me eat them." Sebastian offered, shaking Kurt from his reveries. "A meal shared is half the calories." He glanced around the almost empty diner. "It's pretty quiet in here."

Kurt glanced at the clock. There was still enough time until Gunther got back, and he wasn't the only waiter on shift. His stomach growled, and he eyed Sebastian's plate and bit his lip. The meal was supposed to be a returned favour for the cocktails, but if he was offering...

"I guess I could," Kurt said. "I'll get another fork."

On his way to the counter, he wondered what Blaine would think of this. *But Blaine and Sebastian had plenty of coffees without him*, he thought vengefully. And it wasn't like he was doing something wrong. Blaine shared food with Sam all the time.

Kurt sat down next to Sebastian and put his cutlery on the bar top, straightening it neatly. "Please, tuck in," he said, nodding at the waffles. "You should start, it's your breakfast."

Sebastian smiled and loaded his fork with waffles. "I won't manage it all by myself, dig in too," he said, nodding at Kurt's fork.

"Alright," Kurt said, spearing a piece on his fork and trying to transfer it over the table without spilling syrup. It was rich and delicious, and he already knew that now that he'd started, he was going to eat at least half of it. He covered his mouth with his hand to lick his lips and swallowed. "Pretty good, huh?" he asked.

"They're incredible!" Sebastian agreed, nodding his head. "I love waffles...this was one of the only things I loved right away when I moved to America...Breakfast." He reached for his coffee and sipped it. "Obviously we ate breakfast back home, but it was mainly coffee and a croissant before school. At weekends and school holidays we'd have brunch around eleven which was a lot of bread, paté, and pastries...I'd never tried waffles till I came here."

He felt comfortable talking about France now. For a time, it had been too painful and just made him homesick, but he'd made a life for himself here and had some great friends and was able to look back at his childhood with mostly good feelings.

"Mm-mm," Kurt replied, nodding with his mouth full. He chewed and swallowed, then added "I bet the pastries were so much better, though..." He sighed dreamily.

Sebastian smiled, watching him for a moment. He was used to Americans romanticising France, especially those who'd never been there. But daydreaming about food - that was more a thing a
French person would do.

"Yeah...though do you remember the Dalton cafeteria? Every once in a while, they'd have this cake, we call it *quarte-quarts*. I didn't want to try it for the longest time, thinking they could never do it justice here, but then one day I got nostalgic and tried it...it was perfect. A piece of home. In *Ohio.*"

"And now you're in New York, home of the bagel," Kurt said, grinning. He didn't remember the cake Sebastian was talking about, but then he hadn't been at Dalton very long.

Kurt looked up and saw a familiar elderly couple walk into the diner. He put his fork down, wiped his lips on a napkin, and got up.

"I'm sorry, I have to take this, they're my regulars," he explained, raising a hand at them in greeting. "Ethel and Marvin. They've been married for over fifty years. They come in every Sunday, and order the Argentinian steak - which means..." He waggled his eyebrows and winked. "This boy needs to get his Evita on."

It took Sebastian a moment to realise what Kurt meant, but then he remembered what Kurt had said about being a singing waiter. He'd only ever heard Kurt sing a couple of lines during a regionals performance once, and at the time he'd not really been listening, too fixed on his own performance. Though to hear the Warblers talk about him, Kurt's voice was supposedly something special. It had to be, for him to attend NYADA. Sebastian turned on his stool to face the bar, waffles temporarily forgotten in favour of watching Kurt perform.

Kurt hurried to greet the new arrivals, stooping down to receive a tender hug from Ethel, who only reached to his shoulders, and a handshake from Marvin. He sat them down at their regular table close to the stage, making sure they had everything before going to the kitchen to put in their order. He came back with their drinks, and nodded at one of his colleagues, who went to set up the music. They had karaoke versions of almost every Broadway tune in existence.

Kurt took his place on the stage, adjusting the retro-looking microphone to his height. He smiled at his customers. One of Gunther's conditions of being hired was this particular song. Marvin and Ethel's former favourite had quit just before Kurt had applied and none of the others had met with their approval. After Gunther had heard Kurt was planning to start a Madonna cover band (which sadly never happened for lack of band members and funding), he had been allowed to audition in front of them.

Singing it for them for the first time had been nerve wracking, even worse than singing it in front of the Warblers, because there had been an actual job on the line; money Kurt needed for rent and food. Marvin and Ethel, however, had loved him, and with their blessing, he had gotten the job on the spot. Now, he sang their song every Sunday, and was always rewarded with a generous tip.

The music faded in, and the lights dimmed a little as the footlights turned up and a spotlight went on.

"*It won't be easy, you'll think it strange, when I try to explain how I feel-*" Kurt started, his voice easily reaching the required high notes, "*that I still need your love, after all that I've done...you won't believe me...*" He looked at Ethel and Marvin and smiled. They knew what was coming, as he had asked their permission after the first time. But Sebastian wouldn't know. Kurt sought out his eyes.

"*All you will see, is the boy you once knew, although he's dressed up to the nines, at sixes and sevens with you-*"

As Kurt started singing, Sebastian felt his eyes widen and his mouth opened involuntarily. He had never heard something so angelic in his life. He hit every note perfectly and was able to drag the
notes out without losing pitch or breath. Sebastian couldn't take his eyes off him. He appreciated the change of pronouns and smiled at Kurt when he caught his eye.

Kurt found that looking at Sebastian was too unnerving, and he turned his gaze to the other guests instead, making sure to include everyone.

"I had to let it happen, I had to change - couldn't stay all my life down at heel...Looking out of the window, staying out of the sun...so I chose freedom, running around, trying everything new, but nothing impressed me at all..." Kurt used all of his training and imagination to transport himself to a Broadway stage in his mind, and further still, to the balcony of the Casa Rosada in Argentina, occasionally closing his eyes for emphasis or tilting his chin up. "I never expected it to."

It had been a long time since he had taken Blaine's advice mid-song, and Kurt had grown and learned not to repress his movements since then. It didn't work anyway, and made him cramp up and lose focus. So when the refrain started, Kurt lifted his hands in the iconic gesture that so many Evitas had done before him. At the table, Ethel did the same.

"Don't cry for me, Argentina, the truth is I never left you. All through my wild days, my mad existence, I kept my promise-" Kurt's eyes swept over the diner to rest on Sebastian again as his voice dropped into his lower register. "Don’t keep your distance..."

The way Kurt switched between his high and low registers was mesmerising to Sebastian. Kurt had the attention of everyone in the diner. The old couple sat holding hands. The woman was staring at Kurt with a wistful smile on her face and the man was staring at his wife with a similar expression.

He took the microphone out of his stand and walked a little for the next part, but he was sure to return in time to have his hands free for the next refrain.

"And as for fortune, and as for fame. I never invited them in, though it seemed to the world, they were all I desired."

Sebastian had come to the conclusion that this song was made for Kurt's voice. He knew the words were only part of the song, but it was clear that Kurt deserved every bit of fortune and fame that Evita had received. He was born to be in the spotlight.

"They are illusions, they are not the solutions they promised to be. The answer was here all the time: I love you, and hope you love me."

Something settled in Sebastian's chest. He couldn't explain what it was, all he knew was that Kurt should never stop singing.

Kurt let the last lines ring out, his eyes closed and his arms spread out wide to show he had nothing more to give. The music faded out, and Kurt straightened as the lights came back on.

As the song ended, Sebastian felt the urge to stand and give Kurt a standing ovation. But no one other than but Ethel and Marvin were clapping - which in Sebastian's his mind was a cardinal sin - so he remained seated, not wanting to draw attention to himself. He felt like he was seeing Kurt for the first time and had no idea what to make of it.

Marvin had risen from his seat, applauding wildly, and Ethel, who had a harder time getting up, remained in her seat but had one hands clasped over her mouth and was waving at him with a handkerchief clutched in the other.

Kurt disconnected the microphone and hopped down the stage, feeling satisfied. He felt that it got a
little better every Sunday. Marvin held out his hand, and Kurt could already tell he had a folded fifty dollar note in his palm. Kurt shook his head to decline, putting his right hand over his heart and smiling fondly. He couldn't take their money every week, it just felt wrong. "It's on me," he whispered. "It's on me, please."

Marvin wouldn't have it, and pressed it into Kurt's left hand instead before clapping his shoulder. Ethel beckoned him to her and as Kurt leaned over, she kissed his cheek. More than a little humbled, Kurt ducked his head as he hurried towards the kitchen to get their orders.

Sebastian watched as Kurt greeted the old couple, trying to wave off their money and failing. Good, Sebastian thought, you deserve it, Kurt.

Kurt avoided his eyes as he walked past and Sebastian understood. Singing with such emotion was a very courageous thing to do. You had to let all walls down and open yourself up, leaving you vulnerable. He knew Kurt would need a few minutes to put his armour back on. To pass the time, Sebastian tucked back into his waffles, humming happily at the mixture of syrup and melting ice cream.

Kurt took a few deep breaths, pulling himself back together. He looked down at the money in his hand, bit his lip, and pushed it deep into his pocket until he could put it in his wallet later. He told himself to try harder to refuse their money each week, but so far they hadn't let him. He hoped they could afford it on their pensions.

He glanced at his boss. Gunther was still in the kitchen going "yes, mom, no, mom." Kurt took the plates with Ethel and Marvin's food, balanced them on his arms with the side dishes, and went out again, putting on his serving smile.

As Gunther still hadn't returned by the time Kurt had given his regulars their meal, he returned to Sebastian at the bar. Kurt looked at his plate, which still had a small square of waffle on it, soaked in syrup. He could feel the post-performance adrenaline munchies rumble his stomach. "Are you gonna eat that?" he asked.

Sebastian looked up at Kurt and then back at his plate, feeling guilty for eating almost everything. "No! Please eat it, sorry I should have left you some more."

"It's more than enough, I just need - you know. Do you get that, after singing?" Kurt babbled, taking up his fork and spearing some of the waffle on it, dragging it through the melted ice cream on the plate. He only realised after asking that Sebastian probably didn't sing much anymore. "I mean, did you...back at school?" he corrected himself. He put the waffle in his mouth and closed his eyes for a moment to enjoy it.

Sebastian shook his head, trying to ignore the spot of ice cream on Kurt's bottom lip. "Umm," he started. "No, I didn't really, but then I'm pretty much hungry all the time." He grinned.

Kurt grinned back. "I'll get the chef to make us a bigger portion next time." With the high from performing and sugary food in his stomach, Kurt felt pretty incredible.

"I think you should!" Sebastian said with a grin.

He waited for Kurt to finish eating before speaking again.

"Can I ask you something?" he asked quietly.

"Um, yeah, sure," Kurt said, putting his fork down. If Sebastian had something critical to say about his performance, well, feedback would only make him better.
"Why the hell didn't you get more solo's at school?" Sebastian asked. "That performance was...Kurt, you were incredible!"

He looked at Kurt, holding his gaze. "Honestly, it was amazing! You hit every note perfectly, your breathing was spot on...your register is just...why the fuck didn't you get more exposure at school?"

Kurt stared at him, his eyes wide. It took him a moment to find the right words as his brain tried to catch up with the blood rushing to his cheeks. He felt hot and cold at the same time.

"Um, well..." he started, looking around for a place to fix his eyes on that was not in Sebastian’s demanding eyes. "The first few years, my only real competition was Rachel, and when it came to performing girl songs, Mr Schue always took the safe route. Even if I was better. Eventually, I got tired of trying to prove I was. It was the same at Dalton. At some point they had chosen Blaine and blindsided all their other singers. And then Blaine switched schools, and I lost all chances of ever getting a solo at Glee club."

Sebastian listened to Kurt explain and felt offended on his behalf. That feeling increased with every word he uttered. "That's bullshit!" Sebastian exclaimed loudly, causing a middle-aged couple sat in the corner to look up. He blushed and lowered his voice. "Sorry, but it's true."

Kurt briefly felt a small spark light up inside of him. Sebastian was right. But as quickly as it had ignited, the spark went out. There was no point for Sebastian to get defensive about it, when even Kurt himself had stopped fighting it years ago. It was just how it was.

"It's not my job to educate people about their prejudices," he said quietly. "Either they look at me and see me, or they see what they want to see."

"Well, I see you, and what I see is that you are far more talented than Berry or Blaine...and one day the world will see it too." Sebastian looked at Kurt openly, trying to make him see how much he meant what he said. The sad look in Kurt's eyes made that feeling from before stir inside him and he reached forward, trying to lighten the mood.

"I also see," he added with a grin, "that you have ice cream, right..." he swiped his thumb gently along the corner of Kurt's mouth and across his bottom lip a little, "here."

Kurt started, and caught Sebastian’s wrist in his hand in reflex, though not before Sebastian's finger managed to brush his lip. Taken aback by the intensity of Sebastian's words and his unexpected touch, Kurt held him there for a moment, looking into Sebastian's eyes. What was he playing at? Kurt looked at Sebastian’s hand and saw there really was a smear of vanilla ice cream on his thumb. Huh.

Kurt swallowed. A little of his performance high was still coursing through his system, and in a low voice, he said: "That's mine," brought Sebastian's thumb closer, and licked it off.

Sebastian took a sharp breath and his eyes widened at the contact. It only lasted a second, but it was long enough for Sebastian's mind to come up with several suggestions of other body parts Kurt might like to lick. Then, Kurt let go of his hand. Sebastian tried hard to not look at Kurt's lips. He scolded himself internally for his less-than-innocent thoughts. Kurt was very much in a relationship, one he'd almost ruined once before. He couldn't be that guy again. Plus...this was Kurt Hummel...what the hell was he doing?

"Umm..." Sebastian coughed. "So...speaking of Glee club...how are New Directions getting on this year? I hear they have a cracking new lead singer."
Kurt watched him closely, and bit back on a smile. Was Sebastian Smythe a little flustered? He recognised the deflection for what it was and went along with it. Their little game had gone far enough anyway. He was pretty sure he'd lose against such an experienced opponent.

"The new kids have potential," he replied. "I saw a few videos that leaked online. Mr Schue has been distracted, though. He just became a father, did you know? And with Finn gone-" Kurt broke off. "But they'll be alright. They just need to find their spark again. It always worked with us."

"I'm sorry about your brother," Sebastian offered quietly. "News reached The Warblers and they fed it through the grapevine." He touched Kurt’s hand briefly. "I know my history with him was..." he trailed off, "but I really am sorry that he’s gone."

"Thank you," Kurt said simply. He didn't want to rehash what had happened between Sebastian and Finn, and it wasn't up to him to grant or deny absolution for that.

"From what I remember, you guys wrote original songs to get your spark back and it worked!" Sebastian added with a smile. He hadn't been at Dalton for that, but when he joined the Warblers the following Fall, they were still raving about it. Thad had tried to suggest the Warblers write their own songs, but that had ended in disaster.

"I am taking a song writing class at NYADA. Maybe Mr Schue can use some of the course material to help inspire his students," Kurt mused. "I could offer my help next time I'm over."

He sighed. "That won't be for a while, though. Plane tickets always skyrocket this time of year, and the last time I took the bus to Lima, a smelly old guy tried to steal my headphones while I was asleep. And I was still wearing them!" He shuddered. "I'd rather save up or hold out for a car share opportunity."

Kurt idly ran his finger through the last of the ice cream on the plate. "Blaine's family could easily afford to have us over, but he doesn't want to ask them.

"You could always call Schue?" Sebastian offered. "It's a long way to go to put forward an idea."

"I'd rather not disturb him at home. His son's only a few weeks old, and apparently already colicky..." Kurt rolled his eyes. Daniel Finn was cute, he supposed, going by the pictures on Facebook, but he couldn't imagine the stress of caring for a continuously crying new born. He didn't know how people did it without losing their sanity. Mr Schue probably used every excuse to come into his office to escape his home life right now, and Kurt wasn't even sure he blamed him, though he felt bad for his wife.

"Definitely a pro of being gay - no risk of knocking anyone up." Kurt winked. "It often feels like I already have a kid at home. Two on days that Sam is over," he joked.

"My grand-mère always used to say that having a husband is like have another child. I never really got that. I mean, if your partner can't take care of themselves, why are you together in the first place...?" Sebastian said. The look on Kurt's face made him change topics.

"This Sam?" Sebastian asked. "Is he gay?"

Kurt shook his head. "When I had just met him, I thought so, but then he dated just about all the girls in the New Directions...almost like he wanted to prove a point."

"I've noticed guys do that... fuck any girl who looks at them...and ninety percent of the time they end up the most flaming of homosexuals," Sebastian commented lightly. It didn't prove anything, in his
Kurt pressed his lips together in a crooked smile. "I don't think there's anything more than friendship between him and Blaine, if that's what you are asking. But-" he said with a sigh, "sometimes I get the feeling it's not for lack of trying on Blaine's part."

He suddenly became aware of what he was saying, and added: "In his defence: Sam is an underwear model and he used to be a stripper. So...yeah. I think you can kind of guess what he looks like."

Something about it rang a bell. There was a special place reserved in Sebastian's mind where he kept memorable bodies. "Wait," he suddenly said, sitting up. "Blond, tall, ripped, looks great in a suit..." He narrowed his eyes. "Looks awkward in a Zorro mask?"

Kurt pressed his lips together and nodded.

"I saw him running off with Blaine after they stole the Warblers' trophy," Sebastian said, shaking his head. They had made an odd pair. "Wow, he's a model?"

Kurt nodded again. "Yeah. So...it'd be kinda hard not to be attracted to him, I guess. I mean, I'm not - ...anymore... but I don't blame Blaine for looking. I...trust him."

"I do. Don't I?" Kurt hoped Sebastian wouldn't question that one.

Sebastian finished his coffee for something to do while he thought about how to phrase his next question. "Of course you trust him...if he's never given you reason not to?"

Kurt blinked. "You don't know?" he asked quietly.

After a small pause, Kurt mumbled "I thought everyone knew."

He looked around. His section was quiet. The tables were clean. The ketchup bottles were filled. There was nothing he could do that would credibly be taken as anything but an escape from the conversation.

"Blaine cheated on me shortly after I moved to New York. We were broken up for months. When I came to Lima to talk to him about our problems...he proposed. You were there. I thought you all knew and were on his side!"

Sebastian felt the colour drain from his face as Kurt spoke, a feeling of dread and guilt flooding his body.

He opened his mouth to speak but couldn't find the words. He swallowed and tried again.

"I assure you...I had no...no idea." He looked at Kurt directly. "I know you probably won't believe this, given my past behaviour. But if I had known that was the situation, I wouldn't have even considered allowing that spectacle to happen, not at Dalton, not with my Warblers."

He paused. "I have to ask you, though..." he said, taking hold of Kurt's wrist over the bar. "What the hell were you thinking saying yes? Why would you do that to yourself?"

Kurt frowned and pulled away his hand. "I have to get back to work."

He cleared away Sebastian's plate and coffee cup and turned to retreat into the kitchen.

Kurt's heart was thumping, and he blamed himself for being too honest. Sebastian wouldn't understand. Who would?
"Wait! Kurt! Don't go!" Sebastian said, standing up. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have pressed! It's none of my business...it just surprised me, that's all."

He reached across the bar as if to grab Kurt again but thought better of it at the last minute.

"If you really have to get back to work then fine, but please...don't rush off because I opened my mouth."

Kurt closed his eyes. He considered Sebastian's words.

Sebastian sounded genuine. If he honestly hadn't known... Kurt briefly went over the mental list. Finn had known. Rachel. Santana. Mercedes...Sam? Out of all of those, only Finn had ever confronted Blaine that Kurt knew of. (Finn had called him afterwards and told him about that).

The others had done nothing. Each of them continued to support and applaud Blaine like nothing had happened. Kurt thought they would have spread the word, but in retrospect, why would they?

Sebastian's question was a legitimate one. One that Kurt didn't know the answer to. Or rather, deep down, he knew - but it hurt so much that he kept that truth hidden. And he wasn't about to drag it out at his workplace to a man he barely knew. Still, if he ran off now, it felt like his apology at the bar had been for nothing.

He straightened his back, opened his eyes, and turned back around.

"I'm sorry. It's complicated." He lifted the plate and the cup a bit higher. "I'll just take these to the back."

Sebastian watched Kurt walk away sadly, mentally kicking himself. He'd seen the moment that Kurt drew in on himself and it was not something he ever wanted to see again. It made him wonder...had no one else known? And if they knew, why hadn't they questioned Blaine? Why had no one stood up for Kurt or tried to stop him from making what was clearly a mistake? And if they hadn't...how could they call themselves friends?

Kurt returned a few moments later, holding a small tray with a receipt on it. He didn't want everyone at the diner to see he was giving away a meal. The receipt simply stated 0.00$. He offered Sebastian a small smile.

"Thanks for the cocktails."

Sebastian looked at the blank receipt and shook his head.

"Please Kurt, let me pay. Or otherwise just consider it a tip for the song." He placed a $20 note on the silver tray and stood up again. "Thank you for the breakfast, and the company. I'll let you get back to work now."

He pulled his jacket back on and picked up his bag. He rapped the counter, hesitating for a minute before backing out of the diner, guilt settling over him.

Kurt watched him go, feeling conflicted.
Chapter Summary

The conversation at the diner won't leave Sebastian alone and his friends start to notice.

Chapter Notes

The events in this chapter are completely AU though there is a mention to past canon events.

Kurt didn't come to Satire on Tuesday evening. Sebastian had been on tenterhooks from the minute his shift started right up until closing time. Every time someone approached the bar, he'd hoped it would be his new friend. Whenever the crowd had shifted, Sebastian had searched it feverishly for a sign of his piercing eyes or perfectly styled hair. Every time, he'd been left disappointed.

Guilt swirled in his stomach. He'd crossed the line and he knew it. He had no idea how to make things right again and he was scared that he might have blown his last chance at having Kurt as a friend.

A million scenarios swam in his head, from turning up at NYADA and begging for forgiveness to sending text after text until Kurt got annoyed and replied, either to tell him to fuck off for good or to cave and agree to talk.

But he didn't want to do that. Sebastian Smythe did not beg! And besides that, he would not be a person who forced Kurt into giving in to him against his own will.

That didn't make Sebastian feel better, though.

It was Wednesday, he'd over-slept and hadn't had time for his morning coffee before he had to leave for class. He turned up seconds before his professor shut the door and slumped into his chair next to Alice feeling rough as nails.

Alice took one look at Sebastian, and pushed her ceramic Starbucks mug over to him. Unicorn Up Your Life! It said in bright rainbow letters, and held her morning soy latte with an extra espresso shot. It looked like Sebastian needed it more.

"What took you?" she whispered. Their professor had a strict three-strikes-and-you're-out rule for tardiness, and it wasn't like Sebastian to be this late. "Hard night at the bar?"

She eyed him critically. He usually looked a lot more pleased with himself if he had picked up someone at Satire - and would arrive at class with coffee and some breakfast bought on the road from whatever place he spent the night in. Maybe he just had to put in overtime.

But he'd been behaving a bit strange all week; pensive, moody. Though it seemed to be getting a little better yesterday, today he looked worse than he had in days.
“Didn't sleep well.” Sebastian replied out the corner of his mouth. He took the coffee gratefully and took a big sip, the warm bitter liquid slid down his throat and made him feel marginally better. He handed her back her coffee and took his laptop and books out of his bag as the lecture started.

"It's ok, you can have it," Alice offered, not really satisfied with his explanation. She planned to find out after class. She put her coffee in the middle between them and took out her iPad.

During the lecture, she couldn't help looking over to Sebastian every now and then. He looked distracted and worried. Something was definitely up.

Sebastian struggled with his concentration throughout the entire lecture. The thoughts swimming around his head would have been enough to distract him, but on top of that, he could feel Alice's eyes on him and knew she'd grill him once the lesson was over. He had no idea what he was going to say to her...where would he even start?

As soon as their class ended, Alice turned to face him.

"Alright, pack up your stuff. You're coming with me."

Sebastian sighed. He knew it was futile to argue so he did as she asked and packed up his things.

He stepped out of the aisle and let her walk in front of him. He followed her with trepidation, not in the mood for one of her inquisitions.

Alice led the way to the library. There was a section on the fourth floor that hardly anyone ever used, except for non-library purposes. The books in there were outdated and virtually useless, but it had a window nook that was perfect for homework, naps, or private talks.

Every now and then, couples found it too. Thankfully it was still too early for that today.

Alice put her bag down and sat down on the window sill, patting the seat next to her. "Seb, you know I love you, babe - but I feel it's intervention time."

Sebastian sighed and slumped down next to her, resting his back against the little bit of wall in the nook. He lifted his legs up onto the sill, bending his knees and planting his feet down firmly.

"I've fucked up, Alice..." he said, letting his head drop back against the wall. "Big time."

Alice heart sank. She knew something more than a bad night was bothering him. What was it that he'd said a while ago? A ghost of his past...suddenly she got a chill.

"Are you sick?" she asked. "Did you...get tested?"

She didn't want to buy into the clichés about the gay lifestyle and STDs, but she did know Sebastian wasn't always too picky with his partners. She hoped he was safe.

Sebastian's eyes widened as he realised what she thought was wrong and hurried to reassure her.

“No!” He said quickly. “No, no, I'm fine...I'm clean and healthy. I get checked regularly and I'm always careful!”

Alice let out a deep sigh. "Oh, thank god." She reached for his hand and pressed it.

Of course that didn't make whatever was wrong better, but this way she might have a chance to help him.
Sebastian swallowed. "No, it's nothing like that. I just...god, I don't even know where to start..."

"Did Dr Thiessen find out you wrote that essay for Alex? Because I told you that was a bad idea."

Sebastian smirked. "Nope...it's complicated. Do you want the cliff notes or the After School Special of how I was a jackass in high school and am now, it seems, serving my penance?"

He bit his lip and fingered a spot on his knee absentmindedly.

Alice cocked her head. "Isn't everyone a jackass in high school?" she asked rhetorically. "Just tell me, Seb. Whatever it is, we can work it out."

"Actually, I was more than just a jackass, Alice..."

And he began to explain his history with Kurt, Blaine and the New Directions.

He left nothing out and told her all about trying to split up Kurt and Blaine, blackmailing Finn, almost blinding Blaine, and David Karofsky. The more he talked and re-lived his past, the worse he felt. How was Kurt ever going to forgive him? He had been personally tied with pretty much everyone Sebastian had hurt.

"And then after Dave, I kind of got my act together a bit and tried to be nicer. I helped Blaine propose to Kurt..."

Alice could hardly believe what she was hearing. How could anyone be so cruel as to try and break up a couple? Or use blackmail to try and win a competition? The more Sebastian talked, the less she understood. Who was this person he spoke of? Because it couldn't be Seb.

She knew Sebastian as a kind, generous, caring friend, ambitious, but with an easy-going nature. She also knew he'd had a rough time of it with his family, but she'd never expected it to be this bad. She could tell his guilt and regrets were genuine, and it hurt her to see him like this.

"...and then?" she asked carefully, a little afraid the story would have an awful twist coming.

Sebastian swallowed and looked out of the window.

"Then I moved here, having managed to salvage a few friends within the Warblers and started my new life, with new friends." He smiled at her.

"I knew Kurt and Blaine were in New York, but it's a big city and I figured live and let live. I didn't expect to see them..." He paused and looked back out of the window. "Until Kurt turned up at Satire a few weeks ago."

"By himself?" Alice asked. "Did he know you worked there?"

She hoped Kurt hadn't come to take revenge on her best friend, or extort him in any way. A thought occurred to her, but she didn't want to push. Sebastian needed to tell the story at his own pace.

"Yes, by himself..." Sebastian bit his lip as he thought back to that night two weeks ago. He had been so shocked to see Kurt. "Apparently Tuesday night is "boy's night" for Blaine and his best friend, and Kurt tries to get well out of the way...But no, he didn't know I work there."

He couldn't help the smile that crossed his face as he remembered Kurt's expression.

"He was just as shocked as I was."
Alice nodded, connecting the puzzle pieces in her head. "So...the ghost, I guess?" she asked.

She was glad to see Sebastian smile again, but knew it couldn't be the end of the story. What had he done to 'fuck up big time'?

Sebastian nodded. "Our first meeting didn't...go all that well." He said, still staring off into the distance.

"I tried to make amends and show him that I'm not the same person as I was, but he was in defence mode...which I totally don't blame him for. But then he said some things, and I said some things and it kind of just went kaput and he left."

He looked back at her. "I thought for sure that would be it. He knew where I worked now so I figured he'd avoid the place like the plague..."

He looked down and couldn't help the smile that spread across his face. "But he came back and apologised, and then I apologised for everything...and we had a good night. I paid for a couple of his drinks and he offered me breakfast at the diner where he works in return..."

His smile dimmed. "Which is where the whole 'I've fucked up big time' comes into play."

"Oh, Seb, tell me you didn't..." Alice said quietly. "After you helped his fiancé propose?" She couldn't hide the disappointment in her voice completely.

Sebastian’s eyes snapped up. "I didn't fuck him, Alice," he said bluntly. "What part of 'I have changed' didn't come across? I may have had my fair share of random fucks, but I learnt my lesson okay! I wouldn't do that again, particularly to him."

He knew why she'd come to that conclusion. He probably would have, if things were reversed. But the assumption hurt nonetheless.

Alice sat back a little, looking properly chastised. "Okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" she said quickly. "I just thought...no, you're right. That was out of line." She offered him an apologetic smile. "I'll make sure to remind you to make a few Jeremy jokes for free later. But please tell me what happened, first. Did you end up fighting again?"

Sebastian bit his lip and nodded.

"Yeah...he was complaining about his fiancé and how the guy is always spending time with his friend instead of him, and I asked if the friend was gay, which he apparently isn't..." He sucked in a breath. "And then I said that he surely must trust the guy if he's never done anything to make him have doubts before..." He shook his head. "Turns out, fuck boy did cheat on Kurt just after Kurt moved to New York. They were separated for months until Kurt went home to try and have an adult conversation with him about it...and Blaine proposed, with my help, in front of pretty much everyone he knew, without giving Kurt the chance to talk first..."

He broke off and looked at her pleadingly. "I had no idea, Alice. All Blaine said was that he wanted to surprise Kurt where they had first met and I was like 'sure'. He didn't say they were broken up at all..."

"What?!" Alice let out, frowning, a little too loud for a library setting. She paused for a moment to wait if someone was coming, but no one did. She leaned closer to Sebastian. "He proposed although they were broken up? After he cheated? That...makes no sense at all. Why did Kurt say yes?"

"That's exactly what I asked!" Sebastian said, looking at her. "But I get it...as fucked up as it is. How
could he say no in front of everyone? He'd look like a dickhead." Sebastian scowled. "That was probably Blaine's aim, to back him into a corner in front of the world to see and force him in to accepting." Sebastian shook his head. "If I'd known, I never would have agreed to it!"

Alice wrinkled her nose. "That's awful. But if you didn't know, how is that your fault?" She paused. "Did Kurt say it was?"

"No," Sebastian replied. "But he didn't like me asking why. In fact, he refused to answer, and was just like 'I have to get back to work', effectively kicking me out."

He sighed and looked back out of the window. "I tried to apologise, but it was clear that the conversation was over so I paid and left..."

Alice bit her lip and thought it over. She could understand why Sebastian felt bad about it, but in the end, Kurt was an adult who made his own choices. If he was having regrets about his engagement, he could just call it off, couldn't he? She didn't really understand why it bothered Sebastian so much that someone he was never friends with in the past now refused to be. In a way, Sebastian had lost nothing - and if he had already apologised for the things he had done...what else could he do?

"Maybe you just hit a sore spot," she tried carefully. "If he's having second thoughts...Perhaps you're taking it a little too personally."

Sebastian looked at her. Logically he knew she was right...but...she wasn't.

"I can't explain it, Alice...I have no idea why, but it's all I can fucking think about! I need to make it better, but have no idea how!"

He ran his hands through his hair and gripped it, tugging a little. "I have no fucking clue why it's bothering me so much either! All I know is I need to fix it!"

"Hey...hey, hey," Alice hushed, scooting closer and reaching for his hands, gently disentangling them from his hair and holding them in hers. She looked into his eyes and waited for him to really see her before speaking. "We'll fix it, then. I'll help you. I promise."

She had only seen him this worked up once before, when he had - after much pushing and coaxing - finally told her about his family situation. How or why this thing with Kurt warranted the same reaction was difficult for her to understand, but she could see now that it was really bothering him.

"Do you have his phone number?" She thought quickly. "Maybe you could ask him to come to trivia night? If you just caught him at the wrong time, he might say yes and you can explain how you feel then."

Sebastian looked at her. He gripped her hands, felt himself calm down a little and shook his head. "I have his number, but he's like, stupidly busy."

He couldn't help the little smile that crept across his face. "He works every possible hour that he can, when he's not at the diner he's either at the gym, his internship or at school...he goes to NYADA and it's super intense."

Alice saw the change in Sebastian's eyes as he told her about Kurt, and the smile on his lips, and finally, she understood.

"Ah."

"Wow, NYADA, really? They only accept like, twenty new students a year!" She narrowed her
eyes a little, deciding to test her new theory. "He must really be something special..."

Sebastian's smile softened as he replied.

"He is," he said quietly. "He sung at the diner the other day...he's a singing waiter. There was this old couple that come in every Sunday and request him personally to sing their song....it was 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina' from Evita and fuck, Alice...he's incredible."

Sebastian looked down at their hands for a moment before looking back up. "He was flawless. He didn't get much exposure at school because his voice is...unique, but it was perfect for that song. It's like he was born to sing that song. He changed the pronouns and everything.

He does advanced stage combat classes too, and dance and script writing...it's a great program, but then only taking twenty students a year it'd have to be..."

Alice listened to him gushing, and couldn't help but feel warm inside. This was a new side of Sebastian - when it came to men, anyway. She'd seen him stare at works of art, completely enthralled, she'd heard him read poetry with his voice almost breaking with emotion, and she'd listened to him talk about Paris, and French cuisine with unmistakable passion. But she had never heard him talk about a person like this. His complete rejection of anything resembling dating or courtship had only made this even more remarkable.

But as soon as she realised this, she also saw the problem. Fuck. Kurt was engaged to someone else, and pissed off at Sebastian. No wonder he wasn't sleeping well.

"I can imagine..." she said, searching for ideas and trying to find a way to help, but coming up empty. She sighed. "Well, maybe with that schedule, he just hasn't had the time to think about it. If he only gets one night off a week...?"

"I doubt he'll come back, he said he tries somewhere new every week and he's been to Satire twice now." Sebastian said, dropping her hands and slumping back against the wall. He rested his head on the glass and looked down at the people walking along the street outside.

Oh dear. He had it bad.

"I'm sorry," Alice said. "I wish I had a solution. But maybe he really just needs more time. Maybe, if you haven't heard from him in, I don't know, a week? You text him and apologise again." She put her hand on his shoulder. "The worst he can do is ignore it."

She knew that wasn't going to make him feel better, but she didn't see many other options.

"I don't think you should go to the diner again," she said softly. "If he's made it clear he doesn't want to talk, you'd basically be forcing him to do so by going there as a customer. He would risk losing his job if he ignores you in a professional setting."

Then she had an idea. He shouldn't go...but maybe she could.

Sebastian looked back at her. "The last thing I wanna do is force him into a situation that leaves him no way out...he's had enough of that." I've played a part in it.

Alice offered him a sympathetic smile. "That already makes you better than most guys on this planet."

She smirked. "This," she added, giving him a cheeky look, "is where you say '...says the woman who dated Jeremy!!'" She imitated his voice and intonation, and winked.
Sebastian couldn't help the grin that spread across his face and he chuckled. "I still can't believe you actually dated that guy."

Alice laughed. "Neither can I!" She shook her head. "Oh my god, what was I thinking...I mean, the sweaters alone should have been a red flag!"

She shuddered exaggeratedly, then grew serious again. "All of us do dumb things growing up, Seb. I guess what makes the difference is what we learn from it."

Sebastian nodded. "I know...and I really have learnt and tried to change. But I've hurt him in so many ways and what if I don't get the chance to make it right? I blackmailed the guy's brother for god sake...who is now no longer with us..." He closed his eyes and looked down. "That is something I'll never be able to put right."

Alice put a hand on his arm. "You couldn't know that," she said gently. "And you said you destroyed the picture..."

She let out a soft sigh. "Look, I am not gonna tell you it wasn't awful what you did, because honestly, I am shocked. But-"

She lifted his chin with a slim finger and waited until he looked at her before letting him go, "the reason I am so shocked is because the Sebastian I know would never do that. You don't have to convince me you've changed - I know you're not that person anymore. I wouldn't be sitting here with you if you were."

She paused. "Okay?"

Sebastian looked at her for a moment letting the weight of her words settle over him. His eyes flickered to his lap and he nodded. He felt a tear roll down his cheek and he wiped it away furiously.

"So what do I do now?" He asked quietly, looking back up at her. "Sit and wait?"

"For a bit, yes. I think that's best," Alice said.

She felt bad for him. She could tell he was beating himself up over it, but in her opinion, that was a lot better than those guys who spent their middle-age reminiscing fondly about the mischief they got up to in school. Like her uncle, who loved to tell stories at family parties, about how he and his buddies locked kids in teachers’ cars and stuff like that.

"I know you're one of the good guys, Seb," she said. "And you'll make some lucky man very happy someday. And I'll be jealous for the rest of my spinster days," she joked, winking at him. "You know I'd totally be your girl if you'd have me."

Sebastian smiled at her and took her hand, lacing their fingers together and squeezing tightly.

"Alice, my darling, if I were in any way interested in girls you'd be my first and only choice..."

Alice smiled. Hearing him say that was bittersweet. It would help if he wasn't so damn handsome. But then, it was very handy to have him around to ward off any unwanted advances when they went out; not many guys felt they had much of a chance when he came along.
Of course, it was quite possible that any *wanted* advances were also lost that way. Still, she'd rather be single and have an amazing best friend, than be with someone like Jeremy.

She gave him a wistful look and squeezed his hand back.

Sebastian didn't remind her of his views on relationships in general. She already knew his feelings about those; they never lasted, were messy and complicated and more trouble than they were worth... Kurt and Blaine were living proof of that and Sebastian was pretty sure he didn't even know the half of it.

He knew she was right about Kurt. If Kurt didn't want to talk to him, there was nothing he could do, except wait and see if he'd come round and give Sebastian another chance.

Why did it even matter? He had been fine before without Kurt...he'd get over whatever it was that was screaming at him to fix this, and he'd be fine again.

Alice glanced at her watch. "Do you want to go get a bagel with me before we face Contemporary Lit?"

Sebastian nodded. He let go of her hand so they could stand up and picked up his messenger bag from the floor, slinging it over his shoulder.

"Thanks Alice..." he said softly. "I don’t know what I’d do without you sometimes. You keep me grounded."

"It’s what I’m here for, babe," she replied. She linked her arm through his and they made their way out of the library.

Alice watched him closely for the rest of the day, and while he was clearly still lost in thoughts, he seemed better than he'd been earlier.
Like a Moth to a Flame

Chapter Summary

Despite the way they left things, Kurt's resolve to stay away falters and he returns to Satire a week later.

After his chat with Alice, Sebastian's week had improved a lot.

He'd received top marks in a pop quiz on Wednesday, and it was called by the hardest of his professors so that had cheered him up a bit.

He had the whole day off school and work on Thursday, and he and his friends had spent the day walking around a new exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art. They had stopped for lunch and spent the afternoon in the park enjoying the first batch of really warm weather that year.

The rest of his week had passed in the usual fashion, and he no longer felt as miserable as he had before. He knew that Alice was right about giving Kurt space.

By the time Tuesday rolled around again and he was wrapping his apron around his waist at work, he was resolved to not seeing Kurt that night and decided to focus on earning as many tips as he could.

The club was busy for a Tuesday and Sebastian hadn't stopped taking orders from the moment he arrived. It was just him and Danny at the moment; they had another function on and Jamie had called in sick so Marc was working the second bar for that. His boss Joe was on his way in to help and he was expected any minute, and then Sebastian could take his break.

Sebastian finished serving a set of twins - and fuck if that didn't create some less than PG fantasies in his head. He turned to cash in the guys' money and count out the tips for the jar, his back to the open room.

Kurt spotted Sebastian right away. He was tending bar with another colleague, someone Kurt hadn't seen before. The other man looked a little intimidating, and Kurt waited until he was busy before walking over to Sebastian's section.

Sebastian took a quick sip of his drink and wiped his forehead before turning round to greet his next customer. He saw Kurt the instant he turned round and felt his heart rise in his throat. He was actually here.

Sebastian smiled cautiously and stepped in front of him.

"Hi," he said softly. "What can I get you? Apart from the biggest apology of the year?"

Kurt shook his head. "Just a drink will be fine." He avoided Sebastian's eyes by pretending to study the menu, not really seeing any of the cocktail descriptions. As he looked up again, Sebastian was still there, looking so apprehensive that Kurt knew he had to offer him something more.

"I'm sorry I walked out on you. I overreacted. Afterwards, I understood why you asked. It's just like I said. Complicated."
Kurt took a deep breath and let it out. "To answer your question: I said yes because I love him."

Sebastian reached across the bar and touched Kurt's hand.

"Please Kurt, you've got nothing to apologise for, I overstepped. It's your business and I shouldn't have pried..." He swallowed. "I know you love him. Of course you do. I understand that's why you said yes."

Kurt looked down at Sebastian's hand, and could see Blaine's engagement ring peeking through Sebastian's fingers. "Maybe," he said, "but you were the only one who's ever asked me that question." Apart from myself, he added internally. "It just took me by surprise." He forced a smile onto his lips. "How about you make me a straightforward Pornstar Martini with no surprises?" He raised a warning finger. "And let me pay for it, this time."

"I guess I can do that!" Sebastian said, smiling softly.

He made a show of mixing the cocktail, throwing in a couple of new moves he'd picked up on YouTube, as the bar was crowded and he had an audience. He had to put on a show. At least he didn't have to lift weights in the gym. Throwing heavy bottles helped keep his arms in shape.

He strained Kurt's cocktail into the glass and topped it off with half a passion fruit and a shot of prosecco.

"Eight dollars please," he said, holding out his hand.

Kurt handed him a ten dollar bill, and waved it off as Sebastian reached for change. "For the show," Kurt said, picking up his glass. "Cheers."

A man that looked somehow familiar to Kurt walked up to the bar and let himself in to the staff area, and Kurt suddenly remembered him from the website. It was Joe, the bar's owner. He walked up to Sebastian and clapped his shoulder.

"Ok kid, you can take a break now. Thanks for holding out for so long. I'll take it from here."

Joe reached under the counter and took out a fresh apron.

Kurt cocked his head. The owner of the club tended bar himself?

Sebastian sagged in relief at the sight of Joe. "Thanks!" He put his change into the jar and grabbed his drink.

He smiled at Kurt and nodded his head to the side. "Fancy finding somewhere a bit quieter?"

Kurt nodded, taking up both his glasses and following Sebastian. As they skirted the crowd, two nearly identical guys tried to coax Sebastian onto the dancefloor, but he declined with grace. He led them to a booth furthest away from the DJ and sound installation, and took a "reserved" sign down.

They settled themselves into the booth opposite each other and Sebastian groaned in relief at the chance to sit down. He closed his eyes, breathing in and out deeply for a moment.

"It's busy for a Tuesday," Kurt commented.

Sebastian kept his eyes shut for a moment before shaking himself and looking at Kurt with a smile. "Yeah, there's a function out back, quite a large one and it's split out into the main room. We're a man down as well. We normally only have three of us on a Tuesday but because of the large
function someone else was supposed to be in, and he called in 'sick'...so it's just been me and Danny at the bar. Marc's out back."

Kurt watched Sebastian. He looked exhausted. Kurt wondered how long his shifts lasted, and how often he worked at the bar. Surely NYU also had classes in the morning...

Sebastian took a long sip of his drink, relishing the cool liquid sliding down his throat. He watched Kurt for a second or two before the need to speak took over. "So yeah...look...I really am sorry for the other week," he apologised again.

"Don't worry about it," Kurt brushed it off. "Like I said, I overreacted."

Sebastian relaxed a little and nodded with a smile.

Kurt took a sip from his drink and tried to think of a neutral topic. "So, you really like dogs, huh?" he tried.

Sebastian's smile turned into a grin. "Been checking up on me again, Hummel?" he teased.

"Everyone has a chapter of their life they don't read out loud," he quoted. Sebastian had posted it the week before and Kurt had been thinking about it a lot. He wondered what had happened to make Sebastian post such a quote, but wasn't sure he was allowed to ask.

Sebastian looked at him for a moment, waiting to see if Kurt would ask if the quote was about him. When he didn't, Sebastian grinned and smoothly changed the subject. "But my love of dogs is out in the open. There's something about them. They're always happy to see you and I like that...it's my mission to befriend every dog in the city."

Kurt smiled. "I like the pictures of New York on your blog," he said, hoping Sebastian didn't think it was creepy that he had now admitted to looking at it twice already. "With and without dogs."

"It's such a photogenic city," Sebastian agreed. "But people usually focus on the attractive, wide landscapes...I like capturing smaller moments, things people don't normally notice." He shrugged. "Thank you," he added with a smile.

He wanted to ask Kurt what he had done the Tuesday before, but he wasn't sure if he was allowed to. Instead, he stayed on safe ground.

"How has school been? Taken anyone out with your sword yet?" He grinned.

Kurt smirked. "We're working with the quarterstaff this block. I may have broken a few...hearts." He winked, and quickly took another sip of his drink.

Sebastian turned his grin upwards into a leer.

"I'm sure you break more than a few hearts, Hummel." He winked. "So what do you do with the quarterstaff?"

Kurt took out his phone. "Mostly thrusts and lunges," he said, "but there's a lot of dancing involved, more than with the swords. They're usually used as a prop for large chorus groups."

He opened a video and put it on the table for Sebastian to see. In his last class, he had filmed his instructor demonstrating several new moves with his TA. Kurt leaned over to look at the screen too.
"That's my teacher, Mr Hura, and Marco." They demonstrated a series of spins and blocks.

"I know they make it look easy," Kurt said quickly, "but they're just really good."

Sebastian leant forward to watch the video, the two men on the small screen were dancing around each other and imitating a fight using the staffs.

"Impressive," Sebastian said, nodding. He glanced at Kurt without realising how close he was, leaning across the table to watch the video too. Sebastian swallowed.

"And you can do that as well?"

"Well, not as fluid...yet," Kurt said modestly. "But we only just started on this routine. We get two weeks for new moves."

He paused, sliding his phone to face himself, and quickly flipped through the video section.

"Mr Hura told us the chorus usually only gets one or two training days for their numbers. Companies will just hire twice the number of dancers they need, and sort wheat from the chaff after training. So he's really pushing us to pick it up fast."

Kurt opened a video of himself and Mr Hura duelling; Kurt with his Sai's and his teacher with a short bladed sword. "This is from the last block...I got to help Mr Hura demonstrate some stuff because Marco was ill."

He pushed his phone over to Sebastian and sat back a little, feeling his cheeks redden. He was proud of it, but at the same time, felt a little embarrassed for showing it around.

Sebastian watched with wide eyes at the image of Kurt on the screen spinning his Sai's and 'battling' his teacher.

Sebastian didn't know what was more impressive, the way in which Kurt handled the deadly weapons, his impeccable footwork or the muscles moving under his form fitting shirt.

"Wow," he said quietly, eyes glued to the screen.

The video ended and Sebastian licked his lips as he thought about what he had just seen. "You know, with skills like that, you'd make a good flair-tender," he said, sitting back in his chair, trying to hide how flustered the video had made him.

Kurt glowed with pride. "Maybe I should apply for a job here then," he joked.

For a moment, Kurt could see it. The two of them behind the bar, matching shirts with the sleeves rolled up; a funky song thumping loudly...

_They both grab a mixing cup, spin it up in the air. Bottles fly between their fingers and back and forth between them. They shake the cups suggestively to the wolf whistles of their patrons. On cue, Sebastian lets a stream of ice cubes fly through the air like a jet of slushy - Kurt catches it expertly in his cup and blows him a kiss. With complete synchronicity, they set their identical cocktails on the bar and throw in a cherry._

Yes, he could definitely see it. But somehow he imagined that bar work, just like being a singing waiter, had a little more to it than showmanship.

Sebastian smiled at him. "Why not? It's a pretty good place to work, I've been here since January."
Joe pays pretty well and we get to keep our tips. If you ever get bored of minimum wage, rude customers and smelling of burgers," He winked at him.

"I DO NOT-!!" Kurt started, almost getting up from his seat before Sebastian started laughing.

"Ha, ha," Kurt mumbled, sitting back down. "I don't even work in the kitchen."

Still, a small smile started to form on his lips. He'd completely walked into that one - but it was just a silly joke.

He thought about Sebastian's offer. "I never thought I'd say this, but...it would be nice to work at a place without show tunes. Being roomies with Rachel really killed my inner Funny Girl." He sighed. "But I couldn't do that to Ethel and Marvin," he said, coming down from the fantasy.

Sebastian continued to chuckle at Kurt, admiring the high blush that appeared on his cheeks. "That's the old couple from the other day, right?" he asked. "The Evita fans."

"Yes," Kurt said, smiling fondly. "I kind of feel like I owe it to them to stay. And it doesn't hurt to have a regular dose of applause - we performers need it to live." He winked at Sebastian.

"Do you miss it? Performing, I mean," Kurt continued. "I saw a video of this year's Warblers on their Facebook page. They're not bad, but a lot less...acrobatic than when you lead them."

"I do, in a way...it was nice to feel like I belonged to something. Once the shit had died down and I actually made some friends within the group. And I've always loved singing...but I was never as...obsessed with it as some of the other guys." He smirked at Kurt. "I never knew the guy but apparently it took Wes a long time to move on and even now he still clutches to the glory. From what I've seen in the Facebook group anyway."

Sebastian finished his drink and slid the empty glass away from him. He was enjoying this, the easy chat, friendly banter and harmless flirting. It would seem that below the surface, they were rather similar characters.

Kurt grinned. He remembered Wes quite well. They didn't always see eye to eye, but his heart and soul lay with the Warblers.

"Do you?" Sebastian asked.

"Miss the New Directions?" Kurt replied.

Sebastian nodded.

Kurt's smile dimmed a little. "I guess, like you, I miss being a part of something; I miss that feeling of friendship and camaraderie that we had when we achieved something together against all odds. At NYADA, it's every man and woman for themselves. If someone breaks an ankle, all the more chances there are for you, you know?"

He shrugged uncomfortably.

"But I don't miss being overlooked, underestimated, being called Lady Hummel, or asked to wear a dress to Nationals for sympathy points." He bit his lip. "When even the teachers laugh at the jokes - or they're the ones making them - it's hard not to feel like a joke yourself."

At least at NYADA, being one of only twenty students in his year, he knew he and his craft were being taken seriously.
He paused. "Sorry, that was not the reunion-suitable answer, was it?"

Sebastian felt his heart clench and guilt rise in his throat at Kurt's words, knowing he had added to those jibes. He squashed it firmly, knowing any further apology would be rebuffed. They couldn't spend every evening they spent together apologising.

"To quote George O'Malley: 'High school sucks for everyone who’s the least bit different...but then there's college, and then out in the real world, you find where you belong.'"

Kurt gasped and put a hand over his heart. "Oh my god, you watch Grey's Anatomy?" He hopped in his seat excitedly. "I can't wait till Thursday...season fi-na-leelee!" he let out in a sing-song voice. "I'm definitely training at home in front of the tv that night."

Sebastian laughed at Kurt's excitement. "Yes I do! Thursdays are my day off so I shall definitely be watching it too! I can't believe Christina is leaving! She's the best character! Mer is gonna be lost without her!"

"Oh my god, I know!" Kurt agreed, dropping his hands on to the table. "No more twisted sisters! Who's she gonna bitch to about Derek?"

"Karev probably!" Sebastian mused. “I like him as well."

"He's had the most growth out of all of them! He used to be such an ass." *Bit like you,* Kurt added in his head.

Sebastian nodded. "He was, but being friends with the others helped." He checked his watch and bit his lip, sighing resignedly.

"I should get back, I'm sorry. Danny'll be chomping at the bit for his vape...Thanks for the company," he said with a smile.

"Oh. Yeah, alright," Kurt said. "You too." He picked up his empty glasses, intending to bring them back to the bar himself, but Sebastian took them out of his hands and with one more smile, hurried back, leaving Kurt empty-handed and a little at a loss.

Finally, they had found something this good to talk about, and Sebastian had to leave? Kurt sighed. Of course he had to - Kurt could see how busy it was. But it wasn't easy squashing the disappointment he felt inside.

He looked around, wondering if he should just follow and get another drink, but then he saw the twins on the dance floor and remembered there were other things to do at a club than hang out with the bartender...Such as getting a little ego stroke.

And if Sebastian happened to look his way? Well, then he'd just have to come to terms with the fact that Kurt now had professional dance training three times a week.
Sebastian woke up on Friday morning feeling much lighter than he had in weeks.

Ever since their talk at the bar, Sebastian had been looking forward towards Thursday evening, and he had texted Kurt shortly before their show was about to start.

To Kurt (20:55)

Are you ready for Grey's Hummel? Better get your tissues ready! ~PM

He chuckled at his signature, thinking back to the night a few weeks back when he'd plugged his number into Kurt's phone.

To P. Martini (20:58)

I think the question is are you ready?

Sebastian had sent back a picture of the pizza on his lap and the bowl of popcorn on his coffee table, and the conversation had continued from there all the way throughout the show.

---

That night, Kurt lay awake in bed scrolling through his phone. Blaine was sitting next to him with his laptop. With half an eye, Kurt could see he was on Twitter.

"Blaine?"

"Mmm?"

"You know how in your profiles, you have this...gold star gay thing? In your twitter bio and on Facebook?"

"Yeah?"

Kurt could tell Blaine was only half listening, but he pushed on.

"Do you think, maybe...you could stop calling yourself that?"

He got Blaine's attention now. His fiancé turned and glared at him.

"Is this about Rachel Berry again?" Blaine asked, with irritation in his voice. "Because I told you that doesn't count! I was drunk, and it was just a kiss anyway~"

"I know, I know," Kurt hurried to say, not wanting to start another fight. "It's just..." He tried to recall how Marc had phrased it. "Not everyone has the opportunity to come out when they're young, and some don't even know yet, and it doesn't seem fair~"
"Is this some weird way of telling me you slept with a girl?" Blaine interrupted him. "Because if-

"No!" Kurt let out. "No," he said again, growing quiet. "I just feel like it creates unnecessary hierarchies in the community."

"Oh really? You think that?" Blaine echoed in disdain. "I am upsetting the Community with my Twitter bio?"

Kurt clenched his jaw. "Forget it," he mumbled, turning away from him in the bed. "Do what you want."

"It's my profile," Blaine said defensively, but Kurt was already tuning him out.

---

Sebastian's good mood continued throughout his morning routine and he stopped by Krispy Kreme on his way to class to pick up a selection box for his friends to share before class, along with his morning cappuccino.

He spotted them sat on and around a bench under a large oak tree outside their building and bounced over to them with a grin on his face.

"Morning everyone." He said happily. "I bring gifts."

"Oh, yes," Alex moaned, rolling back his eyes. He held up his hand for Sebastian to high five, which he did with a laugh. "Score!"

Like everyone in their little group, Alex knew bakery food was code for I got laid, bask in my glory.

Steph made a face at him and poked him in the ribs for being insensitive. Or immature. Or maybe she was on her period again - Alex never really could tell.

"What?" he whispered. "I'm just happy for him. Maybe we could bring some to the next study group, hmm?"

Alex waggled his eyebrows and got another poke in the ribs. Women. He eagerly reached for a doughnut.

"You're such a boy," Steph said, rolling her eyes and taking a doughnut from the box. "Thanks Seb."

"No problem. Couldn't let you all go hungry before we get grilled on The Beach of Falesá…please tell me you read this one?" Sebastian said, slapping Alex's hand away as he tried to sneak another doughnut. "You know, as there is no movie version this time."

"Did I fuck!" Alex said laughing. "I only took this class to hang with you guys, I've no actual interest in carrying on with literature next semester…think I might try out social sciences instead."

Sebastian opened his mouth to reprimand him for his continued rejection of their course material but Alice cut in. "We should get to class!" She stood up and looped her arm through Sebastian's tugging him along.

Alice looked at Sebastian critically. From what Sebastian had told her, she didn't think Kurt was the type to cheat. But from what he hadn't told her, she didn't think Seb would jump into someone else's bed for a while.

These weren't celebratory sex doughnuts. But there was something, and she planned to find out.
"Just tell me already," she said, "what are we celebrating?"

She looked back over her shoulder. Alex and Steph were arguing. Apparently Alex hadn't shared his ideas about social sciences with his girlfriend yet. They were well out of earshot.

"Did you see Kurt again?"

"Why do you assume that just because I brought in doughnuts, I'm celebrating something?"

Sebastian asked, trying to avoid answering her question.

She raised her eyebrows and stared at him. He sighed.

"Yes, I did." Sebastian admitted, and instantly felt himself smile. "He came back on Tuesday night and I spent my break with him…turns out he likes Grey's Anatomy too and we ended up talking about that. He also showed me some videos from his advanced stage combat class…" He trailed off as he remembered the one of Kurt twirling the Sai's.

Alice coughed. Sebastian shook himself.

"And then we ended up texting each other throughout the finale last night…"

Alice hummed and squeezed his arm. "I'm happy for you." She paused, hesitating a little. "Just...try not to lose your head, ok? He is engaged, after all."

She hoped Sebastian didn't take it badly. She wasn't exactly used to giving him relationship advice, since he never needed any.

Sebastian dropped her arm and stepped away from her frowning.

"We're just friends, Alice!" he said firmly. "I'm aware that he's engaged and if I were interested in him in any way other than a friend that would be a problem…but I don't, so it's not!"

"Ok, alright, fine," Alice said, hoping to mollify him. "I'm just saying that last week you weren't even sure if he was ever going to talk to you again, and now you're friends...? I just want you to be careful."

"Careful is my middle name, Alice…" he said, winking at her. He didn't know why she was pushing this so hard. He'd been a bit messed up last week, true. But mainly because he was fed up of his past continuing to rear its ugly head.

They'd both apologised however, and had finally found some common ground…He had no idea what Alice was even talking about.

"Even friends is a very loose term," he mused. "We barely know each other."

"Well, good, Sebastian C. Smythe," Alice said, taking his arm again. "Because I won't be replaced that easily, you know." She leaned over and kissed his cheek.

"Now let's go see how many fellow students ended up watching The Beach with Leo."

Sebastian looked at her. "You're joking, right? Please tell me you're joking and that I'm not the only person that actually read the correct book!"

She laughed lightly. He got so anal about things sometimes, particularly Literature. It was almost too easy to wind him up.
"Yes, Sebastian," she said with a smile and roll of her eyes. "I was joking."

He relaxed and sank into her touch a little, leading her towards their class.

Alice smiled. This was her favourite version of her friend, relaxed, easy going and up for a bit of good natured banter. It was nice to see him back. The past weeks had been extremely unnerving.

She hoped things would settle down now and he'd stay her happy chilled-out friend, but she couldn't help but wonder who this mysterious Kurt was, and why he had the ability to make Sebastian pull a 180.

She had a free afternoon that day, and Sebastian had another class. He wouldn't have to know what she was doing...It was time to track down this Kurt Hummel and see what all the fuss was about.

---

After class, Alice packed up her things, said goodbye to her friends and headed off campus. She was a woman on a mission. Taking the address from Sebastian's Instagram coordinates, she headed to Spotlight in search of the mysterious stranger that had captivated her friend.

Maybe she'd be lucky, and Kurt was in. If not, she'd just stalk the place until he was, but she had to know. Was he really that special? What was it about him that made her best friend - the most convinced bachelor she knew - fall for him so hard? Because she no longer doubted that that was what had happened. Or what was happening, right under her nose.

The place was nice enough. A bit retro looking, but just enough to look trendy without appearing old-fashioned. They had a stage with a New York skyline light, and as she came in, a waitress was singing a Celine Dion song with many hand gestures and a concentrated face. A young man with dark curly hair and bushy eyebrows sat at the front, mimicking her gestures silently. Her boyfriend, probably, why else would he know her performance by heart? That couldn't be Kurt.

Alice took a seat and looked at the other waiters. One of them looked about 40, the other had a pleasant enough smile, but somehow...Oh.

A third waiter had just come out of the kitchen, and Alice knew instinctively this had to be him. She sighed. God, he was beautiful. She had no idea what type of man Sebastian preferred (all he had once alluded to was that they had to offer something substantial in the bedroom) but if she had to pick someone from this diner, it would definitely be him. He looked, somehow, too pretty to be allowed.

Before she could put her hand up for his attention, the older waiter came to her and took her order. Apparently it was his section. She told him she needed a bit more time, and looked over the menu. It said that several dishes, such as the Barbra Burger, came with a song included, but if you wanted, you could also put 5$ in the tip jar with your Broadway song request and your table number - or submit a request anonymously. She smiled. Time to hear this Kurt sing a song.

The waiter on stage finished her song and Alice applauded politely. Her boyfriend gave her a standing ovation. Alice smiled. That was sweet.

She quickly scribbled a song and Kurt's name on a note, underlined Kurt for emphasis, and put it in the tip jar with a 5$ bill.

Alice resumed her review of the menu and decided to go for a Sinatra Surf’n Turf. She waved a little to her waiter and he wandered over with his pad and pen.
She placed her order along with a Diet Pepsi and gave him the tip jar with her request. He nodded and took it, heading back over to the counter.

Alice glanced back at Kurt who was heading her way. He was talking to the previous singer's boyfriend in a low voice.

They passed her table and stopped just behind her, at the condiments station.

"I thought you were going to ask for the day off, Kurt!" the guy was saying in an accusing tone. "Sam's going out of town and I thought we were going to spend the day together...you know I don't like being on my own!"

Kurt let out a sigh. "Blaine...you know I always work the Sunday morning shift. They rely on me. I've got my regulars..."

"Oh, of course," Blaine said, in a nasty tone. "Silly me! Here I thought spending time with your fiancé might be more important than your customers. What was I thinking?"

Alice blinked. *This guy was Kurt's fiancé?*

"That's not true," Kurt argued plaintively. "You know I love you. But...I-It's Friday, I can't cancel my shift for Sunday now. It's too short a notice!"

"Then call in sick," Blaine countered.

"I can't do that!" Kurt protested. "Ethel and Marvin-"

"Yeah yeah. I know," Blaine cut him off. "Your sweet old regulars, who are just waiting to stuff your shirt with dollar bills-"

"It's not like that. And that's not why I do it!"

"Then why do you, Kurt? I moved to New York to be with you, but I never get to see you. You're always working!"

Kurt paused. "One of us has to," he mumbled, his voice deeper and slightly sharp.

"That's not fair," Blaine complained. "I have been applying for jobs, even at this dump, but I'm nineteen! It's much harder for me."

*Sebastian was nineteen when he got a job,* Alice mused, but she kept her thoughts to herself and she tried to school her face into a neutral position.

"Not so loud, Gunther is coming over," Kurt shushed him.

Alice listened to the heated argument in shock. From what she gathered in those brief couple of minutes, their relationship was completely messed up.

As Kurt mentioned Gunther, Alice noticed her waiter walking towards the two men.

"Kurt, you've got a request," he said, handing Kurt Alice's note. "They paid extra and requested you specifically, so hop to it."

Gunther set Alice's drink down in front of her and walked back to the counter, where the small woman from earlier started talking his ear off angrily, though Alice couldn't hear what she was saying.
She heard the fiancé turn back to Kurt. "Kurt!" he said angrily. "You can't walk away from me in the middle of a discussion! Why don't you want to spend time with me?"

"Don't make a scene," Kurt hissed, sounding irritated. "And let go of me. I have to work."

Alice couldn't help herself. She'd been tempted to turn and look at them before, but now she just had to see. She shifted in her seat, pretending to rummage in her bag, and moved to look at the couple. She saw Kurt pull his arm out of Blaine's grip with force, and he made to move away.

Blaine's face softened immediately. "Kurt...I thought you loved me! We're...we're soulmates." On the last word his voice turned wet and soppy.

_Who even is this guy?_ Alice thought to herself.

Kurt briefly closed his eyes and walked back to him. He took Blaine's hand and raised it to his lips, planting a kiss on it. "We are," he said softly. "I'll...I'll ask about Sunday, ok? I have to sing now."

He walked over to the bar, where his boss and the waitress were arguing. He talked to his boss for a moment, nodded, and reached behind the bar for a small bottle of water. Kurt took a sip, then made his way to the small stage.

The music started. Alice smiled. She loved Les Mis, having seen it several times with her parents.

"God on high," Kurt started serenely, "hear my prayer-"

Alice's mouth dropped as he started to sing. She was completely blown away. Sebastian had been right. His voice was amazing.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Gunther and the waitress talking furiously. Gunther shook his head and pointed to the condiments counter where a Kurt and his fiancé had been talking just moments before.

She stomped her foot and stalked over, where she was greeted by Blaine.

"This is so unfair! This should be _my_ song!" Alice heard her growl. "First Kurt gets Evita _every_ Sunday and now this! Les Mis is _mine_!"

Alice tried to ignore her and focus on Kurt singing. He really was something to behold. Sebastian was right, no wonder he was falling big time.

"I know, Rachel," Blaine agreed. "He's so selfish!" he continued."He never wants to spend time with me! He's always at school or work or the gym! I asked him ages ago to change his shift for this weekend but he refused and now says it's 'too late' and that he doesn't want to let that old couple down...you could easily sing that song, and you'd do it better justice! It's a girl song."

Alice watched Kurt up on stage. He sung with such passion and emotion and hit every note flawlessly, _what on Earth was this guy even thinking?_

"Right!" Rachel agreed eagerly. "I tried saying that to Gunther but apparently this couple LOVE Kurt and don't want anyone else...ugh, I can't believe he won Midnight Madness with this song," she added as Kurt moved from his high register to his low register for the second chorus. "My range is much better."

"Yeah," Blaine agreed.
Alice couldn't believe what she was hearing. She felt indignant and offended on Kurt's behalf! These two clearly weren't hearing the same song that she was.

"If I die, let me die," Kurt sang, his arms outstretched, "but let him live..."

"I bet it's someone from NYADA," Rachel said, looking around her with narrowed eyes. "They're probably filming us to see if I crack. Well, that's not gonna happen. I shall applause with dignity and let everyone see I am Kurt's best friend."

She gasped as another thought occurred to her. "Maybe he just put the request in, himself! If it was anonymous... I do that sometimes when I am bored."

"Who knows," Blaine replied. "I wouldn't put it beyond him, what with the way he shows off at NYADA too."

Unbelievable. It was the emotional climax of the song, and these horrible people were talking through it. His fiancé and his self-proclaimed best friend? Who needs enemies with friends like that? Alice couldn't take it any longer. She turned around to face them.

"Excuse me, could you keep it down? I'm trying to listen, here!"

Rachel looked at her with wide eyes. Blaine frowned, and opened his mouth to speak, but Alice turned back around to hear the last line of the song.

Applause started from all tables, and Alice rose from her seat to clap loudly as well, whistling between her teeth. She looked behind her and saw that Blaine and Rachel were also clapping, with big smiles plastered on their faces. The hypocrites.

On the stage, Kurt dipped his head and held up his hand in a shy wave before coming down and binding his apron back on.

Alice watched as Kurt took his bottle of water from the counter. He sipped it slowly. It looked like he was stalling for time. She would be reluctant to get back into the argument with Blaine too.

She couldn't stand it. Kurt was so talented, and the others were clearly jealous and felt threatened. Add to that the conversation she'd overheard between Kurt and his fiancé, and Alice was ready to whisk him off under her arm and drop him off at Sebastian's doorstep. But people weren't parcels, and she was quite sure Kurt wouldn't like to be treated as one. She didn't know him, he certainly didn't know her and she wouldn't do anything to jeopardise Sebastian in any of this. He was the reason she was there ultimately.

She watched as the couple joined Kurt by the counter and congratulated him on his performance.

Alice watched as Blaine said something to Kurt as he pulled away from an embrace, and saw Kurt's smile fade and the light dim in his eyes.

Oh god, how she hated that tiny ass already.

Her food came out, and she handed her waiter a twenty dollar bill.

"Could you make sure that Kurt gets this, please? That was an outstanding performance and he should know that."

Gunther looked at her, glanced at Kurt who had stepped behind the register to print out a receipt and turned back to her.
"I will, miss. Can I interest you in an encore? Maybe from one of the girls?"

Alice shook her head. "Nope, I came here to see him."

Gunther nodded and left her to her meal.

As she ate, Alice watched Kurt interact with each of his customers. He was attentive and energetic, he laughed at their lame jokes and gave back any banter he received.

The more she watched, the more he reminded her of Sebastian.
Kurt Hummel's Day off

Chapter Summary

After a fight with Blaine, Kurt needs to get out and blow off some steam, and Sebastian knows just the place.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all the love you're giving this fic <3

Two new characters this time round and then that's it for a while with the OCs :)

Sunday found Sebastian lounging on his bed, laptop open and text books and notebooks strewn all over the place. He'd been in this exact position, laid on his front, legs spread wide behind him, for approximately 4 hours and could feel it in his shoulders and lower back.

The Summer semester classes would start the next day and Sebastian had chosen a class titled Sex & the City: Gender & Urban History in Modern New York. He was really looking forward to starting it and thought he'd do some background reading before hand.

As usual he'd found himself digging deeper as he found text after text which he thought might come in useful. He'd made notes so that he'd have points to raise or offer in class and was feeling pretty pleased with himself. Apart from the pain in his back.

Pushing aside his laptop, he rolled over onto his back and stretched out his limbs, smiling as they gave a satisfying crack. He glanced at his watch and realised it was gone lunchtime. His stomach rumbled at the thought of food and he sat up, thinking of what to do.

He was meeting Steph and Alex later. They were catching a showing of a final project some media studies and drama students had collaborated to create, but needed to eat before that. It was Sunday so Kurt'd be working. If he left now, Sebastian might be able to make it out to the diner before Kurt's shift ended. Or maybe he was already at home?

Since their Grey's chat the other night, Sebastian's mind kept wandering off to Kurt. What was he doing? How was his day? It unnerved Sebastian a little. He wasn't sure what it all meant, but couldn't seem to stop it so had decided to just roll with it.

Then, Sebastian remembered something from his trip to the diner two weeks ago. He smiled and decided to use it as an in to see if Kurt was still there.

To Kurt (13:50)

Hey Evita...how were the oldies today?

--
Kurt paced around the bedroom angrily. He wanted to leave. To walk away and blow off steam before he said or did something he might regret. But where?

Just then, his phone buzzed.

Kurt stared at the text for a moment, feeling his anger rise again. *Evita.* This whole Sunday Song thing was the reason he and Blaine had yet another fight, and it almost felt like Sebastian knew and wanted to rub it in. Kurt first instinct was to tell him to mind his own business.

But Sebastian didn't know- how could he? Kurt took a few steadying breaths and read the message again. It was sweet. Kurt knew he couldn't take out his anger on his new friend. It wouldn't be fair.

Still, he wasn't in a mood to be chatty either. He just wanted to get out and start his Sunday over.

**To P. Martini (13:55)**

*Same song, same old. I want to do something today. Do you have any plans?*

Sebastian's phone pinged to indicate a new message and he smiled, swiping his iPhone screen open to read it.

He frowned a little at Kurt's message. He knew things could be misread in a text but Kurt didn't seem all too happy. He fired off a quick reply, hesitating a little before hitting send.

**To Kurt (13:58)**

*I was just about to go get some lunch and then a couple of friends and I are going to watch a movie. Something a group of seniors have put together, you're welcome to join if you like :)*

Kurt didn't need to think about it. Food. Distraction. Strangers. It was perfect.

**To P. Martini (13:59)**

*Ok. Just tell me where.*

Kurt sent it off and looked at himself in the mirror. He willed himself to relax his face, straighten his shoulders, and smile. It would do. His diner uniform wouldn't, though.

He quickly changed into his Engel Hart safety pin jeans, a white shirt and a jacket, buttoning himself back up in his shields. He braced himself and walked through the living room, but Blaine was sitting on the couch with his laptop, immersed in whatever he was doing. At the moment, Kurt didn't care. They'd sort it out later.

**To Kurt (14:02)**

*Meet me under Washington Park Arch? There's quite a few places to eat around there and it's near to the theater for the screening. Let me know when you're 10 mins out and I'll walk down, I don't live too far away.*

**To P. Martini (14:15)**

*On my way.*

After he had texted Kurt, Sebastian spent a little time getting ready. He put on a pair of white shorts, a navy button down and his blue and white loafers. It was a sunny day so he grabbed his sunglasses
off the bookcase by the door and headed out. He said he'd leave when Kurt was almost there but it was a nice day and he could hang in the park for a bit while he waited.

The further he got from the apartment and his fiancé, the giddier Kurt started to feel. It kind of felt like sneaking off. Cutting class or calling in sick for work. A sense of rebellion and freedom overcame him, and Kurt was almost humming again by the time he came to the agreed meeting spot.

Sebastian was already there. He was looking at his phone. Kurt grinned and sent him one more message.

To P. Martini (14:23)

Stop instagramming your shoes and look up.

He heard a soft pling, and saw Sebastian press his screen, read, and then do what it said.

"Hi," Kurt said drily.

"Hi yourself." Sebastian slid his phone into his pocket and stepped off from the wall he'd been leaning against. "How are you?"

Kurt returned the smile. "Overdressed," he replied. "You look like summer." At least Kurt had thought to pack his sunglasses. Sebastian's smile was disarming, and Kurt felt warm in its glow. He took off his jacket and popped the top buttons of his shirt.

Sebastian grinned. "It is summer!" he declared happily. "Almost anyway...you look..." his eyes swept over Kurt under his glasses. The popped buttons on his shirt showed off the smooth skin of his chest and the jeans clung to his legs in all the right ways. "Great!" he said honestly. "Are those safety pins on your jeans?"

"Safety first," Kurt joked, brushing a hand down his thigh. "They're from Thomas Engel Hart, I've had them for years." He didn't add that he usually wore them in situations where he needed to display more self-esteem than he felt. He looked around. "Where to now?"

"There's a little place just up there called Eva's, they do pretty decent salads and sandwiches which aren't too expensive," Sebastian said, pointing back across the road. "The movie showing is just on the other side of the park but that's not till later."

"That sounds good. Anything but burgers, pizza and fries," Kurt said. "I don't get much salads at home...Or anything resembling vegetables that isn't deep fried."

Sebastian wrinkled his nose. "Why on earth would you deep fry a vegetable?" He shook his head. "Eva's is pretty good for healthy-ish food, and it tastes good."

He held out his hand for Kurt to go on ahead and then fell into step beside him. "So you get take-out a lot, huh?"

"I don't, Blaine does," Kurt replied. He sighed. As angry as he was with his fiancé, he knew he had to be on his side.

"I guess it's all still new for Blaine. You know, living on his own. He's lived at a boarding school and with his parents for years, and he never had to cook in his life. Having easy, unsupervised access to fast food is very tempting. Especially delivered to your doorstep. Almost everyone puts on the 'freshman fifteen'."
Kurt smirked. "When I just came to New York, I tried a lot of fast food places myself. But for me, it wasn't so much the food, as just a nice change not having to cook." He paused. "Of course, no one at Vogue eats, so I adapted quite quickly. And when I started at NYADA it was definitely out of the question. Now I try to only pick one new place a week and go there on Tuesdays."

Sebastian nodded as Kurt talked. He could see how someone would easily slip into bad habits if they were used to food being available whenever they wanted it. They would immediately seek a similar pattern when they had to fend for themselves. And New York was take-out capital of the world with fast food restaurants on every corner and 24 hour home delivery.

"It's understandable," Sebastian reasoned. "I've always had a healthy relationship with food, growing up in France will do that. It's a lot of bread and cheese...fuck I miss the cheese." He moaned, forgetting his point for the moment.

Kurt grinned. The French and their cheese...

It was still a little strange to think of Sebastian as French, but he had lived there longer than he had been here, so Kurt guessed he really was French in a way.

"But it's lighter," Sebastian said, shaking himself out of his daydream. “American food is so damn heavy. It took a while for me to adjust, but now that I'm on my own and I've been here a couple of years, I've been able to find a good balance.”

They reached Eva's and Sebastian pulled the door open, allowing Kurt to enter first.

"My dad has heart issues, so I've been cooking light meals for us since his attack," Kurt said. "I got a few good European cookbooks. It wasn't always easy to get all the ingredients in Lima."

It was definitely easier here, with all the international markets.

"I'm sorry about your dad, is he okay?" Sebastian asked as they sat down at a table by the window. He'd never known anyone who was sick.

"He is, thanks," Kurt replied. "He needs to watch his cholesterol and keep away from stress. Not that easy with me as a son," he added lightly, winking.

Sebastian chuckled, although he couldn't help but feel a twinge of sadness in his chest. It couldn’t have been easy for Kurt either.

Kurt's smile dimmed a little.

"My first christmas in New York, he told me he had cancer, too. It was hard not being there with him when he started treatment and I thought about deferring NYADA and going home, but he wouldn't let me. He's in remission now."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that, but I'm glad he's okay now." Sebastian said honestly. "My nanny was an amazing cook," he added in an attempt to lighten the mood again. “And she taught me to cook while my grandparents were off socialising...she taught me to sing and dance as well.”

He smiled reminiscently at the memory of being twirled around the titled floor of the kitchen back home.

The diversion worked and Kurt focused on Sebastian, his eyes widening comically. "You had a nanny? Like... Mary Poppins?" Kurt smiled.
"Uh... yeah, like Mary Poppins, though she was no Julie Andrews…"

Kurt bit his lip. He wanted to ask why Sebastian's parents didn't raise him, but it seemed such a personal question he didn't dare to ask.

"Only Julie Andrews is like Julie Andrews," he said instead, with a fond smile.

He picked up a menu and studied it. "I've always wondered what they call French dressing in France," he mused aloud.

"Vinaigrette," Sebastian said instantly with a grin. "And FYI, it's nothing like the American French dressing...it's much better."

Kurt smirked. "Of course it is," he teased, trying hard to resist the urge to roll his eyes. "But at least here we get fries with everything."

Their waitress came and they ordered their lunch. She quickly returned with their drinks.

"So, who else is coming to the project thing?" Kurt asked conversationally, sipping his diet coke.

"Just my friend Steph and her boyfriend Alex." Sebastian sipped his drink. "I will warn you, he can be a bit...much, sometimes." He added. "He's a lovely guy but his sense of humour can sometimes be a bit out there. Steph is amazing as well, I think you'll like her!"

He wanted to ask where Blaine was, but from the tone of Kurt's text earlier he sensed that his fiancé might be the reason Kurt had wanted to get out.

"Okay," Kurt said, wondering what kind of humour it would be. He'd wait and see. "Do you know them from NYU?"

Sebastian nodded. "Yeah, Steph was in my first literature class of the year and we were paired to work on a project together. Alex took the same classes as us last semester and even though we'd known him through Steph before that, it cemented our friendship. How about you?" he asked conversationally. "I know you're still close with the ND's, but have you made any friends at NYADA?"

Kurt thought about it. "There's a few guys in advanced stage combat that I talk to now and then, but...I don't know. I haven't really taken the time to make new friends. I haven't even enough time to hang out with Blaine. Which sometimes leads to...disappointment on his side, I guess."

He paused, knowing how it must look to be sitting here making smalltalk while complaining about lack of time to see his fiancé.

"I just don't think calling in sick is a good method to clear my schedule. Especially on Sundays." He sounded more defensive than he wanted.

Sebastian bit his lip and raised his eyebrow. "He asked you to call in sick so you could spend the day together?" he asked, slightly shocked. "Do you get paid if you call in sick?"

Kurt shrugged uncomfortably and started drumming one of his heels to the floor. "Only if I go see a doctor, so on a Sunday...no. And I really can't afford to get fired. Besides, there's the oldies."

He sighed. "It's not like it's every Sunday. Sometimes they go on trips or see Ethel's sister...and they always tell me beforehand so I can adjust my shifts." Kurt's hands smoothed his paper napkin out over the table, and he picked at the small curled edge that kept rolling back in.
Sebastian bit his lip. He didn't want to upset Kurt again, but also couldn't understand why Blaine would ask Kurt to skip his shift if he knew Kurt wasn't going to get paid or even risk losing his job.

"Is that why you needed to get out this afternoon?" he asked carefully, hoping it wouldn't be too pushy.

Kurt nodded, realising he was still playing with the napkin and pushing it aside.

"I am an expert at conflict avoidance," he said lightly, offering Sebastian a smile. "But I guess you already know that."

He shook his head a little. "He usually finds something to do with Sam when I'm at work, only Sam had a photoshoot yesterday and there'd be a party afterwards, so he wanted to sleep in."

Kurt huffed a little. Blaine was probably just a little disappointed he couldn't come to the party.

Sebastian frowned. Blaine only wanted to spend the day with Kurt because Sam was busy? And apparently threw tantrums when Kurt said no...was the guy five?

"Surely he's old enough to look after himself for a few hours while you're at work?" Sebastian asked, unable to help himself.

Kurt smirked. "You'd think so, wouldn't you?"

He shook his head. "No, I guess he was just hoping for a little more romantic entertainment this morning." He winked at Sebastian. Kurt hoped he would leave it at that; it would be something he'd understand, right? And it sounded better than trying to explain the way Blaine twisted everything around until it drove Kurt crazy.

Sebastian hummed in the back of his throat. He wanted to argue the point further but sensed that Kurt maybe wasn't ready. He was saved a response by the arrival of their food.

They ate in silence for a while, both lost in their own thoughts. Sebastian mused how easy it felt sitting in silence with Kurt. It didn't feel forced or awkward, they were just two people enjoying each other's company. A foreign concept, considering their history.

Kurt was glad his tactic had worked. He didn't want to think about his argument with Blaine anymore until it was necessary to face it again.

He looked at Sebastian's salad. "You should eat your tomatoes, they're good for you," he remarked playfully, nodding at the pile Sebastian had pushed to the side of his plate. "Or are they only good when they're from France?"

Sebastian blushed. "I hate tomatoes," he said, pulling a face. "If they're cooked in something then fine...but raw? Yeush...no thanks." He pushed them to the side of his plate. "Have them if you like."

Kurt looked at him and chuckled. Sebastian's face, like he was personally offended by his salad, somehow reminded Kurt of Finn so much it made him feel warm inside.

"Don't mind if I do," he said. He speared the tomatoes on his fork and transferred them to his plate.

"You want something of mine in return?" he asked.

Sebastian looked at Kurt's plate and caught sight of the ring on his left finger. He bit his lip as if in thought over Kurt's food.
"No it's okay, thank you." He smiled at Kurt softly and resumed eating.

Kurt enjoyed his lunch very much, even more so because he didn't have to defend his choices. Sebastian didn't insist they have desert, so Kurt didn't and had a coffee instead, saving up for whatever might await them at the movie. They split the bill and made their way to the venue.

As they approached the theatre, a young woman waved at them enthusiastically from a distance. Kurt was about to ask, when Sebastian confirmed it was Steph.

"Hi!!" she said cheerfully as they reached her, standing up on tiptoes to hug Sebastian. "Alex is already inside, getting us an extra seat. Kurt, right?" She offered him her hand.

"Um, yeah. Hi, nice to meet you," Kurt said, shaking her hand.

"Are you a fashion major?" Steph asked, looking at his outfit.

Kurt blushed. "Oh, no, no. I go to NYADA."

"Wow," Steph let out, staring a little. At that moment, a young man came to join them, a friendly smile on his face. He kissed Steph's temple and nodded at Sebastian in greeting.

"Kurt, this is Alex, my boyfriend. Alex, this is Kurt," Steph introduced them. "He goes to NYADA." She added the last in a whisper, still a little star-struck.

Alex pursed his lips and nodded, showing he was pretty impressed. "Great. Maybe you can give Steph some singing lessons, sometime. We always lose team karaoke because of her."

Steph narrowed her eyes.

"I bet you learn a lot of breath control techniques too, right?" Alex continued. "That always comes in handy." He winked, and Steph gasped, looking scandalized.

Kurt smirked. "Of course. I can teach you a few tricks if you like, Alex. I'm sure Steph will appreciate it."

Alex looked confused for a moment, but Steph let out a high-pitched giggle. "I think I like you, Kurt!" she said. "We need more people that can shut this one down...he has no filter."

Alex was still looking a little confused.

Sebastian grinned and bumped his shoulder against Kurt's fondly.

"Come on," Sebastian said. "The movie will be starting soon."

Kurt was beaming. His reaction had come natural, but that sometimes got him in trouble elsewhere. Steph and Sebastian clearly shared his humour. Alex seemed nice enough, once he'd recovered.

They went inside and took the seats Alex had secured. Kurt looked around, wondering at how many people had showed up on a Sunday to support these students. There were people of all ages there. He silently wished his father would come and see him perform more often, or Blaine- most finals were open to the audience, though Kurt had yet to have one person sitting in to see him.

Kurt was seated between Sebastian and Steph, and Steph filled him in on the project. Apparently she knew some of the drama students involved and felt very passionate about the topic. Every now and then, Kurt would catch Sebastian looking at them. He hoped Sebastian didn't feel like he was
Sebastian couldn't help but watch Kurt interact with his friends, a warmth spread over him as Kurt listened to Steph talking about the project. He seemed genuinely interested, asked questions at the right point and just seemed to fit.

When Kurt caught him staring, Sebastian blushed, thankful for the dark movie theatre. He smiled at Kurt. "You having fun?" he asked quietly.

"I am!" Kurt replied honestly. "Thank you for letting me tag along."

"Hey, I'm glad you came," Sebastian replied.

The project was fascinating, and the students involved got a big applause at the end. They held a short Q&A, and then listed the dates of the next presentations. Kurt hoped the others might be interested in going to the next ones so he could join them again.

The crowd started filling out, but it was slow going because of the amount of people all heading to the doors. They tried to stay together as a group, but as they neared the exit, someone next to Kurt tried to squeeze through, tripping him over so he stumbled and nearly fell. Kurt reached out for something to hold on to and found Sebastian's arm.

Sebastian instinctively braced the arm Kurt had taken hold of and used the other to catch him and steady him on his feet.

His eyes looked up at the perpetrator's back. 'Hey asshole!' he yelled in French. 'Watch where you're fucking going! We're all trying to get out! You almost trampled him!' French still came more natural when something surprised or upset him.

Kurt found his footing and let out a short breath. He saw the person who'd tripped him give Sebastian the finger, and felt his friend start forward a little. 'It's fine, Sebastian, I'm not hurt,' Kurt said, switching to French in hopes of calming his friend faster.

'That's not the point Kurt,' Sebastian said, 'He can see there's no room so he can fucking wait like the rest of us!'

'I know, but I didn't bring my sai's.' Kurt winked, hoping to put Sebastian in a better mood. He didn't want Sebastian to pick a fight over something so unimportant.

Sebastian looked at him and relaxed at the joke. He smiled despite himself. 'That's funny babe-' he said, cutting himself short as his brain caught up.

'Wait, you speak French?' he asked with wide eyes.

'No, not a word,' Kurt deadpanned, then grinned. 'Maybe a little.'

Something caught in the back of Sebastian's throat. It had been almost three years since he held a substantial conversation in French. He swallowed thickly.

"Can someone tell me what's going on?" Alex complained. "Are they talking about food? I'm kinda hungry. I think I heard them say croissants."

Alex successfully managed to break Sebastian out of his trance and he looked up at his friend.

"Kurt and I already ate," he said. "Unless," he looked at Kurt. "You fancy some desert? There's an
"Well, I didn't skip desert earlier for nothing!" Kurt said eagerly. A glance at his phone told him he ought to go home soon, but a sugary treat to close this part of his day sounded perfect.

"Ohh iHop!" Alex exclaimed.

"We already ate too," Steph reminded Alex, who shrugged helplessly.

"I know, but I want croissants now. You know how it is. Wheneve..."
Chapter Summary

As Sam and Blaine head to LA for summer break, Kurt heads to the beach with his new friends. What happens there will change things forever.

It was the end of July and Summer Vacation was finally upon them. It had been a long year and although Sebastian would still be picking shifts up at Satire, classes were over and he was looking forward to an uninterrupted summer of fun and rest.

It was Friday morning and Sebastian was lying awake in bed, the sunlight pouring in through the open windows of his new apartment.

He was listening to some music that was playing softly through the Bluetooth speaker on the nightstand, thinking back over the year and how so many things had changed. He had a job which he loved, classes that were interesting and challenging and a great group of friends that had somehow become his family.

If someone had told him this time last year that he'd have so much happiness in his life he never would have believed them.

Some days it all still felt so foreign, like he was in a dream and any moment he'd wake up and be back in his dorm room at Dalton, all alone and hating the world.

Strangest of all the new things in his life was the presence of Kurt. A chance meeting one evening back in April had led to the biggest change of them all. It was true that they’d had a rocky start, but over time they had managed to navigate around misconceptions and old wounds and somehow, became friends.

That Sunday, after dessert at iHop, Kurt had gone home to 'face the music'; his own words. Sebastian had watched him go with a funny feeling settled in his stomach that he hadn't been able to put a name to.

He still got that feeling occasionally, but two months later, he’d still not been able to name it.

Sebastian was shaken from his thoughts by the soft ping of his phone. He reached for it blindly on the nightstand, unhooked it from the charger and slid the screen open.

From Alice (9:13)

Morning! Is your boy still coming to Coney later? I feel very offended that I'm the only one who hasn't met him yet.

Sebastian shook his head and chuckled.
To Alice (9:15)

For the 100th time he's NOT my boy!!!!

And I think so, I'll check and let you know.

He closed the conversation and opened up the one with Kurt

To Kurt (9:17)

Hey, you still on for Coney Island today?

Kurt was already up, doing push-ups next to the bed. Just because it was summer break didn't mean he'd get to give his body time off; not if he wanted to remain competitive at NYADA next semester. Blaine didn't understand that - or he didn't want to understand. He had celebrated their first day of break by staying in bed and ordering food. When Kurt asked him who Blaine thought was going to eat all of that because they certainly couldn't, Blaine had accused him of being 'manorexic'. Kurt had told him that if he really thought that, it would be more helpful to show concern rather than mock him for it, but Blaine hadn't taken the hint. 

Not that Kurt felt that he had a problem. It hadn't taken over his life, his world did not revolve around food or exercise- he just had his routines and adjusted those according to his food intake. It worked, his weight was stable, and he felt satisfied with the results of his work-outs. If he ate less on Wednesdays because of the cocktails that were now a steady part of his Tuesday night, or worked harder on himself on Mondays because of the stops at iHop with Sebastian, Steph and Alex on Sundays, it all balanced out.

But no matter what he did lately, even if he sacrificed gym hours or shifts to stay home with Blaine and invest in their relationship, it was never enough. Blaine would still find something to criticize ("you're always on your phone, Kurt, who are you texting anyway?") or imply that he was being unfairly treated ("I haven't had the chance to sing with you at Spotlight in forever").

Kurt knew Blaine was unhappy in New York, and hoped that his trip to LA with Sam would help. They were going to stay at Blaine's brother Cooper's house, where it was presumably all party party party. Kurt would liked to have gone too, and maybe visit Mercedes. But he knew he'd feel like a third wheel to BLAM anyway, and it wasn't like Mercedes would have all day to spend entertaining him. The rent of their apartment also didn't pay itself. Knowing it was best to give them a 'boys' holiday' to get whatever was bothering Blaine out of his system, Kurt had volunteered for more shifts at the diner and several days of archive runs at Vogue. It had to be done anyway, and what better time was there than when no one was waiting for him to come home?

His custom ringtone for P. Martini made him smile. He'd been hearing it a lot the past couple of months. They'd been texting a lot during the day, and every now and then, Sebastian would call to ask Kurt a completely random question in French just to hear his reply and speak French for a bit. It was fun, and Kurt already looked forward to spending all day with him and his friends- although he was a little nervous about meeting Sebastian's best friend, Alice. He knew Sebastian valued her judgement a lot, and what if she didn't like him? Still, that was no reason not to go.

Kurt got up, dried his chest and arms with a towel, and dropped himself back on the bed with his phone.

To P. Martini (9:25)

Of course! Do you think I'd let you go without me?
Sebastian grinned at Kurt's reply, ignoring the familiar swooping sensation in his stomach.

To Kurt (9:27)

No :) but just thought I'd check. Alex said he'd drive so we can pick you up if you like?

He closed the chat and opened up the one to Alice.

To Alice (9:30)

He's coming :)

Her reply was almost instant.

From Alice (9:31)

Lucky him ;)

To Alice (9:32)

Fuck off!

To Alice (9:32)

I swear to god if you do or say anything today to make him feel uncomfortable we are no longer friends!

From Alice (9:34)

Come on now Seb would I?

To Alice (9:35)

Well I'd like to think not but you never know :p

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The doorbell rang, and Kurt was still trying to pick a shirt. He wasn't sure what had happened with all of his time; at first he had plenty, and decided to take a shower before getting dressed, and then all of the sudden they were already 5 minutes overdue and he was still only dressed in jeans and socks. Ugh. Some days.

Kurt hurried to the intercom and pressed the button. After making sure it was Sebastian and not his crazy neighbour from downstairs again, he buzzed him in, telling his friend to come up to the fourth floor so he wouldn't have to wait outside. It wasn't the nicest neighbourhood to be loitering on the sidewalk.

Kurt unlocked the door and left it at a crack before returning to the bedroom, picking up several of Blaine's stray clothes and belongings up from where they littered the floor and the furniture. He hadn't planned on showing Sebastian their apartment like this, but it was too late to change it now.

Sebastian wrinkled his nose a little at a couple of the stains on the staircase as he climbed, and tried to ignore the weird noises from the apartment on the second floor as he passed. He made it up to the top floor in one piece and found the door open so he let himself in to the apartment.
As he heard Sebastian come in, Kurt picked up the two shirts he'd been considering, and walked into the living room, holding each of them out to the side. "Okay, so Coney Island, I was thinking either light blue, because of the seaside, or maybe this darker green one in case the previous person on a ride was a kid and they spilled ice cream or soda on the seats--" Kurt broke off. "Are you okay, Bas?"

Sebastian barely had a second to take in the jumble of furniture and knick knacks when he was confronted by a half-naked Kurt, and all other thoughts faded from his mind.

It took him a moment to realise that Kurt was talking to him. He shook himself internally and licked his lips. "Uh...what...sorry?" His eyes searched for clues as to what Kurt had asked him and he noticed the two shirts in Kurt's hand and it all clicked into place. "The blue one." He said hastily. "It matches your eyes."

Kurt looked down at the shirt and pursed his lips. "It does," he agreed. "Thanks!" He took the shirts back into the bedroom and put the other one away.

"I'm sorry I am so late," he called out to the living room. "I guess I'm on summer time. Feel free to look around. I'm sorry it's such a mess!"

Kurt came back into the living room a few moments later, having put shoes and a matching wrist watch on as well. He checked for his phone, keys and wallet, and then smiled at Sebastian. "Ok, I'm all set."

Sebastian was stood in the same position he'd been left in. He'd been too busy trying to comprehend the sight of Kurt's bare chest to notice much else in the room.

As Kurt re-emerged, a car horn beeped loudly down in the street. Sebastian rolled his eyes and smiled fondly at Kurt. "Just on time."

He stepped back through the door into the hall and waited for Kurt to lock up before he led the way down the stairs.

Kurt's nerves surged. Time to go and meet Alice.

They reached the car and Kurt recognised Alex at the wheel and Steph in the passenger seat next to him. That would make the girl in the back Sebastian's best friend. Alex beeped the horn again in greeting. He seemed to be in a very good mood. Steph smiled warmly at him, and suddenly Kurt knew it would be okay. He leaned down to look through the car window and waved hello to Alice, who smiled.

Sebastian opened the door and offered to take the middle seat in the back so Kurt would have more leg space. Maybe he also wanted to put himself between Kurt and Alice as a buffer. Kurt waited until Sebastian was seated and belted in, and squeezed himself in. So much for leg space. He reached for the seat belt to strap himself in.

"Are you okay back there? I can move forward," Steph offered, immediately pushing her chair as far to the front as she could.

"Well, I can't," Alex said immediately, keeping his seat where it was. "I may still want to have children in the future."

"God keep us from such a day," Alice remarked playfully, and offered Kurt her hand, reaching over Sebastian's lap. "Hey, I'm Alice."
"Hi!" Kurt shook her hand. He still had the belt in his other hand and looked down at the back seat. The fastener was somewhere under Sebastian's legs. "Okay, hold on, I'll just-" he mumbled, and slipped his hand between the seat and Sebastian's body, feeling around for the metal clasp.

Sebastian swallowed uncomfortably and leant to his left to give Kurt room to find his buckle.

Alice looked at Sebastian with a smile and blinked rapidly a few times. He ignored it, so she poked him in the side. He glared at her and pressed harder to the left, squishing her up against the door in retaliation.

"Done!" Kurt said and Sebastian relaxed back in his seat, giving Alice a final shove and a warning look.

"All set?" Alex asked up front.

"Yep!" chorused the three in the back.

"Okay kids, let's roll." And he pulled away from the curb.

"So Kurt!" Alice said as they pulled out of the side street onto the main road. "I hear you're a NYADA student? That's really impressive."

"He's our karaoke wild card," Alex commented from the front. "The complete counter-balance to Steph!"

"Hey, watch it," Steph commented, then turned in her seat. "Alice, you have to come next time. We have high hopes of winning."

"Yeah no pressure, Kurt, but if we lose, you can't hang with us anymore," Alex joked.

"What ever would I do without my clique of first-years?" Kurt mused idly.

Alice chuckled. "It's not just singing though, right? I mean, dramatic arts, that includes dance and theatre and everything too..."

"Yep," Kurt agreed, pleased that she knew. Not everyone did- his dad had also assumed he'd be going there just to sing at first. "For example, I'm in stage acting 201. Remember that next time I laugh at your jokes, Alex."

"My jokes don’t need act laughing!" Alex said confidently. "I'm fucking hilarious."

"Sure you are babe," Steph said rolling her eyes.

She turned round and looked at Sebastian. "Seb, you sing too! Next karaoke night you two should definitely do a duet! Your voices would sound so good together."

Sebastian grinned, trying to fight the butterflies wanting to erupt from his chest because he, too, had wondered what they'd sound like together.

"Oh, you should sing now!" Alice said grinning. "Keep us entertained on the journey!"

"I dunno if you could handle it Alice!" Sebastian said with a wink.

"Oh I think we could!"

"Absolutely!" Steph said from the front.
Sebastian glanced at Kurt and raised his eyebrows. "How about it, Hummel?"

Kurt smirked. "Can't back out now, can I, Smythe?" He nodded at Steph. "Put the radio on, we'll see what's on."

Steph squeaked happily.

Kurt felt the familiar calm settle over him like right before a show. He tried not to overthink it, and concentrated on the song.

The radio took a moment to register the station. Once it did, the opening bars of a familiar song rang out through the car and Sebastian grinned at Kurt before joining in with Elton John.

"Don't go breaking my heart!" he sang smoothly.

"I couldn't if I tried," Kurt replied, high and clear.

"Oh, Honey if I get restless-"

"Baby you're not that kind!"

They exchanged lines easily, their voices complementing each other melodiously.

At the chorus, Steph joined in, and Alex patted her hand. "Honey, just don't, ok?"

Their voices really did mix well together. They sung the chorus in sync and Sebastian smiled at Kurt. They did sound good together.

"So don't go breaking my heart," Sebastian sung.

"I won't go breaking your heart..."

"Don't go breaking my heart!"

And there was that weird swoop again. Deep down, Sebastian knew what it meant, but he wasn’t ready to admit it yet. Suddenly the words of the song took a different meaning.

"Nobody told us," he sung.

"Cause nobody showed us-" Kurt answered, thinking about the time Finn and Rachel sang the song in the choir room. It made him happy to see it before his eyes and he smiled to himself.

"And now it's up to us babe-"

Kurt startled a little, pulled back to the present by hearing Sebastian call him 'babe'. He did that now and then, and it always made Kurt a little giddy.

"I think we can make it..." he replied, looking into Sebastian's eyes through the rearview mirror.

"So don’t misunderstand me," Sebastian sung, looking back at Kurt’s reflection.

The other three occupants of the car sat and listened to the two boys sing. Alice couldn’t help the little smile that spread across her face as she watched.

She could see the emotion underneath Sebastian’s mask and felt her heart clench a little. It must be terrifying for him, she thought. This is the first time he’s had feelings for someone and the only path
ahead appears to be heartbreak.

She shared a look with Steph, yep...Steph saw it too.

"You put the light in my life," Kurt sung, sounding lighter than he felt.

He shouldn’t be singing things like this to anyone but Blaine, but it was just a performance, right? It didn’t count when he sang duets at NYADA either. Then why did it start to feel like it mattered?

For weeks, Sebastian had ‘put the light in his life’. Between work, classes and navigating the pitfalls of Blaine’s temper, Sebastian's texts, phone calls and their Tuesdays had been the highlights of Kurt’s day.

Something had to change- as soon as Blaine got back from his break, Kurt would try harder to make their engagement work.

"You put the sparks to the flame," Sebastian sung, and it was true. Kurt had lit a flame inside Sebastian that he’d never known could exist.

Okay, Stage Acting 201, you are up, Kurt thought, and he smiled at Steph with a coy expression. "I've got your heart in my sights!"

Steph made an exaggerated "ooh!" expression, and fanned herself with her hand.

Kurt grinned. Deflection successful. It double didn't count if he was singing to a girl.

Alex picked up on it and half-sung, half-shouted "now don't go breaking my heart!" and Kurt laughed.

"I won't go breaking your heart!"

Sebastian laughed as everyone else joined in and they sung out the song together.

"Yep! Your voices definitely sound good together! You have to team up for karaoke next semester!" Steph said in the front seat.

Sebastian smiled at her, masking his feelings with a joke. "If it stops you from getting up there, I’m in!"

"Ha, ha," Steph replied, sticking out her tongue at Sebastian. "Alice, why are the boys always so mean to me?"

Alice grinned. "Because you are perfect and that makes them feel tiny and insecure. And then they lash out. No impulse control, like toddlers."

"You realise we can hear you, right?" Alex said from the front.

Steph nodded sternly and ignored her boyfriend. "That must be it...Except you, Kurt, you are the only adult here," she reassured him.

Kurt listened to the exchange with a smirk.

"Hey, I'm older than he is!" Alex protested.

"And yet you still act like a twelve year old," Steph said, rolling her eyes before turning to Kurt. "You’d have thought that taking time out from study when he left school to travel and work would
have made him more mature...but nope."

"You see the abuse I have to put up with, Kurt?" Alex said looking in the rear view mirror. "Are you sure you want to get involved with this lot? You can still make a break for it!"

Alex checked the rearview mirror for cars and finding it clear, hit the brake dramatically as if to give Kurt a way out.

Steph squeaked and punched his arm, cursing.

Kurt chuckled and looked to the left at Sebastian. "I'm sure," he said. He knew they were a crazy bunch, but he wouldn't want to miss Sebastian's company for anything.

--

The next hour passed with a few more songs - at one point they all did a perfect rendition of Bohemian Rhapsody, many laughs and jokes and the general 'get to know you chit chat' that occurred when people travelled together for the first time.

Sebastian for the most part sat back and observed Kurt with his friends. It made him happy to see Kurt relaxed in their company. He teased and joked along with the rest of them and they all seemed to genuinely like Kurt too.

After a short burst of traffic getting on to the island, Alex finally parked the car and they all clambered out, stretching and groaning after sitting in the car for so long.

"I need food!" Alex exclaimed as the scent of hotdogs, candy floss and summer hit their noses.

"You always need food," Alice reminded him, shaking her head. "Let’s hit the rides, people!"

Kurt whooped and skipped ahead. He'd rather spend all of his money on fast rides than food. He loved the thrill and the adrenaline rush- and the fright beforehand.

They walked across the car park and onto the broadwalk. It was a short walk to the entrance of the amusement park and Alice killed the time by pulling out her phone and snapping some selfies.

They entered the park, all buying wristbands except Steph who, it turned out, was the designated bag holder.

"Are you sure?" Kurt asked, feeling bad about leaving her behind.

"Steph has balance issues," Alice said, smiling at her friend sympathetically. They were waiting for Sebastian who had needed the restroom, and Alex who had gone in search of food.

"Honestly, you go on, I'll mind the bags," Steph said, looking up at the large rollercoaster.

"She never goes on anything, she's a total wuss," Alex said, returning and handing Steph two hotdogs and a bag of candy floss.

"A wuss who'll eat your dogs, dog," Steph replied.

"Oh honey, you know I love you," Alex said, kissing her cheek. "Don't eat my food," he added in a whisper.

"Yes, yes, go on," Steph replied, grinning.
Sebastian walked back towards the group, smiling easily.

"You're coming, right?" Kurt asked.

Sebastian’s smile turned into a grin. He tipped his sunglasses down his nose to look at him over the top, and said with a wink, "just try and stop me, babe."

The four of them made their way to the ride called 'The Thunder Bolt' and got into the queue.

"So you’re a bit of an adrenaline junkie, are you, Kurt?" Alice asked with a grin.

"Oh god, yes!" Kurt let out. "I know it's silly, but I love that part when you're almost up, and you can't stop going 'oh my god what am I doing? why did I get on here? let me out!!'," Kurt put on a high-pitched, panicky voice, then laughed. "And then you go anyway, because you don’t have a choice, and afterwards, it's the best feeling in the world."

"Second-best," Alex commented from behind them, and Kurt blushed a little.

"Yeah, ok, I guess," he mumbled.

They chatted amicably while they waited in line and soon enough it was their turn. The four of them climbed into a cart near the front of the line, Alice slid in next to Alex leaving Kurt and Sebastian to fill in behind them.

They pulled the shoulder restraints down and fastened them in and the attendant made a quick check before they were off.

Steph was visible down below as they slowly ascended up the first slope and they waved at her cheerfully. She waved back with a grimace. Roller coasters made her nervous.

"Scared yet?" Sebastian asked Kurt as they reached the top and stopped, hanging over the first precipice slightly.

"Terrified!" Kurt laughed, gripping the restrains tightly with a big grin on his face. The waiting was the scariest part. "I have to warn you," he said loudly over the rattling sound of the carts, "I'm a screamer-aaaaah-!" They hurdled down the slope and Kurt let out a high-pitched scream.

Sebastian cheered as they plummeted downwards, his arms raised high in the air. They broke out of the dive into a loop and then a tight corkscrew.

Sebastian glanced sideways at Kurt. He had a big grin on his face and the wind whipped his hair around. He looked so young and carefree. Kurt looked at Sebastian, who grinned back him.

"Put your arms up!" Sebastian yelled over the wind.

Kurt looked at him from the side, trying to make up his mind. If Sebastian could do it, so could he, right? He closed his eyes tightly and put up his hands as well. He laughed loudly at the rush of feeling the wind against his hands. It was amazing.

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"I want to go again!" he said, even before the cars had come to a complete stop.

"I think I had enough," Alice mumbled. "That was great, but my stomach feels wobbly."

"Mine feels empty! Gotta go get my dogs," Alex said.
"You two go on," Alice said, smiling. "We'll wait for you at the exit."

Sebastian looked at Kurt and smiled softly. "Alright babe," he said grinning. "But you can't hold on this time!"

"I won't," Kurt replied, feeling giddy. They got back into the queue. Kurt was bouncing up and down on his heels. "That was great. I never put my arms up in a ride before." He rolled his eyes at his own words. "I'm too responsible for my own good."

They got the front car in the next round. "Oh my god, the front is the worst," Kurt moaned. "Do we really-?"

"Get on the ride, Hummel," Sebastian said with a grin, pushing Kurt’s back lightly. "It's better at the front!"

"I am going to die," Kurt said, squeezing his long legs into the cart. "This is it, we're doomed."

He looked behind him and saw the other carts being filled. No chance to switch.

"I guess I'm glad we got to bury the hatchet before our untimely demise," Kurt mused.

Sebastian laughed and shook his head. "We're not gonna die! But for what it's worth...I'm glad we have too. I'm glad we're friends."

Kurt smirked. "I know we're not going to die," he whispered from the corner of his mouth. "But being dramatic is half the fun." He nudged Sebastian with his hip and winked. They pulled the restraints down and the employee from the ride came to check each cart. Kurt felt his heart thump.

"Okay, Smythe - let's ride this death machine, hands free."

Sebastian grinned and bumped him back. "If you're not living life on the edge you're taking up too much space," he said with a wink as the ride started moving.

"Okay, here we go!" Kurt said, huffing out a bracing breath and letting go of the handles on his restraints. The carts were slowly pulled up the slope and Kurt let his head rest back, closing his eyes and waiting for it to pause... and fall.

He was flying. Flying and laughing. Kurt wrought his head to the side against the heavy press of the wind and looked at Sebastian. Kurt knew he must have the same silly grin as he saw on his friend's face, but he didn't care. Whatever Alex thought, this was the best feeling ever. And Sebastian Smythe of all people had challenged him to it.

The last drop and loop came, and Kurt put his hands up again, reaching for Sebastian's hand and closing his around it for a moment, squeezing softly.

Sebastian instinctively squeezed Kurt's hand back and held on for a second too long as the ride levelled out and they came to a stop.

The barriers were released and he let go of Kurt's hand at the same time. Brushing past the moment, he turned to Kurt with a grin. "Better than the first run?"

Kurt grinned back. "Yes."

Then they were ushered out, with others eager to ride as well. "Oooh.. pictures!" Kurt said happily, skipping to the booth by the exit that showed action shots you could order. The one from their first
ride was hilarious. Alex looked terrified and Alice had a determined but frozen grin on her face, gripping the handles. Kurt had his eyes tightly closed and Sebastian was cheering. Together they showed just about any emotion people usually had on a roller coaster. The second one made Kurt pause.

He wasn't sure they could have looked more like a couple if they'd both had been in Stage Acting 201. With their hands linked and their eyes fixed on each other, big smiles on their faces, it seemed like the kind of picture Kurt wished he had of himself and Blaine to put on their wedding invitation. That there were two strangers with them in the picture didn't take away any of the effect.

Kurt knew right away he couldn't order a print to take home. Even if he knew it wasn't like that at all, he knew what Blaine would make of it. And to be honest, Kurt wasn't sure how his own reaction would be if he saw a picture of Blaine looking at someone else like that.

"Well, eight dollars is a bit much huh?" he said lightly, "we can just take a selfie with the others at the exit."

Sebastian saw the picture appear on screen and felt his heart drop. They looked so happy and together. Kurt's words really stung.

Realistically, he knew Kurt was right. Eight dollars was a lot of money and they weren't together, though the more time they spent together, the more Sebastian had to question why the hell not?

He was snapped out of his doldrums - which in reality had only been for a split second - by Alice who had linked her arms through both of the boys' and was now dragging them over to Steph and Alex.

"We thought we'd hit the dodgems next!" She said letting go of them. "That way, I can kick all of your asses and Steph can join in!"

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Kurt hadn't been on a bumper car since he was little and had to share one with his dad. Now, he had one to himself, and he was having the time of his life. In this ride, Steph was ferocious. She would cut corners and swerve like a mad woman to catch them off guard- though her main target was Alex.

Sebastian and Kurt chased Alice together, but more often than not ended up driving their cars too close to the side bumper and getting themselves stuck while she sped off cackling. Kurt knew his knees and possibly his back would be black and blue next week, but with a two week break until anyone might see him undressed again, it didn't matter. It was awesome.

Alice wanted to go in the spinning teacups next, which Alex refused, saying it was 'the dumbest kiddie ride ever', and as they were soaring around, Sebastian and Kurt working together to make their cup spin almost out of control, Alice told them that Alex had a history of throwing up after this ride. As they got out on slightly unsteady feet, Kurt could imagine why.

They passed an arcade and several prize booths, marvelling at the huge teddy bears and joking how they would get them home if they won any.

"Easy, we leave Seb behind," Alex suggested. "He can go on foot."

"What if we leave you instead?" Kurt replied. "I think I have more confidence in the driving skills of that fluffy unicorn than in yours."

"Watch it, or you go on foot in your fancy shoes, whether we win it or not," Alex growled, but Kurt could tell he was amused inside.
As they passed a can toss, Kurt's eyes idly scanned the prizes. He never won at such games, so he wasn't even sure why he was looking.

"See something you like?" Alice asked from the side, startling him. She nodded at the prizes.

Kurt looked up. Alex and Steph were still at the last booth, but Sebastian was coming up to them. He looked happy and eager to prove his skills at something. "Uh, I don't know," Kurt mumbled, distracted by Sebastian's smile. "I'm not that good at things like this. I, um, used to dodge dodgeball like a disease. You have no idea what it was played like at our school. It was brutal. Anything to do with throwing and catching and balls flying at my face- I'm out."

"Oh Kurt, there are a million and one jokes I could make right now about balls in your face," Sebastian grinned, coming to a stop next to them.

Kurt bowed his head to Sebastian and offered up his palms in surrender. He had completely given him that one for free.

"Oh I love these things!" Sebastian said, still chuckling, and pulled out his wallet. "I'm really good at them as well."

"Just not very modest," Kurt commented from the side-line, crossing his arms over his chest. "Let's see it, then."

The attendant placed five balls on the counter in front of Sebastian. The aim was to knock as many stacks down as you could.

Sebastian picked up the first ball and weighed it in his hand before taking his aim and launching it at the first stack of cans. It hit them right in the middle at the bottom of the stack and they all crashed to the floor.

"I think it's a lacrosse thing," Alice commented, crossing her arms as well. "Or maybe a balls thing."

She winked at Kurt, who snorted. But the more cans went flying, the more enthusiastic Kurt became.

Sebastian was showing off and he knew it. He went down the line, knocking stack after stack of cans down, varying the angle and spin he put on the ball but hitting home every time.

Sebastian knew he was fighting a losing battle but he couldn't help himself. Every cheer or whoop he received from Kurt spurred him on even further. He sent his final ball spinning towards the last stack of cans and they all came tumbling down.

"We have a winner!" the stalls owner roared. "Highest score of the day so far! Well done, young man!"

Sebastian beamed and bounced on the balls of his feet. The stall owner handed Sebastian a blue teddy bear holding a Coney Island flag.

Sebastian thanked him and turned to Kurt. "Momento for the day," he said, holding the bear out to Kurt with a smile.

Kurt, who had been applauding enthusiastically, lowered his hands and swallowed. He looked at the small flag.

"Bas, I... I can't," he stammered. He saw Sebastian's face fall and ached to explain.

"It's just... Blaine doesn't know I'm here." He hesitated. "Or who I am with," he confessed.
Suddenly, he felt incredibly guilty.

Sebastian felt disappointment rush over him. He knew he should be above it, but the rejection still hurt. He withdrew his arm and clutched the bear against him.

"Oh…" he said, unable to mask his disappointment. "Oh, okay." He licked his lips nervously. He knew he wouldn’t like the answer but he had to ask. "Why…why doesn’t he know? I mean, we’re friends right…surely you’re allowed to have friends?"

Kurt briefly closed his eyes. Sebastian looked so crestfallen he could hardly bear it, and Alice was staring at him like she had never seen him before.

It was just a toy- Kurt could take it and keep it away from Blaine. Sebastian would never know. But that would cross the line from simply neglecting to mention his new friend, which Kurt already felt bad about... to active secrecy.

Trying to be nonchalant about it, Kurt smiled a little. "Of course I am allowed to have friends, don’t be silly-"

Sebastian pursed his lips. A million thoughts ran through his head and he tried to push them back. It was no big deal, he tried to tell himself. Kurt probably had good reasons for not telling Blaine and, more than likely, the rest of his friends about Sebastian. After all, Sebastian had a rocky history with all of them and he and Kurt had only really been friends for a couple of months.

"Right, Just...not me, I guess," he said scathingly. *Damn. So much for not losing your cool, Smythe.*

"Seb..." Alice started to say, but he shook his head.

"It’s fine, Alice," he said, not looking at her. "Just leave it." He dropped the bear to the ground and turned his back on them, walking away quickly.

He waited till he was out of sight before breaking into a jog. He passed Steph and Alex. They called after him but he ignored them and headed off in the direction of the beach.

Kurt watched him go, knowing he had messed up badly, but not really understanding why. Not sure what to do, he bent down and picked up the teddy bear, brushing off the dirt.

"It's complicated," he said quietly, looking down onto it. "My friends wouldn't understand. *Blaine* wouldn't understand. He's not happy with us as it is, and I can't risk..."

Alice clenched her jaw closed. She felt awful for encouraging Sebastian all day, only to have him be hurt by it now. She should have known. In a way, it was good that Kurt was so loyal to Blaine, but goddamnmit, Sebastian could really use some loyalty too, even just as a friend.

She bit her lip. "I get it," she said quietly and she did; having seen what Kurt had to deal with in his relationship, she didn’t even really blame him. But Sebastian was her best friend and he was now hurting and that was not okay.

"How much has he told you...about his past?" she asked cautiously. She didn’t want to betray Sebastian’s confidence. It was his story to tell and he had the right to tell it.

Kurt swallowed. "Um, just...that he lived with his grandparents in France and that they sent him away when they found out he was gay," he said softly.

Alice nodded, feeling the familiar nausea that always came when she thought back to the time when
Sebastian had told her. She pushed it down and focused on the anger she felt for her friend's family. "They sent him away. They kicked him out, Kurt. Do you have any idea how that must have felt?"

Kurt shivered. "No," he said hoarsely. "I can imagine, but I know it won't come close."

"He doesn’t talk about it," Alice said quietly. "There’s stuff even I don’t know, that he just won’t discuss because it hurts so much...but it damaged him, Kurt, and he’s spent the last four years trying to put himself back together."

She looked at the spot where Sebastian had just stood.

"He told me about what he did to you and your friends in school. And while I’m eternally grateful that you have forgiven him...I can understand why your friends might not be so welcoming." She looked up at him.

Kurt sighed. "It's not just that," he admitted. "Blaine just gets..." He broke off frustratedly.

Alice looked at him, frowning. She remembered what she had seen and heard in the diner, even if Kurt didn't know that. The way Blaine had grabbed Kurt's arm was burned into her memory. "I know it's none of my business," she started carefully, "but... if he's hurting you-

Kurt went wide-eyed and shook his head. "No! No, definitely not!" he said firmly. "I just don't want him to worry. We've had some misunderstandings about situations like this in the past." He shrugged awkwardly. "Not telling him about Sebastian was the easy way out, I guess."

Alice felt her anger rise again, but this time at Kurt. "Easy for you, maybe," she said. "How do you think Sebastian feels, finding out he's like... your dirty little secret?"

"It's not like that!" Kurt let out defensively.

"Maybe or maybe not," she said firmly, before seeing the sad look in Kurt's eyes. "Look, I like you, Kurt," she added, softening slightly. "But Sebastian is my best friend and he deserves to be around people who want him. He’s been cast aside by people who were supposed to love him far too many times and I’ll be damned if I let that happen again."

She stared at him.

"So go fix it."

Kurt was near tears. She was right, and he knew it. He felt incredibly guilty, and ashamed for taking the easy way out. He nodded, and a tear ran down his cheek.

"I will," he said. He had no idea how, but he would.

Kurt took the bear with him, and went to find Sebastian.
Chapter Summary

As the sun sets on the first day of summer, Kurt and Sebastian share the secrets of their past and realise that they have a lot more in common than they originally thought.

Sebastian sat down on the slightly damp sand under the pier, his knees bent up in front of him and his arms wrapped loosely around them. He was staring out to sea, letting the soft, repetitive crash of the waves settle his mind.

Deep down, he knew Kurt hadn’t actively tried to hurt him by refusing his gift. He also knew, from months of observation, that Kurt’s relationship with Blaine was rocky at the best of times. The addition of a former foe might drive the ship up onto the rocks and crash. He didn’t blame Kurt for trying to save his relationship.

But he couldn’t help the dull ache that lingered over being rejected, again. It wasn’t even about the fact that Sebastian seemed to have developed these pesky feelings for Kurt. Because that’s what had happened; today he had finally been able to put a name to them. It was just the reminder that he was, once again, someone to be ashamed of.

He felt rather than heard the movement behind him and sighed. "Go away Alice," he called out in a steady voice.

"Who is zis Alíce?" Kurt said in a very cheesy French accent, crouching behind Sebastian and reaching an arm around to hold the bear in front of him.

"My name is Maximilian Robesbèar, and I am appalled that you abandoned me in zis...ah, squallor wiz ze Americàns. Zey do not even know about fromage! Zey think it comes from a can! Pah!"

Kurt shook the bear a little as if it was shivering, then pressed it against Sebastian's chest to make it hide.

Sebastian bit the corner of his lip. 'That is the worst French accent I've ever heard,' he said in French, keeping his eyes on the horizon.

'Blame the puppeteer, not the bear,' Kurt said softly, putting the toy in Sebastian's lap and taking his arm away. 'He sucks at accents, just as he sucks at being a friend.'

Kurt paused. He had to switch to English to explain, not wanting any more misunderstandings between them. "I am sorry that I hurt you. I never intended to. I should have told Blaine about you from the start and dealt with his reaction one way or another. There was a time when I would have. But lately...It seems I have become a coward."

Sebastian sighed. "You’re not a coward. I understand why you didn’t tell him," he said quietly. He licked his lips. "And I know that you didn’t mean to hurt me. But... you did."

He fell silent and looked out at the open sea, after a few moments he sighed and patted the sand next to him indicating for Kurt to move down and sit next to him. He realised it was time to explain a few things about himself to Kurt and he needed to see him to do so.
Kurt swallowed down his nerves. He was grateful that Sebastian wasn't sending him away, and quickly moved to sit down next to him. They sat quietly for a while, looking at the water. There was a lot Kurt wished he could tell him, but he didn't know where to start.

Instead, Kurt turned his head and studied Sebastian's profile.

"I never knew my mom," Sebastian said quietly after a pause. "She died just before my second birthday. Apparently she was young when she had me - like nineteen, so she lived with my grandparents. My... dad..." he spat the word out bitterly, "was just finishing up his last year at college and was getting ready to go to Harvard. My mom and I were supposed to be going with him but when she died, he decided that having a toddler was too much hassle and that I’d just get in the way of his big plans. So my grandparents kept me and took over full custody."

He moved to cross his legs and wrapped his hands around the bear in his lap. He started playing with its ear.

"My grandparents were in the throes of planning their emigration to Paris. My grand-mère is originally from there and she’d always wanted to go home when grandpa retired, so I ended up going with them too."

Kurt listened quietly. He realised this was what Alice had probably meant. Cast aside by those who were supposed to love him - his own dad giving him up, his grandparents sending him back once they found out he was different.

Kurt knew this could have been him after his mom died. His dad could have sent him off to relatives in Portland, or to a boarding school. Instead, despite his faults, he persisted, and loved his son.

Tears ran down Kurt’s face, and he made no move to hide them. It was impossible not to think of his mom, and wonder what would have happened to him if he hadn't even had those 8 years. Vague as his memories had become, he remembered her love most of all. Songs she sang by his bedside, stories they read together, tea parties they'd had, and stacks upon stacks of clothes she had made for him, first by his direction, later together, with her carefully showing him the sewing machine. Take that all away, and what would be left?

"I'm sorry," he whispered helplessly.

Sebastian swallowed but shrugged. "I had a good life," he said quietly.

"I wondered about my parents of course, and my grandparents told me stories about my mom all the time. They loved me and gave me everything; from dancing to reading, and everything in between. Despite their love of socialising, I never once felt left out or ignored." He looked down at the bear in his lap and felt his own tears well in his eyes, the back of his throat tingling painfully. "Which is why it was such a shock when they reacted the way they did to me coming out..." A tear escaped despite his best efforts and rolled down his cheek. "I came out and within a fortnight was dumped in the middle of Ohio in the custody of my father who had a shiny new family and didn’t want a mistake from his past soiling his doorstep, particularly one with such 'disgusting afflictions' ."

"Oh god," Kurt let out, clasping a hand over his mouth and shaking his head softly. It was even worse that he’d imagined. Suddenly, he understood. The fake IDs, the drinking, the gay bars, even the bullying. Sebastian had been too young to fight his family, so he had simply fought everyone and everything else.

And then he met Blaine. That made more sense to Kurt now, too. Maybe it had been the same as for him; here was this dapper boy with a charming smile and romantic songs in his backpocket, who was
-as shown by his dating Kurt- capable and willing to be in a real relationship rather than a quicky in
the club. Of course Sebastian would have tried to make him his own, to have someone to care for,
who'd care about him. That didn't make it right, but it made sense to Kurt.

"I think I understand," he said softly. "And if it hadn't been for me, you and Blaine might have found
each other first. You must have hated me for that."

Sebastian wiped his eye with the back of his hand and looked at Kurt, wanting to clear something up
once and for all.

"I never hated you, Kurt," he said honestly. "And I was never actually interested in Blaine." He
shook his head, trying to work out how to explain.

Kurt frowned. If he wasn't, why had he tried to get him? Just because he could?

"So we were just...there?" he concluded. "I always thought, if I had done something differently."

Sebastian sighed and shook his head again, looking back out to sea, the late afternoon sun casting a
golden glow over the horizon.

"I told you a few months back that I wasn’t interested in making friends back then, and in a way, that
was true. I wasn’t." He licked his lips again.

"I was such a fucking mess. I had to redo my premier year, or Junior as you call it." He shook his
head. "I hated everyone, but at the same time...I needed people to notice me...I’d lost everything. My
family, my friends, my home..." he swallowed.

"You know what it’s like at Dalton, everyone adores the Warblers. I can sing and dance, so I thought
if I could join them and could make them champions...I dunno, maybe I thought my family would
hear about it and reconsider my exile...and let me go home."

He sniffed softly and wiped his eye as another tear threatened to fall. "I got in, no problem, but all
they fucking cared about was that Blaine had left them to go running after you. He was the golden
ticket’. So I thought maybe if I could get him back for them, they’d give me a chance. And when I
posed the idea, they were all for it. But the only way he’d ever consider going back was if you broke
up..." He looked at Kurt.

Kurt considered Sebastian’s words. In a way, it made sense, and it explained how Sebastian had
stopped trying to seduce Blaine once he was captain of the Warblers. He nodded grimly.

Sebastian continued. “But Blaine stuck with you, and our Sectionals was a mess. I had nothing to
write home about. Nothing. I was frustrated. We had to get better, with or without Blaine. So I stood
up and told the Warblers what was what, gave one of the best rallying speeches ever and it worked,
they made me captain."

He paused and ran a finger down the bear’s face.

"But it wasn’t enough, was it?" Kurt stated.

Sebastian shook his head.

“They still wanted Blaine back, so I kept trying. I had noticed you cared about your clothes a lot, and
I thought if I could show Blaine you cared more about your outfits than about him, he’d reconsider
my offer. It was dumb and clutching at straws, I know,” he added before Kurt could say anything.
“But I swear I was only going for your clothes with that slushy. I really didn’t want to hurt anyone.”
He paused and looked up at Kurt.

"I truly am sorry for everything I put you through. And Blaine. I never meant to hurt his eye. I know what it looked like and what you all thought of me, but I was never interested in anything from Blaine other than the fact that, in my twisted brain, he was my ticket home." Sebastian looked down at the bear in his hands and smoothed the fuzzy blue fur back on its head.

Kurt sat with his arms wrapped around his knees, listening and trying to imagine how lonely Sebastian must have felt. He did not doubt Sebastian was telling the truth—about his story, and about his regrets.

Hearing that the slushie was meant for him gave him a little start. But in the end, it was no different from the other slushies that had hit their target. He wondered if their owners felt like Sebastian now, or if they ever even thought about it at all. He was disappointed in the Warblers, as a group, but even they had just been kids.

With a quivering voice, Sebastian continued. “We lost at regionals. I looked around for other chances at proving myself, and joined the Lacrosse team. We won every game that season and I sent all the evidence home..."

He fell off and wrapped his hands around the bear’s neck, tears rolling down his cheeks again. "They sent it all back with a letter of their own telling me to never contact them again, unless I change my ‘perverted ways’...so I gave up. If nothing I did was ever going to be good enough then they could go fuck themselves."

He closed his eyes and tipped his head back, letting out a long, sad sigh. "David Karofsky trying to kill himself was the final straw for me. I felt… complicit. I had bullied him too. I finally saw the effects that kind of behaviour could have. I didn’t recognise or like the person I’d become. With nowhere else to go, I stayed and tried to make amends.”

Once again, Kurt felt guilty for not believing Sebastian’s apology back at the Lima Bean.

"I'm sorry your family was so cruel to you. No kid deserves that," he said softly. He let out a long sigh. "I guess I never really thought about the person behind the bullying. Though, after David, I should have known better. But it was easier to believe you just hated me. Most kids did."

Sebastian looked at Kurt sadly. "I never did, and now that I know you, I don’t think I ever could."

He sighed again. "I can’t even explain the logic behind my thinking...I wasn’t thinking, it’s all a bit of a blur now. But I am sorry...I’m not the person I was back then.” He stared out at the sea. The sky was starting to turn pink now. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply, letting the sea breeze dry the tears from his face and trying to let go of the residue pain from reliving his past.

As he came back to himself, something Kurt had said registered in his brain. He turned to his friend.

"When you say that most people hated you...what do you mean? I can’t imagine anyone hating you..."

Kurt laughed mirthlessly and glanced at Sebastian before turning his eyes back to the water. It took a while before he could make himself speak.

"I was eight when my mom got sick. The doctors said was nothing they could do. Me and my dad visited her at the hospital as much as possible. She got gradually worse, and then she died."
He paused.

"I had missed a lot of school, so that summer, I was held back. My new class isolated me from the start. I was older, I was different." Kurt shrugged. "I tried reaching out to the adults; my teachers, the lunch lady... I worked hard and helped them, handing out homework, clearing trays...You can probably guess how my classmates felt about that."

Sebastian felt his blood run cold. Kurt had lost his mom too. He’d never known. He’d also been held back a year, like Sebastian...they had more in common than he’d realised.

Kurt didn't wait for Sebastian to speak, but pushed on. "They started harassing me. Throwing my lunch in the trash, hiding my bag, name calling, that sort of stuff. I didn't tell anyone because I knew that would make it worse."

He pushed the toes of his shoes into the sand.

"When high school started, I hoped it would be different. It was, but not in a good way. The kids were older, stronger. It got more...physical. I was serious about dodgeball back there at the can toss. They targeted me specifically. I broke my wrist twice before I started forging my dad's signature to get out of phys ed. But still, they'd clock me against the wall in the hallway, throw slushies in my face or over my clothes. They’d pick me up and throw me in the dumpster. Once they locked me in one of those tall lockers in the changing room. I was stuck in there for over an hour before the janitor heard me and cut the lock."

Sebastian shivered. Kids were awful, how could anyone treat Kurt like that? But then he schooled himself, feeling ashamed... he had treated Kurt like that. Sebastian felt his heart crack.

"That’s awful..." he whispered.

"I would have preferred it over what came," Kurt commented, sounding distant. "In junior year, the Glee club sent me to spy on the Warblers. It was a dumb idea, but I did it anyway. Then, I met Blaine." He smiled softly. "I ended up telling him about school, and he was really sweet. Understanding. It felt like he knew what I was talking about, and it was like...someone was listening to me for the first time. Taking me seriously. He told me I should be more assertive and show my bullies what I was made of. It sounded like good advice at the time."

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out.

"So, the next time it happened, I tried to stand up against one of them. He was sort of their ringleader. For a moment, I genuinely thought I had a chance. Maybe all of those power ballads we did in Glee club got to my head."

He turned to Sebastian and offered him a smile, but it faded as soon as it had come. He turned back to the sea.

"I followed my bully into the locker room and yelled at him. I was sure he was going to beat me into the hospital, but I didn't care. At least I would have been able to tell Blaine I had tried, you know? Instead, this guy, he grabbed hold of my face, and kissed me."

Kurt absently touched his lips. "Afterwards, he threatened to kill me if I told anyone."

Sebastian listened with growing horror to Kurt’s story. So Blaine had told Kurt to stand up to someone who had already shown himself to be violent...what the actual fuck? And as a result Kurt had been sexually assaulted and then threatened with his life... He never knew Blaine was such a
clueless fool. Sebastian was really starting to dislike him.

He hesitated for a moment, unsure of how Kurt would react, before reaching over and placing his hand over Kurt’s.

"I’m so sorry you had to go through that," he said quietly, unable to say much else...What could he say?

"What, umm.." Sebastian asked after a pause. "What happened after that?"

"I told Blaine, and he drove up from Dalton to confront him. All that time, I thought, I wish he had kissed me instead. He came swooping in like some hero from a fairy tale. No one had ever stood up for me like that.” Kurt paused, and closed his eyes.

“But after Blaine went back to Dalton, it just went on. Without him...It got worse. I was terrified. At some point, I got tired of waiting. I began fantasising about provoking my bullies into hurting me; maybe if they got me into the hospital and it was bad enough, I'd be away from them for a while. Maybe then, the others would see I was serious."

Kurt felt his body tense up as he thought about that time. His breathing became shallow.

"My dad found out and talked to the school. The boy was expelled, but the rest of my bullies were still there. I was afraid they'd blame me, and I begged my dad to let me go to Dalton. I knew we couldn't afford it, so offered to pay for tuition myself."

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "My dad had just remarried, and he and Carole gave up the money they’d saved for their honeymoon to pay for it instead. As you know, Dalton's policy on bullying is pretty solid. I boarded there for several months. Blaine and I became a couple, and being with him gave me the courage to go back to McKinley when my dad's money ran out."

Sebastian knew without Kurt telling him that it would have carried on. He’d never been on the end of bullying but he’d seen it from afar and knew that confrontation rarely worked, as wrong as that was...it normally just egged them on further.

"What happened when you went back?" he asked. "Did it pick up again? Or were things better?" He squeezed Kurt’s hand.

Kurt looked at Sebastian's hand in his. "It got a little better for a while," he said. "At least I thought so. Then came prom. Blaine went as my date, and my fellow students thought it was hilarious to elect me prom queen. Ha ha, right?" He paused. "The principal let them. No one stopped it from happening. It was like the entire school was in on the joke."

Kurt pulled his hand away and played with the ring on his finger. "I wanted to leave, but after talking to Blaine about it, I realised that was exactly what they wanted. They wanted me to go. They did not want someone like me, someone like us, at their party. So I went in there, took the crown, and danced with Blaine for all to see."

He shrugged. "Senior year only brought more of the same. I tried out for the lead in West Side Story, only to lose it because I wasn’t ‘manly enough’. I tried for Senior Class Presidency, as the only one with a real campaign, focusing on bullying- only to see my posters get besmirched and ridiculed."

"And then you came." Kurt left it there. Sebastian knew the rest.

Sebastian bit his lip as a new wave of guilt washed over him. Kurt had had it much worse than he
had. True, what Sebastian went through was awful and no kid should ever be cast aside the way he had been. But at least he had spent most of his life surrounded by family and friends who loved him.

Kurt seemed to have had his dad and later on his step mom, but other than that, all he’d received was ridicule, torment and pain. And when things had finally been looking up for him, new relationship, senior year... Sebastian had come along and torn him down further.

"I’m sorry, Kurt," he said. "I’m sorry you had to go through all that...no one should ever have to suffer the way you did. And I’m sorry that I added to it."

He shuffled so he was facing Kurt, one leg bent under himself, the other stretched out in front of Kurt.

"You deserve so much more than that. You deserve to be happy and loved and cherished..."

"I am," Kurt said. "I have Blaine, I have my dad and my stepmom, and Mercedes..." He nudged Sebastian's foot. "I've got you guys too...right?"

Sebastian smiled at him. "Always," he said, nudging Kurt back. "And really, I do understand about not wanting to tell Blaine..."

Kurt sighed audibly, shaking his head at his own stupidity. "I'm so sorry about that, Bas. You surprised me." He shrugged awkwardly, wanting to explain. "In my senior year, we did this thing called Ditch Day, where we went to Six Flags. Blaine couldn't come because he was a junior. He never said anything, but I could tell he was really bummed about not being able to go. He... doesn't like it that I'm older than he is."

He bit his lip.

"...I didn't tell him we were going here, because it would just mean I was going to a theme park without him again, and having Monsieur Robesbear as a souvenir would only rub it in."

Sebastian nodded. "I get it...I know things haven’t been easy with you guys lately. I know that’s why you come to the bar...I don’t blame you for trying to make it work." Even if he doesn’t deserve a single hair on your head.

He looked down at the bear and grinned. "Mr Robesbear....cute name...."

He looked up at Kurt and hesitated before making his mind up. He held the bear up to Kurt.

"Mr Sebastian would like to know if Mr Kurt would like Mr Sebastian to keep me in his custody. He promises to look after me and let you come see me whenever you like?" He spoke French, using a high-pitched tone.

Kurt chuckled. "Why, yes, Mr Robesbear, I would like that very much," he replied in serious, clearly articulated way like he was a guest on the Muppet Show. "And I'll let you in on a little secret, too."

"Oh?"

"I've heard there's a shop in Soho that sells excellent French cheese. When I come and visit you, I'll bring some."

Sebastian smiled at Kurt. Switching back to English, he asked "Do I get some cheese too, or is that just for Mr Robesbear?"
Kurt grinned. "Oh, I think we can let you have some too."

Sebastian’s smile widened and he stared at Kurt openly, thankful and relieved that Kurt hadn’t run for the hills after Sebastian’s meltdown.

"We should probably get back up there," he said after a minute or two. "I’m surprised Alice hasn’t sent out a search party."

"You’re lucky to have a friend like her," Kurt said, standing up and brushing his clothes down.

"I know," Sebastian replied, doing the same. They looked at each other for a moment, silently conveying to each other that things really were okay between them before they started walking back up to The Broadwalk.

As they walked, Sebastian thought about the last hour and how far they had come. Sebastian had never laid himself out so bare to another person before, not even Alice. He’d always thought that opening up that much would leave him feeling weakened and pathetic. But he actually felt stronger and more settled than he had for a long time.

He glanced sideways at Kurt, thinking over everything Kurt had told him. He felt a sudden burst of anger at the people who had let Kurt down. He knew public schools could be bad, but what kind of teacher, hell what kind of person would allow that kind of abuse to happen under their roof? When Kurt’s name was pulled out of the ballot at his prom, why the hell didn’t the teacher refuse to read it? They could have made something up or re-drawn…anything that stopped Kurt from having to go through that kind of humiliation.

Sebastian felt another twinge of guilt to add to the pile when he thought about how he had once insinuated that Kurt wore girls’ clothes…even earlier that same day, he’d automatically taken Elton’s part of the song...

As they reached the top of the sand and headed back towards the entrance to the park, Sebastian made a decision in his mind. Never again would Kurt Hummel be made to feel like he was anything other than a man, not when Sebastian was around anyway.

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When they returned, Alice knew that whatever Kurt had said, it had worked. They were both smiling, talking in that secret language of theirs (Alice suddenly regretted not taking French in school), and the teddy bear was clutched securely under Sebastian’s arm.

To show Kurt she bore him no ill will anymore, Alice made a moment out of requesting he’d sit next to her on the ride home. That had another advantage as well, which came into effect as Alex stopped the car at Kurt’s doorstep.

"Thank you for all of this," Kurt said, meaning it from the bottom of his heart. "I had a great day."

"Thank you for babysitting us, Kurt," Steph said fondly.

"I'm still older than-" Alex started, then gave up. "Yeah, thanks Kurt. You were right that getting a seventh hotdog might not have been a good idea." He belched and cleared his throat. Alice kicked the back of the driver's seat with her boots.

Kurt grinned. They fought like brothers and sisters, all of them. It made him miss Finn all the more. He looked to his right. "Will you let me out, please?" he asked Sebastian.
Sebastian, who had been deep in thought, jolted a little at Kurt's question.

"Wh-Oh yeah of course." He undid his seatbelt and opened the door, climbed out and stepped back to let Kurt out.

As Kurt stood up and stretched, his t-shirt rose up a little exposing the skin underneath. It caught Sebastian’s attention and he blushed.

"Umm thanks for today," he said. "I’m really glad you came."

Kurt smiled. "Me too." He looked over his shoulder at the others in the car. They appeared to be arguing about something. Kurt looked back at Sebastian. "Thank you for trusting me with your story," he said quietly. "I'll stay between us."

He didn't ask for the same promise from Sebastian. It was implied, but even if Sebastian would tell Alice, or any of them, it didn't matter. Kurt's entire school knew of his past- a few more wouldn't hurt.

"Hey, we're still on for tomorrow too, right? Coffee and Modern Arts?" Kurt asked.

They had made quite a few plans to fill the coming two weeks together, planning around their respective shifts. Kurt hoped today hadn't changed Sebastian's mind about that, because he didn't know when he'd get the opportunity to go out as much after Blaine got back.

Sebastian smiled at him. "Of course!"

He hesitated for a moment. They were doing the staring thing again and Sebastian couldn’t bring himself to look away.

"Until tomorrow then."

"Yes."

Without thinking about it too hard, Kurt stepped forwards and wrapped his arms around Sebastian, hugging him tightly. Something had changed between them today at the beach, and it was his way of acknowledging it.

Sebastian started a little in surprise at the contact but relaxed almost instantly and wrapped his arms around Kurt, hugging him tightly. "Thank you for listening, and for sharing your story with me too."

After a moment, Kurt let go and stepped back. "See you tomorrow, Bas. Au revoir, Mr Robesbear!"

He grinned and went inside, feeling happier than he had in a long time.

Sebastian waited until Kurt had shut the door before climbing back into the car.

"You okay?" Alice asked as he buckled himself back in. She was looking at him cautiously.

Steph and Alex had turned to look at him too. He smiled at them.

"I am," he said honestly. It had been a long day with a mirage of emotions but knowing everything was out in the open now made him feel calm.

"I think things are going to be okay."
The Worst Bowlers

Chapter Summary

While Blaine is away, the boys will play... Coney Island brought Kurt and Sebastian closer than ever. In the week that follows, they become inseparable...and it's starting to feel right.

It was the fifth day of Blaine’s stay in L.A. He had promised to Skype every night, but Kurt knew that had been a bit ambitious, especially given the way they had parted. So far, Blaine had called twice and sent a few selfies of him, Sam and Cooper in running gear in the hills, lounging on a gigantic sofabed in which Kurt assumed was Cooper’s apartment, and a blurry one from a party. Kurt wasn’t entirely sure Blaine had meant to send that last one.

But Kurt hadn’t exactly had time to miss him. Since that day at Coney Island, he had spent all of his spare time between Vogue and his shifts at the diner with Sebastian, sometimes accompanied by his friends too but more often than not, just the two of them. Kurt loved the things Sebastian could tell him about New York and its history. It felt like having his own personal tour guide. In turn, he talked Sebastian’s ear off about all the musicals and film trivia of the city. They also had moments that were just spent in silence; as they walked around or sat somewhere having a coffee- at least until one of them saw a particularly remarkable outfit that needed commenting on, or in Sebastian’s case, a particularly cute dog that needed petting.

Kurt waited indulgently as Sebastian play-wrestled with a large husky. Its owner, a woman in her thirties, stood watching them with little hearts in her eyes.

Tough luck, lady, Kurt thought and smiled pleasantly. You can’t put a leash on this one.

Sebastian lay on the grass with the huge husky trying to lick his face. He was chuckling lightly as he held the dog in play before letting him loose to ‘attack’.

"Oh, you’re so good with him!" The woman gushed as Sebastian wriggled out from under the dog and ruffled his ears one more time.

"I love dogs," Sebastian said with a smile, climbing back onto his feet and brushing himself down. "Thank you for letting me say hi, and for the picture."

"Oh not at all! You know, we’re here every day, same time, same place..." she said smiling and calling the dog as she walked on, hips swaying.

Sebastian put his hands in his shorts pockets and smiled at Kurt. "And thank you for being patient while I said hello."

Kurt smiled, pocketing his phone. He’d taken a few snaps of Sebastian, wanting to preserve this day forever. The sun was shining, the park was lovely and everywhere around them were smiling people.

"That’s ok. It was only the third...in the last hour," he teased. They hadn’t even been in the park that long, but his friend was drawn to dogs and they were drawn to him.

Sebastian blushed a little, had it really been that many?
"I can't help it. If I see a dog, I have to say hello. I feel guilty if I don't."

They started walking along the path again, heading in the direction of the bridge.

"How come you don't have a dog of your own?" Kurt asked, plucking a few strands of dog hair off Sebastian's sleeve.

"My apartment block is part of student accommodation, no pets." Sebastian replied simply. "I want one though! Actually I'd love to have two or three!"

Kurt grinned at Sebastian's enthusiasm. Then his face fell a little. "Too bad about your place," he offered. I don’t even know if we’re allowed pets, come to think of it. But it's not really an option anyway. We’re away all day, it would just be mean."

Sebastian nodded. "Another reason I don't have one. My apartment is so small and I'm hardly ever home! Dogs need space to run around, unless you have a little dog...but I prefer big dogs." He kicked a pebble on the ground. "You know Marc at the club? He and his husband have two...big golden retrievers, they're beautiful."

"Aw, those are Marc’s? I saw them on your instagram. That picture where you only see your feet and your face and the rest is a blur of shiny dogs..." Kurt chuckled a little. Sebastian was so sweet with them. It was no wonder they all loved him.

"Yeah, Poppy and Lola are great!" Sebastian replied, "I'm house sitting for Marc and Paul at the end of the month when they go on holiday. Only for a week, but they have a massive apartment on Park Place and it's mine for the whole seven days. They have a pool in the building and a gym and the dogs of course!" He was so excited! He couldn't afford to go on holiday himself so in a way that week was going to be it!

Not that he hadn’t enjoyed this week with Kurt so far. It had felt amazing to be able to hangout together unhindered by much else than their work schedules. In a way, it was like a mini-holiday, too.

"Wow... oh yeah, Marc's husband's a doctor, huh?" Kurt thought about it. He liked that Marc worked at the bar anyway- they could probably afford for him not to. Suddenly, he grinned and nudged Sebastian from the side. "You're gonna throw a party, right?" he asked playfully.

Sebastian smirked. "I might invite a few people over," he mused. He had thought he might get his friends over one evening but he wouldn't go crazy...he had too much respect for Marc and Paul to risk damaging their apartment.

Kurt smirked. "So what does a boy have to do to get invited...?" He skipped ahead a little and looked over his shoulder at his friend.

Sebastian grinned. "I dunno, I hear a boy turns back into a pumpkin after midnight." Sebastian winked, poking his tongue out between his teeth.

Kurt hung his head in mock defeat. Then, a sly smile crept onto his face and he looked back at Sebastian. "Not on Tuesdays, though..."

It'd be pretty hard for him to come to a party on any other day anyway, with his schedule. But that would mean Sebastian would have to change shifts. And with Marc on holiday... He quickly added: "It's ok, you don't have to. I tag along with your friends so much already..."
Sebastian grinned. "No...not on Tuesdays." He considered dragging it out further but saw the flicker of doubt pass over Kurt's face and relented. "You're not a tag-along dummy, and they're not just my friends...they're our friends." He stepped forward and wrapped his arm around Kurt's neck in a typical 'bro' move. "You're one of us now, babe, whether you like it or not!"

Kurt beamed. "I like it," he said simply. "So, where to now? I feel like doing something that involves junk food and no-brain entertainment. Movie?"

He gasped, turning around under Sebastian's arm to face him. "How about bowling!"

Sebastian grimaced at the suggestion. "Ugh, I hate bowling."

Kurt stepped back a little and cocked his head. "Really? Who hates bowling... it's fun. Oh come on...have you even been, here in New York?"

Sebastian dropped his arm and looked at Kurt bashfully. "Yes, once with Alice and Steph...Alice said she won't go with me anymore." He sighed at the look on Kurt's face. He looked far too adorable with his head cocked like that. Almost like a puppy. How could he deny such a face? "We can go if you really want to," he said, relenting.

Kurt laughed out loud. "I think we're gonna have to, now! What the hell did you do, make out with the shoe attendant behind the racks?" He winked. Now that they had the serious talks about their past behind them, Kurt felt secure enough to make a joke like that without being afraid Sebastian might take offence.

Sebastian chuckled. "If only..." he said shaking his head. He sighed again.

"Alright, Hummel," he said defeated, looping his arm through Kurt's and walking purposefully towards the exit of the park, "You asked for it."

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After a few turns, Kurt still thought Sebastian was a little rusty. Then he chalked it up to nerves. But when his seventh consecutive throw rolled down the lane without knocking over more than the occasional side pin, it finally dawned on Kurt. Oh, this is why he hates bowling.

Not that he was faring any better himself. Kurt had never been very good at it. Every now and then he'd get lucky, but he had no idea about technique or style. For him, a large part of the fun was indulging in pizza and fries and weird clunky shoes. He liked walking down the polished wooden lanes with them like it was a catwalk challenge on America's Next Top Model.

After his own sparkling gold ball rolled into the gutter just before hitting any pins, Kurt did just that and walked back swaying like he had just landed his next strike, and he posed in front of the seats, hip jutting out. He could hear a few laughs from some of the other lanes, but he couldn't care less.

"How about food?" he asked Sebastian, who was hanging in his seat looking a little dejected. He nudged him with a bowling shoe.

"You're really taking this personally, aren't you?"

Sebastian scowled up at Kurt. "I just don't understand why the ball doesn't go where I tell it to!" he said grumpily. "I'm good at sports. Back home I was on both the lacrosse and rugby teams at school...I can even play fucking golf...I just don't understand why a stupid fucking ball won't roll straight down and hit the pins when I'm clearly telling it to...I think it's a conspiracy!"
Kurt gave it a valiant try not to laugh. "You look adorable when you're sulking, did you know?" he said fondly, and sat down next to Sebastian. "You play golf, really?"

Sebastian nodded.

Kurt thought about his school sports career. "I was on the football team for a while. Then I switched to cheerleading." He grinned. "Maybe that's what you need for your next throw. A good cheer!"

He got up and put his arms out. "Push it to the limits, push it to the top! Cause you're Sebastian Smythe and you never give up! S! M! Y! T! H! E!" Kurt put in a few Cheerios moves and ended with a high kick. Wow, that was a long time ago. He really should have warmed up.

Sebastian couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face as Kurt did a little cheer routine. People around them were staring and pointing but Kurt didn’t seem to care. He chuckled at Kurt’s wince at the high kick but couldn’t help but secretly admire how flexible he was, even in jeans.

"How did I not know you were a cheerleader?" he asked, still smiling. "That’s super fucking hot."

He realised what he’d said and blushed.

"There's a lot about me you've yet to discover," Kurt said with a wink. "Here's one for your twitter: He who would search for pearls, must search below the surface."

"I like that!" Sebastian replied with a smile. Every so often Kurt would throw out a quote for his twitter, and every time he did, Sebastian felt a little flutter in his chest.

Kurt shook his head a little. This literature stuff was rubbing off on him. "But, yes. We won the National cheerleading championship in 2010. It was the team's sixth consecutive win. They placed third internationally the year after that, but I had already quit by then. Though you never really quit the Cheerios... not until the coach lets or kills you. So I'm just inactive, I guess. Maybe she'll call on me one day to man the pyramid." He grinned.

Sebastian looked at Kurt as he talked, once again wondering where on Earth he’d come from, and wishing he had taken the chance to get to know him when he’d had it years ago...things may have turned out very different.

"If she ever does, you’ll have to let me know! I wanna see you in action!"

Kurt laughed. "I doubt she will, though. But you can google us, if you like. The Nationals should be up on YouTube, at least." He took up a bright pink, glittery ball and held it out with one hand. "Here, one more shot. I didn't almost tear my jeans for nothing doing that cheer. And then: pizza."

Sebastian failed miserably at his final shot, as he knew he would, but didn’t feel too bad about it as Kurt patted him on the back and smiled cheerfully at him.

Rather than eating cheap crappy pizza from the fast food place in the bowling alley, Sebastian suggested a small Italian pizzeria that was near Satire, which lead to Kurt suggesting they head to the club after, and Sebastian agreed.

"Have you been to any of the authentic pizza places in the city since you’ve been here?" Sebastian asked as they stepped out of the subway and started walking towards the restaurant.

"I tried a few places from my tour guide book," Kurt replied. "There’s a rather nice one near the Condé Nast that I tried before I came to Satire the first time."
They crossed the street at a red light with dozens of other New Yorkers to the sound of car horns.

"Rachel once went to Sardi’s with Finn, but I’ve never been. It’s still on my New York to do list."

Sebastian smiled at him. "I’ve never been to Sardi’s either...I’ve heard it’s a great place to bump into celebrities."

"Yes! Rachel talked to Patti Lupone when she was there! The way she tells it, they practically became best friends that night, but Finn said she barely said hello." Kurt sighed. "It’d be great to go."

He filed his dream away again and focused on the present, thinking about what food he’d like to order. They reached the restaurant and Kurt briefly glanced at the menu outside. He had told himself not to look at the prices this break, but to just enjoy himself, but checked out of habit anyway. It was okay, and they did a prawn pizza. Excellent.

Then he thought of something. "You do eat tomatoes on your pizza though, right?"

Sebastian chuckled. "The sauce base yes, the big ass slices they put on a margarita no...but then I don’t order a margarita. It’s all about the meat feast, babe!" He winked.

Kurt shuddered. "Those kind of pizzas are an abomination," he mumbled. "They’re like the ultimate straight guy pizza."

"I dunno," Sebastian said pulling the door open and letting Kurt walk in first. "Meat feast with extra sausage sounds pretty gay to me," he said with a wink.

Kurt laughed loudly, and quickly covered his mouth with his hand, not wanting to disturb the other patrons at the restaurant. Sebastian grinned, pleased to have amused him.

A waiter lead them to a table for two. Kurt was still grinning as they sat down.

"Do you want to share an entrée?" The appetiser section really looked pretty good, and Kurt could use a decent meal if he was going to drink cocktails later.

"Sure," Sebastian replied when they sat down. He picked up a menu and browsed it. "What do you fancy?"

"Well, since I’ve never been here, maybe just a mixed platter with a little something of each? Unless you can recommend anything? Also that couple behind you is staring at us," Kurt said, adding the last comment smoothly. "Which makes me extra motivated to share." He deliberately moved his chair a little further towards Sebastian around the round table, and offered the couple a sweet smile.

Sebastian turned to look at them and, noticing their frowns turned to Kurt. "Oh honey," he said in an overly camp manner. "You have a hair out of place, let me fix that for you." And he leaned across the table to smooth back a nonexistent hair back behind Kurt’s ear.

He heard the woman behind them tut and winked at Kurt.

"Thank you, darling," Kurt sighed happily, raising the hand with his engagement ring up to brush the same spot and let the shiny metal catch the light. That ought to do. As he looked over, they didn’t dare meet his eye.

"Sorry I am so vindictive," he said under his breath, looking down at the menu, "but I didn’t accept that shit at school and I sure as hell don’t here in New York, not from the likes of them."
Sebastian smiled and placed his hand over Kurt’s, squeezing it softly.

"I get it, I don’t either...plus I love messing with people." He pulled his hand away and resumed looking at his own menu.

"I think a sharing platter would be great!" he said, reading through to options. "Oohh, they have Calamari on this one!" he exclaimed.

Kurt smiled. He liked Sebastian's enthusiasm for food - for food that wasn't take-out or deep-fried.

"Alright, I think we found a winner, then. Do you mind if I order a glass of wine? I could also just stick with water..."

Sebastian smiled at him. "Of course I don’t mind! I shall be fine with my soda...I can’t wait till I can join you with that glass but I’ve only got to wait eight more months. I think I’ll survive." He winked at Kurt and handed him the wine list.

"Thank you." Kurt couldn’t help but think back of the scene Blaine had made after his first visit at Satire. He was nineteen, Sebastian was twenty. Maybe a year really made such a difference.

He quickly focused back on the present and picked a mid-range white wine to go with his meal.

"So is it true even children get wine at dinner in France? I heard that once."

"Yeah," Sebastian nodded. "I mean, they don’t get a whole bottle. But from about nine or ten they start being giving wine with dinner."

He looked at Kurt. "It’s only small amounts of course, and it’s always watered down. Each family is different but the general rule of the thumb is as a child gets older, the ratio of wine to water changes." He shrugged. "It’s supposed to create a better relationship to alcohol, so they don’t go out and binge constantly when they hit eighteen...because the drinking age is lower over there too. My grandparents did it with me."

Kurt nodded. "That makes sense. My dad’s more of the beer type, but he also let Finn and me have some with dinner or in the weekend, and if I used wine to cook I’d have some too. He figured kids our age were going to drink whether he let us or not, and it was safer to start at home than somewhere in secret." Kurt smiled. "Of course, he didn’t know it was already a bit too late for that."

Kurt saw Sebastian’s eyes widen, and while they waited for their food, he gave him the short version of his accident with April Rhodes in his sophomore year.

"Kurt Hummel, you surprise me." Sebastian grinned, after Kurt finished his story. "You were quite the little rebel...alcohol and muscle magazines." He winked.

Kurt chuckled. "I still have them, if you're interested," he joked, and winked.

Sebastian chuckled. "Thanks, but big oiled bodybuilders aren’t really my type." He winked.

Kurt shook his head. "Mine either, to be honest, but it was the first time I had seen guys pose like that. With those little spandex shorts..." He blushed a little, thinking about how forbidden it had felt looking at those magazines, in the bathroom, with the door locked. It had been embarrassing and exciting at the same time.

Sebastian smiled at him, trying to imagine a young and impressionable Kurt pouring over shiny pictures of big buff men in tight speedos.
"Though it definitely taught me a lesson about drinking," Kurt mused, "I haven’t been drunk since. It scared me to lose control like that. I’m missing a whole day of my life! And it was just embarrassing all around. My dad had to come pick me up from school, I had to lie about it to protect Ms Rhodes and say I had the stomach flu...I felt awful. I had only just come out to my dad and we’d said ‘no more lying’..."

He shrugged. "Not a very realistic thing to ask of a teenager, maybe."

"I think that is a wise lie though...though what on Earth were they doing letting a drunkard middle aged woman roam around a school?"

"April’s a special case," Kurt reminisced. "But she has an amazing voice."

He took a sip of his wine. "And then, there was Rachel’s party…” he started, and told Sebastian about the second reason he avoided alcohol in larger dosages,

"You should have seen the look on my dad’s face when he found Blaine in my bed," Kurt finished, grinning. "He assumed the worst, and literally nothing had happened except Blaine throwing up in my Navigator and me sleeping on the floor!"

Their appetiser platter arrived, and there was two or more of every kind so they could both try everything.

"This looks amazing," Kurt said happily.

"It sure does!" Sebastian agreed and picked up a small piece of calamari. He popped it into his mouth and closed his eyes. "Hmm," he hummed happily. "So good!"

"Mmm," Kurt agreed, not wanting to speak with his mouth full. He turned the plate around so the bruschetta with tomatoes were on his side. He swallowed his bite and took a sip of his wine. "I’ll trade you parma ham for those."

It was amazing how quickly they had gotten used to each other’s company and quirks. Already, it felt like it had been like this for years.

Sebastian smiled at him, "deal." He still couldn’t eat over how easy it was being in Kurt’s company. Over the last week they had seen each other nearly every day; from a quick coffee and sandwich if they had conflicting work schedules, to spending the whole day together exploring the city and sharing the wealth of knowledge they each had about various aspects of the place they called home.

Kurt was different when it was just the two of them, without the burden of school, work...and his fiancé. The changes had been subtle to notice at first, but as the week drew on, Kurt had started to unwind and come out of his shell. He wasn’t pressed for time. He wasn’t so jumpy and on edge all the time. He laughed freely and teased without fear of retribution. And every day a little more time passed between the moments where thoughts he didn’t share with Sebastian dimmed the sparkle in his eyes.

Sebastian was already starting to dread the return of Blaine. Would things change back again?

He shook himself internally, mentally berating himself. They still had over a a whole week until ‘B Day’ and Sebastian intended to make the most of that time.

"How’s the wine?" Sebastian asked, taking a roll of parma ham and popping it in his mouth.

Kurt picked up his glass. "It’s nice, do you wanna try it? No one’s looking." He added the last with a
cheeky wink.

Sebastian smiled at him, taking the glass and having a sip.

It was cool, crisp and sweet. "Mm." He hummed. "Very nice...would you like a sip of my coke?" He grinned with a wink.

Kurt grinned back. "No, thanks. I prefer to take my sugar in solid form, like the dark chocolate cake I already spied on the menu."

He sighed happily. "Why can’t food always be this good? Maybe we should elope to Italy..."

"Mmm, don’t tempt me." Sebastian said smiling, wiping his side of the plate with a piece of bread. "I really want to go to Italy one day."

"Me too," Kurt agreed eagerly. "Ugh, I have no idea how I am going to eat a whole pizza after this and chocolate cake. Next time, we need to just pick one pizza and share it."

*Unlike Sam and Blaine, who usually order at least 4*, Kurt thought briefly, before banishing the thought. Not tonight.

During the wait between courses, Kurt excused himself for a moment to go to the men’s room. There was only one and it was occupied, so he took out his phone and scrolled through his notifications. He smiled. Sebastian had just uploaded a picture of their food to Instagram - clearly he was playing with his phone too. Kurt liked it. Then he saw that Blaine had put several selfies up on Facebook. They already had a couple of thumbs up. Pushing away the disappointment of not having seen them first, he liked them as well, and posted a comment with heart-eyes under a particularly cute one. Then he put his phone away and waited his turn.

As he returned, he saw their waiter coming their way with two large wooden slates, and hurried to their table just in time to order another glass of wine to go with it.

"I was starting to think you’d jumped out the window," Sebastian teased, once Kurt had sat back down and their dinner was set in front of them. "I’m not that bad a company am I?" He grinned at Kurt.

"The worst," Kurt replied, "but after that appetiser I couldn't fit through the window and I didn't want to ruin my shoes flushing myself." He winked and picked up a slice of pizza. "Bon Appetit, Bas."

It was like a reflex, but one that had been slumbering for quite some time. It felt good to joke around like this. Back in school, Kurt’s biting retorts were a last line of defence. It was a lot nicer to just banter around with Sebastian without aiming to hurt.

Sebastian grinned at Kurt's quick remark, glad that they could still snark and banter with each other. He ate his pizza in silence for a minute or two, revealing in the delicious combination of flavours.

"I like it when you call me Bas," he said, blushing a little and sipping his drink.

Kurt watched him. "Well, I don’t see why you should have more syllables in your name than me," he said. "Four seems a little excessive."

He looked at Sebastian’s pizza. It looked better than it had sounded, but his own was delicious as well. "This is definitely better than bowling pizza."
‘Everything is better than bowling pizza,’ Sebastian said in French.

He held some pizza up on his fork to Kurt. "You wanna try some?" He’d seen Kurt eyeing it.

Kurt hesitated for a moment, then got over himself. "Sure, I’ll try your gay pizza," he joked, leaning over and putting his hand over Sebastian’s on the fork to direct it to his mouth. He noticed the people on the other table staring again, and made a show of wrapping his lips around the fork and humming contentedly, closing his eyes for a moment.

He hoped Sebastian realised what he was doing, or it was very awkward. He tried to subtly point his free hand at the table behind him.

Sebastian lost concentration for a moment as Kurt wrapped his lips around his fork. Then he noticed Kurt’s subtle finger point in the direction of the homophobic couple and he understood.

"Knew you wouldn’t complain about a little extra meat there babe, you never do." He said with a wink.

"Ugh, really." The woman behind him whispered. "So inappropriate."

Sebastian grinned malevolently at Kurt as he pulled away and Sebastian set his fork down, turning to the woman.

"I think what’s inappropriate here is that you seem to be paying more attention to me and my friend than you are your own husband. He looks a bit uncomfortable there, maybe if you found your own love of meat he might relax a little."

Kurt snorted and raised his glass of wine as a toast to them. The woman looked away pointedly; mission achieved.

"Some people’s own lives must be so sad," he said quietly, "that they must focus on the lives of others for entertainment..."

Sebastian nodded. "To be busy minding other people’s business, is to leave one's personal business unattended to." He quoted absentmindedly. "Oh that can be my quote of the day!" He pulled out his phone and tweeted it quickly "Edmond Mbiaka."

Kurt smiled and started picking the prawns off the rest of his pizza, too full to eat anything but the good bits.

"I can’t believe a week of our break is almost over," he mused. "There’s still so much left to do..."

"I know," Sebastian said solemnly. "I’ve enjoyed having you around this week."

Kurt smile, feeling a little moved. "Me too."


He stabbed a helpless prawn with his fork.

Sebastian blushed and smiled at him. "Thanks...uh.," he didn’t know why he felt embarrassed. He had about five hundred followers on twitter, mainly consisting of the Warblers, the Dalton Lacrosse team and people he knew from school or work. There were also a few people that found him through his writing, but he didn’t think many of them would think what he had to say was important enough
"Thank you..." he said again. "I didn’t think people were that interested in what I have to say."

"Technically, I’m interested in what the people you quote have to say," Kurt teased, but he quickly added: "but you pick interesting ones. I like guessing what made you choose them."

"Well, I and the people I quote thank you!" Sebastian said smiling.

Kurt’s phone buzzed again, and Kurt frowned. He picked up his phone and saw a small audio message from Blaine. He put the phone to his ear with a smile, but lowered it again after a few seconds with an exasperated sigh. "Blaine butt-dialled me again," he said, rolling his eyes. "I keep telling him to get a better phone. His doesn’t lock properly."

Sebastian shuffled awkwardly as Kurt listened to the voice message.

"Have you spoken to him much since he left?"

Kurt absently stroked the screen of his phone. "No... But I guess that’s good. It probably means he’s having a good time, and things were kind of tense before he left so it’d be good if he lets loose, you know?"

Sebastian bit his lip in an attempt to refrain from speaking out of turn. It was becoming more and more difficult.

All week there had been little comments or moments when the gaps in his relationship with Blaine showed and each time Sebastian had bit his tongue and pushed his thoughts aside.

He remembered when Alice had dated Jeremy. All attempts to get her to see what he really was fell on deaf ears, but she had realised in her own time. Sebastian had to hope and trust that Kurt would do the same.

Feeling a little awkward, Kurt offered Sebastian a smile. "How does half a piece of chocolate cake sound to you?"

Sebastian smiled at Kurt fondly. "Half a chocolate cake sounds perfect."

Kurt signalled for their waiter and they ordered one desert with two spoons. While they waited, Kurt typed a reply to Blaine telling him his phone had been recording again, but got no reply. A reminder from his calendar popped up instead.

"Oh!" Kurt said, smiling, and looked at Sebastian. "I have a great idea! You know how we said we might catch a movie on Friday? How would you like to go to Open Mic night at Callbacks instead? It's this piano bar near NYADA, a lot of students hang out there but it's really nice and you don't have to attend NYADA to sing." He grinned and winked at Sebastian. "Maybe Alice and the others want to come too? I wouldn't mind showing off a little. It's how the big kids play karaoke."

Sebastian nodded with a shrug and smile. "Sure! Though it'll probably just be Alice. I think Steph and Alex are heading off to her folks for the weekend." He snapped a quick picture of their cake and posted it to his Instagram to join the pictures of their starter and main courses.

He then typed out a quick text to Alice.

**To Alice (19:38)**
Hey, Kurt's invited us to a place called Callbacks on Friday night, kinda like big leagues karaoke apparently, you game? Steph and Alex are at her folks I think.

He put his phone away and smiled at Kurt. "I've asked her but she'll probably be up for it...so what does one sing at a place like Callbacks? It's not all show tunes is it?"

"No, you can sing anything, provided you or Pascal- that's the piano guy- can play it, or you sing acapella. That shouldn't be a problem for a Warbler, right?" Kurt smiled. Then he looked down at his hands. "Though I do play a bit... if there's something you'd like to sing we could look up the notes beforehand."

Sebastian smiled. Having Kurt play for him sounded amazing. At the same time however, it would be nice to have Kurt as his audience. Sebastian wasn’t stupid enough to even consider a serenade, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t surprise his friend with a song.

"Thank you, I’ll think about it," he replied. "I’m sure we can work something out."

To Seb (19:42)

Do you need a chaperone? ;)

To Seb (19:42)

I can come if you want me to! Not sure I can sing at a place like that but you could!

His phone buzzed in his pocket and he took it out.

He huffed a laugh at Alice’s reply and quickly responded.

To Alice (19:48)

Ha fucking ha! You don’t have to sing! Just hang out with us :) 

Kurt watched Sebastian as he typed. He was smiling a little, but seemed a little exasperated as well. It was like he had a special expression to deal with Alice. It was sweet. Secretly, he wondered if Sebastian had an expression for him, too.

"I sometimes go there to practice for school," Kurt said conversationally. "I can’t always do that at home because of our neighbours. And it’s good to get some feedback. I don’t get to pick my own songs at Spotlight."

He suddenly paled. What if they ran into Rachel there? She would tell Blaine for sure. He quickly tried to recall whose shift it was Friday evening. It had to be Rachel’s, he had the early shift and Dani and Oz had Thursday. If not...they’d have to go there some other time.

Sebastian smiled. "It’s good that there’s a place for like-minded people to get together and help out in that way. I’m looking forward to seeing it!"

Their cake arrived and they tucked in.

"Oh my god." Sebastian moaned, closing his eyes as the rich chocolate melted on his tongue. "This is amazing."

"Yeah," Kurt agreed, his first bite still on his fork, hovering before his lips. He was watching Sebastian again, taking in his expression. He could watch Sebastian enjoy food all day, it had
something very appealing to it.

Before he could get caught staring, he quickly took a bite too, savouring the taste.

Once they had finished their dessert and decided against coffee or anything else, they split the bill and headed out the restaurant.

"If we wanna go to Satire I’m gonna have to change," Sebastian said, indicating his shorts and plimsolls. "They won’t let me in otherwise. My apartment isn’t too far, do you mind?"

"No, of course not. If you call ahead to tell your lovers to get dressed..." Kurt joked idly.

In all honesty, he was curious about Sebastian's apartment. A few months ago, he’d have had a very different idea of what his single’s pad would look like.

Sebastian grinned. "And here I thought you might be game for a threesome?" Sebastian winked.

He was, if truth be told, a little apprehensive about Kurt seeing his apartment. It was a very personal thing, allowing someone into your sanctuary, and with someone like Kurt who had such an eye for detail, he couldn’t help but feel nervous.

Kurt laughed, openly, not bothering to cover his mouth as he usually did. "I'm sorry to disappoint you," he said finally, still chuckling, "but while it is on my bucket list, I'm much too full on chocolate cake. Some other time, perhaps."

Kurt had never felt this uplifted and free. Some of Sebastian's attitude was rubbing off on him, it seemed. It felt good. A year ago, he wouldn't have joked about something like this. He was engaged, and he had no intention of cheating - but words were just words, and he knew Sebastian was just joking too.

"So what else should I prepare myself for?" he asked playfully. "Mirrors on the ceiling... a camera tripod by the bed..." he trailed off, his eyes glittering. "Or large framed photographs of puppies and city landmarks?"

Sebastian chuckled, he liked that it was easy like this. The banter and joking that went on between them.

It had always been the way they communicated, through matching insults and jibes. But now the insults were fond and teasing, the jibes in jest and almost flirty.

How far they’d come in such a short space of time, and yet, sometimes it felt like they’d always been this way.

"Guess you’ll just have to wait and see," he said slyly with a side wink.

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They didn’t spend long at his apartment, just long enough for Sebastian to change his clothes and fix his hair. Kurt has also spent a few minutes fixing his look in the mirror in the living room.

Kurt was still thinking about Sebastian's apartment as they walked to Satire. The first thing he'd noticed after Sebastian let them in, was how uncluttered it was compared to his own place. His and Blaine's apartment was stuffed full of furniture and knick knacks. The loft had been a lot bigger, and neither of them had wanted to part with their own stuff when they moved out.
Sebastian's place was clean and tidy, but warm and inviting. In a way, it reminded Kurt of the loft, with its exposed brick wall and steel beams, and the old wooden floor. He missed the loft a lot.

One wall of Sebastian’s place was completely covered by shelves, filled from the ground up with books. A lot of them were probably for university, Kurt assumed, but in the few minutes he'd had to look around, he'd also discovered several art books and biographies. And enough French language books to make his heart sing. He could easily imagine spending whole days on the comfortable-looking couch by the window, just sitting and reading.

The open kitchen was dominated by a large fridge and a kitchen isle full of utensils. Kurt wondered how often Sebastian cooked on his own, making food exactly the way he wanted it- the way it had been at home.

As for the mirrors on the ceiling, Kurt mused with a smile on his face, he wasn't completely convinced they weren't there- he hadn't seen the bedroom yet.

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A short time later they arrived at Satiere. "Perks of working here is that we can go in before everyone else," Sebastian said, walking to the front of the queue that was starting to form.

"Hey Terry!" Sebastian said greeting the bouncer.

"Seb." Terry nodded in greeting. He smiled at Kurt as well. He'd seen him enough to know he was a regular, and he let them both in.

Marc greeted them with a laugh and a shake of his head. "What's this? Did you get lonely? Surely there's enough other places you kids can go to without hanging out at your job on your night off?"

"We were hoping you'd give us a discount," Kurt said, smiling sweetly.

"Well it is Wednesday." Marc said grinning. "And as the first customers in the door I might be persuaded to give you two for one on your first order...but what's in it for me?" He asked Kurt with a wink.

Kurt smiled. "If you play your cards right, Sebastian might give you his phone number." He winked.

Marc chuckled, "I already have his number...oh alright I’ll let you off...what can I get you?"

"I’ll have a Mango Mule please," Sebastian asked, ordering one of the non alcoholic cocktails they sold. He couldn't wait till he was twenty-one and could actually drink in public.

"Me too," Kurt said, grinning.

"Are you sure?" Marc asked, cocking his head.

"Yeah, two for one, right?" Kurt replied, "and I don’t need to drink to have a good time."

"Shh! You’ll ruin our business," Marc joked, and winked at them. He picked up a large mixing cup and started on their drinks.

Sebastian bumped Kurt’s shoulder gently. "You don’t have to not drink just because I can’t," he said. "I don’t mind."

"I know," Kurt replied, and left it at that.
Kurt watched Marc do his thing. He was faster than Sebastian, the cups almost a blur in his hands. Everything just looked a bit more smooth, and practised. As he caught Kurt's eye, he winked and kept eye contact as he sliced up a mango and a lime, causing an indignant huff from Sebastian. Kurt grinned.

"You know, I was impressed before, but now that I see you at work..." he said to Marc, glancing back at Sebastian with a teasing smile, "I think maybe Bas needs a bit more practise."

Sebastian pouted a little. "Hey! I’ve only been here eight months...Marc’s been here..." he turned to Marc. "How long has it been?"

"Nearly fourteen years," he said, as he separated the liquid into two glasses.

"Wow..." Kurt let out, forgetting he was teasing his friend. He wondered where he’d be in fourteen years. Married... maybe with an adopted or surrogate child? He couldn’t really imagine it, but there’d be plenty of time to think about it.

Marc topped the drinks off and put them on the bar. Kurt and Sebastian took one.

"To the worst bowler in the world," Kurt said lightly, "and his friend Sebastian."

Sebastian laughed and chinked his glass against Kurt’s. "I think it should worst bowler in the world and his friend Kurt, but maybe we settle for a joint title."

"The worst bowlers in the world!" Kurt agreed happily, and took a sip of his drink. Then, a new song started, and he quickly put his glass down. "I have to dance to this," he announced. "It's my jam."

Marc wrinkled his nose. "Single ladies?" he asked, but Kurt was already gone.

Sebastian looked at Marc. "Not a Beyonce fan?"

"Oh I love her, don’t get me wrong...but I wouldn’t bust out onto an almost empty dance floor and perform her entire routine," Marc said as they watched Kurt move.

"He is something else," Sebastian agreed, slightly in awe.

Kurt was off into his own world, his body moving out of it own accord. It was such a feel-good song. Memories of his dad put a happy smile on his face, and the light that reflected off the ring on his finger only enhanced his happiness. When he had first taught himself this routine, he hadn't thought he'd actually be wearing a ring someday.

He gave his all to the hip circles and kicks, shimmying his shoulders and chest. If he couldn't dance like this in a gay bar, where could he? From the side, he could see a few guys doing the hand movement in jest. He didn't know of they were mocking or saluting him, but he didn't care.

Sebastian watched Kurt for half the song, smiling as he did. Kurt was showing no signs of stopping and as the first club crawlers of the night started to filter in, a few of the guys started to join in too.

Setting his glass down, Sebastian walked over to Kurt and tapped him gently to let him know he was there. He started dancing too. He didn't know the routine but he moved his hips in time with Kurt's and gave in to the music.

Kurt greeted him enthusiastically and turned to face him. The song seamlessly transitioned into another one, and Kurt ended his rehearsed choreo and started freestyling. "Sorry, I had to," he said
over the music. "I'll explain some day." He spun around and lifted his arms up, enjoying the music.

"Don't apologise." Sebastian said, letting his body give in to the beat and rhythm of the music. Every so often he noticed Kurt look at him and bit his lip.

It had been a while since Kurt had made actual eye contact on the dance floor. Usually, he closed himself into his little cocoon of music, feeling eyes and the occasional hand on him but not encouraging anyone. He wasn't looking for a real connection- just for a night off. Tonight was different. They had spent the whole day together after a week of sharing their daily lives, on the phone or in each other's company. They'd shared food, and at Coney Island, Kurt had opened himself up more than he had to anyone except maybe Blaine or Mercedes. Dancing with Sebastian now was bound to be a little different from dancing with strangers.

He glanced at Sebastian every now and then, mentally comparing his dancing to that night at Scandals long ago. They'd both picked up a few new moves since then.

As the club filled up and space around them got smaller, Sebastian stepped closer to Kurt.

"Why do you keep looking at me?" Sebastian asked in his ear.

"I could ask you the same," Kurt replied smoothly. "I'm just dancing." He felt a little caught, but tried not to show it.

"Me too. Just enjoying the music," Sebastian said. He spun Kurt around and pressed up against his back.

Kurt let out a huffed laugh at the contact, but didn't move away. If anything, it kept the other guys on the dance floor at bay, which was just as well. It felt a bit like a challenge, and Kurt took it, moving along with the rhythm Sebastian set.

Sebastian had danced with countless guys both here at Satire and in other clubs across the city. But it had never felt like this. His and Kurt's bodies moved together seamlessly, each reading silent cues from the other and moving together as one. It was a heady feeling.

From behind the bar, Marc watched the two boys dancing. His heart ached at the sight of them. They looked so young and carefree and he didn't want to break that up, but he couldn't help but dread the finale. No matter which way he looked at it...someone was going to get hurt.

Kurt let himself go in the music, mouthing the lyrics, his eyes nearly closed. Songs flowed into each other, and Kurt gave his all. He wanted to dance it all away; the fights with Blaine, the humiliation, the disappointment. It was like he only had this one chance to make it count. Blaine would come home soon, and then he had to put in the work to save his engagement, maybe even give up on Satire for a while.

A slower song started playing, and Kurt turned around to face Sebastian, wrapping his arms loosely around his neck. If Blaine could go on piggyback rides with his best friend and cuddle up with him on the couch, Kurt was allowed one slow dance, wasn't he?

Sebastian swallowed at the new position and slid his hands, still on Kurt's waist, to settle at the small of his back. He stepped forward a little to accommodate Kurt in his space and slowed down the movement of his hips.

It wasn't until Sebastian put his hands on him that Kurt realized how starved for touch he was. It was almost like Sebastian's hands threw sparks. Kurt leaned in, closing his eyes with a sigh and let the music lead him.
This was all he wanted. To dance with someone who wanted him, accepted him for what he was, instead of pushing him away or asking him to change. Even if it was just as a friend. Why couldn’t he have this with Blaine?

Sebastian closed his eyes and pressed his cheek to Kurt’s temple. He tried not to read into it. They were just two friends dancing together in a club. It just happened to be a slow song.

*Maybe if I tell myself that enough I’ll believe it,* Sebastian thought to himself.

He’d done a lot of thinking this week, trying to piece together his thoughts and feelings both old and new like a puzzle. The picture on the puzzle was starting to take shape now and it scared Sebastian.

The feelings he’d named that day at the beach were growing stronger. It would ultimately lead him to pain and heartache because Kurt was engaged, and didn’t seem like he was ever going to break that off. If he was smart, Sebastian would cut his ties now and back off while he still had a chance.

But Kurt was warm and solid in his arms, his breath against Sebastian’s neck sent goosebumps to form on his skin. Sebastian tightened his hold on Kurt, moving imperceptibly closer. He knew in that moment that he’d never walk away. He was, it seemed, on this rollercoaster for the long haul, regardless of the impending crash at the end.

Kurt listened to the song, trying not to identify with the lyrics too much. Slow songs were love songs, and that wasn’t right. Briefly, he wondered what would happen if he would kiss Sebastian. Maybe, nothing would. They could keep it at that, shrug it off, play it down to a long day in each other's company. Maybe it would lead to more. A hurried thirst in the Satire bathroom? A quick walk to Sebastian's apartment, a night spent in his bedroom (with or without mirrors?). But it could never be more than that. Sebastian didn't *do* relationships. Kurt knew that whatever they could do together wouldn't change that; he held no illusions that a night in his arms would make Sebastian a changed man.

But *he* would change. It would make him a cheater.

Kurt knew he was to blame for even considering it. He'd let it come this far, encouraged it even, with their flirting and their banter at dinner, but deep inside Kurt knew he couldn't go through with it. He’d sworn to himself he’d never cheat, and even though Blaine had repeatedly accused him of doing just that, Kurt could honestly say he had never crossed that line. It was tempting to do it now. A part of him really wanted to. It seemed especially appropriate that it’d be Sebastian. It was with his arrival in their lives that it had all begun.

But Kurt knew he would be risking his entire future happiness for a moment of weakness. Not to mention the friendship that had blossomed between him and Sebastian would be put in jeopardy.

As the song faded to its end, he looked up, stepping away a little. "Shall we go back to the bar?" he asked.

Sebastian kept his hands on Kurt and looked down at him as he spoke, missing the closeness but knowing that it couldn’t last.

"Sure," he said smiling, hiding the tinge of sadness he felt. He let his hands drop from Kurt’s back and stepped away. He took up Kurt’s hand, purely so that they didn’t get separated! (he told himself) and led the way through the crowd to the bar.

As Marc saw Sebastian coming, he sighed. He'd always said it’d be good for the boy to find someone special- maybe he should have been more specific and said 'someone single '. But one look
Kurt told him he wasn't much happier with the situation. Marc looked down on his wedding ring and hoped they'd figure it out without too much heartbreak. A bartender, after all, could only do so much.

"How about another drink?" he suggested. "Seb, Ipanema? And a Caipi for Kurt?" Kurt looked like he might need something a little stronger.

Sebastian nodded and put some money down on the bar to cover it. "Thanks Marc," he said.

He hopped up onto a stool and looked at Kurt. "You’ve got some moves, Hummel...NYADA is paying off!"

Kurt smiled. "You're not so bad yourself, Smythe. But I already knew that from your time at the Warblers."

Kurt breathed easily again. The temptation had passed. They could just stay friends now. He felt like he had passed some kind of test.

Marc set their drinks on the counter. They looked nearly identical, but Kurt's had a black straw, Sebastian's a red one. Kurt picked up both and handed the mocktail to Sebastian.

"The worst bowlers and the best dancers at this joint," he joked, raising his glass in a salute.

"Only because I am on duty," Marc mumbled. "Otherwise I'd kick both your asses with my moves."

"Disco is dead, though," Kurt said innocently. "Did nobody tell you?"

"I am not that old!" Marc protested.

Sebastian laughed, "You kinda are."

"I'll have you know I’m still in my thirties..." Marc protested.

"Barely." Sebastian threw back at him with a smirk.

"Just you wait, sonny Jim...that three in front is important."

Kurt chuckled a little. He had suspected that Marc was in his forties- not because he looked it (he looked amazing, actually), but because he’d said his husband was almost fifty. He wondered what that was like, having a partner ten years older... Had Paul ever been as exasperated with Marc as he was with Blaine sometimes?

At least they'd met when Marc was an adult. It would have been a little creepy if he’d only been a teenager.

Marc looked at him with a knowing look. "Paul's a special vintage," he said, smiling. "He just gets better and better." He winked at Kurt. "Yes, at that too."

Kurt's jaw fell open. "I wasn't even-!" he protested.

"But you were gonna," Marc said, smirking.

Sebastian grinned "I think sex does get better as you get older...I know the sex I have now is a hundred times better than when I first started..."

Kurt looked into his glass and kept out of that particular conversation. He supposed it had gotten a
little better, after Kurt had gotten over his initial shyness and started experimenting with himself more, finding out what got himself off as quickly and efficiently as possible, but he couldn't really say the same for being with Blaine, not in stamina or otherwise. He enjoyed the intimacy, and the feeling of being desired, but that had faded more than it had grown deeper.

*It's just a phase*, he told himself once again, downing the rest of his drink in one go.

Both Sebastian and Marc saw the subtle change in Kurt’s demeanour at the conversation and they exchanged a look.

Marc watched Kurt sympathetically as he downed the rest of his drink. *Poor kid*, he thought to himself. He’d gotten to know Kurt fairly well over the last couple of months and no matter what Kurt said, it had become clear to Marc that Kurt's relationship was far from healthy. He’d tried to encourage Kurt to talk about it on a couple of occasions but it just resulted in Kurt shutting down each time and often leaving the club.

Sebastian looked at Kurt with a mixture of pity and annoyance. He felt for Kurt and knew he was trying to make his relationship work, but he was getting to the point where it was becoming more and more difficult to not say anything.

He finished his drink as well and turned to Marc. "Where is it you’re going on holiday again?"

"Capri," Marc said happily, glad for the distraction. Kurt probably was as well. "It's where we met."

He smiled fondly. "We're celebrating Paul's birthday there as well. Of course we'll also have a party here," he nodded at the club and smiled, "but we just wanted to go back. You know, wallow in nostalgia like old folks." He took up a whisky tumbler from underneath the bar and raised it to them.

Kurt smiled. "That's so sweet," he said, feeling touched. He wondered where he and Blaine would go, later. They'd never really been on any holiday together, and Dalton Academy was hardly the place to have a silver wedding. Oh god, how old would he be then?

He was shaken from his thoughts by someone next to him, shoving him to the side unceremoniously to order a drink. Marc gave the guy a cold stare and a raised eyebrow, and waited until he had apologised before taking his order.

Sebastian caught Kurt as he was pushed sideways and glared at the culprit.

"Are you okay?" he asked, keeping his hands on Kurt until he was sure.

"I'm fine," Kurt mumbled, covering Sebastian's hand with his and giving it a soft squeeze to show he could let go. He had had such a good day, he didn't want to make a fuss over someone's rudeness. Maybe they had been hogging the bartender's attention a bit too much anyway. He checked his watch.

"Let's just dance some more, I shouldn't get home too late. I have Vogue in the morning."

Sebastian nodded. He took a sip of his drink before leaning over and placing it behind the bar. He took Kurt’s empty glass and did the same. Marc noticed and nodded at Sebastian, swiftly moving the glasses out of the way.

Sebastian took Kurt’s hand again and hopped down from his stool, leading the way back out into the crowd. Sometimes, all you could do was dance like there was no tomorrow.
"They say life is made up of moments", Sebastian thought to himself. "If that is true then I want this one to never end."

Sebastian looked around the tall, marbled lobby of the Condé Nast building, feeling a little intimidated but impressed.

He was meeting Kurt for lunch and they’d agreed to meet at Vogue as Kurt was working that day. Unfortunately, Kurt was running a little late. He’d texted Sebastian, telling him to head up to the sixteenth floor where the website design and development offices lived. The only downside to that was that the security guard at the main desk was refusing to let him go up.

"I’m sorry young man, but without an appointment I can’t allow you access,” the man said to Sebastian, glaring at him through a pair of cheap framed glasses.

"But I told you, I’m meeting a friend for lunch and he told me to go on up! He works with Isabelle Wright. Can’t you just ring up and get them to clear me? Please,” Sebastian said frustrated.

The security guard sighed audibly and picked up the phone, dialled an extension number on the keypad and held the handset up to his ear.

"Hi yes, I have a young man down here saying he has authorisation to come up there…” He gave Sebastian a very obvious once-over, as if matching him to the description he was getting from the other side. “Yeah that sounds about right...yep...ok...sure thing.” The guard hung up the phone and looked at Sebastian condescendingly for a minute before grudgingly placing a visitors badge on the counter.

"Wear this at all times and return it to the desk before you leave the building.”

Sebastian took the badge and attached it to the pocket in his shirt. "Thanks,” he said brightly. "You have a good day now."

He chuckled at the look on the man’s face before heading off to the elevators. There was no reason to let a random asshole with delusions of grandeur spoil his lunch with Kurt.

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"Kurt, did you make those prints yet?"

"Are we on at 14:00 or 15:00 with Florence, could you check?"

"Shoot, I need someone to run to 10th and pick up the proof copies- Kurt?"

"Oh my god, Kurt, I'm glad you're back, the phone wouldn't stop ringing and I'm so swamped, I just know it's Tristan again and I can't deal with him right now..."
Kurt's head was spinning. He hadn't stopped all morning. He hadn't expected it to be so busy today. He checked his watch. It was already fifteen past one and security had just sent Sebastian up. He groaned. He was really hungry and needed a break, but it didn't look like he'd be able to get out soon. The phone rang again.

"Tristan...yes, it's Kurt again. No, Isabelle is still busy..."

He saw the elevator open and smiled, winking at Sebastian from behind his desk.

"What? Oh, yes, I'm listening!" he reassured Tristan as he watched his friend approach.

"Hmm-hmmm. Yes...I know it's urgent." He looked at Sebastian and grinned, rolling his eyes.

"Tristan, babe, she's in a meeting, what can I do?" Kurt turned in his chair and looked through the glass wall of Isabelle's office. His boss was on the phone, cradling it between her face and her shoulder. She was gesturing wildly, pointing at an opened magazine on her desk. The sushi she had made Kurt order for lunch stood unopened next to her breakfast bag from Starbucks. Kurt's stomach growled. To distract himself, he looked at Sebastian and put a slim finger on his lips. Then, he switched his call on speaker.

"I'm freaking out here, Kurt, the upper office is gonna kill me and then make me work overtime from my coffin, I really need Isabelle to give us the go-ahead on the designs or I can just go ahead and pick out my very last suit in this world."

"Hmmm, I hear slim ties are in for funerals this season," Kurt joked.

Tristan just groaned.

"I have to go," Kurt said. "I'll tell her to call you back."

"You know she won't, don't hang up, Kurt, please-"

"Slim ties, Tristan. Take care!"

He hung up and looked at Sebastian. "He'll call again in half an hour at the latest," he commented with a shrug. "Hey."

"Hi," Sebastian said with a grin, sitting on the corner of Kurt's desk. "Busy day?"

Kurt rolled his eyes and sighed. "I had no idea! I'm sorry. If I had known hell was gonna break loose today I would have planned our lunch some other day." He saw Sebastian's expression and quickly added: "I still want to go! I'm so hungry... I just don't know when I can slip out... would you mind waiting a little longer?"

"Not at all. Do your thing."

Kurt smiled gratefully and rose from his seat. He put his telephone headset down and reached for a stack of papers. "Can I--? You're kind of on top--" he started, and Sebastian obligingly lifted his hip so Kurt could pull the paper free. "Thanks." He nodded at the headset. "If a San Francisco number calls, it's Tristan. Sweet-talk him till I get back."

He straightened his back, took a deep breath, and went into Isabelle's office. She was talking loudly on the phone in rapid Italian.

Isabelle's eyes shot up and she fired a few words at him, sounding agitated. Kurt put his hands up,
shrugging apologetically. He had no idea what she was saying.

Isabelle exchanged a few more words with the other side of the line, and then hung up, flinging her phone on her desk. "Oh my god, Kurt, what took you?" Isabelle said, rubbing her hands over her face and at the last moment remembering to switch back to English.

"Tristan," Kurt replied smoothly. "I'm expecting a proposal any day now. I mean, he calls me every ten minutes of the day, so..."

Isabelle sighed. "I'm sorry. I know he's been very pushy." She glanced out to Kurt's desk and paled. "Oh no, one of the models is already here and I am not even done with the colour board!" she groaned.

Kurt looked over his shoulder. "Oh, he's not a model-" he started.

"No, he's Kurt's friend," Chase commented, walking in. "Likes walks in the park and puppies. Right, Kurt?"

Kurt blushed heavily. Isabelle made a 'wow' face at him and gave him a clear look that demanded all the details later. "We were actually hoping to go to lunch... um... if you can spare me?" he tried.

Isabelle took one more look at Sebastian and nodded. "Yes. Of course. Go! Chase can help me. Kurt, give him the copies."

"What?!" Chase protested, but took Kurt's papers anyway. "Alright, go on," he muttered. "But you owe me one."

"I'll set you up with Tristan if you want," Kurt joked, winking at him. He hurried back to Sebastian.

"Let's go before she changes her mind," he whispered.

Sebastian grinned and got up from Kurt's desk.

It was nice to see Kurt in his own environment. They'd spent a lot of time together over the last few months, particularly recently, but it had always been either on mutual ground like the park or out and around the city, or in Sebastian’s world. To finally see Kurt in his felt like a real honour to Sebastian.

Kurt was at ease here, surrounded by people like himself, where what he thought and said mattered. People relied on him and trusted him.

The way he had handled his boss and the difficult client on the phone had impressed Sebastian a lot.

"So, you talk about me at work huh?" he teased with a grin.

Kurt blushed. "Chase caught me looking at your instagram at work," he confessed. "He thinks you're cute, though."

Sebastian grinned and puffed out his chest a little. "Well, I am pretty hot." He winked. "Glad some people notice."

"He said cute, not hot," Kurt teased. "I think I am more his type." He grinned. Chase had been making subtle passes at him since he started working here, but it never crossed the line. He knew Kurt was engaged and didn't force him into any awkward interactions. He just occasionally asked him out for coffee or lunch, like he was testing the waters; and always accepted Kurt's rejection gracefully. By now, Kurt suspected it had become a habit more than actual interest, but it made him
feel pretty good anyway.

"Semantics, babe." Sebastian winked.

Kurt reached for his summer jacket and was about to lead Sebastian out, when Isabelle came out of her office carrying a pink folder. She was looking a little anxious.

"Kurt, I know you're off for lunch, but could you maybe do me a huge favour on the way back? I told Gabrielle I would pick up samples for this spread but there's no way I'm gonna make it now and I need them by four."

Kurt frowned. "That's on Madison avenue!" It would take them at least half an hour on foot, if not 40 minutes.

"I know, I'm sorry...but you can take a cab? Please, Kurt, I can't send anyone else. You always know exactly what I need."

Kurt bit the inside of his lip and shrugged. He nodded at the folder. "Show me."

Isabelle squeaked a little and looked so relieved Kurt already knew he was going to do it. She showed him a few drawings and he asked questions; materials, exact shades. Isabelle confessed that she didn't know yet, all she had was a general mood and she’d hoped seeing the fabrics would do the rest.

"So will you do it? Please?" she asked.

The phone rang. Kurt smirked. "Only if you talk to Tristan."

Isabelle made a pained little noise. "Okay," she said softly. "Put him through. And thank you." She squeezed his arm softly and hurried back to her office.

Sebastian watched as Kurt handled his boss; reassuring her, making suggestions...he was completely in his element and it left Sebastian a little star struck.

Kurt picked up the phone. "Tristan! Yes, she's available. I know...I said I'm holding her sushi hostage until she makes time for you." The man on the other side said something, and Kurt laughed, his voice low and throaty. "Maybe we will someday. Don't give up hope," he replied, still chuckling. "I'm putting you through. Byyyyyee..."

He pressed a button on his phone system and hung up. "You know, normally I love days like this. At first it all seems impossible and then at the end of the day, when it all fits into place..." He smiled. "But today I just wanted it to get lunch time."

Sebastian smiled at Kurt and slid his sunglasses down over his eyes. "Well then we should hurry," he said with a grin. "Before she comes back out and asks you to do something else."

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"You know, it’s pretty impressive," Sebastian said ten minutes later, as they finally walked out into the sun. "You really fit in up there, and they all clearly value your work and opinion."

Kurt shrugged, but it was clear he was very pleased. "I always said I'd go and work at Vogue," he said. "Maybe not as a PA, but it's a start. And it has a lot of benefits, not just for my résumé. I've already learned loads, met people, seen processes from the inside..." He smiled. "Isabelle seems chaotic, but she's a brilliant designer. So is Chase."
They crossed the street, and Kurt lead them to a Thai restaurant he had picked from his tourist guide. "I just wish I could make a living off of it. I mean, I get expenses, like when I go on errands or need to take a cab, but they have zero budget for me."

"Have you ever thought about making it into a career?" Sebastian asked. He had no doubt that Kurt would make it big in the performing arts, but he seemed just as at home at Vogue as he did on a stage.

"I'm kind of hoping I can stay on until I'm done at NYADA; then I have a second option, you know? Hopefully in a paid position by then, though. I don't want to work at the diner forever...But I can imagine staying on at Vogue while I audition for parts." He smiled. "Someday people might be wearing something with my brand on it."

He opened the door to let Sebastian through. Sebastian walked in, feeling a little light.

"Hi, I have a reservation for two under Hummel, please?" Kurt said to the young mâitre’d.

Sebastian felt a flutter in his chest at the reservation and hid his grin by walking behind Kurt to their table.

"I think, if you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything Kurt...the world is your oyster," he said as they sat down.

"I'll be sure to remind everyone you said it first at the award ceremonies," Kurt joked, feeling a little glow-y.

They shared a light meal, smalltalk and smiles. Despite his hectic morning, Kurt felt completely relaxed, and because it was lovely weather, they went to see Isabelle's fabric import source on foot. Sebastian once again served as Kurt's personal tour guide as they passed landmarks, and Kurt just enjoyed being in the sun in good company. They passed a small boutique and Kurt bought a new pair of sunglasses, claiming he needed them for his bright future.

When they reached Gabrielle, Kurt was greeted with controlled enthusiasm.

"Isabelle was supposed to come," the beautifully styled shopkeeper said. They had met at the loft, at Kurt and Rachel’s Thanksgiving KiKi, but that was almost a year ago.

"She asked me to come in her stead," Kurt said self-assuredly, pulling Isabelle's pink file from under his arm.

"She tell you what she wanted?" Gabrielle reached for the file. Small rhinestones on their long fingernails glittered.

"The mood, yes," Kurt said, unfazed. "Look, I'd like to see any bold, large patterned damask you have, or printed velveteen if we have to go there. I don't care about the colours for now, just show me what you've got and we'll take it from there."

Gabrielle looked a little taken aback, but then a small smile crept onto their lips. "Yes, sir. Follow me, if you will." They glanced at Sebastian from under heavy false eyelashes, and swayed to a large table with rolls of fabric stacked underneath.

Kurt looked at the rolls and nodded, pointing at a few to see them rolled out onto the table for a few yards. He ran his hands over them, feeling the weave. "Do you have matching silks?"

Slowly but surely, Gabrielle came out of their shell and started making suggestions of their own,
which Kurt considered without losing the upper hand. He knew what he wanted, and what he didn't want.

"Here, this might work-" he mumbled, taking up one of the rolls of silk lining and stepping over to Sebastian. "Arm, please," he commanded in French, and as Sebastian hesitantly stuck it out, he draped the end over Sebastian's shoulder, keeping the roll in his hand. The shopkeeper grinned and layered it with the other fabrics Kurt had picked to see how it looked.

Sebastian stood dutifully still, his arms outstretched as Kurt and Gabrielle draped different fabrics over him, comparing the effects the different combinations made.

Kurt seemed to know exactly what to say and choose and over time Gabrielle listened to him and followed his example.

Once again Sebastian was left in complete awe of Kurt. Was there anything he couldn't do?

"Okay, I think we got it," Kurt said finally, checking his watch. They might need to take a cab back to get the samples to Isabelle on time. "I'll take all of those- no...not the blue. But the rest, and someone will be in touch about our order within the next thirty-six hours."

He sighed. "Probably me." He looked at Sebastian. "I was only gonna come in today but I have a feeling Isabelle might call on me tomorrow as well. I still wanna do the arthouse film thing with you, though. I'll work around it," he promised.

Sebastian smiled at him and nodded. "No problem. If you need to work then we can sort something else out."

And he meant it, he could see how important this was to Kurt and how good he was at what he did.

"If she's not paying me, I get to choose when I work," Kurt said, winking at Sebastian. "I promised I'd hang out with you, so I will. Besides," he added, nodding at the fabric samples, "this was the fun bit. What awaits me after this is just millions of meetings before anything actually moves ahead."

He took the samples from Gabrielle and left his business card. Not that the shop didn't have his number; but he didn't get the cards for nothing and got a little kick out of handing them out.

Sebastian beamed at him, held up a hand in farewell to Gabrielle and moved to open the door for Kurt who was carrying the samples.

"Bas, what does deuil mean?" Kurt asked, forming his lips around the unfamiliar word he had come across in the book he was reading.

They'd been lounging in Sebastian's apartment since their return from the flea market, and Kurt had picked up one of Sebastian's French novels. It wasn't an easy read, but Kurt liked reading it aloud in his head and letting the words flow. Every now and then, he'd ask Sebastian to help him deconstruct a sentence or translate a word. He felt a little bad disturbing him in his own reading, but at the same time, it was just so nice to have someone help him without once making him feel bad for not knowing something.

Sebastian looked up from his book and smiled at Kurt. "Depends on the context but generally it means bereavement or mourning. Deuil."

He could tell Kurt felt like he was bothering Sebastian whenever he asked for help with a word, but Sebastian didn't mind in the slightest. It felt nice to just sit around reading together, like they'd been
"Deuil," Kurt repeated dutifully, testing it. "Okay, yes, that makes sense. Thanks." He went back to his book, but looked up again a moment later. Sebastian was still looking at him. Kurt smiled.

"I'm ok," he said, not really sure how to interpret his friend's look. "It's not a sad scene. At least, I don't think it is." He chuckled a little. "It's been a long time since I read more than the back of a bottle of wine in French."

Sebastian blushed. He hadn’t realise he’d been staring so hard.

"I like that you can read and speak French...and I really don’t mind helping if you get stuck."


"Pretty good, bit of a slow start but it’s supposed to pick up."

Kurt smirked. "It'd be faster if I shut up, huh?"

He leaned back on the couch. Rays of sun were coming in through the window and he closed his eyes, soaking it up. If only it could be summer forever.

Sebastian looked up at him over the top of his book. Kurt looked so serene and at ease. The sun cast an almost ethereal glow around him.

Sebastian wished he could take a picture to freeze this moment forever.

It was completely quiet in the apartment. Kurt could hear the bustle of the city outside, but he hadn't heard Sebastian turn a page for a while. As he opened his eyes and turned his head, his suspicions were confirmed. Sebastian was looking at him again. Kurt looked back, committing the view to his memory. He smiled a little, not wanting to ruin the moment with words.

Sebastian returned Kurt’s smile softly and held his gaze, unable to look away.

They say life is made up of moments, Sebastian thought to himself. If that is true then I want this one to never end.
B Day is finally upon them and Kurt and Sebastian share a final meal together to end their summer on a high.

Sebastian's music/song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxZQAk62JjU

Other music: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y3dsAY_a_I ----
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX1xWrxFwxE

Kurt had just finished setting the table when the doorbell rang. His eyes swept over the room, checking for last minute decor changes, and upon finding nothing that needed to be straightened or moved, came to rest on himself in the mirror by the door. He smiled.

He had stayed up late to alter the cut of a lace-up vest he had found on a flea market with Alice and Sebastian earlier that week, he had aired it out all day and put it on now to show his friend. When he had told him about the changes, it was clear from Sebastian's expression he couldn't imagine how a vest two sizes too big could be altered to fit Kurt's frame. But the fabric had been in good shape and Kurt knew he could make it work, so he did. It had a large floral embroidery on the front, and he was quite proud that he had worked around it, keeping it intact in the new cut.

It also pleased him that he looked damn sharp in it.

Kurt opened the door and smiled. His friend looked pretty damn sharp as well. Kurt hadn't seen Sebastian's jacket before, or the slim-fitting shirt beneath it. Combining them with the ochre brown slacks Kurt had seen him wear a lot in his spare time, he looked casual and smart at the same time. Though Kurt wouldn't have minded it Sebastian had showed up in his favourite sweater, he was flattered that Sebastian had taken the time to wear something special.

Sebastian grinned at Kurt and let his eyes sweep over his body. He had been dubious when Kurt had explained his plans for the vest he bought but seeing it on him now, Sebastian came to the conclusion that he should never second guess Kurt again.

He looked amazing.

Sebastian was cradling a paper bag with a bottle neck sticking out. Kurt smirked.

"Mr Smythe," he chided, "Have you been taking your false ID out for a spin again?"

Sebastian blushed a little at Kurt’s question. "No...Alex bought it. I couldn’t turn up empty-handed." He handed Kurt the bag with the bottle of red.
"You didn't have to," Kurt said, pulling the bottle from the bag to look at the label. French - of course. "But thank you. We should open it so it can breathe while we cook."

“I, uh, also brought you this,” Sebastian said, taking a small paperback out of his pocket. “Since you said you wanted to read more of those.” It was one of his French novels.

Kurt cocked his head. “Aw, Bas, that’s so sweet,” he said, taking it in his free hand and glancing at the back blurb. Then he sighed and held it out again. “I’m afraid it’d just lie around here forever, though. I don’t think I’ll have the time to read it.”

Sebastian frowned, a little disappointed, but he brushed it off with a shrug and a smile. “No problem, it was just a whim I had.” He slid the book back into his pocket, stepping into the apartment.

Kurt stepped aside to let Sebastian in, and walked over to the kitchen to take out a decanter.

"I had some time this afternoon so I went over to the markets to pick up some fresh vegetables," he said conversationally, rummaging in a drawer for the bottle opener. "I figured maybe a stir-fry dish?"

“Stir-fry sounds good!” Sebastian said taking off his jacket and hanging it up on the coat stand. He walked over to join Kurt in the kitchen.

Kurt looked at the bags on the kitchen counter. He may have gone a little overboard with his shopping, but Blaine was coming home tomorrow and he wanted to take the chance to start fresh - literally. If he already had all the ingredients, they’d be less tempted to order junk food, so he had made sure there’d be plenty left over to last the weekend. He wondered what kind of food Blaine had eaten in L.A. Somehow he couldn't imagine Cooper had take-out pizza every day. Hollywood was probably like NYADA in that way.

He found the opener and screwed it into the cork. A real cork bottle - it had been a while. It reminded Kurt of the time he had just moved to New York. Back when he lived with Rachel at the loft, with her dads picking up half the bills and sending her care-packages from home, they’d get the real stuff now and then.

"Urgh," he mumbled, pulling at the handle. "I hate this opener. We should really invest in one of those that pulls it out by itself."

Sebastian bit his lip. We... he thought, knowing that Kurt was referring to him and Blaine. He tried not to let it sting. He knew that he and Kurt were just friends and he liked it that way, but he’d gotten so used to it being them over the last two weeks that he couldn’t help but feel a little melancholic at the loss of that.

But instead of wallowing, he decided to make the most of their last night. To start, he could tease Kurt.

“Americans,” he said in French with a grin. “Always blaming their tools instead of themselves.” He took the bottle and corkscrew off Kurt and twisted it into the soft cork. He wiggled it around gently and with a light pop, the cork was released from the glass. He handed the bottle to Kurt with a grin and a wink.

“It's all in the wrist.”

Kurt laughed, shaking his head. He’d miss this; the two of them, their talks, the innuendo. The French.

Stop acting like you’ll never see him again, Kurt berated himself. You will still be friends.
Yet somehow he knew it would be different. It had to be. To make his engagement work, he needed to focus on Blaine.

Kurt took the bottle and poured it into the decanter, setting it on the dinner table. They’d have to finish it tonight, but that shouldn’t be a problem between the two of them.

"Do you want to help?" he asked, nodding at the bags.

"Sure." Sebastian wandered over to the kitchen counter and looked in the bags. "I know a good recipe for a sauce that uses some of the wine, it would go great with the chicken." He looked up at Kurt with a smile.

"Sounds good," Kurt said, taking a knee-length black apron from a hook by the fridge and wrapping it around himself. "I'll put on some tunes and then start on the chicken."

Kurt switched on the small kitchen radio and grabbed a knife from the block. He smiled. A song by Michael Jackson came on. It reminded him of singing Human Nature at Callbacks. That had been a good night.

Alice had joined them, and much to his luck, they hadn’t run into anyone he knew from NYADA there - at least, no one prone to talking to Blaine about it.

They had run into Brody though. It had been good to catch up. Kurt hadn’t seen him around much since Ms July fired him as her PA, but he was in his last year now and he had come over for a chat after he’d heard Kurt sing.

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"Hey Kurt," Brody said, sliding into the free seat at Kurt’s table. Kurt sat with two people he didn’t know, a tall good-looking guy and a petite girl with long, wavy blonde hair. "That song was amazing!"

"Brody! Oh my god! It’s so nice to see you!" Kurt let out enthusiastically. He was still on his performance high and despite everything that had happened, he liked Brody and felt bad for the way Rachel (and the others) had treated and then shunned him.

He turned to Alice and Sebastian to introduce them to each other. "Alice, Sebastian; this is Brody, we go way back. He used to walk around the loft naked all the time."

Brody chuckled. "Always nice to hear I managed to make a lasting impression."

"On my furniture, yeah," Kurt quipped. "I had to dry-clean the upholstery of my vintage chairs. I was going to send you the bill."

"Broke men pay no bills," Brody joked. "I would have had to work it off." He winked, and Kurt blushed on cue.

Alice was looking from one to the other with wide eyes.

"He dated Rachel for a while," Kurt quickly explained, his throat suddenly a little dry.

Brody shook hands with Kurt’s friends. "So, Kurt, this the new boyfriend? Or are you still testing the waters? I saw you making eyes at that blond guy over there...didn’t he use to go to NYADA too?"

Sebastian had watched the exchange between the new guy and Kurt with growing amusement.
Brody was hot...super hot, and there was a pleasant tilt to his mouth when he talked.

"I'm Sebastian," he said holding out his hand across the table. "Not the boyfriend! We just know each other from back in Ohio. This is Alice."

"Okay Not-The-Boyfriend, got it," Brody said, winking at him before smiling pleasantly at Alice. "Hi there."

Alice, who had been surveying Sebastian for a hint of pain as he spoke, was relieved when her friend seemed okay. She turned to Brody with a bright smile and held out her hand. "Hi."

Kurt watched him charm them both equally; Brody was about the least homophobic straight guy he knew.

Alice and Brody held each other's gaze for a moment before Brody broke the connection to look at Kurt. "Well, no matter who you pick, any of them will do over your ex, right? I mean, I only saw him one or two times, but I've heard plenty from Rach-...

Sebastian felt Kurt freeze next to him as Brody started talking about Blaine. While it amused Sebastian to hear that Brody wasn't on Team Blaine, it was creating an atmosphere that they were desperately trying to avoid.

"Actually, Blaine and I are engaged now," Kurt said a little tersely, coming down from his high quickly.

Brody blinked and looked at the other two for confirmation. Alice nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Uh, alright," Brody backpaddled. "I'm sorry, I just assumed- well, because of the way you broke up...I mean, that Thanksgiving at your place, you were so-" He stopped himself, clearly realising he was only making it worse.

Kurt put on a smile. "I was," he confirmed, "and now I'm not. We do ok."

Brody nodded. "Well...I know we haven't seen each other for a while, but if he gives you any trouble again, let me know and I'll round up the boys."

Kurt's smile became a little more genuine. "Thanks."

"So, any of you here to sing?" Brody asked, clearly hoping to put the awkwardness behind them.

Sebastian felt Kurt relax next to him as Brody backed off and he nudged his friend's shoulder imperceptibly. He felt Kurt nudge him back and smiled.

"I already signed up...my piano skills might be a bit rusty but I thought I'd give it a go. Unless the offer of you playing for me is still there?" Sebastian added to Kurt.

"Of course, always. But-" Kurt broke off and turned to face him, his eyebrows raised. It had only just registered what Sebastian had said. "You play the piano?"

Sebastian blushed. "Yeah...and the violin...I was forced into lessons growing up. I haven't played either since moving to America, but I think I remember how."

He didn't think he'd ever forget. His instructor hadn't been the nicest of people and would rap his knuckles every time he messed up. It was definitely an effective motivation to learn quickly.

"He's the perfect prince," Alice teased, putting her hand on Sebastian's thigh and squeezing. "Silver-
spoon fed, dexterous-" she wriggled her fingers. "bilingual..." She let out a dramatic sigh. "Just not bisexual. What's a girl to do?"

"Keep looking," Brody replied promptly, winking at her.

Kurt vaguely noticed the sparks between the two of them, but he was mostly looking at Sebastian. The piano and the violin? "We should...play, sometime," he said.

Sebastian grinned. "I'd like that," he said softly.

Just then, his name was called and he smiled at his friends. "Maybe you should wait till I’m done before you decide if you want to collaborate in the future," he added with a wink.

"Ohh," Brody said, moving his bar stool around to Alice's side to get a better view at the stage. "What's he gonna sing?"

"No idea," Kurt replied, watching as Sebastian got up to Pascal, exchanged a few words, nodded and then sat down at the piano. "He didn't tell us."

Pascal motioned for the audience to quiet down, and Sebastian started playing. At first, he played a few runs, as if he was testing if his fingers still remembered how. He paused briefly, then started into the melody, and a sigh went through the audience. It was a Callbacks favourite.

Sebastian felt the rumble of the sigh from the audience and glanced around the room. Everyone was smiling softly and it relaxed him. He closed his eyes and felt the music flow through him as he started to sing.

"It’s nine o’clock on a Saturday, the regular crowd shuffles in,
There’s an old man sitting next to me, making love to his tonic and gin."

He opened his eyes and glanced around the room. A few people caught his eye and he grinned at them, winking at a couple.

"He said; son can you play me a memory, I’m not really sure how it goes.
But it’s sad and it’s sweet and I knew it complete, when I wore a younger man's clothes...oh la la di di dah..."

Kurt couldn’t decide whether to close his eyes and listen to his voice, or stare at Sebastian's hands flying over the keys.

Very softly, he started singing along- like almost everyone else was.

Next to him, Alice was watching Brody. He was mouthing the lyrics as well.

Sebastian smiled as the crowd sang along. He caught Kurt’s eye and grinned at him. He was singing too.

"And the waitress is practicing politics, as the business man slowly gets stoned.
Yes they’re sharing a drink they call loneliness, but it’s better than drinking alone."

Alice looked at him at that line and he smiled at her. He hadn’t been lonely in a long time, and it was because of her. She had been the light that pulled him from the dark. Without her, none of things that had happened to him in the past year would have.
"Sing us a song, you’re the piano man, sing us a song tonight, well we’re all in the mood for a melody and you’ve got us feeling alright."

His fingers moved across the keys as if he'd only just played yesterday. He had forgotten the way playing made him feel.

He closed his eyes as he sung out the last verse in a low register.

"It’s a pretty good crowd for a Saturday and the manager gives me a smile, cause he knows that it’s me, they’ve been coming to see to forget about life for a while."

And wasn’t that why they all sung? Because for a few minutes when they were singing, they could pretend that they were somewhere else.

He finished the song with a gently stroke of the keys and blushed a little as the room applauded. He stood up and nodded his head in a bow before making his way back to the table and slid back onto his stool next to Kurt.

Kurt smiled at him. "Rusty, huh?" he said fondly. "That didn’t sound rusty to me."

"That was great!" Brody agreed. "You fit right in, here."

"What about me?" Alice asked coyly. "Do I fit in here?"

"Of course," Brody said. "Though I can think of an even better place where you’d fit in..." He leaned over and whispered something in her ear. Alice covered her mouth with her hand and giggled, nudging Brody in the side with her elbow.

Kurt exchanged a look with Sebastian and smirked. He’d never seen Alice like this. It was cute, and she could do a lot worse than Brody.

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"Do you think Alice will see Brody again?" Kurt asked, setting down his knife on the cutting board. "He’s a good guy, really."

Sebastian grinned. "They’ve seen each other three times this week, and they’re going out again tonight." He was happy for his friend. She deserved to be happy and Brody seemed like a nice guy. The fact that he disliked Blaine also helped raise Sebastian’s opinion of him.

Kurt gasped. "Wow, way to go, Alice..."

He washed his hands and dried them on his apron. "Though I’m not sure why I’m surprised. The look on her face when he sang that Spanish song really spoke volumes." He grinned as he thought about it.

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"So... Rachel’s ex, huh? Is that problematic?" Alice asked, keeping her eyes fixed on Brody. He was up on the stage singing Enrique Iglesias’ Hero in Spanish while Pascal played the piano. A girl with very obvious heart eyes had joined them on stage with a maraca.

"For me? Or for him?" Kurt asked. "I don’t mind, I rarely see Rachel as it is. And I’m pretty sure Brody doesn’t exactly feel nostalgic about her either."

He saw her frown and bit his lip. It was not his story to tell. If Brody wanted her to know about his
past, he ought to tell her.

"It’s wasn’t a pretty break-up," he said simply. "Her ex, my brother, drove up and got involved..." He shook his head. "We lost touch for a bit after that, because I was still Rachel’s roommate back then. But we see each other at NYADA in passing, and he’s really a nice guy."

"And damn hot," Alice added.

"Yes, indeed," Kurt agreed. "All of him," he added with a cheeky wink.

"Did he really walk around your apartment naked?" Alice asked slightly breathless. Sebastian laughed and leaned across Kurt to tease his friend. "Careful Alice, you’re drooling."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "All the time. He’s not modest. At first I didn’t mind, because...hello... But, yeah, it is kind of distracting when you’re trying study or have breakfast..."

"And is he..." she held up her hands front of her with a large space between. "You know?"

Kurt smirked. "It would be against the Code of Gentlemen to tell you that," he said. "And you know size doesn’t matter, right?"

He looked at Sebastian for back-up.

Sebastian raised his eyebrows. “In theory I guess...but in my experience the bigger the better,” he said with a wink.

"Depends on where it’s going," Kurt chipped in, though it was with a poker face. The topic made him a little uncomfortable.

"Doesn’t matter where it goes, with the right prep it can feel like heaven..." Sebastian said, sipping his drink. "But that’s just me."

Alice raised an eyebrow. "Actually, I’m gonna agree with Kurt here, because if I’m going down-"

"Brody’s coming back," Kurt interrupted, glad for the chance to stop discussing it. Sometimes, when Alice and Sebastian got started about sex, it was almost like talking to Santana if she were twins.

_Doesn’t matter where it goes._ Well, that cleared _that_ up, Kurt supposed. He had occasionally wondered, secretly. He probably should have guessed that his friend was down for anything, though every now and then he had imagined Sebastian would be more like Blaine. Maybe that was just because, porn aside, it was his only point of reference.

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Kurt glanced at Sebastian from the side. He was slicing vegetables with a speed that would have less experienced people in the kitchen lose a finger. He blushed. He shouldn’t be thinking about his friend in that way at all - or any guy that wasn’t Blaine.

Sebastian finished slicing the vegetables and set them aside. "Do you have a wok?" he asked Kurt.

"Bottom cupboard to the right of the oven," Kurt replied.

Sebastian bent down and took it out of the specified place, setting it down on the hob. He plucked a couple of garlic cloves from the bulbs hanging next to the stove. He removed the shell and crushed them, scooping the pulp into the wok along with an onion he’d sliced earlier.
"How’s the chicken?" he asked, as he drizzled some extra virgin olive oil into the pan.

"Ready to go," Kurt said, handing him the cutting board. It was unusual for him to relinquish control over the kitchen, but Sebastian seemed to know what he was doing.

"Shall we try the wine you brought?" Kurt suggested, taking two glasses from the cupboard. He winced as he saw how dusty they were, and ran them under the tap.

Sebastian took the wooden board from Kurt and slid the chicken easily into the pan.

"It’s a good one, we used to have it back home all the time." He moved the chicken around the pan. "Sorry...I’ve kinda just taken over your kitchen..." he said blushing.

Kurt smiled. "I don’t mind," he said, and found that he really didn’t. Sebastian wasn’t creating chaos or getting oil all over things, and he had already washed up in between. Maybe one day, Kurt could teach Blaine how to cook like that, instead of piling everything he used up in large, greasy stacks, and leaving them like that.

Thinking of the dishes, Kurt realised he couldn’t let the other wine glasses sit dusty in the shelf. Not only was it gross- it would look more than a little suspicious if two of them were sparkly clean next week. He sighed and set himself to the task. The wine could breathe a little longer.

"I’ll get it in a minute," he said, holding up a dusty glass to show Sebastian.

"We don’t get company very often," he said by means of explanation.

Sebastian glanced at the glasses and chuckled.

Once the chicken was seared, he grabbed the tray with the vegetables on it and slid them into the pan, adding a few spices.

Kurt poured two glasses of wine and waited until Sebastian had a hand free to take one.

"To summer break," he said, smiling and holding up his glass.

He wished it didn’t feel so finite.

"It’s been great," Sebastian said, clinking his glass against Kurt’s.

He sipped the wine and hummed happily, trying not to think too hard at how, after tomorrow, things would go back to how they were before.

"It has," Kurt agreed. Coney Island, walks in the park, museums, flea markets, dinners, bowling, dancing, singing...Kurt felt like he had caught up on a year of socialising in two weeks.

The wine was delicious, and Kurt almost felt a bit sorry for adding some to their food.

"And thank you...for giving me a second chance," Sebastiane added quietly.

"You gave me a second chance too, though," Kurt reminded him. "And I got not just one but three friends out of it. You only got one. So I think I should be the grateful one here."

Sebastian grinned and bumped his shoulder against Kurt’s.

"This is just about done," he said turning off the heat.
"I love this," Kurt said blissfully, after they had tucked in. "I really need to get back to cooking with fresh ingredients. It's so typical. Back in Ohio, I had all the time in the world but no decent markets anywhere, and here I have access to the world's greatest foods and I just don't have the time to go out and get some."

Before Sebastian could say anything, Kurt waved it off. "I know, I know, it's no excuse. I could, if I really wanted to, but most of the time there'll be left-over pizza in the fridge and my resolve just...melts away."

He took a large sip of his wine as if it would wash away the imaginary taste of cold congealed cheese.

"Cold pizza is good for a hangover...but other than that..." Sebastian said pulling a face.

He sipped his wine too, watching Kurt, wondering how on Earth someone as amazing as him was with someone like Blaine. They said opposites attract, but Kurt and Blaine seemed so different that it baffled him. Guess you don’t know what goes on behind closed doors.

Then something occurred to him. “Oh, I have Tuesday night off, and there’s a new Andy Warhol exhibition. I know you didn’t get to see the special anniversary one so I thought maybe we could go? We could grab something to eat before.”

Butterflies briefly fluttered in Kurt’s stomach, before he reminded himself of his resolutions. “I...don’t know,” he started carefully. “I have the morning shift at the diner before class. Might be a bit much. And I don’t know what Blaine has planned, I’d have to check…”

“But it’s a Tuesday…”

Kurt smiled thinly. “I know, but…”

Sebastian could see the troubled expression on Kurt’s face as he tried to explain so he relented. “It’s okay,” Sebastian said, cutting him off. “Maybe another time.”

“Yes.” Kurt could tell Sebastian was disappointed. He felt torn. Part of him wanted to take back what he had said. Andy Warhol? With Sebastian? Of course he wanted that! But he didn’t think it would be fair to Blaine to plan things into the first week he was back, especially not something he knew Blaine was also interested in. If he found out…

He took another bite of his food, noticing that the silence between them felt a little more awkward than usual.

Sebastian stabbed the final bit of chicken on his plate. First the book, now the exhibition. Was this a sign of things to come? Kurt had had his ‘Summer Fling’ and was now going to slip back into ‘real life’ as if nothing had happened?

Kurt finished eating, sighed and sat back, draining his glass. He noticed Sebastian had finished as well. "Could you pour us another, Mr Martini? I'll get desert."

He rose from his seat and walked to the kitchen.

Sebastian rose too, clearing the plates away into the sink. He walked back to the table and re-filled their glasses before sitting back down. He was disappointed, but decided to try and let it go. He didn’t want to end the summer on a downer. If tonight was be their last chance to hang out for a
while, he wanted to make the most of it.

Before Sebastian arrived, Kurt had prepared a cheese and fruit plate from the French store he had told Sebastian about. He felt a little nervous about it- he got cheese more often with Blaine, but this was different. Sebastian was essentially French. He hoped letting the grocer pick the cheeses was the right decision.

"Okay...we'd best not tell Mr Robesbear about this..."

"Oh my god, Kurt," Sebastian said grinning, bouncing in his chair a little. Letting things go might be easier than he originally thought. Cheese solved everything.

Kurt smiled. He'd been hoping for this reaction. "Mmm, there was a reason we had a light meal. It's all about the balance." He looked around and decided against the dinner table. He walked over to the living space and set the board down on the coffee table instead, picking up his glass on the way. He gave Sebastian a small nod at the couch, and sat down, unbuttoning his vest to make room for all the cheese he planned to eat. It'd be back to the gym and NYADA soon, so he had to make this night count.

Sebastian picked up his glass and the bottle of wine and made his way over to join Kurt on the couch.

"It is, and I’d choose cheese over most things on any day of the week." He set the bottle down next to the cheeseboard.

He knew it was a cliché, the French guy loving cheese. But he couldn’t help it, they were called clichés for a reason.

He put his glass down and sliced a piece of Brie, putting it on a cracker. He bit into it and closed his eyes at the rich taste. "Fuck."

"Is it okay?" Kurt asked superfluously. Sebastian's expression really said it all, but he couldn't help but ask.

“It’s amazing.” Sebastian hummed licking his lips.

"I asked for help picking it out, because I wasn't sure..." Kurt trailed off and just stared at Sebastian for a while. As he opened his eyes again, Kurt quickly sat up and helped himself to some cheese as well.

"Oh, yeah, this is great," he agreed, trying the same one Sebastian had taken. It went well with the wine. Then, Kurt tried one of the other ones. He wrinkled his nose a little at the smell, but knew that sometimes, the taste did make up for it-- sadly, not this time.

Kurt covered his mouth with his hand and forced himself to swallow, closing his eyes tightly until it was gone. "Okay, that one is all yours. Ugh." He glared at the cheese like it had personally betrayed him.

Sebastian laughed at Kurt’s offended expression. "That’s Bleu d’Auvergne, it’s a delicacy." He sliced the cheese and added it to a cracker. "Here, try it with the grapes and have a sip of your wine as well."

Kurt looked at the cracker suspiciously. "I don’t know..." he said. "I don’t see how grapes or grape juice can possibly mask the taste of that."
"Just...try it? Please?" Sebastian asked with a smile, holding the cracker up in front of Kurt.

Kurt took a sip of his wine and tentatively bit into the cracker, taking the cheese and grapes with it. Sebastian looked at him hopefully, eyebrows raised.

Kurt narrowed his eyes, bracing himself as he chewed. The grapes did make it marginally better, but it was still one of the nastiest cheeses he had ever tasted. He didn't want to disappoint his friend, but he knew his face was probably showing everything.

He winced a little as he swallowed, and quickly chased the bite with the last of his wine. "I'm sorry," he offered, clearing his throat. "It's just not for me."

He reached for the decanter and filled his glass again, topping off Sebastian's too.

Sebastian smiled at him. "It's okay." He said popping the remainder of the cheese into his mouth. "More for me."

He looked at the almost empty decanter.

"Wow, we sure got through that!" He chuckled. "Are you trying to get me drunk, Mr Hummel?"

Alcohol was swirling in Kurt's bloodstream, and he gave Sebastian a heavy-lidded look. With a low voice, he asked: "Depends, how far would that get me?"

Sebastian swallowed at Kurt's sultry tone, his eyes widening in shock.

Then, Kurt blinked, killing his own buzz by remembering why he had been pouring so liberally. He looked at the decanter and his smile faded.

"I just thought it would be a shame to have to throw it out..."

Sebastian frowned at the sudden change and let Kurt's words settle over him.

"What do you mean?" he asked confused. A feeling of dread started to creep over him, but he held it back, giving Kurt a chance to explain.

Kurt breathed in to reply, then let it out in a sigh.

"It's...a bit too fancy for cooking, and with Blaine coming back, I just..." He paused. "I don't feel like explaining I was entertaining gentleman callers," he finished with a grin, giving his voice his best Southern belle lilt.

Sebastian bit his lip and clutched his wine glass, the disappointment and hurt from earlier washing back over him.

"Oh..." He took a sip and set the glass down on the table. He should have expected this. He knew that Blaine didn’t know about him or his friendship with Kurt. They had discussed it at great lengths on the beach at Coney Island. He understood.

But at the same time, he didn’t.

Sebastian had gotten to know Kurt well over the last few months. He was kind and funny and sexy. He was talented and courageous and fiercely loyal. Anyone would be lucky to have him in their life.

Sebastian knew how lucky he was.
The thing that got him, was that Blaine didn’t seem to realise it at all. Kurt bent over backwards to make sure that Blaine was happy, that Blaine was okay, and felt wanted and respected. But Blaine didn’t seem to do the same for Kurt. Sebastian never heard Kurt say anything about the things he liked about Blaine, or nice things he did or said, or things they’d done together.

All he ever heard was ‘Blaine and Sam’. The guy had cheated on him, but was incredibly jealous at the same time. He disapproved of things Kurt did - and things Kurt was. Even stuff he couldn’t help at all, like his age. The only positive things Kurt had told Sebastian about their relationship so far were from long ago, back in high school. But was that really enough to build a marriage on?

Sebastian hadn’t seen Kurt and Blaine together since the proposal, but he was good at reading between the lines.

From what Sebastian could make out, Blaine ignored him, belittled him, forced him out of his own apartment and made him feel inferior. Kurt spent every day walking on eggshells in the fear that if he did something wrong, he’d lose everything. And it shouldn't be that way.

The Kurt he had seen these last two weeks was a different creature entirely. He was like a bird whose cage had been opened; he’d taken flight and stretched his wings, a window was wide open for him to fly away and be free. But instead he was choosing to go back into his cage.

And the sight was almost too much for Sebastian to bear.

"Umm..." He was trying desperately to find words that wouldn’t upset or hurt Kurt but still get his opinion across. It was proving difficult.

"More for us, though, right?" Kurt said, raising his glass. "Same goes for this cheese..." He cut a wedge of the third cheese and tried it pure. It was delicious. He’d have no problem removing that bit of evidence...

Sebastian bit his lip and took a large gulp of wine.

"So I suppose we need to eat all this tonight as well...?" he said gesturing to the plate between them.

"Terrible, isn't it?" Kurt joked. "But we need to be strong and work together...I think we can make it."

Kurt refilled his glass and offered him the plate of cheese with a grin and Sebastian just couldn’t take it anymore.

"God would you just stop!" he said, half shouting. "Would you please stop sitting there as if everything is okay? As if this is fucking normal?"

Kurt stared at him, taken aback by his sudden outburst.

"What...what are you talking about?" he asked, trying to keep his voice calm.

Kurt didn’t understand. He had only been joking around a little. He knew he was a little intoxicated from the wine, but he hadn’t crossed any lines, had he?

Sebastian looked at Kurt. His breathing was coming hard and fast and he could feel his pulse thumping in his neck.

"The past two weeks were some of the best weeks of my life. You and I hanging out... Watching you be yourself. But now it’s like...you’re starting to shut down, blocking off everything. You
'won't have time', really? Not even to read? What happened to that multitasking genius I saw at Vogue? To the guy who reads a French novel in a week and still finds time for grocery shopping whilst wearing an outfit he constructed nearly from scratch in two days?"

He took a deep breath and pushed on. "What you’re saying is: you want to devote all your time to him again. … 'oh we have to eat all the food and drink all the wine'... just in case Blaine comes home and realises that you haven’t been sitting alone in your apartment for a fortnight pining after him and waiting for him to come home."

Kurt’s jaw dropped. "That's...!" he started loudly, rising from the couch. He took a moment to calm himself, and when he spoke again, his voice was dangerously level.

"That is not what this is, at all."

All he was doing was making good resolutions for his engagement, thinking ahead, foreseeing arguments.

It hurt. He felt incredibly attacked. Kurt had planned this dinner, gotten desert for Sebastian specifically, sparing neither money or effort. For them, to end their holiday on a high note. And now Sebastian threw it in his face?

"Oh no?" Sebastian said standing up too. "Then what is it Kurt? Tell me. Because from where I’m standing, that’s sure as hell what it looks like." He remembered something else from earlier too. "I guess that’s why you washed up the wine glasses too, couldn’t have just two clean ones when all the others were dusty..."

"No," Kurt said tersely. "I just noticed how dirty they were." But it was a lie, and they both knew it. Kurt could feel his cheeks burning. He crossed his arms over his chest.

"Blaine doesn't expect me to stay at home and wait for him."

That was actually true. Blaine knew Kurt was away almost every night even when he was there- it was the basis of many of their fights. Kurt doubted if Blaine had given any thoughts about what he’d been doing at all- he certainly hadn’t asked. It had been clear he had needed distance and Kurt had given it to him. And now he was preparing for Blaine to come back - all the way; and left-overs from a dinner party had no place in that. Was that really so bad?

"Right," Sebastian said sarcastically. "Then what’s with the charade to make it look like you have?"

"This is not a charade!" Kurt replied angrily. "This is my life, and I get to choose who I spend it with. And if that means cleaning up the place before he gets home so I don't have to explain spending a day’s salary on luxury foods to share with another man, that's my choice, too."

"It's not just the damn food, Kurt!" Sebastian throwing his hand out to point around the apartment.

"You are a completely different person when he’s around. You’re jumpy and defensive. You constantly check the clock to make sure you don’t get home too late. He says jump and you ask how fucking high! You must know that that’s not normal right?"

"Well, you liked this different person well enough to invite me to Coney Island," Kurt replied, narrowing his eyes, "so it can't have been that bad."

He shook his head. "And what would you know about normal, anyway? You've never been in a relationship in your life. Your whole world-" he said angrily, waving his hand at Sebastian's face, "revolves around you. You have no idea about sacrifice, or compromise, or mutual respect-"
"Oh yeah? Do you want to know why my world revolves around me, Kurt? Because for the longest fucking time I WAS ALL I HAD!" Sebastian yelled, his voice catching painfully on the last word. "In case you forgot, I was fucking abandoned and left all on my own in a fucking alien country with no friends and no family. There was NO ONE who gave a crap about me, so I had to!"

Old hurt mixed with the new as Sebastian spoke and he felt tears prickle in his eyes. He swallowed them down, refusing to cry in front of Kurt.

Kurt could feel tears starting to form in his eyes, and he wiped them off his cheeks quickly. Embarrassment made his face burn. He hadn't forgotten the things Sebastian had told him on the beach, but it had been easier to reduce him back to the boy Kurt had met in school. It was easier to hate him this way, easier to discard everything he said as lies and taunts.

Sebastian started pacing. "I invited you to Coney Island because we’re friends...we’re finally friends and I care about you...as crazy as that may seem to you." He walked over to Kurt and placed his hands on Kurt’s shoulders.

Kurt jerked away from the touch and stepped back, keeping some space between them. He didn’t want to hear the things Sebastian was saying, and Sebastian holding him felt too familiar. This was how his arguments with Blaine usually ended. An accusation, followed by a few soft words, a gentle touch- and Kurt would feel like he had no choice but to give in or look like the one who wanted the fight.

Sebastian recoiled, stung by Kurt’s rejection. "I may not know much about relationships…” he said, his voice catching again, “but I know that they’re supposed to be an even playing field. Both parties make sacrifices and compromises. Both people work to make it work, not one person sitting on his ass all day complaining while the other works himself into a fucking stupor and sleeps on the fucking subway between work and classes!"

Kurt repressed a sob and closed his eyes tightly. He knew Blaine made sacrifices too. But how could he explain, how could he make Sebastian see that the compromise...was him?

"Blaine’s not making me do those things," he said, opening his eyes again. "He doesn’t even want me to work as hard as I do."

"Then why the fuck do you do it?"

Kurt wished he could say it. It was on the tip of his tongue. *Because when you're like me, you have to work twice as hard to matter half as much as others.*

He couldn't share that with Sebastian anymore, not now, not while they were shouting and angry and Kurt felt like the next words from Sebastian's lips might draw blood. He locked the truth away and raised his chin to take another hit. It was better this way; he was well-trained in this fight.

"I don't expect someone raised by nannies to understand."

Sebastian felt like Kurt had slapped him. Tears welled up in his eyes again and he fought hard to keep them at bay. For the sake of their friendship, he decided to give it one more try.

"What I understand, is that you don’t see how fucking amazing you are and you are settling for something less than you deserve. Jesus Christ, Kurt...can’t you see how messed up that is?"

Kurt gritted his teeth. All his life, other people seemed to want to dictate what he deserved. What about what he wanted?
"You wanna know what's messed up?" he asked. "This. Us. Playing at being friends when it's clear you don't support me or trust me to make my own decisions. If I wanted someone to make fun of my life, I could just ask Santana or Rachel."

“I’m not making fun of your life, Kurt. I’m trying to make you see that this isn’t a life. Whether you believe it or not, you do deserve more than this existence. Because that’s all you’re doing with him, Kurt. You’re existing.” He swallowed, breathing heavily.

Kurt shook his head softly. Tears were running down his cheeks now, and he did nothing to stop them. He didn’t want to hear Sebastian’s words. Sebastian didn’t understand. He didn’t know about them, about their love. They were soulmates, and they just had to overcome.

“I never expected it to be easy,” he said quietly. “There were always going to be days where life just sucks...but those pass eventually and things get better.”

Sebastian stared at him, realising that no matter what he said, it wouldn’t be enough. Kurt wasn’t ready to see the gaping holes in his relationship and the whole situation had reached Sebastian’s level of tolerance. He needed to get out before he said or did anything else that he’d regret later.

"You know what? I don’t know what the hell I’m still doing here." Sebastian walked over to the coat rack and took down his jacket. He pulled it on, pressed the book deeper into its pocket, and picked up his phone from the table.

"You can stay locked up here and play the part of the perfect little Stepford wife to Blaine if you want, Kurt, but I can’t be here to witness it anymore..."

He looked at Kurt and felt his heart break at the expression on Kurt’s face.

"Thank you, for dinner."

He took one last look at Kurt before turning and heading out of the apartment, slamming the door behind him.

He waited till he was down in the street before he fell against the wall in shock. He couldn’t believe that had just happened. The tears that had been bottled up for the last fifteen minutes finally broke free and poured down his cheeks.

His chest heaved with the effort to breathe and he actually felt his heart split in two.

Chapter End Notes

“Surrender to what is. Let go of what was. Have faith in what will be.” Sonia Ricotti
Disconnected

Chapter Summary

Following their argument, Kurt and Sebastian spend some time apart.

KURT

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is to try just one more time." - Thomas A. Edison

Kurt rolled over on the mattress, breathing hard. Blaine wiped his hands on the cover and lay down next to him.

"How was that?" he asked.

Kurt laughed breathlessly and turned his head to look at his fiance. "That was amazing," he whispered in awe. "I guess absence makes the heart grow fonder, hmm?"

"Hey, who are you? I haven't seen you around before."

"I'm Cooper's brother, Blaine. I'm staying here for the week."

"Well, Cooper's Brother Blaine, do you wanna dance?"

"Sure."

"Yes," Blaine said softly, running his hand up Kurt's arm.

Kurt shivered, his skin still sensitive. "I missed you," he confessed. "I missed this."

"Do you want to show me the guest room?"

"Okay."

"Me too," Blaine replied, leaning forward to kiss Kurt's lips. "I love you so much."

"Let's do this again sometime."
"I'm in L.A. until Friday."

It was all Kurt could think of in the days that followed Blaine's return. They were finally in a good place again. If this was what a honeymoon felt like, Kurt wished he could get married right now, colour of the napkins be damned. They stayed in all weekend. Kurt called in sick to work on Sunday and switched his phone off. They cooked the vegetables he'd bought and left the dishes as they were.

When Kurt came home from Vogue on Monday, Blaine had washed up and bought flowers for the table. They put music on and danced around the small living room. Instead of going to the gym, Kurt retired early to spend more time in Blaine's arms.

"I can't believe you would do this to Kurt. Again," Sam said that night.

"It was nothing," Blaine replied. "I was just being hospitable."

"In your brother's guest room? I saw him come out after you. He was zipping up."

"You were spying on me?"

"No, I was looking for you. The pizza guy needed someone to sign off on the delivery. Then I found Coop and he signed it, but-- Look, I don't think it's okay, what you're doing." Sam looked genuinely troubled.

Blaine brushed it off. "I told you, Kurt and I are on a break. Hell, for all I know he's doing the same right now."

"I don't think-"

"No, you hardly do," Blaine cut him off. "Just enjoy the party, Sam. It's L.A! Come on!"

"Hey, Kurt, I was thinking," Blaine said over a shared meal on Tuesday, "maybe tonight, we stay in, just the two of us. Or we go and catch a movie. I've spent so much time with Sam lately... I really just want to be with you. Is that okay?"

Kurt's heart fluttered. "Of course that's okay. I'd... like that very much."

"Did you have plans to go out? I'm not ruining anything for you, am I?"

"No! Absolutely not! No, I have no plans..." Then Kurt hesitated. "I heard there’s a new Andy Warhol exhibition, though. And we missed the last one... maybe we could go there?"

Blaine frowned a little, then smiled softly, the way he did when he was about to tell Kurt something he knew his fiancé wasn’t going to like, and was trying to be gentle about it.

“Maybe some other time, Kurt. I was really just looking forward to some cuddling in the dark with you...”

Kurt sighed happily. He couldn't remember the last time he and Blaine had gone and seen a movie together. And, his mind supplied, now that they were okay again, there was something about movie theatres on their bucket list that he'd always wanted to try...
Like most good things, Kurt’s resolve to cook healthier didn’t last. Before the week was out, Blaine had picked up his habit of bringing home take-out food again, undoubtedly with the best intentions, and staying in with him more also meant sharing more snacks.

Despite Blaine’s renewed interest at being intimate with him, Kurt knew he wasn’t getting enough exercise and was starting to feel a little boxed-in at the apartment. When he carefully suggested they’d go for a jog together, Blaine didn’t want to, but to Kurt’s relief, he seemed very encouraging for Kurt to go by himself, so Kurt went for it.

He also tried working out at home, but most of the time, that seemed to make Blaine moody (when it wasn’t making him horny, which was a nice side effect of walking around in shorts) so when the next weekend came around, Kurt went back to the gym before taking his shift at the diner. This too, went uncommented by Blaine, so Kurt felt they were really okay again. Blaine’s trip to L.A. had been good for them. Kurt slowly settled back into his usual rhythm.

Another Monday came around, and with it, a notification popped up on Kurt’s phone for the day after. *Pool Party*, it said, with Marc’s address. Kurt had put it in weeks ago. He suddenly remembered this was the time Sebastian would be dog-sitting at Marc and Paul’s house...Knowing Blaine would be back by then, Kurt had asked Sebastian to have the party on a Tuesday.

He bit his lip. Blaine hadn’t spoken to Sam all week, as far as he knew. He wondered if they had had a fight in L.A. They hadn’t had a BLAM Tuesday since.

Kurt kind of missed his night off - and what was *wrong* with him? He finally had what he wanted, spending quality time with his fiancé - and he was thinking about going to a party without him? Moreover, to a party with friends he kept secret from him? With a pang of regret, Kurt erased the date from his calendar.

Then he recalled the way Sebastian had left his apartment after their fight, and felt justified. *A perfect little Stepford wife.* Kurt couldn’t believe how much that had hurt. After everything he’d faced in high school, the song-distribution in Glee club, the girl-jokes, the tampons and sanitary napkins stuck to his locker, the nicknames; he’d been Lady Hummel to most of the Cheerios for a long time; Kurt thought he would be able to handle one more jab at his masculinity. It was something Sebastian, too, had joined in on in school. Kurt should have expected it.

But he hadn’t. They’d become friends, and he had let his guards down. It had hurt all the more for it.

Kurt’s housekeeping, the cooking, the cleaning - it was a choice. He *wanted* to do it, so it would be done well and the way he wanted it. Of course it would be nice if Blaine helped now and then, but Kurt had always taken care of such things, for as long as he could remember, even at home. It was a part of life and he accepted that.

He couldn’t expect someone who’d lived in a mansion abroad and a boarding school after to understand.

Kurt stayed in on Tuesday, picked red-hot shorts for his work-out DVD, and hoped for distraction from his gloomy thoughts.
"Your absence has gone through me like a thread through a needle. Everything I do is stitched with its colour." W.S. Merwin

--

It was Thursday night, Satire was heaving and Sebastian had disappeared. It had been twenty minutes since he left for his break and he should have been back five minutes ago.

Marc sighed. He’d not seen Sebastian much over the last couple of weeks, but a change had come over him since his holiday. What he had seen was sparking worry. Sebastian had been late for work on several occasions, he was shucking his duties, being unnecessarily rude or inappropriate with his patrons… and now this.

Marc picked up the radio and pressed the button, knowing everyone with a radio would hear him. “Has anyone seen Sebastian?”

Terry reported he hadn’t seen him at the door.

“I saw him head into the bathroom about ten minutes ago,” Danny’s voice said through the speaker. “Do you want me to go see if I can find him?”

Marc shook his head and pressed the button to speak again. “No, it’s okay, I need to take a leak anyway. Can you close up bar two and join Kyle on bar one for a bit?”

He put the radio back on its stand, waited for Danny to get there, and made his way in the direction of the toilets.

The minute Marc pushed the door open, he heard them. As he walked further into the room towards the sounds of heavy breathing, moaning and the occasional bang on the wall, Marc noticed the end cubicle was shut. A pair of feet were poking out from underneath the door, their owner clearly on their knees.

Sighing, Marc rapped his knuckles against the door and all movement and noise stopped instantly.

“Occupied,” came the breathy, slightly annoyed voice of his youngest colleague.

“You have precisely five seconds to exit this cubicle before I call security,” Marc said in a low voice. “1…2…3…"

There was hurried shuffling, the pair of feet disappeared and the door swung open, revealing Sebastian, who was slumped against the wall, jeans still unbuttoned and his shirt hanging off him haphazardly, and his red faced partner.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Marc asked the two men.

“What does it look like?” Sebastian asked flippantly.

“You,” Marc said to Sebastian’s partner, “Get out of here.” The guy didn’t need to be told twice. He turned to Sebastian, held up his hand and mouthed ‘call me!’ - then dashed, red-faced, passed Marc and out the main door. Sebastian didn’t look overly concerned.

Marc waited for him to leave and then turned back to Sebastian.

“What is wrong with you? You know the rules! No sex on the premises. No exceptions. You’re lucky I don’t have you fired on the spot...how can you be so careless?”
“It was just a bit of fun!” Sebastian said annoyed, rearranging himself and buttoning his jeans back up.

“It wouldn’t be fun if you caught something! You weren’t even using protection! You’re cleverer than this, Seb!”

Sebastian avoided Marc’s eyes.

“What’s gotten into you recently?” Marc asked, his voice softening. “This is not like you at all.”

“It’s none of your business! You’re not my dad and you’re not my boss, so just leave me alone!”

Marc frowned. “I may not be either of those things, but that doesn’t mean I don’t care about you!”

“I don’t need you to care about me! I don’t need anyone! I’m perfectly fine on my own,” Sebastian said defiantly.

“Well tough shit!” Marc said. “I care and I’m not going to let you throw your life away or risk your health! Now get back to work!”

Sebastian glared at Marc before storming passed him to the sink. Marc sighed and clapped him on the shoulder on his way out of the bathroom.

Sebastian looked at himself in the mirror, his face falling. He was a mess and he knew it. Marc was right, he was being careless and stupid and he was lucky he’d not hurt himself. Yet.

He splashed some water on his face and took a deep breath. You can’t afford to lose your job Smythe, he said to himself. Sort your life out.

Shaking his head, he took a final breath before leaving the bathroom. Back to work.

---

Marc watched Sebastian closely after he came back to the bar. Sebastian was distracted, irritated, and his flair work was uninspired. At first, Marc thought he was just a little moody for being interrupted, but the more he saw, the less things seemed to add up. Sebastian could hook up with anyone after his shift, and it had never seemed a problem for him to wait. He usually even enjoyed the flirting with his potential candidates at the bar until closing time, making them eager. Why would he flout the rules like this?

He wondered what had changed- and when he realised it, his heart sank. It was Kurt. It had to be Kurt. He hadn’t seen Sebastian’s friend in weeks. So he’d stopped coming...and Sebastian had stopped caring. Fuck.

Marc waited for a quiet moment at the bar, and then walked up to Sebastian.

“You’re spilling a lot tonight,” he said, eyeing the wet counter. A few stray ice cubes lay melting in a small puddle. ”Do you wanna tell me what’s going on?”

Sebastian looked at the melting ice and shrugged. “Not really,” he said deflated.

Marc wiped the counter down, scooping the ice up into his cloth. “I’ve not seen Kurt around the last few weeks...is he away?”

“No, he’s just at home fucking his fiancé,” Sebastian snapped.
Marc clenched his jaw and nodded in understanding. He shook out the cloth over the basin and wrung it out, trying to make up his mind. He looked at his watch.

“Paul should be home already. Maybe you should call it a night. I could ask him to come and pick you up. Go for a round in the pool. Take Poppy and Lola for a walk?”

Sebastian glared at him. He knew he should be touched at Marc’s offer, but all it did was annoy him further. In a way, the idea of being looked after for a few days was a welcome one. But he couldn’t stay with Marc and Paul forever and he was no longer an angry teenager unable to look after himself.

He was an adult who had to man up and get over it, and being molly-coddled by Marc’s husband for a few days would not help.

“No, thanks.”

Marc’s expression hardened a little, but he reminded himself of Sebastian’s age.

“Suit yourself,” he replied. “But you’re no good here at the moment. Take a couple of days off and get your head straight, alright? I’ll tell Joe you’ll be back on Monday.”

Sebastian opened his mouth to argue. He knew the bathroom thing was a dick move but he wouldn’t do that again. He didn’t understand why he was being punished, this was all Kurt’s fault. But the flash in Marc’s eyes told him to pick his battles and this was not one that he’d win.

“Fine,” he said grumpily, taking off his apron and throwing it down on the counter. He brushed passed Marc without looking at him and headed for the staff room to collect his things.
Sebastian gets some much-needed advice.

Alice stood in front of Steph and Alex's apartment and rung the bell. She was at her wits' end, and could really use the help of her friend.

Alex opened the door. "Alice!" he said, frowning as he saw her expression. "What's wrong?"

"Is Steph home?" Alice asked.

"No, she's with her mom," Alex said. "Is this about Brody? Do you need, uh, a girls' talk?" He looked a little uncomfortable asking.

Alice shook her head. "No, it's not Brody... It's Sebastian. He's... Something's going on with him, but he won't tell me what."

Alex ruffled his hair, thinking about it. "Maybe it's guy stuff," he suggested.

Alice rolled her eyes. "He'd tell me about that," she said, sure of herself.

"No, I mean, guy stuff," Alex repeated, pointing his eyes down his sweatpants before looking back at Alice.

Alice bit her lip. She'd suspected something similar before, but Sebastian had assured her he was always safe and got his check-ups.

Giving up, Alex nodded over his shoulder and let her in. "Tell me what he said," he offered, mentally saying goodbye to his free evening.

--

It was late when he made his way to Sebastian, but Alex knew his friend would still be up. He was a bartender, after all. Alex had stopped along the way to pick something up, and now knocked on his friend's door carrying a paper bag.

The knocking on the door shook Sebastian from his stupor. Following Marc's orders on Friday night, he'd come home, slept for twelve hours straight, eaten his body weight in Chinese food and set himself up in front of his TV binge-watching Grey's Anatomy starting with Season 1.

That had been two days ago. Other than a heated argument with Alice on the phone, he'd not spoken to or seen another living person. Sally the Chinese delivery girl didn't count.

As the knocking got louder, Sebastian sighed. He paused the TV and got up, groaning as his muscles cracked.

"I said: I'm not in the mood, Al-" he started to say as he opened the door.

"I'm the other Al," Alex said, taking in Sebastian's appearance. "Man, you look like shit. And that's
saying something, coming from me."

He held up the bagged bottle. "Move over, I brought a friend."

Sebastian looked at the bag and saw the familiar black wax seal.

Sighing, he stepped aside and let Alex in.

"Damn, it smells in here. Why don't you open the curtains and windows and get some light and air circulating in here?" Alex said, taking the bottle of Jack Daniels out of the bag and setting it on the kitchen island.

"Because I like the dark," Sebastian replied, shutting the door and folding his arms over his chest. "I'm guessing Alice sent you?"

"Nope," Alex said. "But that's probably because she expected me to fuck it up, so she didn't ask." He shrugged. "Any Chinese food left?" he asked, nodding at the paper boxes on the table.

"No..." Sebastian said, walking to the cupboard in his kitchen and taking down two whiskey glasses. "But we can order something if you're hungry."

He reached for the bottle and opened it, pouring healthy measures into each glass.

"Is that even a question?"

Two large pizzas and three drinks later, Alex hadn't asked Sebastian anything about his self-imposed isolation yet. He seemed perfectly satisfied just keeping Sebastian company in the half-dark, eating and drinking.

At some point, his phone buzzed. "That's Steph," he said, sending her a text not to wait up and putting his phone back in his pocket.

Sebastian glanced at his friend. "You don't have to stay, you know..." he said solemnly. "I know you're all worried about me, but it's really not necessary."

"Yeah, but look at you, bro," Alex said. "Steph would have my ass if I tell her I left you like this."

He reached for the bottle and topped their drinks off. "I'm so whipped," he sighed.

Sebastian sighed as well. "At least you have someone to go home to," he mumbled before downing the contents of his glass.

Alex nodded, taking a sip of his drink. "My mom used to say I'd never get a girl if I didn’t grow up," he mused, then chuckled. "Proved her wrong, didn't I?"

He sat back, wondering if it was possible Sebastian had his eye on someone. He never seemed interested in relationships before.

Sebastian half-smiled. "You and Steph make a good couple." He picked the cheese off the remainder of his pizza.

His mind involuntarily flickered to Kurt. He poured himself another drink and sipped it.

Alex smiled. "She's amazing. Balances me out, I guess. Though I know I need to step up my game if I want to keep her. She's not gonna stay if I keep floundering." He held up his glass. "A toast... to finally picking a major and sticking with it," he said, then lowered it without drinking and shook his
"I don't know who I'm kidding. I'll probably need to switch my major at least twice more."

He winked.

"The future, you know?" He said turning serious for a minute. "It's scary. I don't want to pick the wrong thing."

Sebastian smiled and sipped his drink. "If it takes you a while to figure it out, then so be it. I don't think Steph is going anywhere any time soon." He shrugged. "I know exactly what I want and it doesn't make things easier."

Something about Sebastian's wistful look told Alex he wasn't talking about school.

"And is shutting yourself inside your apartment and giving up on personal grooming the solution to that?" Alex asked, keeping his voice neutral.

Sebastian looked down at his sweatpants and t-shirt. He'd not changed since he got home Thursday night. The stubble on his face was starting to itch from neglecting to shave.

"Something like that," he mumbled, finishing his drink. He could feel the effects of it now, his eyes were glazing over and his head felt heavy. "Dunno what else I'm supposed to do."

Alex watched him for a bit. "Did you get fired?" he finally asked. He didn't know Sebastian's shifts by heart, but he knew his friend was at the bar a lot - and it looked like he hadn't been anywhere but here for days.

Sebastian shook his head. "Nope, but I nearly was..."

He thought back to Thursday night; the look on Marc's face, the disappointment in his eyes. Sebastian had said some awful things to him.

"I was caught with my pants down...literally," he said, shaking his head.

Alex winced. No matter what place you worked at, that was never a good idea. "Was it worth it, at least?" he asked carefully.

No, Sebastian thought to himself. He shrugged. "I've had better."

"That sucks," Alex replied. "So...did you get off with a warning, or did you get suspended?" He suddenly wondered if he should have insisted on paying for the pizza.

Sebastian shook his head. "I got a warning and Marc told me to take a couple of days off...I'm back on Monday." He sighed. "When the fuck did my life become this?"

Alex knew it was probably rhetorical, but gave the question some thought anyway.

"I don't know," he said pensively. "Alice never did tell me what happened at Coney Island. I thought you just might have had too many hot dogs too. And then you seemed ok after that? I don't know man, Steph's always saying that she could shave her head and I wouldn't notice until she told me she got a haircut, so...Did something happen?"

Sebastian sighed. He didn't want to talk about Coney. That was a happier time, even with the emotional conversation - that day had changed their friendship. And now it had changed again. "Kurt and I had a fight...A big one. I've not seen him since...it's been almost a month."

"Yeah, Steph was wondering what was up with him," Alex commented. "I figured he was just busy.
Though he did say he'd come to the next karaoke game and then never did." He chewed his lip. "Is he, uh... officially out of the gang now?"

Sebastian looked at his hands holding the glass and shrugged.

"It was a bad fight," he said quietly. Snippets of the awful things they said to each other reverberated around in his brain. "His fiancé is an ass and Kurt didn't like it when I pointed that out. And he's never going to leave him, so..." he trailed off.

Alex nodded, beginning to see where the problem might lie.

"So, like... Jeremy-bad...or worse?"

"Worse...much, much worse," Sebastian said darkly.

He let his head flop back into the cushions of the sofa and closed his eyes.

"Kurt cooked me dinner the night before Blaine got back from LA... or rather, he bought the food and I cooked." Sebastian smiled a little despite himself as he remembered. "I took that bottle of wine you bought for me, and he had the most amazing cheese board, and it was great, but then he kept filling the wine glasses and I made a joke about how he was trying to get me drunk..." he trailed off and swallowed. "And he said he just didn't want to have to pour it away if we didn't drink it..."

"Dude, that was a twenty-five dollar bottle!" Alex let out, sitting up. "Why would he pour it away?"

"Because he didn't want to have to explain to Blaine that he'd had someone over," Sebastian said glumly. "...it led to a really big argument and I said that I couldn't sit by and watch him stay with someone that doesn't deserve him and I left..."

Alex paused for a while. The alcohol was making his brain fuzzy, but he tried to focus. Reading between the lines was Steph's forte, not his.

"...as opposed to someone who does deserve him...?" he finally asked. "Like...you?"

Sebastian bit his lip. That thought had been circulating around his mind for a month. If he was honest with himself, it had been there for longer. But he didn't want to say it out loud. Saying it out loud made it real, and once it was real he couldn't take it back.

He looked at his friend and knew that he'd reached the point where he couldn't deny it anymore.

"I guess...though I'm pretty sure I don't deserve him either...but yeah..."

Alex let out a long breath. He was way out of his depth now and he knew it, but he also knew this was his friend, and he was hurting. He had to offer him something.

"Well, in general, you're not as pathetic as you seem right now," he tried, smiling a little. "You're a good guy. You work hard, you get good grades, the girls both adore you..." He swallowed. "I guess you're also, uh- hot, in that way, that I... I don't know, it wouldn't hurt to look like you, I mean. As a guy. And uh, all of these things...I think Kurt sees that too."

Sebastian looked at Alex for a moment before smirking and snorting out a laugh.

"Thanks," he said, with a grin. It was the first he'd smiled properly in weeks and he could feel the strain in his cheeks. But as soon as it had come, the happy feeling inside of him died again.

"But it doesn't matter. Even if he did see it...he wouldn't let himself act on it. He's not like that."
Alex shrugged. "But they could break up? Alice and Jeremy eventually did. Remember how worried we all were that they never would?"

"Yeah, but this is different," Sebastian argued. "I'm not just concerned about his relationship, like I was with Alice. The stakes were different then. I mean, I love her, but I've never been interested in girls." He sighed. "Besides, Alice was with Jeremy for 5 months...Kurt and Blaine have been together for three years and they're engaged and they live together... He's never going to leave him now."

"That's what we thought about Alice and Jeremy too, though," Alex reminded Sebastian. "And then suddenly, she saw the light. Oh, happy day!" He drained his glass in a salute.

Then he frowned. "But, um...if you wanna hang around for that moment, maybe you should actually... be around him?" Alex suggested carefully.

Sebastian bit his lip. "I know but...how can I be around him, knowing that he's with the wrong guy? I've never felt like this before. I have no idea what to do, or how to hide it, and seeing him with someone else will kill me."

"...and yet, he hung out with us all the time, without this guy," Alex replied. "He hardly ever talks about him...if it wasn't for his ring, you wouldn't even know he was engaged. It wouldn't be that hard to ignore it." He shrugged.

"Maybe I'm looking at this the wrong way. But if he's really in such a bad relationship, worse than Alice was, and he doesn't want to hear about it...he's gonna need all of his friends to keep an eye on him and be around when it crashes."

Alex hesitated, not sure if he should give in to the Jack Daniels' inspired fortune cookie moment he was feeling.

"Maybe part of deserving him is just being his friend when he needs one."

Sebastian bit his lip. Alex had a point.

"Yeah..." he said quietly. "What if he doesn't want to see me though? I said...I said some awful things."

Alex scratched his head. "Man, I don't know. At least you will have tried? It beats sitting here feeling sorry for yourself, anyway..."

He grinned. "You might wanna take a shower before you go, though."

Sebastian looked back down at his clothes and pulled a face.

"Yeah...and a shave." He stretched his arms and shuddered. "I'm such a mess!"

He looked at Alex. "Thanks, for the chat...and the whiskey." He looked at the almost empty bottle. "Seems a shame to leave such a small amount."

Alex grinned. "I'll take it. You're under age." He winked and held out his glass.

Sebastian laughed and poured it into his friend's glass. "I guess you need it...supplying a minor with alcohol is a criminal offence," he said with a wink.

"To which I will plead not guilty! Who are they gonna believe? The sweet, innocent man-child with
his Zelda t-shirt or the scruffy, sexy bartender?"

"Clearly the sexy bartender! I'm not always scruffy you know!" Sebastian let out.

"I'll drink to that," Alex said, and drained his glass. "To the best-looking male friend I have, with my thanks for *not* using those looks to steal my girl," he mumbled, the alcohol really kind of getting to him now.

Sebastian laughed. "You will never have to worry about that! I am one hundred percent gay!"

He sat up and put his pizza box on the coffee table.

"Thank you...really...for tonight," he said quietly, sitting forward and looking back at his friend.

Alex shrugged. "You're my bro, Seb. And the girls can't hold their booze, so I had to," he added with a wink.

He nodded at the leftovers. "Are you gonna eat that?"

Sebastian chuckled and handed his box to Alex. "Be my guest."

He stared at a spot on the floor in front of him, thinking. Alex was right. Being there for Kurt was the only thing that mattered right now.

He bit his lip as a decision formed in his head. It was Sunday tomorrow. Kurt would be at work.

*Time to swallow your pride, Smythe.*
Dosado

Chapter Summary

Sebastian goes to the Spotlight diner to find Kurt, but meets someone else instead.

It was Sunday morning and Sebastian stood rooted to his spot on the sidewalk across the street from Spotlight, with nerves crashing around in his stomach. Every time he made an attempt to move his feet, another wave broke inside him, threatening to bring up the coffee and biscotti he'd picked up on his way over.

*Man up Smythe*, he said to himself. *Even if he kicks you out, at least you'll know.*

Mustering all his courage, Sebastian took a deep breath and forced his feet to move. He crossed the road and placed his hand on the silver plate on the door. He hesitated for a moment before pushing the door open and entering.

He was immediately hit with the familiar smell of the diner and it made his stomach flip. His eyes swept the room for the familiar face but he couldn't see Kurt anywhere. Guessing he was out the back, Sebastian made his way to the bar and sat up on his usual stool. He wiped his sweaty hands on his jeans and bit his lip, his heart beating wildly in his chest.

"It's your lucky day," a young woman with black hair and blue streaks announced. "I'm Dani, your chorus girl waitress today - and by lucky I mean you get one cheesy pick-up line on the house; after that, I charge 5 bucks on your tip." She winked and held up her notebook. "Ok, shoot."

Sebastian blinked at Dani. It took a minute for him to register what she'd said. When it clicked, he smirked and winked.

"You're safe, babe...not your team."

"Perfect," Dani replied cheerfully. "Sorry for being so blunt, but I always like to just nip it in the bud, you know? Before the length of these uniforms gives a guy ideas." She grinned. "I'm all for girly ideas though."

Sebastian smiled at her. His eyes went to the double swinging doors that led to the kitchen. They remained firmly shut and he sighed a little. Kurt was probably on his *intermission.*

"Can I get a latte please?" he asked, his eyes flicking back to her.

Dani looked over her shoulder to the doors, and then back at him. "Sure thing. Is there something else I can get you from the kitchen? Or someone?" She wiggled her eyebrows.

Sebastian swallowed. He wanted to ask, but he didn't know this girl and despite everything, he didn't wanna blow Kurt's privacy. Then again, he didn't recognise her as a New Direction, so maybe it was okay.

"I'm a friend of Kurt's..." he said cautiously. "Is he working today?"

"Oh." Dani's face fell a little. "I'm sorry, he called in sick today. That's why I'm here, we usually
don’t see each other much because we alternate our shifts. I got called in as a replacement this morning."

She picked up a cup and switched on the heater for the milk.

"I knew he should have stayed home longer last time," Dani added conversationally as she prepared his coffee. "He called in sick on Sunday a few weeks ago- and he never misses a Sunday, so he must have been really ill! But then he showed up again, like, a few days later, although I had told him I could take the whole week for him, but he wouldn't have it." She rolled her eyes a little. "That boy works more than is healthy for him, but if you're his friend you probably know that already."

She gave him a sympathetic smile and put his latte in front of him, with a pattern of cinnamon stars.

Sebastian looked at the drink, thinking back to his first Sunday here all those months ago.

"Oh," he said. Three weeks ago had been when Blaine got back...he must have persuaded Kurt to call in. That was probably the case again today. Sebastian sighed.

"Do me a favour?" he asked her, reaching for his wallet and pulling out a ten dollar bill. "Don't mention that I was here? Please?" He slid the note towards her.

Dani looked at him for a moment, then took the money. "Alright," she said, "but you didn't have to tip me for that. You know, gay solidarity and all that." She winked. "So instead, if you want, you can hit me with your best 5$ pick-up line. I might learn something."

But before Sebastian could say anything, she frowned at something she saw over his shoulder and sighed.

"Sorry, I need to go tell the Queen that her audience has arrived," she mumbled. "Excuse me. Lady-in-waiting duty." With that, she left for the kitchen.

It didn't take long for Rachel Berry to appear, uniform freshly pressed, her eyes huge with false eyelashes, her hair blow-dried out in wavy curls. She zoomed straight in on the elderly couple that had found their way to their table at the front themselves, taking no notice of Sebastian at the bar. She was all smiles.

"Oh god," Sebastian said under his breath as he watched Rachel greet the old couple and noticed the visible disappointment on their faces at the fact that Kurt was missing.

You and me both guys, he thought bitterly.

He considered leaving his coffee and bowing out before Rachel noticed him, but morbid curiosity kept him on his stool. He knew this song was perfect for Kurt. He'd heard him sing it before. When he wasn’t too tired from the bar, he tried to make it to Kurt’s Sunday morning performances as often as he could.

It had been a few years since he heard Rachel sing, but from memory he knew that she wouldn't handle it as well as Kurt.

"I hate that girl so much." Dani whispered in solidarity to Sebastian.

"Me too......" Sebastian replied darkly.

The music started to play and on the little stage, Rachel started to sing.
Her posture was tense, hands almost curled to fists, and she formed her words with intense pathos from the start, drawing out the notes to showcase her voice and closing her eyes with a frown, as if the sheer act of singing this intensely caused her emotional turmoil. It was too much, and the gleam in her eyes didn't reflect Evita's love for her people, or even Rachel's respect for the couple who had requested the song, but an imaginary audience of thousands that existed in Rachel's mind only.

At the table, Marvin was talking to Ethel, and she was nodding, occasionally saying a few words too. Their attention was only casually on the stage, and more on each other.

Rachel virtually bawled through the song, at the end looking as if she might break down in tears right away. Her strong voice belied that emotion, however - which made it feel affected and pathetic.

"Gunther had Patrick sing it last time," Dani said, leaning over the bar to speak to Sebastian confidentially. "But it wasn't a big hit. So Rachel convinced him to give her a shot at it." The tone of her voice said clearly what she thought about that.

Marvin and Ethel applauded politely at the end, and when Rachel came down to speak to them, she received a soft pat on the shoulder from Marvin before he directed his attention to his wife again. Storm clouds seemed to gather over Rachel's head.

"Uhoh," Dani said. "I'm gonna scram. I suggest you do the same. Thanks for the tip. I won't tell."

Sebastian, all nerves rescinded now that he knew there was no chance of seeing Kurt today, nodded at Dani as she disappeared.

He had no intention of leaving. It had been a long time since he saw Rachel Berry and she didn't appear to have changed a bit.

Alice had told Sebastian about her visit to Spotlight, and what she'd overheard. Sebastian was livid. Looking at Rachel now as she stormed back towards the bar, Sebastian smirked to himself. *Time to have a little fun.*

"Well if it isn't Rachel Berry," he said in a drawling voice. "Do you have any ear plugs on you? Because if you're going to wail at us like that again, I'm gonna need protection."

Rachel's eyes widened in shock, then narrowed angrily. She pointed a finger at him.

"Sebastian Smythe! What are you doing here? How did you find out I work here?"

She looked around him as if expecting him to be hiding a slushie behind his back.

Sebastian grinned, please to have gotten a rise out of her.

"I had no idea you worked here," he lied smoothly. "I live in the city and thought I'd try out somewhere different for breakfast...it was a happy accident that I happened across the place where you work, but as I recognised you, I thought I'd stick around and have some fun."

Rachel gasped. "Well, New York is big enough for you to go elsewhere. Like the gutter, where you belong."

She opened her mouth to say more, but then caught sight of Gunther coming from the kitchen.

Sebastian grinned at her. "It is a big city, but I don't feel like going anywhere else right now. I have a coffee and I am enjoying myself far too much annoying you. So I think I'll stay."
Rachel raised her chin and reached behind her to untie her apron. "Unfortunately for you, my shift just ended." She threw her apron on the counter.

"Dani can bring them their check," she said to Gunther, nodding back at Ethel and Marvin. "I have an important class tomorrow and need to rest my voice."

Gunther raised his eyebrows, then shrugged. He turned around to Dani, who was filling up the cupcake display and had been watching them covertly. She sighed, closed the display, and wiped her hands on her apron. She rolled her eyes at Sebastian as she passed, careful not to show her boss.

"Maybe you should rest your voice on a permanent basis?" Sebastian suggested in French, sipping his coffee. "You wouldn't wanna break anything...the mirrors for example."

Rachel looked at him blankly. She wasn't able to understand a single word he'd said, but she could guess.

"You're such a-

"Rachel!" Gunther said warningly. Rachel huffed.

Sebastian grinned and winked at her, wiggling his fingers in 'goodbye'.

Dani returned to the bar just as the door of the diner slammed closed, the small bell sending Rachel off with a clear 'ding'. Dani sent a scowl at her back and curtsied, picking up the hem of her apron.

Gunther saw her do it. "Plenty of people pay to hear her sing," he said defensively. "We can't keep this diner running on your gal pals alone."

"My liege," Dani replied, mock-humbly lowering her head. Gunther gave her a look and stalked off.

Dani looked at Sebastian and shrugged. "He's right. I do tend to date the cheapest girls." She winked at him. "Did Rachel give you any trouble? I warned you to leave..."

Sebastian grinned. "Nothing I can't handle..." He winked. "It's fun getting a rise out of her." He sipped his coffee. "Why don't you give that song a go?"

"Nah, I'm more of a rock and roll girl," Dani replied. "I cover the edgier musicals." She gave him the sign of the horns and stuck out her tongue, then chuckled. "I've been here for a while. I know where my strengths lie, and so does Gunther. And..." She leaned over and lowered her voice, "I also know his real name. So my job is pretty secure."

Sebastian's widened and he grinned conspiringly. "You know his name? What is it?"

He liked Dani. In a way, she reminded him of both Alice and Steph, and she seemed pretty trustworthy. The fact that she didn't like Rachel set her high in his estimations from the off. He wondered what she thought about Blaine.

Dani smiled. "I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you," she joked. She nodded at his cup. "Do you want another?"

Sebastian looked down at his coffee mug.

"No thanks, I should probably get out of here before she comes back with a torch and pitchfork," he said chuckling.

"Thanks for keeping my secret." He put some money down on the counter. "Keep the change."
"Any time," Dani said, putting his tip with the money he had given her earlier. There'd be a free coffee in it for him next time she'd see him.

"Huh," Blaine said, looking at his phone with a frown.

"What?" Kurt asked, looking up from a magazine.

"Apparently, Rachel is coming over. A 911 situation, she says."

Kurt scoffed and looked back down on his issue of Vogue. "Probably needs another a makeover."

He could feel Blaine's disapproval before his fiance even said anything. It was like it was tangible in the air, carried on his clipped sigh of disappointment.

"I wish you weren't so nasty to her," Blaine said quietly, managing to sound a little hurt.

It made Kurt's heart twinge a little, but he stood by what he had said. Rachel rarely called on him any more, her former best friend - unless she needed something. These days, she had grown closer to Blaine. Which of his friends hadn't?

There was no time to explain. Apparently, she had only announced her coming from down the street, because someone was already pounding on their door.

Blaine gave Kurt a strict look and went to open the door.

"Rachel! Hey," he said sweetly, "honey, what's wrong?"

Kurt bit his tongue. He didn't want to ruin it, now he and Blaine were finally doing so well again. He rose up as well, put his magazine away, and put on a sympathetic smile.

"You guys, I just had to come!" Rachel announced dramatically. "You won't believe who just came to the diner."

Blaine placed his hands on Rachel's shoulders and guided her into a chair.

"It wasn't Barbra was it? Oh my god, did you get her autograph?"

Rachel shook her head and waved him off.

"No this was a bad visitor...that slime-ball meerkat Sebastian Smythe! He came waltzing in as if he owned the place, interrupted my perfect performance of Don't Cry For Me and cost me my tips!"

"What?!" both Blaine and Kurt said at the same time.

Rachel took a moment off from looking indignant to squeak happily.

"Oh my god, you guys are so married already," she whispered excitedly. "Did you enjoy your morning off? Hmm?" She winked conspiratorial, then seemed to remember what part she was playing and put on a tortured face again.

"Yes! That evil, rock salt-slushie-throwing, photo-manipulating, blackmailing Warbler," she said with menace, seemingly forgetting that she was talking to two Warbler alumni. "He actually had the audacity to-"
"He interrupted your song?" Kurt cut her off. "How? What did he do?"

"What do you mean, what did he do?" Blaine interjected. "Who cares about that? Why was he even there in the first place?"

Kurt's stomach suddenly filled with lead. He knew why Sebastian had come to the diner on a Sunday. And if he hadn't let Blaine convince him to call in sick again, he would have been there instead of Rachel. A dreadful thought came up. What if Sebastian had asked for him, or worse, told her why he was there?

"I have no idea why he was there, but the second he saw me, he attacked!" Rachel said, her voice rising.

"How dare he! God, I thought we'd seen the last of him!" Blaine let out indignantly.

Kurt bit his lip. Something was wrong with Rachel's story. He couldn't imagine Sebastian doing something like that, not after this summer, not after knowing what Ethel and Marvin meant to him—oh.

For a brief moment, Kurt considered if Sebastian was so angry with him that he would, but rejected it almost right away.

"You know what, I guess people really don't ever change," Blaine continued. "He tried to make a move on me at my own proposal, you know."

Kurt's heart skipped a beat. It was like someone had just poured a slushy down the back of his shirt—a memory he was quite familiar with. He stared at Blaine, who cocked his head and gave him a sympathetic look.

"I couldn't bear telling you at the time, Kurt. I'm sorry. But he really did." He offered Kurt a shy smile. "I refused, of course."

"Of course," Kurt echoed in a whisper, feeling sick to his stomach. His mind was racing. First Rachel, now Blaine?

He couldn't explain why, but something told him they were both lying to him.

"What did he say, exactly?" he asked Rachel, narrowing his eyes.

Rachel looked at him frowning slightly. "I don't know exactly, he started rabbiting in French and you know I can't speak French, but when was anything he said ever nice?"

"I'm sure it was something very vulgar," Blaine said supportively.

*I'm sure it was something scathingly witty*, Kurt thought, tempted to say it out loud. But then he looked at Blaine and remembered why this whole mess had happened in the first place, and sighed. "I'm sorry about your tips, Rachel. But you shouldn't take it personally. It's nearly the end of the month, and I am not sure about their pension—"

"It was Sebastian's fault," Rachel insisted. "They always tip you."

*Yeah, when I show up*, Kurt thought guiltily. "Do you want to stay for lunch?"

"Oh! Let's make it a cheat day and get Cronuts!" Blaine agreed, his face brightening.
"I'd love to, you guys, but I really wanna go and shower the stench of French off me," Rachel said, pulling a face.

"Shower here and then we can go get Cronuts after!" Blaine said grinning at her.

Rachel beamed. "Okay!" And hurried off into the bathroom.

"I can't believe Sebastian is here, after everything he's done!" Blaine said, scowling at Kurt. "We have to get back at him!"

"And do what, Blaine?" Kurt asked. "Throw a slushy in his face? Steal a set list? We're not sixteen anymore."

Blaine gave him an irritated look. "I know that, but..."

Kurt looked at the bathroom door. "Have you considered that maybe...Rachel is exaggerating?"

Blaine looked surprised. "You don't think Smythe came to the diner?"

"Oh, I'm sure he did," Kurt replied, carefully guarding his expression. "We knew he lived in New York, right? ...Coincidences...happen." He tried not to wince. Blaine might be lying, but so was he. "Just maybe...he just sat there, had a coffee, and left." And blueberry waffles with extra ice-cream, he added in his mind. And cinnamon on his latte.

"But why would he do that?" Blaine asked.

"Because he's not sixteen anymore either," Kurt replied.

Blaine scowled. "I still don't like it Kurt! After everything he did? He almost blinded me, he blackmailed your brother, he tried hitting on me...knowing he's so near..." His expression softened, "It scares me, Kurt. What if he tries to hurt us again?" Blaine said with wide eyes.

There were so many things Kurt wished he could tell Blaine. That Sebastian had been hurting back then, that it wasn't his fault - not really. That he was a student now, with a job and responsibilities, new friends and a blog, and that he liked puppies. That Kurt knew exactly why he'd come to the diner, and it wasn't to antagonise Rachel.

But how could he, without confessing everything? It would risk everything they had finally regained.

Kurt clenched his jaw and nodded.

"We'll cross that bridge if we get there," he said instead, stepping closer to put his arms around Blaine. "I won't let him hurt us."

Blaine relaxed into Kurt's embrace.

"Why is he even in New York? Why doesn't he fuck off back to France! It was all he ever spoke about," Blaine spat out..

Kurt froze, feeling his anger rise. He knew why Sebastian couldn't go back to France, and it wasn’t because he didn’t want to. Kurt let go of Blaine, and took a few steps back.

"The way I remember it, you were the one constantly asking him about France. Like that night at Scandals. Wow, Sebastian, did you really drink Courvoisier in your coffee at school? Did you and your friends really get locked into the Louvre overnight? " He imitated Blaine's voice, the events of
that night coming back in all their bitterness and pain.

Blaine’s eyes flashed. "Why are you attacking me?" he asked accusingly.

"I..." Kurt started, realising what he was doing. His anger was completely misdirected- he was angry with Sebastian’s family, mostly, not with his fiancé. Guilt washed over him. "I'm sorry."

Blaine's expression softened. "He's the bad guy here, remember? Not me. I just asked him all of those things to be polite."

Kurt nodded, feeling conflicted. If Sebastian was the bad guy... why were they lying to each other?

The sound of the shower turning off caught Blaine's attention and he glanced in the direction of the bathroom before looking back up at Kurt.

"Look, we've had a bit of a shock...why don't we just take Rachel for lunch and try and forget about it? And hopefully we'll never have to see him again?"

Kurt nodded again, eagerly accepting Blaine's offer to forget about it and stop fighting.

He knew now that any hopes he might have had about telling Blaine about Sebastian, and the three of them becoming friends, were dashed. It would be best if he forgot about all of it; summer break, Coney Island... Sebastian, Alice, Steph and Alex.

Yes, that would be best - but he knew he couldn't.

As he followed Rachel and Blaine down to the bakery, he sent Sebastian a text.

To: P. Martini (13:45)

Can we talk?
A Word of Truth

Chapter Summary

After a month apart Kurt and Sebastian finally talk, and start to re-build their friendship

Chapter Notes

We'd like to take this moment to say thank you for reading and sticking with us!

Sebastian sat on a bench underneath the canopy of trees arching over The Mall in Central Park. He had his phone clutched tightly in his hand.

After leaving the diner, he'd decided to stay out and get some air in his lungs after being cooped up in his apartment for two days. A walk in the park seemed like a good idea.

He'd gotten Kurt's text a couple of hours later and felt the jolt in his chest at his words.

From Kurt: (13:45)
Can we talk?

Sebastian had stared at his phone for almost five minutes before typing out a hasty reply.

To Kurt: (13:50)
Yes. I'm in the park if you fancy a walk.

Kurt had replied yes and they'd agreed to meet here.

Sebastian kept glancing around nervously, looking out for him.

Kurt wasn't sure what to expect. Had Sebastian come to the diner to reconcile, or to tell him he wouldn't be waiting for an apology any longer, and he and his friends would move on?

The excuse to leave the Cronut shop had come readily enough - even if he wasn't heading out to a secret meeting, Kurt would have taken a walk after having a fried lunch. As expected, Blaine and Rachel didn't join him.

He spotted Sebastian from a distance, and took a deep breath, straightening his back. He slipped into stage posture easily, locking his nerves behind tightly coiled muscles, and approached him.

Sebastian saw him coming and bit his lip nervously, standing up as Kurt approached. He slid his phone into his pocket and wiped his hands on his jeans.

"Hey," Kurt offered.
A couple with two playful dogs walked by. He noticed that Sebastian paid them no heed, and he swallowed. This was going to be worse than he expected.

"Hi..." Sebastian replied quietly. "I umm...how are you?"

Kurt shrugged. "I'm okay," he said. "You?"

Sebastian shrugged in return. "I'm okay..."

It felt awkward and formal, but Kurt couldn't relax just yet.

"Why did you come by the diner today? Rachel came to tell us."

Sebastian looked at Kurt, hating the awkward air that hung between them and the slight accusatory tone to Kurt's voice.

"I missed you, and was coming to apologise," he said quietly, feeling a little defensive but reasoning that honesty was the best policy. "I'm really sorry, Kurt."

Kurt nodded, letting out a deep breath. He had spent a lot of time rehashing Sebastian's angry words in his head after their fight and rationalising what he had said in return. And then, he had slowly allowed Blaine to replace and smooth over the loss of his friend with his love until he didn't have to think about him or their fight anymore.

Until that morning, when Rachel's mention of Sebastian had brought it all back. Her and Blaine's dismissive and rude words about him had made Kurt angry. He knew he wouldn't be feeling that way if their fight had broken everything between them. As soon as he had realised that, he knew he had already forgiven Sebastian. They had both said a few pretty hurtful things.

"I'm sorry, too," he said. "I shouldn't have said those things about you."

Sebastian pursed his lips and nodded. "And I shouldn't have said the things I did..."

He looked at Kurt and noticed several faint love-bites on his neck. He tried to ignore them. Things were apparently going well.

Kurt noticed Sebastian's eyes on him and brushed his hand over his throat. He knew what Sebastian was looking at. Kurt had half-heartedly tried to cover the hickeys with a neckerchief, but it was too warm to wrap his neck up completely.

A small part of him was also secretly proud of the marks. Blaine knew pressing passionate kisses to his throat was an infallible short-cut around foreplay; it might as well be an on-switch. To Kurt, they were visible proof that someone found him desirable. He'd always envied the kids in high school who walked around sporting love-bites, feeling like he'd never find someone willing to kiss him like that. Maybe it was immature, but Kurt couldn't help it.

He blushed a little, making himself lower his hand.

"Did you want to sit or shall we walk?" Sebastian asked.

"Walk. I had a big lunch and would like to move a bit," Kurt replied. He nodded at the foot path and they started walking down.

"Rachel mentioned, um...you were there when she sang *Evita*?" he asked carefully. He didn't want to repeat what Rachel had really said about him.
Sebastian nodded, sliding his hands into the pockets of his hoodie. "Yeah...she was out back when I got there and I talked to Dani a bit. Then the old couple came in and Rachel came out...Dani made herself scarce and I thought I'd watch the show..."

"What did you think about it?" Kurt asked neutrally. He knew Rachel had the vocals to sing the song, even if her presentation was a bit melodramatic. "Do you think Marvin and Ethel liked it?"

Sebastian shrugged. "It was okay, a little pitchy and she was kind of over-acting it, which killed the effect..." Sebastian bit his lip. "I don't think they hated it...But she has on nothing you. It's like that song was made for you."

Kurt smirked. "It's a song about a woman," he reminded Sebastian sternly, "But thanks." He hesitated. "But nothing...happened?" He glanced at Sebastian, and decided to tell him. "Rachel says you ruined her performance and with it, her chance at a tip."

Sebastian scoffed. "Of course she did." He shook his head. "I did nothing of the sort. She didn't even notice me until she got back behind the counter."

He scowled and kicked a stone. "I might have goaded her a little, but it wasn't anything really bad. He quickly repeated what he’d said, switching to French.

Kurt laughed out loud. "I knew it!" he said triumphantly, skipping ahead a little and spinning to look at Sebastian. "She said it was vulgar, but her French is abysmal. You should hear her slaughter Celine Dion..."

He gave Sebastian a small sample of singing that sounded like an opera version of Robesbear.

Sebastian shook his head in mirth. It was a pretty good imitation. Then, he hesitated. He didn't want to cause another argument, but he had to ask.

"That girl Dani said that you'd called in sick today...and that you did a couple of weeks ago too. Is everything okay?" Sebastian glanced at him sideways. He didn't look all that sick, which confirmed his suspicions that Kurt had faked it to be with Blaine, but there might have been something wrong that he couldn’t see.

Kurt bit his lip and smiled shyly. "Um, yes...more than okay, actually." He touched his neckerchief briefly. "I was planning to go to work today, but Blaine was...very persuasive."

He sighed dreamily. "I think we are past our funk now. Those two weeks apart, it made all the difference. We haven't had a single fight yet, Blaine brings me flowers, he helps out in the apartment, and he hasn't been out with Sam since he came back. We've just been hanging out on Tuesdays, watching movies and..." He trailed off. "It's like we're finally back to before."

Kurt turned to look at Sebastian. He was frowning.

"I'm sorry," Kurt offered. "I know you think relationships are lame. This must sound so...bourgeois to you. But it's what I want. What Blaine and I talked about when we dreamed of coming to New York."

Sebastian shook his head. "I think relationships can work if they're right..." he said quietly. "And I'm glad things are okay. You deserve to be happy Kurt."

Kurt was a little surprised. He had expected Sebastian to laugh it off, maybe tease him a little; but perhaps they weren't back there, yet.
"Thanks."

They walked for a bit, and Kurt couldn't help but think of their fight again.

"I think, maybe...I gave you the wrong impression last month," he started. "Or maybe I was a little too pessimistic about what would happen when Blaine got back. I might have overreacted with the wine. I'm sorry."

Sebastian half-smiled at him, "it's okay...I overstepped. And I shouldn't have called you a ...umm...yeah." He broke off, not wanting to say it again. They both knew what he'd said.

He kicked a stone in front of them and was pleasantly surprised when Kurt kicked it back.

He couldn't believe that Kurt had let Blaine talk him into pulling a sickie, twice. But he didn't say anything. He didn't want Kurt to shout at him again.

"So...how've the others been? Steph and Alex? Is Alice still seeing Brody? I wanted to text her, but..." Kurt hadn't been sure it would have been allowed. In a way, the fight with Sebastian had felt like a break-up, where everything was suddenly divided into two camps. Kurt remembered how fierce Alice had been at Coney Island, and he hadn't felt ready to face her again.

Sebastian smiled. "They're okay...I saw Alex last night, actually." He thought back to the night before with a small smile. It was rare for Alex to be serious, but that meant that when he was and took the time to look after his friends, it meant that much more. "We drank so much whiskey I'm surprised I don't have a worse hangover..." he said laughing lightly.

"Whiskey, really?" Kurt said, making a face.

"It's delicious, and a sure-fire way to get me drunk. And yes, Alice is still with Brody, they're practically fused at the hip," Sebastian continued to smile. He was happy for her.

"I'm glad for her. And for Brody too! He needs someone feisty like Alice in his life," Kurt said. In retrospect Brody and Rachel had never been a good match,

Sebastian smiled and then hesitated. He didn't really care but it was polite to ask. "How was Blaine's trip to LA?"

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Oh, amazing, apparently. I mean, I am not complaining! But I am getting a little sick of hearing about it. Cooper has a great house, and great friends, and everything’s great, great, great...he met filmmakers and producers, it was all very Hollywood."

Sebastian didn't miss the exasperated tone to Kurt's voice.

Kurt saw Sebastian look at him and added, "His brother Cooper is an actor. You might know him from the Free Credit Rating Today commercial? You know, tall, built, dreamy?"

"I wouldn't know...to be honest I don't really keep the channel on for commercials and I don't watch that much TV...just a couple of shows. I'll take your word for it though," Sebastian said with a grin. It was a nice change to hear Kurt use the word ‘dreamy’ about someone who wasn’t Blaine.

"Well, let's just say, between us... I didn't get the best-looking brother." Kurt winked and then blushed heavily. "Blaine would be so angry with me if he heard me say that," he confessed. "He's always been in competition with - and quite honestly - losing, to his big brother." Kurt cleared his throat. "But you know... I'm pretty sure his brother is straight, so...Well, as straight as anyone is in Hollywood, anyway. And Blaine has other...qualities."
Sebastian smirked. "So he has a big dick then?" He couldn't help that that was where his mind went.

Kurt huffed out a surprised breath and looked at him from the side. Sebastian looked genuinely interested.

"That's not what I meant," Kurt mumbled. "And I think...he's ok." He blushed. "You have to realise, guys at school were always uncomfortable with me showering with them, so... it's not like I have had a lot of comparison besides myself. Blaine was- he is- my first and only." Kurt braced himself for what was assuredly coming- Sebastian's vocal disapproval or amusement.

Sebastian smirked. "I didn't mean anything by it," he reassured Kurt. "I was joking..."

His smile softened as he looked at Kurt. He considered Kurt's admission about Blaine being his only lover.

"It's pretty cool that you've only been with one person," he said honestly.

"Why would you say that?" Kurt asked, coming to halt. "I thought you'd be the last to think that."

Sebastian stopped walking and turned to look at Kurt with a serious look, a frown forming on his brow.

"Just because I haven't done the monogamous thing myself doesn't mean I don't get why other people do it. I don't judge when it comes to sex...if you've done with it hundreds of people or one person or even none...Everyone is different and whatever works for them is cool."

He paused.

"But I do feel you should either be monogamous or casual. They're mutually exclusive. You can't claim to be in a committed relationship with someone, and still go out and fuck random people. Pick one path and stick to it, if you want to change lanes fine, but don't sit over the line."

He paused again.

"The thing that bothers me most, though, is when people judge me because I've had a lot of partners. Just because I enjoy sex does not make me a bad person."

Kurt bit his lip, nodding.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I've been...judgemental in the past. I just don't understand how that whole...casual thing works, so I just echoed what others said about it. It shouldn't be anyone's business how many people you sleep with except yours."

Sebastian’s frown dropped and he offered Kurt a small smile. "That wasn't directed at you," he said quietly. "But thanks."

He bit his lip, hating that it still felt awkward between them. "So was Rachel really mad earlier?" he asked with a grin, trying to lighten the mood.

Kurt was happy for the change in topic.

"Oh yes!" he replied eagerly. Now that he was talking to Sebastian again, it seemed ten times funnier. "You know how she is, 'the world is but a stage, and all the men and women merely Rachel's extras.' He winked. "She was convinced you had come to New York to sabotage her."

He grinned. "I'm glad I don't live with her anymore. It was fun at first, but after a while, her ego left
Sebastian chuckled, shaking his head. "She is something else."

The couple with the dogs from earlier came their way again, having finished their round.

"Go on," Kurt said fondly. "I know you want to."

At Kurt's words, Sebastian looked and saw the two black labs walking towards them again. He bit his lip and shook his head. "No...it's okay."

Kurt swallowed nervously, that was the first time since knowing him that Sebastian had not greeted a dog.

"Oh um...okay." It unnerved him a little. Then he remembered something and used it to try and avoid the awkward moment. "Hey, how was the dog sitting at Marc and Paul's?"

Sebastian shrugged. "It was okay.... I uh, didn't have a party in the end. I just had a quiet week instead." He sighed a little.

"Oh," Kurt let out, a little surprised. "I thought..." He wondered how to finish that.

He had assumed that Sebastian's life had just gone on without him, like nothing had happened at all. Why hadn't it?

"Because of our fight?" he finally asked.

Sebastian hesitated. He didn't want to upset or annoy Kurt again but he also didn't want to lie about it.

"Umm yeah, kind of...I just wasn't really in the mood to be sociable."

"I'm sorry," Kurt offered. He should have apologised sooner, he saw that now. It had been selfish to think that their fight had only affected him, and that it was over after Blaine had successfully distracted him from it.

"Are we... ok now? Can we be like before?" Kurt asked carefully. "I miss talking to you without you making any inappropriate jokes or innuendo."

He added the last in hopes of cheering his friend up. He nudged Sebastian's shoulder with his.

Sebastian half-smiled but he was still wary. He'd missed Kurt too, and wanted to be them again. But a month was a long time to go without talking and it hurt that Kurt seemed to have walked away from their argument without giving him or it a second thought. It felt like Kurt had forgotten about him completely, right up until he had found out about Sebastian’s visit to the diner. And that stung... a lot. It made him wonder if Kurt would ever have tried to make amends if Sebastian hadn’t made the first move.

"I've missed you Kurt. This last month has been really shit without you. You're one of my best friends.” Sebastian breathed deeply. "But I can't just bounce back completely as if it never happened.”

He knew that deserving Kurt meant being there for him when he needed it, but he wasn’t completely ready to let all of his walls down again.
"I get that," Kurt replied. He really did. Whenever he and Blaine had a fight and they'd made up, they'd pretend everything was okay again right away, but Kurt could list several fights from the top of his head where that tactic hadn't worked. He still hurt whenever he thought about those. Eli C. for example.

After Coney Island and what Alice had said about Sebastian, Kurt understood that this was one of those times for Sebastian too.

They walked on for a while without speaking. The silence wasn't like before either.

Actions were what mattered, not more apologies.

"Can I still come to karaoke night?" he asked after a while. "Maybe I can win back your favour..." he joked, then paused.

'Please Bas,' he added softly, appealing to his friend's preferred language. *I'll do better. I really want to be your friend.*

Sebastian smiled despite himself, unable to resist the gravitational pull he felt towards Kurt, particularly when he spoke French. Yes, he was hurt, but he did want Kurt back and he knew that he couldn’t ever turn Kurt away. The whole reason for this conversation was because he wanted Kurt back.

'Of course,' he replied. *I want to be your friend too, don't ever think that I don't.* He let out a breath and moved closer to Kurt, offering his arm for Kurt to loop through as he so often did with Alice.

Kurt took his arm and pressed his cheek to Sebastian's shoulder for a moment. Maybe they'd make it, and could restore their friendship.

"Did I ever tell you about the time Nationals were in New York, and Rachel and I broke into the Gershwin Theatre?" he said conversationally, for now bridging the silence until it felt comfortable again.

Chapter End Notes
The June Dolloway Dance Lab Part 1

Chapter Summary

Kurt has some good news for his friends.

Alex pulled the door open to Pianos, a regular haunt of theirs, and let the girls and Sebastian walk through first.

"What time did Kurt say?" Steph asked Sebastian as they made their way to a table.

"About seven-thirty," Sebastian replied, looking at his watch.

"And did he say what we’re celebrating?" Alex asked.

"Nope, just that he had something to tell us and that we should meet him here tonight at seven-thirty."

It had been a very cryptic text conversation between him and Kurt earlier that day, and it had left Sebastian feeling a mixture of confused, excited and nervous.

It was a Thursday, which itself was an odd thing, considering Kurt normally only hung out with them on Tuesdays or Sundays.

"Oh, maybe he finally ditched the skanky fiancé and wants to celebrate his freedom!" Steph said, winking at Sebastian. Alice kicked her under the table.

"I highly doubt it," Sebastian replied, thinking about the happy, doe-eyed look on Kurt’s face whenever he’d spoken about Blaine since his fiancé’s return from LA.

"Guess we’ll have to wait and see," Alice said, taking Sebastian’s hand and squeezing it.

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Kurt made his way to the bar and beamed happily as he saw his friends already seated at a table.

Following their walk in the park a few weeks prior, Kurt and Sebastian had carefully picked up the threads of their friendship and knitted them together again.

He was so glad none of their friends had held any grudges against him for going MIA for almost a month after his fight with Sebastian; Alice was definitely grateful for introducing her to Brody, and Alex's jokes had intensified but - as far as Kurt was concerned - had become more tasteful. Maybe he had just gotten used to them.

"Hiiii!" he said, greeting them with jazz hands. "Thank you all for coming!" Before he sat down, he turned to Alice. "Hey, I ran in to Brody at NYADA, he's gonna be a bit late but he said he'd meet us here. He already knows, so I can tell you guys now."

He sat down and looked around into their expectant faces.

"Okay, hold on to your hipster hats," he joked. "June Dalloway is coming to NYADA. Now, I
know you guys probably don't know her, but she's the widow of Lester Dalloway and-

"Wait, is she that old lady who owns her own museum?" Steph asked.

"The name does ring a bell," Alice mused. Alex looked completely clueless.

"I met her at an art gallery once," Sebastian added. "She was unveiling a commission she’d paid for."

"Yes!" Kurt agreed happily, and more than a little impressed with his friends. "She's like the coolest socialite in the world, and pretty much the patron of every artistic endeavour in Manhattan. And now, she’s made this big donation to NYADA, and they are renaming the dance studio after her. And—" Kurt paused for dramatic tension. "A selection of students have been asked to perform at the ribbon cutting."

He looked around at his little group and nodded, tapping his own chest and grinning. "Madame Tibideaux personally put me forward."

"What! Oh my god Kurt, that’s amazing!" Steph leapt from her seat to hug him.

"I know, right?!" Kurt said excitedly, squeezing her tightly.

"Congrats man! You’ll kill it!" Alex said grinning.

"Well done, Kurt!" Alice said beaming.

Sebastian grinned, waiting for Steph to release Kurt before he spoke. "I’m so happy for you!" Sebastian squeezed Kurt’s arm. "Congratulations."

As Kurt looked at Sebastian, he could see genuine happiness and maybe even a little pride in his friend’s eyes. It made Kurt feel warm inside. He had to tear himself away to address everyone again.

"Okay, drinks on me, and then, I need you guys - and girls - to help me. I have to pick a song that represents NYADA as well as upholds my personal standards."

"I don't want anything from the recent hitparade. I was thinking maybe Sondheim, but Madame Tibideaux will expect that of me and I kind of want to surprise her."

"Am I too late for the free round?"

Kurt looked up and saw Brody standing behind him, carrying a bouquet of pale pink roses.

"Hey Kurt. Congratulations, man." Brody pulled out a single rose and gave it to Alice with a kiss on her cheek, before offering Kurt the rest.

"Aw, Brody, you shouldn't have," Kurt protested.

"No, you really shouldn't have," Alex agreed. "Because we have nothing and now you make us look like dicks. Why did he already know, Kurt? It's unfair."

"It's NYADA," Brody said, pulling up his shoulders apologetically. "Everyone knew within minutes."

"Alex, you have yet to buy anyone flowers here," Steph reminded him teasingly.

"Well, I might have, if I'd known," Alex grumped, "and then you would have gotten one too."
Kurt chuckled, smelling the flowers and enjoying the moment. An attentive waitress arrived to put them in a vase for him.

Sebastian smiled. Kurt was talented and people were really starting to notice...finally.

"Really Kurt," he said quietly while everyone else was distracted, bumping Kurt's shoulder gently. "You deserve it!"

"Thanks," Kurt replied. "It's a bit of a step-up from the chorus line at New Directions, huh?"

Their reaction was balm to his soul. Kurt would never tell them, but they weren't the first to hear the news. He had tried telling Blaine the moment he'd received word, but apart from not knowing "all the old Broadway stars we're supposed to worship" (June wasn't an actress, but Blaine didn't seem very interested in Kurt's brief but detailed bio of her life's achievements), Kurt's fiancé had been preoccupied with picking a bowtie to wear to his evening with Sam. They had reunited when school started again, and to catch up on lost time, they now had BLAM nights twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Kurt hadn't told Sebastian about that yet, and wasn't sure if he should. He knew his friend's opinion about Blaine.

"It's a massive step and it's where you're meant to be...you should never be hidden away at the back, Kurt. You're too talented."

Sebastian smiled at him. He thought it a little odd that Kurt wasn't at home celebrating with Blaine and the rest of his friends, but Sebastian wasn't complaining. He'd always rather that Kurt was here surrounded by people that loved and respected him.

A first round of drinks arrived, and after everyone but Kurt and Brody hadinstagrammed different angles of their beverage, they raised a toast to Kurt. He could hardly believe it. Not just that he got a chance to sing - but that this group of people was genuinely happy for him without any agenda but his success. He felt giddy with joy.

"What do you think about I Dreamed A Dream?" Steph suggested. "I've always loved that song."

"Or Bring Him Home," Alice added. "It's definitely in your range."

"Is she a music critic now?" Alex mumbled, looking a little embarrassed that he couldn't list any Broadway songs off the top of his head.

"Bring Him Home is an excellent choice," Brody chimed in. "Did you guys know Kurt won Midnight Madness with it at NYADA? It's like a song battle, Broadway style."

"I was just lucky," Kurt said, taking a large sip of his drink.

"No, you were amazing," Brody countered. "Don't start again, Kurt. You deserved that win and everyone, including Rachel, knew it."

Sebastian sipped his drink and looked at Kurt. He noticed him blush a little. He'd been beaten down so much he still didn’t see how amazing he was.

"What about Memory?" Sebastian suggested.

Kurt gasped and sat up, looking at Sebastian with wide eyes.
"Yes! Oh my god, I love that song!" he exclaimed.

"And...it’s Classic Broadway, well within your range and not done much anymore," Sebastian added.

"Why am I the only one who doesn't know what that means," Alex asked Steph, and she quietly explained about vocal ranges and Kurt's extraordinary talent. Kurt tried not to listen, feeling a little bashful.

"Memory . I love it," he repeated, smiling at Sebastian. "And I know just the outfit for it too." He thought about it for a moment, already planning accessories and shoes. "I wish you could come. But it'll probably be NYADA students and alumni only."

"Well, I can bring Alice," Brody said, sliding an arm around her waist. "But I can’t get you all free passes unfortunately."

"Alice can film it and then we can all sit and revel in your talent Kurt!" Steph said grinning at him. Kurt smiled. Why not?

"Your man will be there too, right?" Alex asked. "He goes to NYADA."

Kurt nodded. "Yes, yes, I suppose he will be. I mean, of course he will." If it's not on a Tuesday. Or a Thursday.

At least there was no risk of Sam turning up at a NYADA event.

Sebastian frowned but held his tongue. He saw Alex glance at him and Sebastian shook his head, sipping his drink.

"We’d all be there if we could, Kurt!" Alex offered instead.

"You’re gonna kill it!" Sebastian added, grinning at Kurt, and desperately fighting down the urge to rant about Blaine.

"Thanks, everyone," Kurt said, visibly moved. "I’ll remember you all in my first Tony speech."

"You'd better!" Alex huffed.

"Did you know in your senior year at NYADA, there's an optional class on acceptance speeches and reward ceremony protocol? They don't beat around the bush at our school," Brody said. When everyone was giving him wide-eyed looks, he quickly added "Uh, I am not taking it, of course."

"Maybe you should," Alice said fondly.

"I think you should too, babe," Sebastian said nudging Kurt with his shoulder. "You’re going to win multiple awards...if they offer a class to help you deal with that you should take it."

Kurt felt a warm glow spread all over his chest from inside. For the first time since their fight, Kurt felt like maybe they were really okay again.

"Nah, I'll get so famous I'll hire someone to write my speeches," he joked, deflecting Sebastian’s compliment by making it grander.

It always felt a bit strange to talk like this - on one hand, he was convinced he was talented, maybe even extraordinarily so - but at the same time, real life had proven again and again no one saw him...
like that. It was hard not to stop believing.

Until now, that was. Professional recognition and being lauded by his friends...it felt pretty damn good. Kurt hoped that Blaine would be more susceptible for his news tonight. He was usually in a good mood after meeting with Sam.

Blaine never did tell what had caused his friendship with Sam to take a backseat for a month - maybe just like Kurt, he had also resolved to spend more time on his relationship. Now, with school and work and homework, Kurt couldn't really hold up all of his plans, unless he gave up sleep all together. So Blaine had gravitated back to his bff...it was probably unavoidable. He couldn't expect Blaine to just sit around in the apartment waiting for him to have time, after all.

"I think I need to try the cheesecake here. It's New York after all," Kurt announced. "Who's with me?"

"Is this guy for real?" Alex asked. "I just can’t tell anymore. What kind of question is that?" He looked around the group.

"I'm with you on this one," Brody chipped in. "I don't understand the question at all."

"Beats me," Steph added.

"Cheesecake is never a question," Alice said sagely.

"So that's cheesecake for everyone then?" Kurt concluded, looking at Sebastian questioningly. "Or is that something the French do better, too?"

Sebastian shook his head and chuckled. "Hit me with your Yankee cheesecake, American boy," he said fondly.
Chapter Summary

The opening ceremony does not go exactly as planned.

Chapter Notes

Listen to the referenced song here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0XDVrEqwHg

"Don't worry. It's going to be great." Blaine hugged Kurt from behind as they both stood in front of one of the large mirrors in the dance lab.

A part of the large hall had been warded from view with room dividers to serve as a changing room for the performing students. Next to them, a petite young woman was binding herself into pointe shoes. She looked determined rather than nervous. Kurt wished he felt that way too.

Blaine kissed the side of his throat and Kurt closed his eyes, letting himself be distracted.

On the other side of the room dividers, he heard the unmistakable French accent of his mime - and body language teacher. He introduced June Dalloway, making her name sound exotic. Kurt thought of Sebastian. He didn't sound like that. But when he spoke French...

"No, stop it," Kurt protested, pushing Blaine away. "Don't give me a hickey just before I have to go on stage." Blaine's kisses had been growing more and more heated.

"I can't help it," Blaine complained. "I want you."

"Well, there's a time and place," Kurt hissed. "Save it for after."

"...and now, my dear Ms June, it is my pleasure to introduce to you: Kurt Hummel!"

Kurt raised his chin, straightened his posture, and took Blaine's hand. "Okay, let's go," he said.

Alice and Brody sat in the back of the room, waiting eagerly for Kurt to perform.

"I can't see his fiancé," Alice whispered to Brody, scanning the room. "I can't believe he wouldn't show up to support Kurt."

"I know," Brody whispered back. "He always seemed a bit off, but to dismiss Kurt's achievement completely..." he shook his head.

Alice sighed and leaned into Brody a little. His arm wound around her automatically, holding her close. He placed a kiss to her temple.
As Kurt and Blaine stepped onto the stage, the audience politely applauded. Right in the front, in the middle, sat June Dalloway, an elderly lady with a dyed pixie haircut and a lot of make-up. She looked reserved. Somewhere in the back, Kurt spotted Brody and Alice.

"What-" Alice said wide eyed. "What the hell is going on?"

Brody shook his head. "No idea."

There was only one microphone, so Kurt lowered it for Blaine to reach, and they shared it. He nodded at the band, and they started playing.

"No milk today, my love has gone away..."

It was a pleasant enough tune, and it was hard not to like it. It was in A-minor, which showed off Blaine's vocals. Kurt hoped it would remind June of the time of her youth.

Alice and Brody frowned at each other. This wasn’t the song Kurt had picked, and he wasn’t even singing lead vocals.

"Oh hell no," Alice said, folding her arms across her chest and scowling.

"Now all that's left is a place dark and lonely..."

June was smiling at them. Kurt got the feeling she was smiling just a little more whenever Blaine looked her way, but most people did. She must like the song, he thought happily. He could tell Blaine was getting agitated sharing their microphone. Kurt knew that look. Blaine wanted to move.

Kurt shook his head a little, but Blaine didn't see. His fiancé unhooked the microphone and danced towards June, who held out her hand. In between lines, Blaine kissed it gallantly.

There was nothing Kurt could do if he didn't want to make a scene, so he let it happen, switching to singing the background vocals as if this was part if their plan.

Down in the crowd, Alice saw red. She opened her mouth to say something, pulling out of her boyfriend’s grasp, but Brody wrapped his arm back around her around her and pulled her close.

"Don’t make a scene, you’ll just embarrass Kurt more," Brody said quietly, looking at their friend. Kurt was visibly mortified and trying desperately to brush it off.

Alice closed her mouth and bit her tongue. She was fuming.

"I can’t-"

"I know," Brody said in a dark voice, glaring at Blaine who was wailing into the mic. His voice kept losing pitch and he was trying to mask it by dancing and spinning around. "Me neither, but we can’t help Kurt right now and making a scene will just make things worse."

Alice's shoulders shook in Brody's arms. "I hate this," she whispered, the fight going out of her. "It's so unfair."

"It is," Brody agreed, holding her tightly. There were days where he hated NYADA and its divas and sycophants. He'd seen great performers get passed over due to favouritism, mediocre talent get celebrated due to pandering... in a way, it prepared them for the world outside of school, but it was not a productive learning environment.
Brody looked around. He could see several other students with equally horrified expressions. He recognised a few from Mr Hura's class.

Blaine eventually remembered Kurt and returned to share the microphone, and they finished the song together. A moderate applause rose from the audience.

Alice slipped her phone back into her pocket. She had been unable to film the horrific sight she’d just been witness to. She felt her stomach drop to her feet like lead.

Blaine bowed deeply, beaming at the crowd, clearly under the impression that he’d killed it. Kurt nodded his head a little with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes.

"We have to do something to fix this." Alice said quietly.

"Like what?" Brody replied. "Kurt won’t hear a bad word against Blaine, Sebastian learned that the hard way."

Alice sighed, "I know."

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[Backstage]

"That was so great!" Blaine said, bouncing on his feet. "I really think they liked me-I, uh, mean us! They really liked us."

"Yes, June liked you a lot," Kurt said, “but did you really have to leave me standing there without a microphone? That was kind of-"

"Mr Hummel, a word in my office, please." The calm voice of Madame Tibideaux cut through Kurt's words. It was clear that this was not a request. The other students quickly hurried off as soon as they saw a flash of her turban.

Kurt felt his heart sink, but he nodded quickly and followed her swaying robes. Her office wasn't far, but it seemed to Kurt that the walk lasted for hours. His mind was racing. How bad was it? Was she going to reprimand him, or worse? Unlike Blaine, he knew they had messed up, in front of their big time sponsor.

"Close the door."

Kurt's nerves surged.

"Mr Hummel," Madame Tibideaux said, in that special voice that betrayed nothing about her intentions. "I put you forward for this event because I believed you were the perfect candidate. You have excelled in everything you have done since joining NYADA, and despite starting late you are now on track to graduate on time and likely in the top 5% of your class..." She paused, and Kurt braced himself.

"Please explain to me," she continued, "why you invited your freshman fiancé to join you, when he is barely hanging on by a thread? And why you picked such a mediocre piece of music? I chose you to represent the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts, not Radio Vintage FM."

"I..." Kurt started, but a single look from Madame Tibideaux made his words falter. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Miss Dolloway seemed to enjoy it?" he tried carefully.
"Miss Dolloway is a senile eighty year old crone with more money than is good for her. Yes, she sponsored one of our halls and I’m thankful for that. That doesn’t make her a music critic. There were more people in that room, Mr Hummel; press, other sponsors - I counted on you to represent our school to the best of your abilities, which is why I endorsed your performance. Had I known that you would invite Mr Anderson to join you, I would have advised against it. You sprang this on all of us without warning, which makes me think you knew it was a bad idea. What were you thinking?"

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[The previous Thursday]

Blaine opened the door to his and Kurt's apartment, on a high from a great night out with Sam. He was glad that they were friends again. He loved Kurt but he lived for his nights with Sam. His relationship with Kurt was an investment in the future - Sam was just instant fun.

He stepped into the apartment and dropped his keys on the table, letting his bag fall to the floor.

He heard Kurt in the bedroom and started to walk towards him. On the way, he toed out his shoes and left his jacket on the sofa.

"Kurt?" he called.

"In here," Kurt called out. He was already in bed, reading a magazine. Or, pretending to read it anyway. He had lit a couple of candles and was really just waiting for Blaine to come home. After the great reception of his news from his friends, Kurt had decided to give it another try to celebrate with Blaine, too. Maybe he had just been preoccupied earlier.

"Hey," he said with a smile as Blaine entered, putting his magazine away. "How was your evening?"

Blaine looked at Kurt laying in bed, candles lit on the nightstand, and felt something stir inside him.

"It was really good! We went to Five Guys and then saw The Maze Runner...how was yours?" He stripped off his clothes down to his boxers and climbed into bed next to Kurt.

"Alright," Kurt replied. "I was just thinking about songs I might do for the Ribbon Cutting ceremony. You know, I told you before? With June Dolloway?"

Blaine frowned. He didn’t remember what Kurt had been saying. Sometimes, Kurt talked so fast and high pitched that Blaine had learnt to tune him out.

"What ceremony? Who’s June Dolloway?" he said shuffling away to look at Kurt.

Kurt let out a soft breath and smiled. "June's an old lady who donated a lot of money to NYADA and Madame Tibideaux has asked a few of us to perform in her honour," he explained, cutting straight to the chase so Blaine didn't lose interest half-way. "I'm in it. I get to sing when they dedicate the dance lab to her." He pressed his lips together in a thin, hopeful smile and looked at Blaine.

"It's... kind of the biggest endorsement I've had since the Winter Showcase, and I wasn’t officially at NYADA then yet...so..." Kurt tentatively put a hand on Blaine's shoulder as he waited for his fiance's reaction.

With every word that came out of Kurt’s mouth Blaine felt his heart sink lower and lower.

No way, he thought. That makes no sense! Why didn’t Madame Tibideaux ask me?
"That's...great," he said glumly. He knew Kurt was expecting him to be happy and proud, but he couldn't manage it...he was being left behind again. How could they do this to him?

"It could be," Kurt said softly, trying to squash his disappointment. "If I don't mess it up." Suddenly, he wasn't so sure if he really had what it took to sing Memory. "Maybe I should tell her to ask a senior to do it."

Kurt felt like he was begging for Blaine to refute him and he hated it, but already the vibrant colours of his evening were draining away. He really just needed Blaine to tell him it was going to be okay, to bring some of that buzz back so he could share it with the one who mattered most to him. He let his hand slide down Blaine's arm to seek his hand and guide it to his hip.

Blaine pulled his hand away and frowned at Kurt. Why was he fishing for compliments? Surely he got enough of those from everyone else. Madame Tibideaux asked him especially! Couldn't Kurt see how insecure it made him to be left out? What did Kurt want from him? It wasn't his job to bolster Kurt more.

"You won't mess it up," he said grumpily. "Everyone at that school loves everything you do...and they hate me."

"That's not true," Kurt said immediately, his voice a little stronger. "They don't hate you! You got in, remember? At first try, one of twenty in the entire country. There are no free tickets into NYADA, I should know!"

Kurt licked his lips and considered his possibilities. He could let it drop, go without his support and face Blaine's passive-aggressive comments until the ceremony, or...

"Maybe you should sing with me," he suggested.

Blaine's head snapped up and he looked at Kurt with wide eyes.

"Really?" he said, laying on a thick sappy tone that always made a Kurt give in to him. "You'd do that for me?"

Kurt blushed. "There's...pretty much nothing - apart from selling my tiara collection that's back in Ohio - that I wouldn't do for you," he joked feebly, but his heart was racing.

"Kurt," Blaine said warmly, scooting closer to him. "Thank you, I love you so much." He placed his hand over Kurt's and leaned in to kiss his neck.

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"I, um..." Kurt stammered, feeling his heart race again, but differently this time. "I guess I just...I don't know. I wasn't thinking."

"...with your head," Madame Tibideaux supplied. "You're lucky that there are, at this very moment, three other performers from this school that I trust will not pick today to trade favours with other students, and so I believe we can save this faux-pas. But I could not let this pass without voicing my disappointment in you."

"Yes," Kurt said miserably. "I understand."

"See it as a chance to improve your judgement, Mr Hummel. You have an amazing talent, but if you make the wrong choices, you will end up nowhere."
Kurt nodded, not trusting his voice to speak.

Carmen Tibideaux rose from her seat. "I will speak to Mr Anderson as well." She paused, cocking her head and frowning a little. "If you need a moment, I will go up ahead by myself."

Kurt nodded again, pressing his eyes closed tightly. As soon as she had left the room, he sobbed into his hand.

After a few minutes and several steadying breaths, Kurt wiped his face, pinched his cheeks to make his face look flushed and distract from his red-rimmed eyes, and forced himself back into an uplifted posture. It was time for another performance, without sheet music or cues.

He walked back to the dance lab. He could see Madame Tibideaux standing with Blaine...and June Dolloway? Before he could join them, he saw Brody and Alice come his way, and he put on a bright, enthusiastic smile.

The minute Alice saw him she left Brody and made a beeline for Kurt. She could see the remnants of tears in his eyes and his cheeks were puffy and red.

She wordlessly went up on her tiptoes and wrapped her arms around him in a tight hug. She held onto him for a moment before stepping back and looking up at him. "What was that, Kurt?" Alice asked. "I thought you were gonna do Memory. By yourself."

Kurt wished the hug had lasted longer but Brody had caught up with them. Kurt rolled his eyes a little. "Yeah, well, I had a little change of hearts. You know us drama types, fickle as spring weather."

Alice frowned. "Kurt!" She said looking up at him. "That was your moment and he completely took your spotlight..." She wanted to slap him as much as she wanted to hug him. "Why would you let him do that?"

Kurt shook his head. "That's not...It was my idea, okay? I asked him."

Brody put a hand on Alice arm, hoping she'd remember what they had spoken about earlier. Making a scene here, or worse, making Kurt feel even more miserable than he clearly already did wasn't helpful.

"So maybe it wasn't the best-" Kurt started, but broke off when he saw Blaine walking up to them.

"What are you doing here?" Blaine asked Brody bluntly. "Didn't they kick you out?"

Brody shared a look with Kurt and then glanced at Alice. "Hello Blaine. No, I actually still go to school here, believe it or not. I just came over to Kurt to say hi and introduce my girlfriend, Alice."

Blaine only gave her a vague, irritated look, and then zeroed in on Kurt. "You won't believe what just happened!" he let out.

"Did Madame Tibideaux talk to you?" Kurt asked carefully, trying to estimate the amount of damage control he had to do.

"No, well, yes I guess so, but - June Dolloway asked me to come to a charity dinner with her at the SOHO Center for Outsider Art, and get this, it's twenty-five thousand a plate. It's insane! She said she loved our song so much and she wants to talk to me about my future."

"Your future as... what?" Kurt asked. "Was she being inappropriate, because I draw a line at-"
"No, Kurt, eeew!" Blaine said, scrunching up his face. "No, she said something about having a very
discerning and tasteful eye for the extraordinary, and that she loves to hone it like a rough diamond
until it sparkles."

"And you're sure she doesn't just want to hone something else?" Kurt asked, narrowing his eyes at
the old lady who was now talking to Madame Tibideaux.

"Kurt, why can't you just be happy for me, god! That's disgusting."

Alice stared at Blaine completely dumbfounded. Anger was pulsing through her veins, reaching
every tip and fibre of her body.

Brody wasn’t faring any better, but he saw Madame Tibideaux walking their way. He subtly put his
arm around Alice and pulled her back. He could feel her vibrating with rage.

Blaine looked at the pair of them and scoffed. What’s her problem? He thought to himself. Then he
focused back on Kurt.

"Come on Kurt...this is a big thing for me, can we please go home and celebrate?" He wiggled his
eyebrows at Kurt.

Kurt closed his eyes for a moment, gathering himself. When he opened them again, he was ready to
be the person Blaine needed. "Sure. Yeah."

He turned to Brody and Alice. "Well, um, it was nice... meeting you, Alice," he said, feeling a little
conflicted over lying about her but using the opportunity Brody had given him. "Maybe we'll see
each other again some time."

Alice opened her mouth and took a breath as if she wanted to say something, but then closed it again
and nodded.

"See you around, Kurt," Brody offered.

Kurt saw Madame Tibideaux heading for them. He knew they couldn't avoid her forever, but maybe
he could still save the night. "Let's go," he said to Blaine, taking his hand and pulling him along.
"You can finish what you started earlier."

Blaine shot a small smug smile at Brody and quickly followed Kurt out.

"Why would that lady invite Blaine and not Kurt?" Alice said quietly, watching them go.

"I think she knows Kurt's not that easily bought," Brody said darkly, and took Alice's hand as well.
He had spotted Rachel in the crowd, and she had seen him as well. If they didn't leave now, he knew
she'd make a scene. "Let's go. I've had enough of this place for today."

As Blaine went to the bathroom to take a shower, Kurt took a large, comfortable sweater from his
closet, shrugged it on, and went into the living room. He felt hollow inside. Sometimes it felt like
there was nothing left inside of him that could feel anything.

If you make the wrong choices, you will end up nowhere.

Kurt's phone buzzed. He glanced at the lock screen and saw it was a message from Sebastian, asking
how Memory went. There was a pun about Cats he probably would have liked any other day. He
ignored it. Alice would tell him. He briefly wondered what Sebastian would say, but then pushed the thought aside. He couldn't defend this fiasco to yet another person.

Kurt sat down in his leather car seat, the only piece of furniture he had left from Ohio, and curled up his legs under him. He rested his cheek against the leather and stared at the wall. It had a water stain.

Then, he figured that since he wouldn't be able to sleep anyway, he might as well take a shot at his homework. He got up, took a folder from his bag and folded himself back into his chair. Songwriting 101... did he have something to sing about?
Chapter Summary

Kurt deals with the Dolloway disaster in his own special way.

Chapter Notes

A/N: The ‘orginal song’ in this chapter is a song by Adam Lambert, released in 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QA8RBytYh-c] As Elliott Gilbert may yet make an appearance in this story, we decided to pretend Adam does not exist in the Glee universe ;) We highly recommend listening to the song in the live version linked above!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"So wait, Kurt didn’t sing Memory?" Steph asked Alice and Brody. They sat at a high table in the bar on campus and they had just finished recounting the devastating events from the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Alice shook her head sadly.

"Blaine completely dominated the show," Brody said darkly. "It was awful and then Madame Tibideaux called Kurt into her office and..."

"I hate that guy so much," Alex said in a low voice. "And I’ve not even met him."

"Have you heard from Kurt?" Alice asked Sebastian.

Sebastian sipped his drink quietly, trying to keep his anger in check. "No, I texted him that evening but didn’t get a reply and he wasn’t at the club on Tuesday...god, I hope he’s okay." When Kurt didn’t reply to his text he had assumed that he and Blaine had been celebrating so had left them be. However, when Kurt didn’t turn up at Satire on Tuesday, Sebastian had become worried.

He had sent Kurt another text, which was ignored, so he’d tracked Alice down before class on Wednesday and she’d told him what had happened.

It had taken every ounce of strength that he possessed to not storm over to Kurt’s apartment and murder Blaine - from the look on Alice’s face he’d have a strong alibi...or an accomplice. But he knew Kurt would never forgive him. He’d already had a taste of what life without Kurt was like...he didn’t ever want to experience that again. So he’d left them alone and seethed in silence.

"Well, we’ll soon find out," Steph said, spotting Kurt walking in through the door of the bar.

"Hey," Kurt greeted them. He looked a bit tired, but his smile at seeing them was genuine. "I'm sorry, am I late? You're all here already. I don't usually arrive after Alex."

"Ha. Ha," Alex said.
"Yeah, at Open Mic night it's hard to get a booth if you're not here when the doors open," Alice explained.

Kurt smiled. "So who's gonna sing? Or are you just here to listen?" He gave Sebastian an expectant look.

"Well, you, of course," Brody said.

Kurt frowned. "Me?"

"Yeah, you owe me some Cats," Alice agreed.

Sebastian saw Kurt's face fall a little and he reached over to squeeze Kurt's hand.

"They told us what happened, are you okay?" He was glad his voice sounded calm. He was trying desperately to play the supportive friend rather than throw around I told you so's.

Kurt shrugged. "Just jealous, I guess...I let Blaine sing with me, and he ends up getting a personal sponsor organising an event just for him to shine...and all I get is a reprimand from NYADA's Dean. It's..." He sighed. "It's just hard not to take that personally."

What hurt a lot more, though, was the way Blaine expected, quite naturally, that everything should revolve around his days with June now. He spent hours with her every day, going to luncheons, 'meetings' (whatever they were) and rehearsals for the event she was setting up in his honour. He didn't cancel for dinner or send messages when he'd be home...leaving Kurt to worry. He'd talk of nothing else and all of his sentences would start with "June says..."

Sebastian bit his lip and looked at Kurt sadly. "I'm sorry..." he's such a dick, Sebastian added in his head. "For what it's worth, I think June made a huge mistake."

Kurt smiled a little. "Thanks. Madame Tibideaux seems to think so as well, but she won't go against someone willing to donate that much money to her school."

He shrugged. "It's just high school all over again."

"And us," Alex chimed in, and Alice kicked him under the table for ruining the moment.

Sebastian smiled at Kurt. "You do." He agreed. "And I'm pretty sure everyone in here would love to hear you sing, so if you're up for it...there's about a hundred people ready to boost your ego a bit." He winked.

Kurt grinned. "You know me too well," he said fondly. "That might really be just what I need."

Steph cheered. "So will you do something from Cats?"

Kurt eyed the piano on stage and bit his lip. "Actually, I may have something else...if I can get someone to play for me."

"Oh, they have a band, so if you have sheet music?" Alice said.

"I do...sort of," Kurt said, reaching in his bag for his homework. This seemed like a good opportunity to try out the song he had written. He looked at the handwritten notes. He'd need to make a clean copy to hand in at school, but it was legible enough...

Kurt contemplated if he was ready to open himself up this much. But if this was the song he was
going to hand in, he'd need to be able to sing it in front of strangers anyway. And these weren't
strangers, these were his friends.

"You write your own music?" Steph asked, looking at him with an expression that could only be
described as 'heart eyes'.

Sebastian looked at Kurt too, something warm blooming in his chest. From the look Alice gave him
he was sure he must have a similar expression on his face.

"I didn’t know you wrote songs..." he said softly. "Is there anything you can’t do?"

Kurt blushed. "I've never written anything before. This is for school...so I need you all to be brutally
honest afterwards. I still have a few days before I have to hand it in so I can make last-minute
changes."

Alex frowned. "You have to hand it in? But you keep the copyright, right?"

Kurt shrugged. "I think...I don't really know what happens to the songs after they're graded. I
mean, we'll need to make a presentation...but afterwards..."

"Make sure you get that clear and in writing," Alex warned him. "Before they sell it to Bieber or
something."

Kurt laughed. "I'm not sure it'd be his kind of thing, but thanks. I'll ask."

He got up. "I'll go talk to the musicians, then." His heart was beating rapidly in his chest. "Wish me
luck."

"Good luck!" They all said as Kurt slid off his chair and walked towards the stage.

"I can’t believe Kurt was upstaged by his fiancé at his own performance," Steph said darkly as soon
as Kurt was out of earshot.

"You don’t know Blaine," Sebastian responded in a low voice. "Even his proposal to Kurt was all
about making himself look good."

It didn't take long for Kurt to negotiate with the band. They were enthusiastic about trying new
material, and after making sure the sheet music was legible, Kurt returned to their booth, having
secured a pianist, drummer and guitarist. He hadn't written more than the melody for the piano, but
explained where he thought the others might come in and gave them permission to improvise.

"They'll do it," he announced, suddenly starting to feel a little nervous. "Now let's talk about
something completely different so I forget how terrified I am."

"How did your sister’s scan go yesterday, Steph?" Alice asked. "Does she know what she’s having
yet?"

"No, not yet, it’s too early to tell. I hope it’s a girl though!" Steph said grinning. "I’d love to have a
niece I can spoil."

Sebastian and Alex looked at each other with the same uncomfortable expression.

"What is it with girls and babies?" Sebastian asked. "Any mention of them and you get all mushy
and gooey..."

"You clearly never met my sister," Alice replied. "At the mere mention of babies she goes green in
the face and starts this whole rant about how the earth is overcrowded as it is and people should just stop procreating..."

"Well, some people should," Alex agreed. With a quick look at Steph, he added: "Not your sister! She's ok, I'm sure she'll make a great mom."

Kurt smiled. He had no intention of having children in the near future, but he could appreciate the excitement of the girls. "How far along is she?" he asked.

"Eleven weeks," Steph replied. "It looked amazing, the little beating heart... little arms and legs and everything! We got a print-out but I don't have it with me."

"It looks like an alien," Alex told Sebastian and Kurt. "Or a tiny T-Rex." He made a roaring sound and pressed his arms to his ribcage, making claws with his hands.

Steph just rolled her eyes. "Why don't you go get us a round of drinks, honey?"

Alex grumbled but conceded and got up from his chair to walk over to the bar.

"I'll come with!" Brody immediately offered, seemingly glad to opt out of the conversation as well.

"To turn your question back on you Seb, what is it with guys and babies that makes them freak out so much?" Steph asked seriously.

"Kids don't freak me out!" Sebastian said honestly. "I don't mind kids in general, but I'm only twenty...I don't wanna think about having my own just yet thanks..."

"Yeah, that," Kurt agreed, "and I think it's also the fear that this tiny new person will replace the affection of their partner. Suddenly it's not just the two of them anymore, but three." He glanced at the bar. "And in Alex' case, maybe, he'd feel pressured to finally pick a major." He winked at Steph.

"Well, I'd definitely want to wait until I finish my studies," Steph agreed. "Maybe even work a couple of years... there's no pressure, right? My mom didn't have us until she was thirty-five."

Kurt smiled wistfully. "My mom was twenty when she had me," he said. It was a strange thought - if she had waited until 35...he wouldn't even exist. He waved it off.

"At least I won't have to worry about any biological clocks ticking...we'll go surrogate anyway." He winked at the girls.

Sebastian ignored the twinge his heart gave at the thought of Kurt having children with Blaine.

"I think if I ever settle down I'd consider kids," Sebastian said, plowing through. "In like, ten years when I have my career sorted. And yeah, I guess a surrogate or adoption...whatever I decide with my non-existent future partner."

Alice playfully rested her head on Steph's shoulder and put her hand over her heart. "Do you hear that, Steph? 'His future partner'... our boy's finally growing up."

"It's adorable," Steph sighed.

Kurt snorted and elbowed Sebastian. He liked it. Somehow, he could see Sebastian living with someone. A house. A couple of dogs, maybe, like Marc and Paul... kids?

In the past few months, he'd seen Sebastian change his opinion from 'relationships are lame' - which may have been posturing in the first place - to 'maybe someday'. And while Kurt wouldn't go as far
as to agree with the girls that this made Bas a 'grown up', it did show he was starting to feel ready to invest in someone emotionally, which must have been a difficult process, considering his youth. Kurt was happy for him.

Sebastian blushed awkwardly. He suddenly felt very exposed. He felt Kurt bump his shoulder gently and he looked round at his friend and smiled.

"Who's growing up?" Alex asked, coming back carrying a tray. Brody was holding another.

"Seb!" Alice said happily.

"Yeah, right," Alex scoffed.

"Shut up, Alex!" Steph snapped. He was really annoying her this evening. "Just because you will forever be a man-child doesn’t mean everyone else will."

"Hey, come on guys," Brody offered. "Alex didn't even know what you were talking about. What did we miss? Is this still about babies?" He turned to grin at Sebastian. "Is Sebastian pregnant?"

"Eww," Alice let out, making a face at her boyfriend. "You're making it worse. Just shut up, the both of you. What did you get us?"

"I got you that horrible hipster lemonade you like. Bio...something." Brody picked a bottle from the tray and handed it to her.

The argument dispersed a little, though Alex remained pensive for a while after Steph's words. Not long after that, the Open Mic night started, and they concentrated on the singers. Kurt had a hard time not judging them from a NYADA view point, in his head rating technique, breathing, pitch. But he made a point of applauding for all of them, and hoped they'd do the same for him.

Finally, Kurt's name was called up, and he rose, giving Sebastian and the others a nervous smile. He walked to the small stage, climbed up, greeted the band, and adjusted the microphone. He waited for everyone to quiet down and look at him before he spoke.

"Hello, my name is Kurt Hummel, and I will be singing a song by...myself. For the first time. So...here it is."

Calm came over him, as it always did shortly before singing. He nodded at the pianist, and the intro started.

Kurt's friends smiled at each other. The opening melody rang out soft and gentle around the room and everyone had stopped talking to listen.

Kurt looked down at the floor before the stage, counting along in his head. Then, he looked up into the audience. The spotlight blinded him a little, and he could only see silhouettes. Maybe that was better than seeing their faces.

"You say you want the truth, but you can't take it," he started, scoffing softly. "So I give you lies...I give you lies."

About his friends. About his feelings. About the times he said 'I'm fine'.

The drummer picked up on the rhythm like a heartbeat.

"You say you want the best, but you destroy it..." Kurt closed his eyes, feeling emotion bubble up at
the memories. "So I keep it inside. I keep it inside..."

He frowned, concentrating on leading his voice through the melody cleanly despite the pounding in his heart.

"I tell you something - it's a double-edged sword you're giving, and I can't see the truth in living... when we hide behind a wall of fear." He finally opened his eyes and looked into the room as if he was addressing the one he wrote this song for. "And you don't see it. It's a twisted dream you believe in -"

The twisted dream that was them. Kurt and Blaine. How could it still exist if they kept doing this to each other?

"...and what's the use in pretending? Let's make the smoke and mirrors disappear..."

Kurt raised his voice and straightened his back, putting power and conviction behind the lyrics.

"So there I said it. I won't apologise to you anymore. 'Cause I'm a grown-ass man, and I won't live again and I'm sick and tired of living in your shadow... So there I said it."

As Kurt started to sing and the lyrics registered, his friends’ smiles dropped a little and they frowned at each other.

"I thought he said he was 'a little jealous' of Blaine?" Steph said quietly.

"He did..." Alex replied.

"This is not a song about being jealous," Alice said, shaking her head.

Sebastian didn’t say anything. He kept his eyes on Kurt up on the stage. He was magnificent and the tragedy of his words added to his beauty. He was baring his soul to every person in the room.

"So there I said it. No, I won’t apologise to you anymore. 'Cause I’m a grown ass man, and I don’t understand why I should be living in the shadows. So there: I said it."

Kurt sung the second half of the chorus, louder and with more anger behind his words. Why should he be satisfied with living in Blaine’s shadow? That was not how his father had raised him. He let the words ring out clearly, and in the pause before the next verse, the guitarist picked up on the melody, making the song sound more complete than it had at the apartment, with just Kurt’s small piano.

"You want to hear my voice, my mind, my demons... but not too much... or you'll give up..." Kurt sang softly again, thinking of the many arguments they’d had in the past days.

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"Where were you all day?"

"You know where I was. I was with June!"

"For six hours? What are you two planning for, world domination?"

"You know what-" Blaine broke off and frowned angrily. "Why don't you just come out with it, Kurt? Ask me what you really want to ask me."

"Alright," Kurt said, crossing his arms over his chest, not letting himself be cowed by Blaine's threatening tone. "Are you cheating on me again?"
"I can't believe you're still thinking about that!" Blaine let out exasperatedly.

"How can I not, when you stay out all day, don't text me back, and refuse to tell me what you've been doing? What am I supposed to think, Blaine?"

"Maybe you should just trust me," Blaine replied icily.

"I did, right up until you cheated on me the first time," Kurt bit back.

"You know what? I'm tired. I'm going to bed. I don't need to listen to the same old song every time," Blaine replied, and slammed the door of the bedroom closed, leaving Kurt standing in the living room.

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"I tell you something...it's a double-edged sword you're giving, and I can't see the truth in living...when we hide behind a wall of fear..."

The chorus repeated from then on, and with every line, Kurt's voice grew stronger and more determined to let it all out, building up until he was belting it out - he was sick and tired of this, and it was time he said it.

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"Bas? You know at my proposal..?" Kurt had started carefully a few days ago.

"Mmm?"

"Did you...you didn’t...Blaine says you came on to him that day," Kurt said, bracing himself.

Sebastian frowned as Kurt's words sunk in. "He what?"

Kurt winced, wishing he had kept it to himself. "He said you tried to make a move on him the day he proposed to me, and that he said no. I...I didn’t really believe him, but I wanted to hear it from you."

Sebastian looked like he had just eaten something that had gone bad. "I can assure you that I did no such thing, Kurt." He shook his head, and Kurt couldn’t help but feel validated - and it made him feel sick, too.

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As Kurt continued to sing, his friends watched with a mixture of pity and sadness for Kurt, and anger towards Blaine.

At the end of the song, he drew out the last lines, pushing his voice past its limits, almost turning the words into a scream. "So there I said it...I said it!"

The piano rang through the outro, and suddenly, the entire room was silent. But not for long.

The whole crowd was so captivated by Kurt and his song that it took a minute for the room to realise it had finished. As soon as it did, the whole place erupted in applause, people were standing up, stomping their feet and whistling.

Sebastian stood with the rest of his friends clapping hard, pride flooding through him. Kurt had taken his pain and turned it into a masterpiece.
"You have to do something, Sebastian!" Alice said loudly. "People in a happy relationship don’t write songs like this. You have to make him see that he’d be better off without Blaine!"

"I’ve tried, Alice!" Sebastian shouted back. "Remember? He didn’t talk to me for a month!"

Kurt smiled softly, feeling overwhelmed and wrung out. He made his way down the stage only to be called back by the pianist. He handed Kurt back his sheet music, clapping him on the shoulder before pulling him into a hug. The drummer and the guitar player joined them, the later gesturing excitedly and taking the sheet music to write something down in the margin. Kurt nodded, and shook their hands, the music once more in his possession.

"I think Kurt just found himself a band," Brody said, smiling.

Sebastian left Alice’s side and walked forwards to meet Kurt as he approached the table, pulling him into a hug. He tried not to think too long or hard about his actions. He just wanted to show Kurt that he was there.

"Are you okay?" he whispered in Kurt's ear.

Kurt swallowed a few times to get his throat to work, then replied. "I'm fine, I just over-strained."

"Not what I meant, babe."

Kurt pulled away a little to look at Sebastian. Maybe it was time to stop pretending. No more smoke and mirrors.

"I know," he whispered. Tears welled up in his eyes. "No, I'm not okay."

Sebastian wrapped his arms tighter around Kurt and pulled him close again.

"I know," Sebastian said quietly. "But you have us and we’re all here for you."

The atmosphere around the table subdued a little as they watched Sebastian comfort Kurt.

After a few more moments, Sebastian felt Kurt pull away and he released him reluctantly.

"Kurt, that was amazing!" Steph said as he slid back into the booth.

"Thanks," Kurt croaked, clearing his throat and wincing. "I think I threw my voice, though."

"Shall I get you some tea?" Brody offered.

Kurt nodded, and reached for his bag to take out some throat soother pastilles; standard supplies in his NYADA bag. The next act had started, but people were still looking their way and talking. A few were looking at their phones, playing back the videos they’d made. Kurt hoped they wouldn't upload them anywhere- the organiser of the Open Mic night had requested people not to, but that didn't mean they wouldn't. He wasn’t sure what would happen if his song got out before he had officially presented it at NYADA.

"Do you wanna talk about it?" Alice said, taking Kurt’s hand. Sebastian slid in next to him and placed his hand over Kurt’s comfortingly.

Kurt shrugged. Everyone was looking at him, and it made him feel very self-conscious. He rolled the throat pastille around in his mouth, sucking the soothing syrup into the back of his throat, stalling. As Brody returned with honeyed ginger tea and he had no real excuse to draw it out longer, Kurt started talking.
"I told you how Blaine is getting this special show sponsored by June Dolloway? Well...it took him a few days to tell me about that. When I asked him why I was the last to know, he said it was because he was still negotiating my part. I hadn't counted on getting to sing at all, so I was really happy."

Kurt took a sip of his tea.

"I started gathering ideas, coordinating outfits...but every time I asked Blaine when we'd start rehearsals, he'd put me off. Until I got sick of it and asked him what was going on."

Kurt cleared his throat. "As it turned out, June never wanted me in the showcase, and Blaine had lied to me to avoid telling me. He said he did it because he had been sure he would be able to change her opinion, but-

Kurt sighed, and as he closed his eyes, two tears rolled down his cheeks.

"The fact remains that he lied right to my face. Again. And I can't. He shook his head. "I just don't know how I should believe anything he says, now. Where he was, who he was with, what he was doing...if he actually loves me."

As he reached the end of his confession, Kurt clasped a hand over his mouth as if to physically stop himself from making it even worse, and choked off a sob.

Everyone around the table sat in silence as they listened to Kurt's story. Each of them was growing angrier at Blaine by the second and wanted to hug Kurt and make the pain go away.

Sebastian got there first and slid his arm around Kurt's waist, squeezing him gently.

"Kurt," Alex said quietly. "If he makes you feel this bad and you can’t trust him...you’ve gotta do something about it. It’s not supposed to be this hard."

Kurt shook his head. He opened his eyes and lowered his hand from his mouth. "No, but...at least I got an epic song out of it, right?" He knew what Alex was suggesting, but that couldn't be the answer. He couldn't break up with Blaine again. It would make everything he'd worked for since then void. He just wanted it to be as before.

"Kurt..." Alice started, but Kurt shook his head.

"I know something has to change," he said resolutely. "And I know what all of you want me to do." He glanced at Sebastian. "I just don't know if I can."

Doing what other people wanted or expected of him was what got him into this position in the first place.

"It’s not about what we want," Alice said gently, taking his hand. "It’s what you want." She paused. "What we want is for you to be happy, if that’s him...then fine." She looked around at the group. "But...you’re clearly not happy. And that’s not okay."

"Speak for yourself, Alice, I think this Blaine is a-" Alex started, but one look from his friend silenced him. He gave her an angry look in return. He knew he was right. All of them thought this Blaine character was a fucking dick and he, for one, wasn't going to encourage someone decent like Kurt to be treated like this.

"In all honesty, Kurt," Brody added gently, "sort of having been around the last time you two broke
up...I think Blaine has a lot of growing up to do. And I'm not sure it's your responsibility to make
him a better person."

Kurt opened his mouth to speak, but then just sighed and shook his head. Blaine hadn't always been
like this. There was a time where Kurt looked up to him, valued his opinion and counsel. But
somewhere between Ohio and New York - or maybe even before that - the tables had turned, and
the both of them had a hard time adjusting to that. Blaine was resentful, feeling he had lost his
superiority - Kurt was floundering, suddenly having to take the lead. Like in all other aspects of his
life, he had risen to the challenge, but not completely without damage.

Sebastian listened to the conversation going on around him feeling conflicted. On the one hand he
agreed with everything Alex and Brody were saying and was mentally preparing to lead the march
around to Kurt and Blaine’s apartment and give Blaine what was coming to him.

And on the other hand, he knew what Alice was saying was true as well. It wasn’t about what any of
them wanted. It was Kurt’s decision and as his friends they would be there to support him no matter
what, and pick up the pieces when, inevitably, it fell apart.

Sebastian wished beyond all else that he could muster up the courage to tell Kurt how he felt. Maybe
doing so would help Kurt see that he had other options besides Blaine. But he didn’t want to risk it.
The month apart had been enough to show him what life without Kurt was like. He never wanted to
feel like that again.

He’d rather have Kurt in his life as a friend than not have him at all.

"No matter what you decide babe," Sebastian said quietly. "We aren’t going anywhere."

"That’s right," Steph agreed, and Alice and Brody nodded. Reluctantly, Alex did as well.

The weight that was lifted off Kurt’s chest was so big he could not keep his feelings inside, and he
sobbed in earnest now, crying in relief. He had felt like he could only lose; either his relationship or
his friends - possibly even both. But despite all of his previous experiences, he believed them. They’d
still be there, no matter how he chose to deal with this.

"Oh god, I'm sorry," he apologised. "I'm just...This is-" He shook his head and gave up. "Thank
you," he said simply.

Sebastian gave up all pretence and pulled Kurt towards him, his other arm coming up to wrap around
his front.

"We got you babe," he whispered. "You don’t need to thank us."

Kurt hid his face against Sebastian's shoulder and held his breath for as long as he could, wanting
everything to simply stop and stay like this. Eventually, of course, he had to let it out, and found that
the next breath came just a little easier. Sebastian smelled good. He was warm and strong and - Kurt
really needed a handkerchief before he ruined his clothes. He pulled away, quickly reaching for his
bag again and pulling out a pack of paper tissues.

"So," he said, trying to sound casual. "What do you think, will I pass my songwriting class?"

Sebastian let Kurt go a little reluctantly but didn’t fight it.

They all chuckled a little nervously and allowed the change of subject.

"Amazing!"
"Superb!"

"You killed it!"

"I think you’ll definitely pass!" Brody said. "And if Madame Tibideaux hears it I wouldn’t be surprised if someone gets a golden ticket this year," he added with a wink.

"Madame who?" Alex asked. "Look, if there's a chocolate factory involved, I'm your plus-one," he said, pointing at his chest. "I mean, sorry, Steph, but-" He pulled up his shoulders in a universal 'what can you do?' gesture. "I'll go gay for the cho-co-la-tay."

Kurt laughed loudly, feeling his face relax. He brushed off the last of his tears. "Sorry, Alex, it's just an elaborate showcase at NYADA," he explained. "By personal invitation of the Dean only."

"For the best of the best," Brody said, smiling. "And Kurt was already in it once before."

Kurt shook his head. "Not really. I only-" He saw Brody look at him and bit his lip. "Yeah. I was," he corrected. "Which is why I think it's very unlikely she'll invite me again. Especially not after how disappointed she was with my last performance." His face fell a little again. "She'll hear the song anyway, though. She often sits in with our presentations." He wondered if she did that with all students, or just the ones she wanted to intimidate.

"Sing like you did today and they'll be crazy to not give you a shot!" Steph said.

"She’s right! Though, critically you need to hold back your emotions a little on your performance and not let them crack your voice," Brody said.

Alice opened her mouth to contradict him but he held up his hand.

"Kurt knows what I’m saying, his performance tonight was outstanding, and for this crowd, emotion is key...but at school we’re marked on our control and technical skill, and losing it to the point where it affects our voice does not win favours."

Kurt nodded reassuringly at Alice. He was fine with feedback like this.

"If you like, I'd be happy to help you practice and fine-tune it!" Brody said with a smile. "It really is an amazing song."

"Thanks. It's been a while since I hurt myself singing but I'd be a fool to dismiss any offer from someone who survived NYADA long enough to make it to senior year," Kurt said, meaning it.

"How about those guys, did you exchange numbers?" Brody asked.

"Yeah, Kerim, the guy who played guitar, he offered to sit down with me and add the music for the other instruments. I liked what he did with it. I only wrote a score for the keys." It had sounded like an actual song. A song that he wrote.

He drank down his ginger tea, sighing as it passed his vocal chords. He'd sung like a rookie.

He turned to Sebastian. "You know, I wouldn't have had any of this-" he gestured at the group and the bar, "if it wasn't for you."

Sebastian smiled at him, blushing a little.

"Glad I could be of service...though all I did was make introductions, the rest was all you, babe."
"Yeah, but you already had your little gang together," Kurt said. "NYADA is a hard place to make friends."

"That's for sure," Brody agreed. "And a very easy place to lose them." A hint of a shadow passed over his face, and Kurt bit his lip. He wondered if Brody had told Alice yet. Maybe Kurt wasn't the only one who profited from tagging along with Sebastian, or in his case, Alice.

"Well, we're your friends now too, Kurt!" Alice said, patting his leg. "And we aren't going anywhere."

"Hear hear!" Alex said holding up his glass.

"And you too, Brody!" Steph said smiling. "Though you better not ever hurt Alice!"

Brody grinned and wrapped his arms around Alice. "I have no intention of ever doing that," he said, kissing her on the cheek.

"To friends," Alice said, holding up her glass.

Kurt smiled and held up his tea. Steph and Alex held up their drinks as well.

"Let's take a group selfie," Kurt suggested. "I have a red-eye filter." He winked at Sebastian, knowing his eyes probably still showed he'd been crying. Despite his breakdown, or maybe even because of it, he felt better than he had in days.

He asked someone sitting nearby to take their picture and handed them his phone.

Sebastian squeezed Kurt’s side and smiled at the camera as the picture was taken.

He tried to enjoy the moment, and not think about how Kurt would likely have to hide the picture on his phone away from prying eyes.

One thing he did know however, was that Blaine Anderson was an asshole and didn’t know how good he had it.

Chapter End Notes
Kurt couldn't sleep. He stared at the ceiling and smiled. His ears were still full of sounds. Music, songs, and the sweet, sweet sound of applause — and June Dolloway's apology.

He glanced over at Blaine tenderly. He was already fast asleep, snoring lightly. His face was completely relaxed and peaceful. Kurt leaned over and pressed a kiss to his cheek. Blaine frowned a little in his sleep, and Kurt smoothed his brow with his hand. Then, he slipped from under the covers and quietly got dressed.

--

It was late, but he knew Sebastian would still be at work. Satire wouldn't close for at least an hour. One of the club's bouncers, Terry, knew him by now and let him in without a cover fee. Kurt let a few patrons pass who were already on their way out. They looked tired and intoxicated. Kurt was wide awake and high on post-performance adrenaline.

He saw Sebastian wiping down the bar and had to use every ounce of self-control he possessed to walk, and not skip, towards him.

Sebastian saw someone approach the bar out of the corner of his eye and glanced up.

A smile spread across his face at the sight of Kurt walking towards him. He straightened up and dropped the cloth into the bucket of soapy water that sat on the ledge under the bar.

"Hey," he said brightly. "I wasn’t expecting to see you tonight."

"Hey yourself," Kurt said. "I couldn't sleep." He bit his lip and looked around. On the other side of the bar, Marc was serving a customer, but it didn't look like he'd be mad if Kurt distracted Sebastian for a little bit.

"You will never guess what happened!" Kurt announced, hopping up and down on the balls of his feet.

*You broke up with Blaine?* Sebastian thought, before shaking himself. If that had happened, Kurt surely wouldn’t be in such a good mood.

"I hate guessing games," he said grinning, "what happened?"

Kurt helped himself to a bar stool and leaned forward on his elbows.

"Tonight was Blaine's big night. So we went, all dressed up...a bunch of important people held some boring speeches, bla bla, June introduces Blaine, and then he says..."

Kurt paused for dramatic tension.
"Talent is nothing, if not backed by passion, and there is nothing I am more passionate about than my fiancé, Kurt." Kurt beamed. "And then, he walked over, handed me the microphone, and told me to go out there and sing."

He straightened up and grinned. "So I did. I knew the songs he'd been practising backwards. You should have seen the look on June's face!"

Sebastian’s grin froze for a split second before relaxing back to normal.

He was happy for Kurt. The whole thing should have been his to start with and Blaine stole it. It was only right that he got it in the end.

But he felt a little conflicted as well. As happy as he was for Kurt, he couldn’t help but feel upset that it meant Kurt would now forgive Blaine entirely.

"Kurt, that’s so great!" he said beaming, not allowing any of his resentment to show through - that was for him to deal with - not Kurt. "You deserve it!"

Kurt closed his eyes for a moment, basking in the feeling. "It was amazing. The first song was a duet with June. She had no choice but to sing it with me. I could tell she was pissed off at Blaine, but he just sat there smiling like an angel, and she would have lost face if she refused me."

He shook his head a little in mirth. It had been delicious, really.

"Then I did Blaine's other songs, two solos, and--" He paused again. "People clamoured for an encore! So I talked with the band for a bit and ended up recycling a few things from Glee club and stuff we'd been doing as assignments for NYADA. It couldn't have worked better if we had planned it! The fundraiser went through the roof!"

He stretched his back leisurely. "Afterwards, June came up to us to apologise. She said she still wanted Blaine to sing with her, but that she had been wrong about me not equalling him as a performer. Then Blaine said she was still wrong, because I am better."

Sebastian listened as Kurt talked and tried to just be happy for him.

"He’s right about that!" Sebastian agreed. "You are better!"

He still didn’t trust Blaine, but at least they both agreed on Kurt’s talent.

"Can I get you a drink?" he asked.

"Oh yes," Kurt said happily. "I want something that requires a lot of your bottle magic. And a little umbrella." He grinned. Nothing could beat this feeling.

Sebastian nodded, thinking quickly.

Making up his mind he began grabbing bottles of liquor and syrups and made a show of added them into a silver shaker.

"So what’s next for the great Kurt Hummel, fundraiser extraordinaire?" he asked with a smile, juggling with a few bottles while he talked.

Kurt watched the bottles fly, admiring the way Sebastian caught them without even looking. "I don’t know..." he said absentely, picking a short cocktail straw from the counter and twirling it in his fingers. "Just school and work, I guess."
Sebastian smirked. "Make the most of the easy life, I think big things are coming your way babe." He caught the bottles expertly and poured measured amounts into the shaker before picking that up and throwing it in the air. He poured the drink into a glass over ice and placed a purple umbrella into the top, spiked with two glacé cherries.

"One Mai Tai," he said, sliding the drink towards Kurt.

"Thank you, that looks perfect," Kurt said, licking his lips. God, he loved those cherries.

Sebastian watched him for a moment, then made up his mind.

"You know, it’s pretty quiet in here now...I could teach you some flairs if you like, maybe you could add it into a routine for school?"

Kurt blinked and looked around. "Me?" he asked, "Really?"

Sebastian grinned. "If you think you're ready." He nodded for Kurt to come around to the other side of the bar.

"I was born ready," Kurt replied. "Uh...you have insurance, right?" He winked, and hopped off his stool. He rounded the bar, opening the small gate to let himself through. It felt incredibly off-bounds, and his heart was pounding.

From the side, Marc watched him curiously. Patrons weren't allowed back there, but the bar was almost deserted and he trusted Sebastian. He had been doing a lot better again recently, and somehow Marc felt it had a lot to do with Kurt.

Kurt rolled up his shirt sleeves. Just then, a song by Lady Gaga began playing, and Kurt saw it as a sign and reached for a bottle.

Sebastian grinned at Kurt’s confidence but swiftly grabbed the bottle he’d picked up out of Kurt's hand.

"Easy, tiger," Sebastian said with a laugh. "Maybe we should start you on something that doesn’t cost $40 a bottle."

Sebastian grinned and held up a finger. He hurried down to the end of the bar and grabbed a couple of empty spirit bottles from the box waiting to go to recycling. He walked back to where Kurt sat and placed the two bottles on the bar in between them.

"We can practice with these, it’s what I practiced with," he said brightly. "If they smash we just sweep it up."

Kurt bit his lower lip and nodded. Of course that was a better idea. After his first trip to Satire, he’d tried his luck with some ketchup bottles at the diner, which had resulted in the kitchen floor looking like a tomato sauce massacre.

"Try throwing it over your shoulder and catching it behind you," Sebastian instructed.

Kurt took the empty bottle and weighed it in his hand, giving it an experimental hop. Alright, here goes nothing, Kurt told himself, and swung the bottle over his shoulder. The bottle fell quicker than he anticipated, and Kurt had to drop to his knees to catch it.

"I got it!" he let out. "Ow." He scrambled up and dusted off his jeans. "Maybe I should start with some tricks where I can see what I’m doing, first."
He took the bottle by the neck and spun it around his wrist like a sai. The weight was unusual, but after a few swings, it worked. Smiling at the small victory, Kurt took the second bottle in his other hand.

"That’s good!" Sebastian said watching as Kurt spun the bottles around his hands. "You have the dexterity for this, you just need to get used to the bigger and heavier objects."

Marc watched from the other end of the bar. The kid’s got talent, he thought.

He wondered if Kurt was looking to apply for a job. They’d be hiring within the next couple of months. They’d had two people quit and with the holiday season fast approaching, they’d need all hands on deck. He made a mental note to talk to Joe.

"Very good babe!" Sebastian said as Kurt pulled off a more complicated spin. "You’re a natural."

Kurt almost felt a little awkward with the praise Sebastian was giving him. He wondered if Sebastian had been like that as leader of the Warblers as well. It would explain why the group worked so well - unlike the "you need booty camp / you are not masculine enough to play Tony" tactics of Mr Schue.

He tried to remember what else he had seen Sebastian do when he had mixed his Mai Tai, and smiled. He grabbed a bottle by the neck, heaved it up, and tried to catch it on his elbow. The bottle tipped over and crashed to the floor. Kurt laughed, jumping towards Sebastian a little to avoid the shards. "So much for being a natural!" he chuckled.

Marc walked up to them with a broom and a dustpan. "Giving away the secrets of the trade, are you, Seb?" he said kindly, handing Kurt the dustpan. Kurt started sweeping the shards together.

"Don't be discouraged, Kurt. You're doing great," Marc said.

Sebastian smiled. "I thought I’d show him some tricks. And you’re right, he is doing great!"

He stepped aside a little to allow Kurt to get all the glass. "He’s picking it up quicker than I did."

Marc smiled fondly. "And just as over-ambitious." He nodded at the door to the back. "Glass containers back there, Kurt."

He couldn’t help but feel comfortable around the kid. As Kurt hurried to dispose of the glass, Marc looked at Sebastian.

"Everything alright?"

Sebastian smiled at Marc and nodded. "Yeah, thanks for not giving me a hard time letting him back here. And I’m sorry...for the way I was before," he added, his smile dropping. He let his head dip down. He felt very remorseful for the way he’d spoken to Marc a few weeks prior and whilst he’d already apologised once, he felt the need to do so again. "You’ve been so great to me and I threw it all in your face..."

Marc shook his head. "That’s not why I asked, ok?" He clapped Sebastian’s shoulder. "We’re good."

He was just glad the aura of self-destruction seemed to have lifted around his young colleague.

"So, we’re down two guys... and I talked about it with Joe. You won’t need my supervision anymore soon. Then you can man bar 2 on your own."
Sebastian smiled at Marc. He wasn’t twenty-one until April, so technically he wasn’t allowed to serve unsupervised until then. To have them take his training wheels off early was a real show of trust and it made him feel warm inside. It would mean a pay-rise as well.

"Thanks," he said quietly. "That really means a lot."

"Joe and I have been in this business for a while, Seb. We can recognise a good one when we see ‘em." Marc winked. "Even on their bad days."

He gave Sebastian a moment to gather himself. "So, while we’re talking recognising talent..." He nodded at the back. "Would you be willing to train him?"

Kurt walked back to the front and wiped his hands on his jeans. "Train who?"

"You," Marc said, grinning.

For a moment, the both of them looked at him in such a way that made Kurt feel very warm inside. Then he caught up with what they meant and blushed. No more naughty bedtime reading for you, Kurt, he told himself sternly.

"Oh, I... I have a job, actually."

Marc smiled at him. "Well, if you ever fancy a change, you’re welcome to apply here," he said. "Sebastian could show you the ropes."

Sebastian nodded. "I’m a good teacher," he said with a wink.

Kurt, who was still blushing a little, mumbled "Yeah...yes, you are."

He quickly focused on Marc. "Thanks. I have some obligations in my current job-" He stopped himself. He wasn’t at a job interview- this was Marc. He’d understand.

"I have 2 regulars, an old couple. It’d break their heart... and mine," he admitted. "I think I’ll stay there for now. Though I have to say, working with the both of you sounds very...enticing."

"That’s because we’re awesome!" Sebastian said smugly.

"And not very modest apparently," Marc said, rolling his eyes. "Well, we have a couple of vacancies, so if you change your mind, let me or Sebastian know and we can work something out."

"Thank you. I’ll keep it in mind."

Kurt smiled at Sebastian. "Can we try another move? I’ll be more careful this time."

--

The last hour at the club flew by, and before they knew it, Terry and the other bouncers came in for a nightcap and it was closing time.

"I’m gonna have to kick you out, Kurt," Marc said kindly. He nodded at Sebastian. "Maybe you can see him to the door."

Sebastian nodded and took his apron off, smiling at Kurt. "Sure thing, c’mon babe."

Kurt returned the smile, said goodbye to everyone, and followed Sebastian out. "Thank you," he said once they reached the door. "I had a great time."
Sebastian smiled back at him. "I did too, I’m glad you stopped by."

Kurt pulled the collar of his jacket closed. It was cold, and he was beginning to feel tired. Still, he was reluctant to leave.

"I’ll practise at home," he said, grinning. "I may surprise you next time."

"You’re constantly surprising me babe..." Sebastian said with a wink, shivering slightly as the chilly wind kissed his skin. "That’s a good thing." He added.

Kurt smiled. "Good."

He hesitated. "I should probably go... I don’t want Blaine to worry. I didn’t leave a note."

Sebastian bit his lip and nodded. "Thanks for coming by. I’m really glad you finally got your moment." He shivered again but made no move to head back inside. "Let me know when you get home okay? So I know you’re safe."

Kurt nodded. "I will. Goodnight, Bas." Without thinking about it too much, he leaned in and kissed Sebastian’s cheek.

The spot where Kurt’s lips brushed his skin burnt hot despite the cold air and Sebastian felt himself blush a little.

"Goodnight, Kurt," he said quietly, and smiled softly.
Something Stupid

Chapter Summary

The holidays are the happiest time of the year; just not for everyone.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Thanksgiving]

Sebastian stretched back in his chair, his waistband uncomfortably tight on account of the festive meal he had just consumed.

"That was amazing, Mrs Turner," he said to Alice's mother.

"No problem at all honey, and please, it's Samantha."

Sebastian blushed.

It was Thanksgiving and he was celebrating with Alice and her family at their house in Georgia. After finding out he had spent Thanksgiving all by himself the year before, Alice had threatened him with bodily harm if he didn't go home with her.

Alice’s sister was there with her husband, as were several aunts and uncles, Alice’s cousins with a band of children high on candy-corn, a grandmother who kept dozing off, and a great-aunt who kept referring to Sebastian as Alice’s ‘gentleman friend’. Alice hadn’t told them about Brody yet, and although she kept telling everyone Sebastian was just a friend, it didn’t really seem to register. He was accepted as one of the family, as they assumed he might soon be one of them officially.

As the family got up to start clearing the table, Sebastian stood too, reaching for an empty dish.

Samantha tapped his hand away. "No, no, Sebastian you're our guest, please, sit and relax."

"Oh no, Mrs...Samantha," he stammered. "Please, let me help."

"God, you're a dream!" Alice's sister Jess said doe-eyed. She hit her husband who was snoring lightly next to her. "Why aren't you like that?"

He jolted awake and glared at her. "What was that for?"

Jess rolled her eyes.

"Mom," Alice said hastily. "I thought I might take Sebastian on a walk after lunch, can we go now?"

Alice’s great-aunt cooed and gave them unsubtle winks.

"Sure honey. You kids wrap up warm," Alice’s mother said.

Alice’s great-aunt winked at them again.
Alice rolled her eyes and beckoned Sebastian to follow.

"Sorry, I needed to get out of there for a bit," Alice said to Sebastian as they made their way into the hall. "I mean, I love them all, but they're so loud! And Auntie Martha is really just being a pain."

"I think they're sweet. Are we really going for a walk?" Sebastian asked sceptically. "Because I don't think I could, after eating so much."

"No, silly," Alice said, wrapping a scarf around her neck and sliding her feet into her boots. "You're my cover story, I wanna call Brody."

Once they were wrapped up to protect from the elements, they headed out of the house and down the road. Alice pulled out her phone and dialled her boyfriend.

Chuckling, Sebastian pulled out his phone too. He knew Kurt was spending the day with Blaine and Sam but he might be able to talk for five minutes.

He pressed the call button and held the phone up to his ear, waiting for Kurt to answer.

"Hey," came the familiar voice of his friend.

'Hey,' Sebastian responded in French. 'Happy Thanksgiving, can you talk?'

Kurt glanced at Blaine and Sam, who were watching the Thanksgiving Football. He couldn't care less about the game, and he was fairly sure Blaine didn't either, but Sam was heavily into it.

'Just a second,' he replied.

Kurt took his phone into the bedroom and dropped down on the mattress. He wouldn't be missed, anyway. He lay down on his back and propped his legs up against the wall.

'Okay, here I am,' he said, sighing. 'Thank god you called, I'm bored out of my mind. Tell me about your day.'

'Well, we had a really chilled morning, just the four of us; Alice, her parents and I. Then the rest of her family started arriving. They're great, but...we're taking a little breather outside right now,' Sebastian said happily, glancing sideways at his friend.

'I'm glad she dragged me along. We've just escaped the crazy house so she can call Brody, and I thought I'd see how your day was...what are you up to?'

'Hmm... ' Kurt let out, staring at the ceiling without really seeing anything. ‘Not much. The boys are watching the game, and I was thinking about taking a bath. I'm making dinner, but I don't expect them to move from the couch.' He sighed. ‘Two years ago, Rachel & I spontaneously hosted a kiki for Isabelle and her posse at the loft. Back when Rachel was with Brody...’

‘Kiki?’ " Sebastian asked intrigued. 'That sounds like an amazing idea!' ‘It was! We had a wonderful time. Isabelle and her friends were great! But that was when we had the loft...’

Kurt heard cheering from the other room. It was before Blaine and Sam moved to New York, too. He sighed.

He'd been blown away after Blaine had sacrificed his gig for him...but he wasn't enjoying the price he had to pay for it. Blaine expected him to live in a bubble of gratitude, from chores to extra BLAM
nights, and it was exhausting.

'I don't know, Thanksgiving was never really my thing,' he said darkly.

Sebastian bit his lip, Kurt didn't sound like he was having a good day at all.

'We always celebrated it, but we never made a big deal out of it,' he said. 'It always felt a bit eccentric to celebrate a US holiday in France. But today was good so far.'

'What did you have for lunch?' Kurt asked, clearly wanting to change the topic.

'Um, well, turkey, obviously. With green bean casserole...oh! And these mashed potatoes with garlic, god. I think I ate almost all of that by myself. It was amazing. Alice's mom made it with fresh potatoes, not those horrible instant flakes they had at Dalton, you know? And it was just to die for. All I wanted, honestly, was some cheese with it. But - ' he sighed deeply, 'I guess you can't have everything in life. The deserts more than made up for it, though...apple crumble with deliciously thick custard and a cheesecake that would have had you salivating at the mere sight of it.'

Kurt listened to him talk, closing his eyes and imagining his friend trying everything with his critical gourmet taste. He smiled as he could see Sebastian's satisfied expression when he tried something he really liked – and his offended look when something tasted bad. Kurt didn't know anyone who'd go into detail as much as Sebastian would, but that was why he asked. He liked cooking, and talking about home-made meals.

He was still thinking about all the times he'd watched Sebastian enjoy food when Sebastian asked him a question.

'Are you hitting the Black Friday sales tomorrow?'

'God, yes, it's the only thing keeping me alive,' Kurt sighed dramatically. 'Well, and this...' He crossed his legs against the wall. 'This is nice, too.'

He liked speaking French. It made everything sound better. And Sebastian didn't laugh if he messed up. He'd just correct him and continue. Beggars couldn't be choosers, Kurt supposed.

Sebastian smiled. Yes, this was nice. It felt good to be chatting in French again. It was one of the many things he liked about Kurt.

'Will you go shopping with Alice?' Kurt asked.

'Probably,' Sebastian said resignedly. 'I'm not overly keen but she's told me my job will be to hold the line while she runs around like a mad woman.'

'Someone's got to,' Kurt agreed. 'I kind of miss Rachel at such times. I mean, the old Rachel. She's really taken to this every man and woman for themselves attitude of NYADA.'

Kurt grinned as he remembered something Sebastian wouldn’t know yet. 'She used to wear old lady pantsuits in school, you know. There was a time before the thigh-highs and the fake lashes...' The memory made him smile. The make-over he had given her for Finn had been mean, but hilarious.

Before he could let it depress his mood too much, he quickly added: 'Well, I got you now, though, and Alice and the others.'

"You'll always have us, Kurt," Sebastian said, switching back to English so that he could be sure Kurt understood him. "We're not going anywhere."
"Yeah, you said," Kurt said, touched. He knew he ought to feel embarrassed about his breakdown in front of them, but he somehow didn't. "Maybe next year, we'll have a kiki," he said, only half-joking. "We'll rent out Satire! You won't have to tend bar...and neither will Marc, because I want to dance with you both. We can get Mr Clean to mix our drinks, I'm sure Isabelle's friends will go crazy for him."

"Mr Clean?" Sebastian laughed. "You mean Danny?"

"Yeah. You know that's what he looks like!" Kurt replied.

Sebastian snorted. He'd never noticed, but now that he thought about it, Danny really did look like the cleaning agent's animated mascot a bit.

"Name the time and place, babe and I'll be there, whatever you want," Sebastian said, smiling at the thought of spending Thanksgiving with Kurt. He knew it would only ever be as friends, but that was enough.

--

Quite some time later, Kurt emerged from the bedroom and found Blaine and Sam just as he had left them. There was another game on - Kurt vaguely registered different jerseys- but it seemed to be just as fascinating as the one before.

"Hey," he said, testing if they had even noticed he'd been gone.

"What?" Blaine replied, glancing over his shoulder. He frowned. "Did you take a nap or something?"

"I lay down for a bit, yes."

Blaine looked like he was going to say something, but then someone scored, and Sam sat up and wrapped his arms around Blaine happily, and Kurt watched Blaine hug him back, with closed eyes and everything.

"I'm gonna check on the turkey," Kurt suggested.

"Oh yeah, how long will it take?" Blaine asked, reluctantly letting go of Sam.

"Another hour at least," Kurt said, eyeing the chips in front of them. They'd have no appetite left, but it wasn't his problem. He wasn't their mother. He shrugged and walked into the kitchen, humming a French lullaby.

--

[Christmas]

Christmas had always been Finn’s favourite time of the year, right from when he was a little boy. He’d sing the songs at the top of his lungs, write letters to Santa, and lie awake at night wondering about the magical reindeers. As a teen, Carole could always tell when he had finished his Christmas shopping - the excitement in his eyes, the anticipation. More often than not he couldn’t hold back and already told her what he had gotten her.

This was her second Christmas without him. To say that Carole wasn’t struggling would be a lie. Last year, Carole had kept herself busy with work. She had taken every shift that she could to keep her hands and mind busy, though when she was asked, she had said she’d wanted to give the nurses
with young families a break. Really, she was just giving herself one.

She couldn’t do that this year. Kurt and Blaine were home for the holiday and she had to put on a brave face. Kurt was her son now too, and she couldn’t ignore him while she mourned her other son.

"Oh Kurt, they have a karaoke machine! Let’s do our Christmas duet for the shoppers! They’ll love it!” Blaine said.

Carole watched as Blaine danced around her step son excitedly and didn’t miss the way Kurt’s shoulders drooped. Apparently she wasn’t the only one struggling this year.

"Blaine, this is Ohio, not New York. I don’t think..." Kurt looked around, searching until his eyes found his father.

Carole followed his eyes. Was Kurt holding back because of him? Burt had told her they’d had their differences, but the way he told it, that was all in the past.

She looked back at Kurt and Blaine, and heard Blaine go on about christmas traditions and being ‘out and proud’. It irritated her. Kurt was out and proud, and to imply that he wasn’t just to get him to sing seemed like a cheap line. Still, it seemed to work, as Blaine was already at the machine picking a song.

"Oh how about this one!” Blaine said, already pressing play and handing a microphone to Kurt.

Carole frowned a little. Blaine hadn’t even given Kurt the chance to help pick the song.

A familiar tune rang through the speakers and people stopped to watch.

Carole watched Kurt slip into a stage persona and plastered a smile on his face as he and Blaine started to sing.

"I know I stand in line until you think you have the time to spend an evening with me," the both of them sang, Blaine looking overly devoted. Kurt smiled at him, cocking his head and swaying with the music.

"And if we go someplace to dance I know that there's a chance you won't be leaving with me...”

Carole watched Kurt closely. Blaine had turned his back and was now dancing on tiptoes towards a group of elderly ladies, and Kurt allowed his face to rest, his showy smile fading. She wasn't sure if it was the song, or just the general mood of the day. Kurt had been quiet since they picked them up from the airport. Blaine had talked for two, telling them all about some old lady who had apparently wanted him to do a show for her; Carole had kind of tuned him out in the car.

Blaine bowed to the women as he sang and they all smiled warmly at him.

"...like I love you," he sang, kissing one of them on the hand.

Carole watched as Blaine fawned over the women and moved on to another group. It was as though Kurt didn’t exist.

Burt appeared at her side and placed a hand on her shoulder. She glanced at him to see if he was as troubled by the performance as she was, but he was smiling.

"I’m so glad they worked things out,” he said quietly. Carole frowned and glanced back at Kurt, who was looking a little uncomfortable as he watched Blaine flirt with everyone around him besides
"And though it's just a line to you for me it's true and never seemed so right before..."

Carole didn't know what to think of it. Kurt had given up waiting for Blaine's attention and was now copying him instead, singing to bystanders in his sweetest voice.

"I like this Christmas tradition of theirs," Burt continued. "A singing Kurt was always a happy Kurt."

Carole frowned at her husband. "Do you not think that Kurt seems a bit...down?" Carole edged carefully.

Burt shrugged. "I don't know. He seems fine, but then he always had a way of keeping things to himself. I guess that's what I get for sending him to a theatre school!" He wrapped his arm around Carole. "He promised me we'd talk, though. You know, back then. So he knows he can come to me if something's up."

Carole hummed and leaned into him a bit. Blaine had finally rejoined Kurt. She watched carefully as Kurt smiled at Blaine. It didn't quite meet his eyes.

Maybe Burt doesn't see it because he doesn't want to, she thought to herself. How long had she failed to see Finn’s unhappiness when he came back from the army? What could she have done differently? It haunted her at night.

The song came to an end and the gathering of people clapped. Blaine bowed deeply and blew them all kisses.

Kurt bowed his head to the people applauding and handed Blaine his microphone. As his fiancé brought them back to the karaoke station, Kurt took his phone from his pocket. Carole watched him tap the screen and smile. It was the first genuine smile she'd seen on him all day, and she wished she could see what had had caused it. But whatever it was, it had improved his mood instantly.

Unfortunately it was not to last.

--

After dinner, when Burt asked Blaine if he wanted to watch The Deadliest Catch with him, Kurt's crestfallen expression at not being asked reminded Carole of that afternoon at the mall.

"Kurt, would you like to help me with the dishes?" she asked.

Kurt blinked and tore his eyes away from his dad and Blaine retreating to the living room. "Oh, sure, sure," he said, and began to clear the table.

Carole watched Kurt load up a stack of dishes on his hand and the rest on his arm, place their glasses and cutlery on top and carry them through to the kitchen. It always amazed her how he could carry all of that and not drop anything - but then he did work as a waiter. She threw a glance at her husband over her shoulder and followed Kurt through. He was already stacking the dishwasher.

"Leave that be for a moment, honey," she said, setting her own load down on the counter and wiping her hands on her apron.

Kurt looked at her and raised an eyebrow, but he didn't argue. Instead, he closed the dishwasher and looked at her expectantly.

"I was wondering," Carole started carefully, "if you're having a good time so far."
"Oh, I am," Kurt replied immediately. "Dinner was lovely. And it's Christmas, happiest time of the year, right?"

Carole nodded slowly, the response seemed to come so easily to Kurt it sounded rehearsed.

"In theory..." she said quietly, unable to keep the thought of Finn enter her mind. "Forgive me for overstepping but...are things alright with you and Blaine?"

Kurt paused, a little taken aback. "Sure," he started. "I mean, he's...we're getting married. Some day."

Carole frowned, but said nothing. Another automatic response. She wondered if Kurt even realised he was doing it.

The longer she remained silent, the worse Kurt felt.

"I guess I have been feeling a little...underappreciated lately," he admitted. "But I've been very busy, with school, and work...holiday season is big with the tourists on Broadway, and Vogue is deep into the spring fashion week preparations...I think it's ok that Blaine moved on to fun stuff without me. It's all in my head." He shrugged. "We're just in a bit of a funk. It's nothing to worry about."

Carole bit her lip and and nodded a little, trying to formulate a sentence that wouldn’t scare Kurt away.

"Did Finn ever tell you about Darren?"

Kurt thought about it. "I don't think so," he replied, a little curious.

Carole nodded. "Well, he was quite young back then," she started. "After Finn’s father died, for a while, I had a...boyfriend. He used to spray paint the lawn, with his radio blasting. Finn loved it. Darren would let him help paint the grass and they'd sing together...We were a little happy family again. And I held on to that a lot longer than I maybe should have..."

Kurt swallowed. "What happened?"

"Nothing at first," Carole said with a little shrug. "He was the perfect man. He’d help around the house, take Finn to ball games and bring me home flowers once a week."

She paused. "But...over time those things started to slip away, he’d stay out till the early hours or go away for days at a time and when I asked him about it he’d get upset and accused me of not trusting him. So after a while, I ignored it and stopped asking...I didn’t want to lose the family that we’d built."

Kurt felt his throat tighten. He suspected he knew how the story would end. There was no one called Darren in their family when he met Finn.

"And then?" he whispered.

"And then, one day, I saw him driving down the street with this pretty young thing by his side, and when I called him out, he left me," Carole finished.

Kurt felt a little sick. He’d known what was coming, and yet...

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "How did Finn take it?"

Carole shook her head. "He was devastated. He didn’t understand...how do you that explain to a 10
year old?"

She shook her head again.

"I blamed myself...I was holding so tightly to that feeling of belonging that I ignored all the signs that things were wrong. I felt like such a failure."

Kurt chewed his lip. He understood where she was going with this, but he couldn’t tell her about Blaine. He didn’t want her to tell his dad.

"I'm really sorry," he offered again. "But we're ok. It's...not like that." *Not all the time*, he added in his mind. They'd get better.

Carole looked at him pensively but nodded. He clearly wasn’t there yet.

"I’m glad,” she said quietly. “It’s good that you’re trying to make it work, but if it doesn’t work there’s no shame in walking away. You’re still so young…” She took his hand. "Sometimes, our first loves don’t have to be our only loves.” She glanced at the living room and smiled softly.

Kurt swallowed hard. He looked down on her hand. "I know," he said softly. "And my friends keep telling me -"

"Hey Kurt,” Blaine said, poking his head into the kitchen, “would it be okay if we watched *Love, Actually* some other time? I know it's your Christmas fave but your dad and I kind of want to watch this special on NBC sports..."


Blaine smiled at him and then went back to the living room.

Kurt looked at Carole and shrugged. "I watch it every year anyway."

Carole watched as Kurt shut down and turned back to loading the dishwasher. She knew any further attempt to get him to open up would be futile. It broke her heart to see him so defeated but knew from personal experience that the more people pushed someone into doing something, the longer they’d put off doing it.

She hoped that Kurt would come to the realisation himself one day, and above all, hoped that when he did, it wouldn’t be too late.

Chapter End Notes

1...
Chapter Summary

A tear slipped down Kurt's face as he heard his friend's voice answer. He had been afraid he wouldn't pick up.

"Bas? I...I need you."

Kurt stood in front of his mirror and shook his head. It was wrong. It was all wrong. The black jacket was too formal, the printed jackets too cheerful. Black shirts made him look like he was trying too hard, but the white shirt made him look like a waiter.

"What are you doing?" Blaine asked from the doorway, looking at the outfits that were strewn over their bed.

"Trying to find an outfit for the funeral," Kurt replied, his eyes on the mirror.

"You're actually going?" Blaine asked. "You didn't even know her!"

Kurt stopped what he was doing to look at him.

"People attend funerals to pay their respects to the family," he replied softly. "It comforts them."

Blaine's expression softened. "It'll only remind you of your mom, and then you'll get sad," he tried.

Kurt shrugged. "I still want to go." He hesitated. "It would help if you came."

Blaine sighed, and looked ready to argue. Kurt quickly shook his head. "Never mind. I'll go alone."

"You sure?" Blaine asked, relief showing on his face.

"I'll be fine," Kurt said.

But an hour later, he wasn't fine. He was standing across the street from the cemetery. He had bought a white lily at the flower shop, and suddenly, its scent had thrown him back years. Blaine was right. It did remind him - and not just of his mother.

He didn't know what to do. He had to go.

With trembling fingers, he dialled Sebastian's number.

"Mmm...yeah..." Sebastian let out, letting his head drop back into the pillows. He touched himself casually, concentrating on the touch between his legs. "Go on..."

His phone rang at the exact same time that Danny scissored his fingers inside of him.
“Don’t answer it,” Danny mumbled, his voice a little rough with lust.

Sebastian frowned. It was Kurt's personal ringtone. It was Monday morning; Kurt was supposed to be at work. He was very serious about not using his phone during work hours except for the occasional text.

“Seb, come on...” Danny implored.

“I’m sorry,” Sebastian sighed, stilling the hand between his legs with his own. “I think something’s wrong with Kurt. He never calls this early.”

“I’m sure he’s fine,” Danny argued, but he pulled his hand away, shifting on the mattress to give Sebastian space to move.

Sebastian sat up, picked up the phone and pulled the covers over his lap.

“Kurt?”

A tear slipped down Kurt's face as he heard his friend's voice answer. He had been afraid he wouldn't pick up.

"Bas? I...I need you."

Sebastian’s eyes widened at Kurt’s words and the broken sound of Kurt’s voice. He gave Danny a worried look. "What’s wrong? What happened?” he asked concerned.

"It's Ethel," Kurt said softly. "She died last week. I only found out a few days ago because Marvin didn't want to tell anyone at Christmas." He paused. "The funeral is in an hour. Marvin asked me to sing at the memorial, and I thought I was going to be okay, but..." He broke off. "I'm really kind of not." He whispered into the phone, clutching the lily to his jacket. He knew he had to sing. It would haunt him if he didn't. But he couldn't stand there all by himself.

"Blaine didn't want to come, and no one from the diner is going, Gunther didn't even want to give me the morning off," he added, his voice becoming more forceful again as his anger rose to replace the desolation he felt.

Sebastian listened intently. When Kurt paused, he spoke. "Oh Kurt, I’m so sorry," he said, "What’s the address? I’ll be there as soon as I can!"

Kurt rattled off the address and they said their goodbyes, Sebastian promising to be there asap.

He put his phone down on the nightstand and swung out of bed.

"You gotta leave," he said, reaching for a towel. "Something’s come up and I have to go out."

"I can see that something’s up," Danny said with a nod to Sebastian’s pelvis. "That’s kind of what we were going for..."

Sebastian grinned at him.

"Look, I’m sorry, I’ll make it up to you at New Year,” Sebastian said, wrapping the towel around himself.

"Unless I find someone who doesn’t leave me with blue balls,” Danny said, rolling onto his back and looking up at Sebastian with a smile.
"You're a big boy, I'm sure you can take care of yourself. Last night should have given you enough inspiration." Sebastian winked. It was an awkward situation. He didn't usually let his hook-ups spend the night unless he was too exhausted to kick them out, or was hopeful for an encore the next morning.

"I'm going to have a shower," Sebastian said, leaning down to kiss Danny once. "And when I get out you'll be gone."

He withdrew and walked into the bathroom.

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Forty-five minutes later Sebastian sat in the back of a cab dressed in a black suit, a single rose from the shop near his apartment clutched in his hand.

The cab pulled up outside the cemetery and Sebastian got out, paying the cabbie quickly. He saw Kurt standing by the large wrought iron gate that was the entrance to the cemetery and Sebastian walked over to him, enveloping Kurt in a hug wordlessly.

Kurt relaxed into Sebastian's arms for a moment. As soon as he knew his friend was on the way, he had felt better. Now that he was here, Kurt knew he could do it.

"Thank you," he said simply, pulling back. "The service is in the chapel over there." He nodded at a small building inside the cemetery lot. A group of solemnly dressed people was already standing by the door.

Kurt mustered Sebastian. "You look handsome," he said, trying to distract himself from what was coming.

Sebastian smiled at Kurt and took both of his hands in his own, squeezing tightly.

"Thanks," he said glancing down at his outfit. "So do you."

Kurt looked down on his suit. "Are you sure? It's not too...? I don't know. I didn't know what to wear."

When Sebastian shook his head, Kurt accepted the compliment as it was.

Sebastian glanced towards the little white chapel. "So if Gunther wouldn't let you have the day off...how did you wangle it? Did you call in sick?"

"No," Kurt said, and shrugged. "I quit." He took Sebastian's arm and they started towards the chapel.

"You quit?" Sebastian asked with raised eyebrows, coming to a halt.

"Yes," Kurt said resolutely. "Gunther will probably dock me two weeks pay for not giving notice, but... to be honest, I don't give a fuck."

"Wow..." Sebastian said shocked, still looking at Kurt. It was very unusual for him to use the f-word, and the impulsive reaction was so unlike Kurt it was a little scary. "What are you going to do for money now?" He knew that Kurt was the sole breadwinner for his house.

Kurt shrugged. "I still have some money saved from selling my car in Ohio, and I can always sell a few of last season's shirts on ebay. I'm not going to wear those again anyway. I'll look for a new job
soon.” He didn’t want to think about it yet. He could apply in the new year. No one was hiring between Christmas and New Year's Eve anyway.

He looked ahead at the chapel. Marvin stood at the door, greeting everyone entering with a handshake.

"Marvin and Ethel were the only reason I still stayed, anyway," he added softly.

"That job offer at Satire is still there, if you're interested,” Sebastian reminded him.

Kurt offered his friend a thin smile. "Careful, I might actually apply, and steal all your tips,” he teased, but his heart wasn't really in it, and his mind was already on the service.

Sebastian took Kurt’s hand and squeezed it reassuringly. He let the conversation about jobs drop. Today was about Ethel. He let Kurt lead the way over to the chapel and kept hold of his friend’s hand in an attempt to offer some support. He silently seethed at the knowledge that Blaine wasn’t there supporting Kurt, another item on the list of things that showed how wrong he was for Kurt - but Sebastian didn’t let it show. He was glad that he was able to be there for his friend instead.

*If Blaine was here, he’d probably demand to sing the song himself,* Sebastian thought to himself bitterly.

They reached the door, and Marvin extended his hand with a smile. Kurt took it, and Marvin clasped it between both of his.

"Thank you, Kurt. It means so much to us that you're here," he said, and it broke Kurt's heart a little to still hear him use couple-plural.

"I wouldn't miss it," he said softly. "I, um... I brought a friend, I hope that's okay."

Marvin smiled at Sebastian. "Of course, of course. Welcome, please, come in," he said warmly, shaking Sebastian's hand as well.

Sebastian squeezed Kurt’s hand that he was still holding, and guided him into the chapel behind Ethel and Marvin’s friends and family.

They filtered into a row half way back from the front. The deep mahogany coffin sat at the front of the room before the altar, draped heavily with flowers.

As they sat down, Sebastian wrapped his arm around Kurt, holding his waist comfortingly.

The sermon started, and Kurt looked at the portraits next to the coffin. One of Ethel as he had known her, and one of a beautiful young woman with daintily coiffed hair and winged glasses. Words about God and eternity went over his head. Kurt had his own deal with deities, at that was to politely ignore each other's existence. He understood the words were a comfort to those who believed in them, but to him, they were just that: words.

But then family members and friends had the opportunity to speak. Ethel's younger sister held a moving little speech, talking about their youth, and before Kurt knew it, tears were rolling down his face.

Sebastian hadn’t known Ethel, had never even met her directly, but even he was moved by the service.

Listening to Ethel’s family talk about her life, her spirit, stirred something inside him. He felt Kurt
tremble next to him and squeezed his side comfortingly.

Then Marvin stepped forward. He looked back on fifty years of marriage with humility and gratitude, and a special New Yorker sense of humour. He cheered everyone up. Kurt had almost forgotten why he was there, when Marvin's tale reached the present.

"...Sunday morning was her favourite time of the week. She'd get dressed up, and I'd take her for brunch at 'the new Broadway diner'. That's what she called it. Grounded in 1982. The new diner! I don't think any of its waiting staff were even born yet! I told her this every time, but she'd tell me to shut up because I was making her feel old. You're 92, I would say. Just sayin' good morning will make ya feel old." He chuckled.

"But she always wanted to go and listen to the kids sing. After so many years on stage and later in the college rooms, she still couldn't get enough of it. And one of her favourites did us the honour of coming today to, if he'd be so kind, send our Ethel off with her favourite song. Mr Kurt Hummel."

Sebastian felt Kurt freeze. "You got this babe," he whispered in Kurt's ear.

Kurt nodded wordlessly, and smoothed down his jacket with one hand. He carried the lily to the front and put it with the other flowers. He nodded at Marvin, who made way for him and signalled for the music. The slow intro started, and Kurt closed his eyes, waiting for his cue.

"It won't be easy....you'll think it strange, when I try to explain how I feel-

As he started, his voice was clear, filling the chapel with practised ease. But as soon as he opened his eyes and saw Marvin, Kurt's voice faltered. Tears rolled down his cheeks again, but with a few short breaths, he pushed on.

"All you will see... is the girl you once knew:" Kurt sang quietly, pressing his eyes tightly closed to block out the view of Marvin looking at his late wife's portrait, "at sixes and sevens with you."

He used the pause in the song to take a deep, strengthening breath, and looked out over the benches, finally finding Sebastian's eyes in a sea of sad faces. Kurt focused on him, letting everything else slide off him as his voice grew stronger. By the time the refrain came, he had managed to lock his tears away and gave it all he had - for Ethel, and for Marvin.

As he reached the last refrain of the song, he switched to the lyrics of the musical's requiem. They hadn't talked about it, but it seemed like the natural thing to do.

"Don't cry for me, Argentina; for I am ordinary and unimportant... and undeserving of such attention... unless we all are. I think we all are..."

The music died down and the people remained quiet. Some were sobbing quietly, others coughed. It seemed to last for hours, but then, Marvin rose and applauded loudly. That seemed to animate the others, and gave the signal that it was allowed to applaud in a chapel. The sound was deafening. Kurt lowered his head and quickly wiped at his face. He wanted to return to his seat, but Marvin stopped him and wrapped his arms around him. Kurt could tell he was trembling, but Marvin still pressed him firmly.

"Thank you. Thank you, Kurt, I know she heard you," he said, his voice wrought with emotion. "Please don't leave, okay, I have something for you, later."

"Oh, no, Marvin, I-" Kurt started to protest. This was one performance he would definitely not take money for.
"No, something from Ethel. A gift. Please, stay," Marvin pleaded. "It would mean so much to her."

"Okay," Kurt promised, feeling overwhelmed. Marvin finally let him go, and Kurt hurried back to his seat as the pastor went to lead them in prayer.

Sebastian smiled sadly at Kurt as he came back to his seat, tears in his own eyes.

"That was beautiful, Kurt." Sebastian whispered. "You did her proud."

Kurt shrugged awkwardly. It could have gone better, but he was glad he had done it. He watched as everyone around them prayed, and took Sebastian's hand. "I couldn't have done this alone," he said quietly. "I hope I didn't ruin your morning off."

Sebastian squeezed Kurt's hand gently. "Of course not! You should always call on me if you need anything."

"Thanks," Kurt whispered. This was definitely not something he'd ever imagined doing, accompanied by Sebastian Smythe. It still seemed slightly surreal that they were friends now, but he couldn't think of anyone else who would have shown up here today.

The people in the first seats slowly started filling out, each stopping at the coffin to put flowers down or just say a silent word.

It was their turn to go up to the front. Kurt slipped his hand from Sebastian's and together, they made their way there. Kurt encountered only kind and pleasant smiles on the faces of the people that looked his way, and it made him feel like he had given them something. He had reached out and touched all of these people; not just Marvin. Tears welled up in his eyes again, and he stopped fighting it.

Sebastian lay his rose down amongst the other flowers and lay his hand on the coffin. 'Thank you,' he whispered in French. 'For giving my friend the chance to shine.' He closed his eyes for a moment and bowed his head before straightening up and offering Kurt his arm with a sad smile.

"You okay?" he asked quietly.

Kurt nodded, taking Sebastian's arm and walking down the aisle. In front of the chapel, people were gathered in small clusters, talking quietly among themselves. Marvin and Ethel's sister moved from one group to the other, thanking them for coming. When Marvin saw them coming, he excused himself at his friends and they made their way to them. Marvin said something to Ethel's sister and she reached into her bag to take out an envelope and a small box.

Kurt's stomach swirled. He tightened his hand on Sebastian's arm. "Marvin said Ethel had something for me," he explained quietly.

Marvin smiled at them. "Ethel and I had some time to prepare for what was coming," he said. "When you get to be as old as we are, and have no children, you do kind of worry what will happen to all of your things when you pass on. Ethel really enjoyed our Sundays out, and she was adamant about this. Here-" He handed Kurt the envelope. "You can open it, it's nothing macabre, I promise. Ethel's sister is already getting our naughty pictures." He winked. "Just kidding, Nettie, I'm keeping those, of course." Ethel's sister rolled her eyes fondly.

Kurt carefully opened the envelope and peeked inside. His eyes widened. In it was a well-preserved Evita playbill...signed by several members of the original cast. "This is..." he started, not sure what to say.
"It's just a keepsake," Marvin said, "but I'm told it's worth quite a bit for collectors. You can keep it or use it for your student debt...I promise Ethel won't mind either way. It's yours to do with as you wish."

Kurt clutched it to his chest. "I want to keep it," he said.

"Then there's this," Marvin continued, taking the small box and offering it to Kurt. "Ethel got this as she retired from the theatre. It's just a replica, but she said you were the only one she knew who'd be able to properly appreciate it."

Kurt opened the box and gasped. He'd seen Ethel wear this brooch often, but until now, he'd never realised it was a theatre prop. He had complimented her on it a few times, and it had always made her face shine with joy. "Could you hold this?" he asked Sebastian, giving him the envelope in one hand and the box in the other, so he had his hands free to take the brooch. He pinned it to his lapel. It was an ornate faux-jugendstil design, and clearly a lady's piece, but that had never stopped Kurt.

"Thank you so much," he said to Marvin. "I love it."

"You're welcome, kiddo," Marvin said. "And I expect to hear from you when you get your first shows. Nettie and I will be there."

"Absolutely," Ethel's sister added. "Thank you so much for coming today, Kurt."

Kurt bit his lip and nodded. "We'll leave you to your friends," he said softly. "But I'll be in touch, I promise."

"Yeah, you kids go do something fun, no need to hang out with the old farts," Marvin said, grinning.

Sebastian stood next to Kurt throughout the exchange in support. It was a very touching gift and Sebastian could tell how moved Kurt was.

He watched his friend closely and could see the thin cracks that were starting to spread across his armour, weaving an intricate web towards a collected centre. Like a glass window that has been shattered but kept in its frame, one more tap and the whole thing would crumble into a thousand pieces.

He refrained from touching Kurt at the moment, knowing that it could be the catalyst and knowing that Kurt will not want to break here in front of all these people.

He placed the empty box into his trouser pocket and held on to the envelope as Kurt hugged Marvin and Nettie again.

As Kurt turned back to him, Sebastian saw the final crack settle in and offered Kurt his arm again.

Kurt said goodbye and they walked towards the gates. The further they moved away from the chapel, the heavier Kurt felt. He had underestimated the impact of the service. Maybe Blaine had been right. Still, he wouldn't have wanted to miss it.

"We didn't sing, you know," he said suddenly, his voice shaking, "For Finn. I don't even know why we didn't. We just sat there. The whole Glee club. We should have sung."

And then, he couldn't hold it inside anymore.

Sebastian felt Kurt stop as his resolve finally shattered and he instinctively moved to support him.
He let Kurt's hand fall from his arm so that he could wrap it securely around Kurts waist. He pulled Kurt towards him and brought the other hand up to cup the back of Kurt’s head as Kurt started crying in earnest against his chest.

Sebastian’s heart broke for his friend and he closed his eyes, tipping his temple against the top of Kurt’s head and tightening his grip to stop Kurt from falling.

' Shh, it's okay, ' he whispered in French. ' I've got you. '

He didn’t offer any other words of comfort because he knew that there were no words that would make Kurt feel better. Sometimes actions were what mattered and all Sebastian could do for Kurt right now was be there.

"I know I should be thinking of Ethel," Kurt mumbled, "and I am, but...all the while I kept thinking, why didn't we sing? He would have liked that." 

He shook his head a little. He couldn't change it anymore. They had sang for Finn in Glee club, but it wasn't the same. He should have sung at his funeral, for Carole.

"I'm sorry," Kurt said softly. "I didn't think it'd hit me this hard." 

"Shh," Sebastian soothed quietly. "You’ve had a lot of loss in your life, Kurt, and grief works in odd ways. You don’t need to apologise."

Kurt closed his eyes and relaxed into Sebastian's embrace. He was so glad he wasn't alone.

He suddenly remembered something. "It was sweet of you to bring a flower," he said, smiling a little through his tears.

Sebastian smiled. "I didn’t wanna turn up empty handed, there’s a flower stall right outside my building. I grabbed one on the way out."

He held Kurt for another minute before pulling back. "Do you have to get home soon? Or do you want to come back to mine? I have the Grey’s Anatomy box set and a freezer filled with Ben and Jerry’s."

"Throw in a pillow fort and I'm sold," Kurt joked through his tears. He didn't want to go back to Blaine like this only to hear him say 'I told you so'.

Sebastian pulled back to smile down at Kurt fondly. "I think I can manage that."

He stepped back, letting his arms fall from around Kurt and took his hand instead.

They walked down the path and through the gate onto the street. Sebastian held his free hand up to hail a cab and held the door open for Kurt to climb in first.

They settled into the back, and Kurt leaned his head on Sebastian's shoulder. His mind already half on Grey’s Anatomy, he closed his eyes and mumbled, "thank you for being my person, Bas."
Kurt and Sebastian's New Year's Eve celebrations don't quite go as planned.

"I can take any truth; just don't lie to me" - Barbra Streisand.

These kind of evenings were his favourite. Blaine sat in his apartment surrounded by friends eating good food (New York city’s finest takeout) and drinking.

Rachel and Kurt were having a diva off on the karaoke machine and Kurt was surprisingly keeping up with Rachel as they battled it out to 'Take Me or Leave Me' from Rent. Tina, Artie and Sam sat around him singing softly as Sam played the guitar and Blaine stopped for a minute to just take it all in.

Kurt had actually been okay when he came back from the funeral the other day. He said he’d stayed for the wake and listening to Ethel’s family and friends talk about her life had helped. Her husband had also given Kurt an old Playbill from the original screening of Evita with the casts’ signatures and a replica brooch from the show.

In all fairness the brooch was hideous and he’d definitely stop Kurt from wearing it in public, but he supposed the sentiment was nice and it had caused Kurt to not be such a downer.

The duet ended and Rachel and Kurt hugged it out. "Oh Kurt, I’m so happy you’re back!" Rachel said bouncing happily, kissing him on the cheek.

Kurt smiled tersely. In his opinion, he'd never left - it was Rachel who had taken the midnight train to diva town. But it was New Year's Eve, and he wanted to enjoy himself, not argue semantics. Kurt looked at his friends. He had missed this, but at the same time, he longed for the others. He had to watch himself a little. Among his old friends, it was becoming harder not to slip up and mention his new friends - Steph would love this game, and if Alex were here, we'd need at least 3 more pizzas! And Bas...

Well. Sebastian had to work tonight. It was all hands on deck at Satire as it was the busiest night of the year, and yet every now and then, Kurt's phone would buzz in his pocket, and he'd make a surreptitious trip to the bathroom to check his messages. So far, Sebastian had sent him a picture of Marc and his husband Paul (who looked incredible), a glass tip jar that was filled nearly to the brim already, and a selfie of him, Danny and Terry, making Charlie's Angels poses. In return, Kurt had sent him a screenshot of his karaoke high score, the label of their wine with a few question marks, and an obscurely lit bathroom mirror selfie that showed off his laced-up vest. He was wearing Ethel's brooch.

It was nice, even if he had to sneak around. It was a bit like having his friend with him.

They had ended up spending the rest of the afternoon together after Ethel’s funeral, watching DVDs
and eating ice cream. Every now and then, Kurt would tell Sebastian something about Finn or his
mom, and Sebastian listened, not once telling him to ‘cheer up’ or ‘stop putting the mood down’. Given the alternative, staying with him had been the best choice.

"My turn!" Tina yelled standing up and snatching the microphone from Kurt. Blaine watched as Kurt chuckled and shook his head.

Kurt picked up his wine glass and walked towards him, planting himself into Blaine’s lap. Blaine’s arms instinctively moved to hold him and Kurt curled into his embrace.

"Aww shucks you guys," Rachel said, taking out her phone to take a snapshot. "You two are so adorable."

Blaine kissed Kurt's cheek for the picture and Kurt made an exaggerated 'oh!' face.

"That's going on facebook!" Rachel said happily.

A few seconds later, Kurt's phone buzzed in his back pocket, registering the tag. Blaine chuckled and pressed up against him a little. Kurt felt his heart flutter. Suddenly he wished it was just them. Unfortunately their guests would probably all stay until midnight at least.

Blaine checked his phone as well. "Oh my god, you guys, you won’t believe this," he mumbled." Sebastian Smythe liked your picture, Rachel. He probably saw it on my page because you tagged me. Ugh, I really need to block him."

"No, don't!" Rachel said, suddenly eager. "Show us his page instead!"

Blaine grinned maliciously and tapped into Sebastian profile. His profile picture was of him hugging a beagle and Blaine scoffed.

"Oh puppy!" Tina said as she looked over Blaine’s shoulder. She’d moved to sit on the arm of his chair to get a better look. "What?" she asked when everyone glared at her, "he may be an ass but his dog is cute."

"Oh my god!" Rachel said, pulling a face as Blaine scrolled down. The first post they came to showed Sebastian striking the Charlie’s Angels pose.

"His standards have really slipped," Blaine said. "Mind you, he’s probably fucked half the gay population of New York by now so all that’s left are the bottom feeders."

"That guy looks like he’s the same age as my dad!" Tina said appalled, looking at Terry.

"That other guy is really fit," Sam remarked, squinting to look at Danny, who was wearing one of his customary skin tight shirts.

"They could just be his friends," Kurt protested. And he knew for a fact Terry wasn't as old as Tina's dad. He felt anger bubbling up inside, but he didn't know how he was supposed to defend his friends without giving away they had been hanging out in secret for months.

Artie scoffed. "I doubt a guy like that has friends."

"Yeah, he just uses people," Blaine added. "He wants only one thing."

He scrolled down. There were several pictures of cocktails on Sebastian's timeline. In one, Kurt thought he recognised part of his own elbow. Thankfully it was a neutral shirt.
"Wait," Sam said. "Is he even 21?"

"He's twenty," Kurt replied, without thinking about it. "Uh...I think," he added feebly.

"That never stopped him before," Blaine said. "Remember that time he got us fake IDs?"

"Yeah," Kurt replied quietly.

"Oh my god, what?!" Rachel let out. "When was that?"

Blaine shrugged. "At school. When we were doing West Side Story. He got us into this gay bar-

"Blaine," Kurt reminded him sharply. He didn't want all of them to hear this particular story, as sensational as it must seem to Rachel. "Can we just stop this? Put your phone away."

"Geez. What's your problem, Kurt?" Blaine asked, but he lowered his phone.

Kurt shrugged. "I just happen to think people can change. And looking up someone's personal page to share it with others is really kind of a dick move."

"Serves him right," Rachel said vindictively.

"And if someone did it to you?" Kurt mumbled, feeling conflicted.

Rachel raised her chin and pretended it wouldn’t bother her at all.

"Hey y’all, chill," Artie said picking up a pad of paper and some pens that had been set up earlier. "Let’s play Who Am I?"

"Oh, I love this game!" Rachel said, bouncing on her feet and clapping. Artie ripped out sheets of paper and passed them around the group with the pens. "Everyone think of three people and write their names down. It can be anyone…friends, family, celebs. They all go in a bowl and we take it in turns."

Blaine took at his sheet of paper and ripped it into three. He smirked as a wicked thought came to him and he wrote a name on one of his sheets, using Kurt's back as a table.

Kurt thought about it for a moment, then wrote down Noel Coward, Michelle Obama, and Mr Clean. He folded the notes and handed them to Artie. Each of them took a name from the bowl and somehow attached them to their hair using paper clips and hairpins. The name Kurt had drawn was apparently very funny, as all of his friends started laughing. Kurt hoped it wasn't too embarrassing, but it was just a game.

Blaine got Oprah Winfrey. Kurt wondered if he remembered signing that no-more-cheating contract from her website before their engagement.

Rachel got Michelle Obama, and she got to start. After several clues (am I a woman? am I pretty? am I someone famous? am I talented, influential, well-loved?) she actually had the audacity to guess she was Rachel Berry. It seemed like she was still a definite resident of diva town.

Sam got Vito Corleone, and guessed it almost right away - then spent at least 10 minutes doing Godfather impressions.

Then Kurt was up. He looked at his friends' smiling, expectant faces.

"Okay, am I a man?"
They laughed. "I guess so," Rachel said, her eyes twinkling. Kurt's heart sank a little. He hoped this wasn't going to be some kind of LGBTQ joke.

"Am I someone famous?"

"No."

"Am I someone you know?"

"Yes."

Kurt bit his lip, thinking about it. He looked around. "Am I a teacher?"

"No!"

"Am I from McKinley?"

More laughter. "No!"

Something about the look on Blaine and Rachel's faces gave Kurt an inkling. "Am I from Dalton?"

"Yes."

Kurt didn't want to play anymore, but he knew he had to go on. "Am I...a nice person?" he asked reluctantly.

Everyone laughed.

"No," Sam said, shaking his head.

"Definitely not," Artie agreed.

"Pure evil," Rachel added.

"And gross," Tina chipped in.

Blaine didn't say anything, but he was watching Kurt closely.

Kurt gave up. "I'm Sebastian, aren't I?" he said quietly, pulling the note from his forehead. Sebastian Smythe. He recognised Blaine’s handwriting. What a shitty thing to do. Sebastian was his friend, his best friend - he was definitely not a joke.

And yet, everyone was laughing.

Anger rose inside of him. “Do you think this is funny?” Kurt snapped, looking around. His friends were staring at him. “How many of our former classmates do you think are playing this game right now, using me as the punchline? Do I talk like a girl? Do I wear skirts to class? Do I deserve to be thrown into a dumpster? Am I Kurt Hummel?”

“Kurt...” Rachel objected, and Kurt turned his anger on her. She was the one who had instigated the facebook stalking.


Rachel gasped.
Kurt looked around the group, bile rising in his throat. “Am I a wanna-be director who makes fun of people's auditions behind their back? Do I try to date three girls at the same time? Am I Artie Abrams?”

He pushed on, seemingly unable to stop. “Did I fake a stutter in school? Am I a creepy fag hag? Am I Tina Cohen-Chang? Am I a formerly homeless guy who conveniently forgot who helped me out when I was living in a motel room? Am I Sam Evans?”

Finally, Kurt turned on Blaine, his voice cracking from the force of his anger. “Do I wear clashing primary colours to inappropriate occasions? Do I use too much product in my hair? Do I push myself into the spotlight at every possible occasion? Am I...Blaine Anderson?”

There was a ringing silence as his tirade finished. Kurt clasped a hand over his mouth. He knew he had gone too far when he saw the expression on his friends' faces. He shook his head and hurried to the bathroom.

After he had closed the door behind him, he took out his phone. His hands were shaking. He didn’t want to tell Sebastian about this; it was kinder if he never found out. But he wanted to write something, to feel close to the only person whom Kurt felt still cared about him.

To P. Martini (23:30)

Last chance in 2014 to say thank you for everything... Merci, mon ami. See you in 2015! <3

Kurt looked at the small heart and hesitated, then pressed send.

He lingered in the bathroom, trying to calm himself. This couldn't be happening. He had to get himself under control. He had been moments away from telling Blaine about Sebastian. He didn't want to start the new year with a fight. He wanted things to get better, not worse.

He pulled himself together, once more telling himself to work at this harder. It could be his new year’s resolution.

He lifted his chin and stepped out. Tina pushed straight passed him and slammed the door closed.

Kurt looked around at the rest of his friends. They were giving him subdued looks - Artie and Sam were, at least. Blaine and Rachel were huddled together over Blaine’s phone, laughing at something. Kurt didn’t want to know.

Sam approached Kurt, shuffling awkwardly. “I’m sorry Kurt,” he said quietly. “Of course you were...no you are a good friend. I haven’t forgotten all the help you gave me! You took me in and helped put clothes on my back, I’ll never forget that.”

"It feels like you did forget, sometimes," Kurt admitted. "When you're off with Blaine..."

He shrugged. "I know you became this 'dynamic duo' after I graduated, but...when you came to New York, neither of you asked if I wanted to be part of a 'terrific trio'."

Sam blushed and glanced over his shoulder at Blaine who was still focused on his phone. “I did, I wanted to, but Blaine said he’d spoken to you about it and that you said it was healthy for you both to have time away from each other...I thought...I thought that was what you wanted. I really am sorry.”

Kurt frowned. He didn’t remember talking to Blaine about that. It felt like ages ago that they moved in. He remembered how disappointed he had been when they’d gone to the Statue of Liberty without
him, but if he had really said he wanted time to himself...

He wished he could recall.

He believed Sam, however, and he didn’t want to make him feel worse.

"Yeah...yes, I guess I did say that," he offered. "Still, some weeks you see Blaine more than I do!"

He smiled a little.

Sam nodded. “I’m sorry, I’ll do better. I don’t want to come between the two of you, honest. You’re like, the real thing, right?”

“Right,” Kurt confirmed, feeling a little awkward. He had said quite a few harsh things about Blaine, too.

Artie watched the exchange, feeling awkward himself. “When you said I made fun of people’s auditions behind their backs...what did you mean?” he asked, trying to think back over all the auditions. He always tried to keep it professional, at least until he was sure no one would overhear.

Kurt swallowed. "I was outside Ms Pillsbury’s office that day you decided who was going to play Tony. I heard what you said about me."

He could feel the humiliation burn in his cheeks again at the memory. "So I tried to prove myself to you in my second audition, and you laughed me off the stage."

He paused. "I was used to being laughed at by the rest of the school, but you have no idea how much it hurt to know that I was a joke even within Glee club."

Artie felt shame wash over him. Now he remembered. He hadn’t realised how much it clearly still bothered Kurt. Back then, Kurt had acted like he hadn’t cared, and that he had been happy for Blaine, but Artie understood - too late - that it had been an act to save face.

“I’m sorry, Kurt,” he said quietly. “Truly. I don’t have any excuses, but I should have known better. I really am sorry.”

Kurt nodded. He knew Artie was a good guy, deep inside. It was prejudice and peer pressure, but dammit, this was his life, and he couldn’t always excuse other people’s behaviour and take it all onto himself. It wasn’t his fault people didn’t see him as leading man material.

He glanced over at Rachel and Blaine. He wasn’t holding out for an apology from them, but he’d settle for a fresh start in the new year.

He checked his phone. His message to Sebastian was still unread. The countdown to the New Year was about to start.

--

Sebastian had put his phone away after the picture of Kurt and Blaine was posted. He knew he shouldn’t be surprised, but he couldn’t help the tiny twinge his heart gave. He also hadn’t been able to stop himself liking the picture. Despite the overall content, Kurt looked really good and seemed happy. Which was all Sebastian wanted.

Other than that, it had been a fun night at the bar. The atmosphere was chilled and happy. Plus, he would be getting laid later which was always good.
He’d not had a random hook-up in months…not since the episode over the summer. But thanks to
his and Danny’s arrangement, he still got to take the edge off once in a while.

Free shooters were set up on on the bar. It was self-service until midnight. The staff was on a 45
minute break to give all the employees the chance to watch the ball drop with their loved ones.

Sebastian stood around the spouses table with his colleagues and their partners. Joe had relented and
let Sebastian have a proper drink to see in the New Year with. He’d gone for a whiskey over ice and
was sipping it slowly as he listened to a conversation between Marc, Paul and Joe.

He’d felt his phone buzz about half an hour before but had ignored it. As the clock started ticking
however, his resolve faded and he withdrew his phone.

He smiled sadly and typed out a quick reply.

To Kurt (23:57)

Happy New Year Kurt! I hope that 2015 brings you all the happiness you deserve - x

"5...4...3...2...1...HAPPY NEW YEAR!" Everyone yelled, and suddenly there was a flurry of hugs
around Kurt. He somehow found himself in the eye of the storm, all alone, looking down on his
phone.

Then, Rachel was hugging him, telling him about how this year was going to be epic and something
that Barbra or Patti said about new beginnings - he didn't really hear her. Inside, Kurt wondered how
much happiness he deserved.

He watched Blaine and Sam hug and go into a complicated choreography of fistbumps and mock-
attempts at killing each other, and walked up. "Hey," he said softly. "May I cut in?"

Sam grinned sheepishly and stepped aside, giving Kurt a nod to show he didn’t want to get in
between the two of them again.

"Happy new year, Blaine," Kurt said, offering him a tentative smile. Was this the year they were
going to get married?

"Happy new year, Kurt," Blaine said, and kissed his lips.

"You guys are so awesome, you know that?" Sam commented from the side. "The way you fall in
love, and break up, and get together again, and break up again, and get together-"

"So Ross and Rachel," Rachel added, snapping another picture. "It's just meant to be."

Kurt tried to ignore them, but something about Sam's words bothered him. He pulled away from the
kiss.

"We only broke up once ," he said, frowning. "Before our engagement."

Sam shrugged. "I thought you broke up this summer, too? Blaine said you were on a break."

Rachel gasped. "Just like Ross and Rachel!"

Kurt blinked. This summer? He turned back at Blaine, who was looking trapped. For the second
time that night, Kurt got a sinking feeling of foreboding.
"Blaine, what does he mean, 'we were on a break'?” he asked, his voice carefully measured even though his whole body felt like it had been doused in ice. "What happened in LA? Did you...did you cheat on me again?"

"It was nothing!" Blaine protested. "It wasn't even really - I mean-" He broke off, looking like a deer caught in headlights. "We'd been fighting so much, Kurt. It really felt like LA was like a break. A different world."

"Like an alternate universe?" Sam supplied helpfully.

Kurt felt sick. "Not to me," he whispered.

"Kurt..." Blaine said, reaching for Kurt’s hands. Kurt stepped away from him. "Come on Kurt, don’t be like that," Blaine said, getting angry. "What was I supposed to think? You were hardly ever here, we were arguing all the time...this...this isn’t my fault."

Kurt shook his head. He didn't want to hear it. Not again.

He looked around him. His friends were all looking at him; Sam looked troubled, Rachel looked moved, Tina fairly annoyed - she was inching closer to Blaine and eyeing his hand. Artie looked as if he was taking it all in as inspiration for his next project.

Kurt didn't want to be there anymore. Not with them. If he was all alone anyway, he might as well do it by himself somewhere else.

"Happy new year, everyone. May 2015 bring you all the happiness you deserve," he said bitterly, pushed passed Blaine and headed out the door.

--

Sebastian added another twenty dollars to the tip jar and grinned at it happily. It was their second jar of the evening and it too was almost full.

The bar was back open for the final few of hours until the club shut at three and Sebastian was buzzing. He’d pushed past the slight hurt from earlier and was now focused entirely on putting on a show at work, and gearing up for a whole other kind of show later on.

Danny appeared to be feeling the same way, because whenever they passed within a few inches of each other he brushed up against Sebastian. At one point, when Sebastian had been reaching up high to push vodka into a glass Danny had actually pressed right up behind him so that Sebastian could feel the hard line of his dick against his ass. It made his knees weak.

"Stop it," Sebastian said without heat. "I don’t wanna get caught and lose my job. Save it for later." He pressed his ass back against Danny in a teasing manner.

"Mm...I will," Danny mumbled, briefly nipping at the back of Sebastian's neck. "I don't wanna lose my job either. It has definite...benefits." He reached for a bottle next to the vodka, using it as an excuse to press up to him a little longer, then stepped away.

Marc watched the two of them. He wasn't the only one. As he passed Paul at the bar widows' table to collect empties, his husband reeled him in.

"Is Sebastian ok?" he asked, nodding at the bar.

Marc sighed. "I think he's just lonely," he replied. "But he does seem better than he was in the
summer. And Danny's a nice guy. He could do a lot worse."

Paul nodded. "I guess everyone's entitled to a party on New Year's Eve." He kissed his husband. "Go finish up so we can have our own," he added in a low voice. Marc winked and carried his crate with empties to the back.

—

People were slowly filing out of Satire. They looked happy and tired. Kurt felt tired as well, but not from partying.

He had walked around for hours, trying to clear his head. He'd caught the last of the party at Times Square, but had felt just as lonely among the thousands of tourists as he had at home. He'd taken a walk by the Hudson river, but everywhere he looked, couples were doing just that - and that made him feel worse. Then, he'd gone into one café after the other, looking for something he could not define.

In the end, he could think of only one place to go, and that was Satire. It was closing time. Kurt waited across the street. He had left home without a jacket, and he was starting to really feel the cold.

He wasn't even sure if he really wanted to bother Sebastian tonight. What if he was planning to leave with someone? The last thing Kurt wanted was for Sebastian to get angry at him for cockblocking. He decided to wait and see. The alternative, he supposed, was to return home eventually, and hope Blaine was already asleep.

--

Sebastian set his empty dishwasher tray on top of the rack at the end of the bar and sighed happily. That was the last load finally put away.

Marc and Paul had disappeared about half an hour ago and it was just him, Danny and Joe left.

"Alright guys, you can clear out now too," Joe said, tapping their shares of the evenings tips with his pen. They had easily made over two hundred dollars each.

"Thanks, boss!" Sebastian said with a grin. He reached for his coat and started pulling it on.

Danny winked at him, his coat already done up. They grabbed their money, said bye to Joe and made their way towards the exit. Just before they went out into the cold, Danny cornered Sebastian and pressed him up against the door. He slid his hand into the back pocket of Sebastian’s jeans and squeezed his ass, leaning down to whisper roughly in his ear. "So, your place or mine?"

Sebastian grinned and closed his eyes, fighting the wave of arousal that coursed through him.

"Mine," he whispered back, opening his eyes. He kissed Danny hard, licking into his mouth hungrily. Their raincheck from Ethel’s funeral was due, and it was due badly. “Let’s go.”

They stepped outside, pulling their jackets closed against the cold. It was then that Sebastian caught sight of something on the other side of the street that made his heart stop.

"Kurt," he said in shock.

It was Kurt. He stood in nothing but jeans, a shirt and a vest, hugging himself against the cold, his face blotchy and red. He’d been crying.
Sebastian instinctively left Danny’s side and ran across the street towards his friend.

"Kurt!" Sebastian said again as he reached him. "What's the matter? What happened?" He pulled off his coat and wrapped it around Kurt’s shivering body.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know where else to go," Kurt let out, his teeth chattering. "I just had to leave."

Danny crossed the street as well, looking worried. He looked Kurt over. "Do you need a doctor?" he asked, all further plans abandoned. "Or a ride to the police station?"

Kurt shook his head. He knew what it must look like to show up here without a coat, looking like he did, but he couldn't help it.

"Blaine cheated on me. Again," he admitted softly.

Sebastian felt his heart sink and his blood pressure rise in anger.

"He what?" he said trying to keep his voice calm. Kurt was the most important thing right now. Hating on Blaine could come tomorrow. "Oh Kurt, I’m so sorry."

“Yeah man, that sucks,” Danny agreed. He offered him a sympathetic smile. "Hey, do you want me to beat him up for you?"

Kurt let out a short laugh. What he'd give to see the look on Blaine's face if Danny showed up at his door! Then he shook his head.

"Thanks. He probably deserves it, but... I have to take the higher road."

Danny raised his eyebrows but accepted Kurt's decision.

Kurt hesitated. "Bas, do you think...would it be okay, if...I crash at your place tonight?" he asked, quickly following it up with an explanation. "It's just that...I really don't want to go home right now."

He had told himself to accept it if Sebastian had other plans, but his reluctance to go home was bigger than his fear of rejection.

"Of course you can!" Sebastian said instantly, rubbing his hands up and down Kurt’s arms to try and get some heat back into him. There was no way he was letting Kurt go home tonight, or ever again, if he could help it. He looked at Danny a little helplessly. "I have to..."

Danny nodded in understanding and offered Sebastian a lopsided smile. "Are you alright getting him home?"

Sebastian relaxed and smiled at Danny. "Yeah, we'll be okay. Thanks Dan..."

Danny shrugged it off. He put a hand on Sebastian's shoulder and squeezed it. "I'll see you next week." Danny nodded at Kurt. "Take care, Kurt. And let me know if you change your mind."

Kurt brushed a few tears off his face and smiled. "I will."

He watched Danny go, and his smile slowly faltered.

"I'm such a fool," he whispered. "When he came back from LA, I genuinely thought the time apart had been good for us, that we'd worked things out. I thought." He shook his head. Sebastian knew all of that. Kurt hadn’t stopped talking about it back then. "I guess all the romantic stuff he did...was just him feeling guilty."
Sebastian shook his head. He had never felt such hatred towards another human being as he did for Blaine Anderson right now.

"And do you wanna know the worst thing?" Kurt asked rhetorically. It had been haunting him for hours.

"He made me miss two Sundays that I could have sung for Ethel. And now she'd dead and I'll never, ever get that chance again."

Sebastian felt his heart break and he stepped closer to Kurt, pulling him gently into a hug.

"Oh Kurt," he whispered. "Don't think like that. You were just trying to make your relationship work."

"For nothing," Kurt replied bitterly. "All of it was for nothing!"

All the times he stayed silent when he should have spoken up, all the sneaking around, all the temptations he had resisted. The solo he had given up for Blaine...

Sebastian held him wordlessly. He didn’t know what to say or do other than hold Kurt and let him know that he was there.

This was really happening; Sebastian acknowledging it instead of offering a "it'll be ok" made Kurt see that. It was too much. Tears started coming again, and this time he couldn't hold them back.

"Alex," he started, hiccupping, "Alex will tell me 'I told you so' - so hard."

Sebastian closed his eyes and held him close, letting him cry it out into his chest.

"Shh," he said soothingly, rubbing his hand along Kurt's back. "No, he won't, he may seem brash but he has a heart of gold and he cares about you, Kurt. We all do."

"Come on," Sebastian said quietly. "Let’s get you home."

Kurt nodded, feeling oddly detached from what they were doing. He watched Sebastian hail a cab, and they got into the back.

He was glad Sebastian didn't force conversation or smalltalk on him. He was just...there. Kurt stared at his own reflection in the window as they rode through dark streets, rehashing situations in his mind, wondering what he could have done differently. Then, after a while, he grew tired, and his head started drooping against Sebastian's shoulder.

Sebastian changed his position to accommodate him.

Kurt briefly woke up every time the cab stopped at a red light, as if to check Bas was still there, and then closed his eyes again.

They finally pulled up outside his apartment block and Sebastian shook Kurt awake gently.

"We’re here, babe," he said quietly.

Kurt blinked a few times and made himself sit up. They stepped out of the car and Sebastian paid the cabbie. A gush of cold wind pushed through the streets, and Kurt shivered, pulling Sebastian's jacket closer around himself. He wished he had brought warmer clothes - or any extra clothes, period. But then, he hadn't exactly planned the evening to end up in an overnight stay at someone else’s place. At least he had the day off, and wouldn't need a Vogue or NYADA appropriate outfit in the
morning.

Sebastian fished his keys out of his pocket and opened the main door to the building. He guided Kurt inside and locked the door behind them. They walked across the lobby and he pressed the button to call the elevator. They rode up in silence.

Kurt followed Sebastian to his front door. "Thank you for doing this, Bas," he added softly. "I know a pity party was probably not the kind of party you had planned for tonight."

Sebastian turned to Kurt outside his door and looked at him.

"You don’t have to thank me, Kurt. I am glad you came. You’re my best friend, you should always come find me or call me if you’re in need." He smiled softly and opened the door, allowing Kurt to walk in ahead of him. “You can take a shower if you want, warm up properly.”

Kurt nodded gratefully. He wasn’t sure exactly when it had happened, but it was true. Sebastian was his best friend. He was beginning to find out what it was like to have one; a real one.

He looked down at his clothes, taking inventory. His vest wasn’t too badly wrinkled; if he hung it out in the bathroom while he showered, the humid air would pull most of the folds out and he could wear it again in the morning. Knowing that he’d have something to wear already made him feel marginally better.

"Could I maybe borrow a t-shirt to sleep in?"

"Of course," Sebastian replied. "I'll be right back."

He walked into his room and grabbed a pair of soft cotton pyjama bottoms and a large grey t-shirt, a pair of socks and an unopened toothbrush from the multi pack he’d bought a few months back.

He also grabbed something to sleep in for himself, a pillow off his bed and a spare duvet from a trunk at the foot of his bed and wandered back into the living space. He set his bedding and his sleeping gear down on the sofa. It pulled out into a semi-decent sofa bed, but he’d do that in a minute.

"The towels are in the bathroom by the sink," he said, handing Kurt the change of clothes and the toothbrush. "You can use whatever supplies you find there, my shampoo isn't great but I don't mind if you take some..."

He could tell he was talking too much, but he wanted to make Kurt feel as welcome as possible.

Kurt had sat down on the sofa and taken off his shoes as he waited, and he had almost dozed off again in the short time Sebastian was in the bedroom.

He blinked at Sebastian as his friend put blankets down on the sofa, and it took him a moment to understand what it meant. He planned to sleep out here. Sebastian was offering him his own bed. Kurt knew he ought to protest, but he was too tired; too weary; too grateful.

"Can I make you anything to eat or drink?" Sebastian asked quietly.

Kurt inventorised the needs of his body. "No, I think I just need to get warm and then sleep." He sighed deeply. "I'll deal with this mess in the morning."

Kurt stepped closer to hug him, seeking out the reassuring comfort he’d come to depend on. "Good night, Sebastian," he said quietly.
Sebastian hugged Kurt back. "Good night, Kurt. I’ll be out here if you need anything."

"Thanks," Kurt mumbled, making no effort to disentangle himself from Sebastian's embrace. Eventually, he knew he had to.

Someone else's bed, with no one in it but him - not even his boyfriend pillow- ...in normal circumstances it would have kept Kurt up all night, but with so little of the night left, Kurt didn't think it'd be a problem.

Sebastian stepped closer to Kurt and tightened his embrace, sensing Kurt’s need for comfort and selfishly seeking a bit of his own.

Kurt had his head tucked under Sebastian’s chin and Sebastian moved a little so he could press a soft kiss to Kurt’s forehead, just below the hairline.

He tried to stop his mind from racing too far ahead. He didn’t even know if Kurt had broken up with Blaine and was half-expecting him to go back, but his heart was already supplying thoughts about getting a chance to really be with the amazing man in his arms.

For now he squashed all that in an effort to just be there for his friend.

Instinctively, Kurt brought his face up towards Sebastian's lips, but caught himself in time and just looked at him instead.

"I'll go take that shower then," he said, still not letting go. Confusing thoughts were swirling through his mind, and none to do with Blaine.

Sebastian looked at him and smiled. "Sure thing babe. I hope you sleep okay, it’s a pretty comfortable bed."

A dozen flirty replies sprung up in Kurt's head, each one an invitation; a plea for comfort and a few moments of distraction. What hotblooded gay man would refuse if he made it this easy?

But it would reduce his friend to a tool in his rebound, and Kurt knew it would mean the end of their friendship. Sebastian would not forgive him, and he was pretty sure Alice wouldn't either. Sebastian was worth more than Kurt had to offer.

He let go, and walked to the bathroom, locking the door behind him.

Sebastian watched Kurt disappear and rubbed a hand over his face tiredly. Poor Kurt, he thought to himself. He thought back on what Kurt had said about ‘I told you so’s’. He knew Kurt was right, everyone would think that. Alex may be the only one bold enough to say it, but even he wouldn’t do that yet.

There may come with time as it had for Alice and Jeremy.

Right now however, Kurt didn’t need ‘I told you so’s’. He needed his friends to rally around him and support him through what was more than likely going to be a messy and difficult time. Sebastian took out his phone and quickly typed a message to the others. In a few words, he told them Kurt was staying with him for now, and to leave Kurt alone about it until he was ready to talk about it himself. He wrote a bit more to Alice, knowing she’d be able to tell the others discreetly. Then, he switched his phone off. They could both use all the sleep they could get.
The Morning After

Chapter Summary

Kurt and Sebastian wake up on New Year's Day to the reality of the events from the night before.

When Sebastian woke up, it took him a moment to remember why he was sleeping on his sofa bed and not in his comfy king-sized bed, but then the memories of the night before came flooding back and hit him like a freight truck. Kurt turning up at Satire frozen to the core after learning of Blaine’s most recent betrayal, and coming back to stay at Sebastian’s because he couldn’t face going home. Sebastian glanced at the bedroom door and sighed. Poor Kurt.

An idea of how he could cheer Kurt up came to him, and with a low groan at the ache in his muscles he rolled out of bed, stretching his long limbs out as he did. He was going to make Kurt breakfast. Sebastian slowly crept into the bedroom and headed straight for the bathroom, trying to ignore the sight of Kurt spread like a starfish in his bed.

The duvet had been kicked down around Kurt’s hips, one of his feet was sticking out from under the covers at the other end and, jutting up under the covers, there was an obvious line of Kurt’s - Sebastian almost dropped his phone. Good morning Kurt, he thought, blushing a little as warmth started to pool in his stomach. Thankful that he’d not been caught in his fluster, Sebastian hurried into the bathroom.

He relieved himself, grabbed a couple of aspirin from a box in the cabinet and tiptoed back out though the bedroom into the living room, leaving the box on the table next to the bed for Kurt as he passed. He made quick work of folding up his bedding and putting the sofa bed away before heading over to the kitchen. He took a bottle of water out and crept back into the bedroom to put it with the aspirin before returning to his task.

Operation Cheer Up Kurt.

He wasn’t sure what kind of breakfast Kurt liked, so he decided to make everything he liked and let Kurt pick. He pulled all the ingredients out that he’d need and set them up on the makeshift island counter that was set up opposite the kitchen area.

He turned the radio on quietly and set to work making the various batter mixes.

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Kurt woke up, feeling sweaty and dehydrated. Still, Sebastian's bed had been amazing, and the lack of snoring (or glow of a laptop screen) had contributed to a long, healing sleep. He still hurt, and his head was killing him, but the first rawness of last night had faded.

He spotted an unopened bottle of water and a box of asprins by the side of the bed that hadn’t been there when he went to bed, and smiled softly. He took two, washed them down, and lay back in the soft pillows to wait for them to take the edge off his headache.

When he felt he could bear it, Kurt got up, took off his shirt, and did a few morning pushups and
crunches. The familiar ache in his muscles distracted him from the ache in his heart, and when he had enough, he already felt a little more like himself again.

Then, he went into the bathroom to wash and get dressed. As he took a look at last night’s clothes, he knew he couldn’t wear them anymore. Even if they still looked fine, they immediately brought everything back. Kurt remembered exactly what he had worn the last time Blaine had told him he had cheated, and hadn’t worn those clothes since. He looked at this outfit with the same distaste now.

He wasn’t sure if he could just help himself to fresh clothes from Sebastian’s closet, so when he was done, he put his sleep shirt and his pyjama bottoms back on and carefully opened the door. Seeing the couch was empty, he figured Sebastian was awake. He opened the door fully and walked into the open plan living area.

"Morning," he said, his voice a little hoarse.

Sebastian was so wrapped up in his work that he didn’t hear Kurt emerge from the bedroom. He’d just picked up another egg to crack into a bowl when Kurt spoke. He looked up in greeting and froze, taking in the sight and sound that was Kurt Hummel first thing in the morning. His bed-slept hair, the imprint of the sheet on his stubbly cheek and his low, raspy voice.

Sebastian dropped the egg he was holding and it splattered on the floor, covering his bare feet with sticky goo.

"M-Morning Kurt," Sebastian said, flustered. He couldn’t erase the image of Kurt from earlier from his mind, and now he had this to add as well. "D-did you sleep okay?"

"I did," Kurt replied, unaware of Sebastian’s inner turmoil. He took in the sights and smells of the kitchen, and the mess at Sebastian's feet. "Y-you know, you’re great with bottles, but your egg-juggling technique may need a little work."

He looked around for something to fix it. "Don't move, I'll get it."

Kurt reached for a roll of paper towels, wetted a wad of them under the tap, and crouched in front of Sebastian to wipe the egg off the floor. "There. Now, lift your foot?"

Sebastian complied.

Content that he had wiped up every last speck of yolk, Kurt started to rise to his feet when he made the mistake up looking up at Sebastian. And oh. This perspective was...interesting, and so was the look on Sebastian’s face.

"I made breakfast!" Sebastian said, diverting the awkward moment. "I didn’t know what you liked so we have waffles, pancakes, French toast. Or if you don’t fancy that I can do bacon and eggs. Or there’s muesli...or fruit...and coffee!" He was rambling and he knew it, but he couldn’t stop himself.

Kurt rose to his feet and looked at the set table. "Wow...you weren’t kidding when you said you liked breakfast, huh?"

It looked and smelled amazing. "I like all of these things. In moderation." Kurt patted his flat stomach. "As long as you don't insist I eat every last bite..."

Kurt didn’t really expect trouble with that from Sebastian. Still, it was better to say it out loud before disappointment could arise. He’d learned that by doing.

"Of course I don’t." Sebastian said. "It’s only eggs and flour...what we don't eat can just go in the
"bin..." He swept his eyes over Kurt's body appreciatively. "I know you work hard to look good and it...definitely works...I wouldn't do anything to jeopardise that. Now, what would you like?"

Kurt looked away as he felt Sebastian's eyes on him. Whatever his friend said, it clearly hadn't been enough to keep Blaine satisfied for long. He took a deep breath and willed his tears away.

Being cheated on was the humiliation that kept on giving.

"Coffee," he said, and looked over all of the things Sebastian had prepared, considering which needed to be eaten right away and which would also taste good after they had cooled. "And some French toast?"

As Sebastian prepared everything, Kurt looked around and felt his mind slowly catching up with himself again. What would happen now? He couldn't stay at Sebastian's indefinitely. At some point, he needed to make a decision. Kurt looked down on his ring. At their last break-up, many of his friends had taken Blaine's side and everyone had assumed it was only a matter of time before they got back together. They had all treated his time alone like a rebound phase, an indulgence before going back to regular life, the way things were 'supposed to be'. For a while, Kurt had even believed that. He was pretty sure all of them - including Blaine - believed that was how it was going to be now, too.

But hadn't Blaine gone too far? Hadn't he proven, once and for all, that he would not change, no matter how much he may (pretend to) regret his actions afterwards? As loathe as Kurt was to be alone, if he wanted to keep the last shreds of his dignity, Kurt knew they had to break up...right?

Then why was he so scared to take that final decision?

A mug of coffee appeared by his hand, and the rich, dark scent pushed Kurt's gloomy thoughts to the background.

"Thank you," Kurt said. "I haven't even asked how you slept. Are you okay? I really kind of sprang this on you."

"I'm okay," Sebastian said with a reassuring smile, not wanting to make Kurt feel worse. He handed Kurt a plate of French toast. It smelled of sugar, cinnamon and hospitality.

Sebastian placed a couple of waffles on a plate for himself and carried the plate and his own mug of coffee over to the table, nodding for Kurt to do the same. "How are you?" he asked.

"It's a lot to process," Kurt admitted, joining Sebastian at the table.

"What happened? Do you want to tell me?" Sebastian asked carefully.

Kurt looked at the steam rising from his mug. It took him a while to speak.

"I don't know...I was wishing Blaine a happy new year, and then Sam said something, and I just knew. So I asked Blaine if it was true. And suddenly everyone was listening to us, and Blaine started telling me how it was my fault that he...that he'd-" Kurt broke off.

Sebastian scowled. How the hell was Blaine cheating Kurt's fault?

"I don't know exactly what he did," Kurt continued. "But apparently he felt like we were on a break this summer. When he was in L.A. So he was with someone else. Or several - I don't even know, I couldn't bear to ask."

Kurt shrugged. "Then I left."
"I’m so sorry, Kurt," Sebastian said quietly, squeezing Kurt’s arm. He didn’t know what else to say. "He’s an asshole! And it most certainly is not your fault that he cheated. He doesn’t get to go fuck other people every time you argue."

Kurt winced. He knew it was stupid to use euphemisms. Blaine fucked someone else, and calling it anything else didn't make it less true. But it hurt.

"The first time he cheated, he said we'd been apart for too long. I tried…not to give him that excuse again,” Kurt admitted.

He bit his lip to stop himself from saying more. Sebastian knew him well enough by now to fill in the blanks.

"But it wasn't enough, apparently,” Kurt added softly.

Sebastian was at a complete loss for words. He looked at Kurt with sad eyes, hatred for Blaine coursing through his veins. He really didn’t understand how anyone could treat Kurt this way. How could Kurt not be enough? Kurt was the most amazing person he knew. He was everything.

"Kurt..." he started, then something else occurred to him. "...Wait. You said that it all came out just after midnight? We closed up at three. Were you walking around in the cold for three hours?"

Kurt shrugged again. "I didn't know where to go," he said, "and I didn't want to go back."

He shivered and took a sip of his coffee. Then, he took a deep breath, and offered Sebastian a quivering smile. Maybe, if he could still smile, things couldn’t be so bad.

Sebastian’s heart sank and he looked at his plate for a moment before mirroring Kurt's smile. "Well, you're welcome to stay here as long as you need...and I'm here for you if you need anything at all!"

Kurt looked at him for a moment, wondering if he deserved someone who really seemed to like him unconditionally.

He would have taken any of his friends in after such a situation, no questions asked. But for someone else to offer, now that it was he who needed help... that was something else.

Kurt cleared his throat and took a sip of coffee. "I actually do need something...um. Maybe a fresh shirt?"

Sebastian grinned at him. "I’m sure I could stretch to a shirt…though you’ll have to pick it out, woe betide me if I try and dress Kurt Hummel!" he said winking at Kurt with a grin.

Kurt laughed, feeling his spirits lift a little.

“Yeah, that one with the bulldog print is definitely out of the question!“

He chuckled. Then, he felt reality catch up with him again, and his smile faded. “I have work tomorrow, though. I’ll need things from my place; a jacket, my other shoes, my bag…”

“I understand,” Sebastian said, though he wasn’t sure he really did. Was Kurt actually considering going back to Blaine, or just thinking about making a quick trip to pick up supplies? He decided to ask. After their fight last summer, he had learned to clear up misunderstandings and wrong expectations as soon as they arose. “So…once you’ve got those things, you’ll come back here?”

Kurt looked at him for a moment and took another bite of his breakfast.
"If you wanted me gone, you shouldn't have made me food," Kurt joked. "Now I'm yours forever."

_If only that were true…_ Sebastian thought to himself. _Maybe one day._

They ate in silence for a while until a faint sound broke the silence. At first, Kurt wasn't sure if Sebastian had a radio alarm that had just switched itself on... but then he realised it was his phone.

"It's not Blaine," he said, looking at Sebastian apologetically. "It's not his ringtone. I'll go check, it might be my dad."

He got up and walked to the bedroom to look for his phone. He found it just as it stopped ringing. He picked it up and looked at the display. He had five missed calls from Blaine, and a barrage of messages.

The call he had just missed, however, had been Sam calling. Or Sam's number, anyway. He didn't think it was beyond Blaine to use his bff's phone to try and get Kurt to talk to him.

Kurt took his phone back into the living room. Before he could open his messages, it rang again.

He gave Sebastian a nervous look and took the call.

"Sam?" _Please don't be Blaine_, he thought anxiously. It was too early. He hadn't prepared anything to say yet.

"Kurt?" Sam said. "Yes, it's me! Where are you? Are you okay?"

"I'm okay," Kurt said, giving Sebastian a little nod to show that it was Sam. "I'm...with a friend." He hoped Sebastian would understand now was not the time to elaborate.

"Oh thank god!"

Kurt could hear the relief in Sam's voice.

"Dude, you had me worried! I've been out looking for you all night! Do you have _any_ idea how big this city is?" Sam continued.

"A little bigger than Lima," Kurt said softly, feeling moved. "Did Blaine come with you?"

"Err no, he didn't." Sam paused. "I told him to stay at the apartment just in case you went back."

Kurt swallowed down his disappointment. For a moment he had imagined Blaine looking for him along with Sam, his mind providing a perfect montage scene of all of New York's iconic sites, with romantic music in the background and Blaine looking more heartbroken at every shot. Like Kurt would have run away to the Statue of Liberty or The Bull of Wall Street...or balancing the railing of the Brooklyn Bridge?

Kurt looked at Sebastian, and forced himself to remember his life was not a movie.

"I'm not going back, Sam. Not for a while." _Maybe not ever_, he thought.

Tears were welling up in his eyes again.

"No!" Sam confirmed. "No, Kurt, and you're right! Blaine was way out of line! I told him that back in the summer when...when it happened."

_When it happened._ Kurt knew what Sam meant, but it sounded like the way Blaine would say it.
Like it was something that was beyond his control. It had happened to Blaine, like rain or a hurricane.

"You mean when he chose to cheat on me," Kurt said sharply.

It was quiet on the other side for a brief moment.

"Yes," Sam said softly. "But I told him you deserved better and that he should tell you! He told me to mind my own business."

Kurt could hear the frustration in Sam’s voice. There was shuffling on the other side of the line, like Sam was walking around. Kurt knew he shouldn’t be treating Sam like he was the one who cheated.

"That’s why we didn’t talk for ages," Sam continued. "I know I should have told you myself. I’m so sorry, Kurt."

For the sake of their friendship, Kurt bit back an angry reply. Sam was the one who’d been out looking for him, after all. Yet he couldn’t help wanting to know why Sam and Blaine had made up, if Sam had really been against it. He asked, and heard Sam breathe in sharply.

"Blaine told me he had talked to you and confessed everything. He said that he had apologised, and that you agreed to forgive and forget. He said you wanted to never mention it again, and I shouldn’t either, because it might hurt you if I did."

Sam sounded more and more frustrated. "I swear I thought you knew!"

Kurt closed his eyes, sending two tears that had gathered in his tear ducts coursing down his cheeks. Everything started to make sense. It was like a fog was being lifted.

"I think Blaine has been lying to the both of us for a long time, Sam," he said softly.

Sebastian listened to Kurt's half of the conversation, his knife and fork abandoned on his plate. He stretched a hand across the table and placed it over Kurt’s. He didn’t like seeing him cry.

"I’m so sorry Kurt!" Sam said down the phone, sounding broken. There was a pause. "Listen...do you want me to bring you some clothes? You said you’re at a friends right? I could come and meet you."

Kurt hesitated. It would save him going back to the apartment, but he wasn’t sure if he really wanted Sam to handle his things, or if he could describe what he needed in ways Sam would understand without taking his closet apart.

He looked at Sebastian, turning his palm up to take his hand. He had no words to describe how much it meant to him that Sebastian had taken him in like this.

"Thanks, but...I think it’s easier if I do that myself," he said. Then something occurred to him. "Maybe you could make sure Blaine isn’t there when I stop by. I don’t want to see him yet."

"Consider it done!" Sam replied instantly. "I’ll drag him out for lunch. I can probably buy you at least an hour, maybe two."

It was clear that Sam was trying to make up for neglecting Kurt for the last few years.

"I’ll let you know when we’re clear of the apartment, and don’t worry. I won’t tell him anything."

"Thank you, Sam. An hour will be enough."
Before Sam could start apologising again, Kurt quickly shut him down by saying goodbye, and hung up.

"Blaine told Sam I knew about L.A.," he said, and looked at Sebastian. "And that I was okay with it."

Sebastian stared at Kurt and shook his head. "He really does live in a fantasy world, doesn’t he?" he said darkly. "How could he ever think you’d be okay with him cheating?"

Kurt hesitated. “Well, it’s not like there wasn’t any precedence… Blaine cheated on me before, and I got engaged to him. I guess it wouldn’t be too far-fetched.”

To avoid Sebastian’s eyes, he scrolled through his messages from Blaine.

**From : Blaine (00:50)**

Kurt where are you?

-  

**From : Blaine (01:10)**

This isn’t funny, come home! Now!

-  

**From : Blaine (01:45)**

Stop being so dramatic and come home!

-  

**From : Blaine (01:50)**

Ok I called your dad. He says call him.

-  

**From : Blaine (02:00)**

Everyone is worried. Stop doing this to us.

-  

**From : Blaine (02:30)**

We weren’t even together you can’t be mad at me.

-  

**From : Blaine (02:45)**

CALL ME! WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU KURT?
From : Blaine (03:15)

ARE YOU WITH SOMEONE ELSE?

-

From : Blaine (03:20)

Don’t bother coming home, I am going to bed.

Kurt felt his stomach swirl. His French toast was threatening to come back up again. He wasn’t sure if he should feel angry, guilty, or both. So much for his romantic dream of Blaine looking for him in the city streets. Blaine had called his dad in the middle of the night? Saying what? That he was missing? Did he want to give his dad a heart attack??

And yet...there were no messages or missed calls from his dad. Just one he had already seen, sent at midnight, to wish him and Blaine a happy new year. Another lie, then?

Kurt took a deep breath and opened a new message to Blaine.

To: Blaine (11:13)

I am staying with a friend. I need some time, Blaine. I am not sure I can do this again. I’ll let you know when I am ready to talk.

Sebastian watched as Kurt read through the messages on his phone. What little colour he had left seemed to drain from Kurt the longer he read. Sebastian could only imagine what the messages said.

He stroked the back of Kurt’s hand with his thumb. "Do you want me to come with you to get your clothes? Extra support in case Blaine is there?"

Kurt bit his lip. "Sam said he’d make sure Blaine wouldn’t be there, but...yes, actually, I want you to come."

It wasn’t that he was afraid of confrontation, though after reading Blaine’s messages he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t a little apprehensive. No matter what his last message said, Blaine would surely try to talk him into staying, and until he knew what he wanted, Kurt didn’t want Blaine to make his mind up for him.

Sebastian nodded and smiled at Kurt sadly. "Of course!" He hesitated for a moment. He felt he should be honest even if Kurt got annoyed. "I um, I hope you don’t mind, but I told the others." He looked at Kurt. "With you staying here they’re going to catch on that something has happened, and rather than making you have to answer awkward questions, I told them so that they know. And I’ve told them to not mention it to you or bring it up at all until you’re ready to talk." He spoke very quickly to explain.

Kurt nodded as he thought about it. "That's ok. I'm glad you did, actually. It saves me from trying to explain this mess." He sighed. "I can't even explain it to myself."

He looked at his plate, and the rest of the food Sebastian had prepared. "Maybe we should ask all of them to come. We could put this in the fridge and all come back here after. Alex would be up for it."

"It’s up to you, babe," Sebastian said quietly, secretly thinking that Kurt might not be up for a big company later on, but keeping their options open. "However you want to play this."
He wanted Kurt to know that they were all there for him, but if he needed to do this with as small an audience as possible that was perfectly okay too.

"Let's call them," Kurt said resolutely. "It's the new year. I want to hang out with you guys, and this food is much too good to go to waste." Kurt sounded decided. Already, he felt a little more in control of his own life.
Danny

Chapter Summary

Danny decides to test the waters...

Danny was already at the bar unloading dishwasher trays when Sebastian came in. The club was still empty, and they didn't expect a big crowd tonight. Only the main bar was open and it was just Danny and Sebastian on shift. Last year, such a configuration would have had a predictable end - the two bartenders would close up early and go home together. Danny had the feeling that things were going to change now. He'd seen the way Sebastian looked at Kurt, and his actions the past week spoke volumes; he would literally drop anything for that boy.

Nonetheless, he threw Sebastian a smile and held open the small wooden gate to the bar to let him in, and handed him a fresh apron.

"Hey."

Sebastian smiled at Danny and accepted the apron.

"Hey," he replied. "Thanks."

"Everything okay? How's Kurt?" Danny asked.

Sebastian nodded as he wrapped the apron around his waist.

"As well as can be expected," he replied solemnly. "He’s staying with me for a while, until he figures things out.” Sebastian paused. "How are you? I’m sorry about the other night...”

Danny shrugged it off. "Don't be. It was just sex, Seb. Your friends should always come first, especially when they turn up in a state like that." Just to test the waters, he added: "We can have a raincheck any time, right?"

Sebastian bit his lip. Technically, he knew that they could. He was still single, he wasn’t even sure if Kurt and Blaine were officially broken up and even if they were, it was going to be a long time before Kurt was ready for something else.

But there was something about seeing Kurt finally owning what was happening, and standing up for himself and what he wanted, that made Sebastian think. Kurt cared so deeply. Even if he was in pain now, it meant he felt all of that passion for another person.

Sebastian wanted that too. He didn’t want to screw around any more. Even if his arrangement with Danny was convenient and Danny was a nice (hot) guy, it didn’t make him feel anything. There was no passion.

He wanted it to mean something.

"I don’t think I can...” Sebastian started. "I...I think I want more. I want to find something more than just sex.” He shook his head. "I’m fucking terrified, but it’s true.”
Danny smiled fondly. Sebastian had it bad.

"That's ok, Seb. I gotta admit, as much as I like you, I'm not ready to pick out curtains with anyone yet," he teased. "So I understand if you want to look elsewhere for that."

He clapped Sebastian's shoulder. "You'll be alright. And hey, if not, I'll let you skip the queue, ok?" He winked.

Sebastian grinned and shrugged his shoulder. "You're lucky you know...without me as competition you might stand a chance at getting some real game." He winked.

"Hey, watch it!" Danny replied sharply, pointing his finger at Sebastian. Then he chuckled. "I never thought you'd settle down before I did," he mumbled fondly. "That kid must really be something special. But then I knew that when you gave up the chance to get up on this -" He swivelled his hips, "twice in one week."

Sebastian grinned. "It is definitely a good ride," he said, his eyes sweeping over his friend’s body.

"I don’t know what it is about him," Sebastian said, sobering up. "I never thought I could feel this way and I can’t even explain what it is. All I know is that it's him."

"Then I hope you get him," Danny said, meaning it. The way he saw it, if Seb was the one Kurt went to at a time like this, they were already pretty close. "And in the meanwhile, you can forward all your candidates to my side of the bar...Danny will take care of them!" He winked again.

Sebastian laughed and threw a cloth at him. "Doctor Danny available for house calls."

"That's right, open up wide and say aaah," Danny replied, catching the towel and slapping it against the bar. He grinned as Sebastian laughed. He was glad Sebastian was a good sport about it and didn't go sanctimonious on him. Some guys had, after settling down. Suddenly hooking up was cheap and dirty to them, and so was everyone who did it. He knew Sebastian wouldn't treat him differently now.

"Showtime!" he said, nodding at the entrance. The first patrons were coming in. They were open for business.
Chapter Summary

Kurt receives a Golden Ticket and Blaine "congratulates" him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kurt stood in line with the rest of his advanced combat class. One by one, they were to spar with Mr Hura and show him what they had worked on in their holiday break. Kurt hadn't exactly worked on anything. Over Christmas, he and Blaine had been in Ohio, pretending everything was fine between them. Shortly after, he had been too distracted by Ethel's death, and after the events of New Year's Eve, it had been too tempting just to pretend nothing existed outside the small world of Sebastian's apartment. He hadn't even gone to Vogue in the end, telling Isabelle the basics of the situation, and she had immediately agreed and sent over a box of Italian chocolate per courier.

He'd gone out once, with Sebastian and their friends.

Sam had been true to his word. The apartment had been deserted, and Kurt had packed in peace. Alex's steady commentary about hurting Blaine and making it look like an accident had kept them all amused while he did. Alice wouldn't leave Brody's side from the moment she had arrived. Kurt had never really heard the full story about Jeremy, but something about his own situation must have reminded her of it, going by her sympathetic glances.

He'd paused by the bed, an overwhelming sadness overcoming him. Remembering how intimate they had once been there now made Kurt feel hollow, and vaguely disgusted. Then Sebastian had spotted his boyfriend pillow and teased him mercilessly until he was laughing again. That evening, back at Sebastian's place, after all the food had been eaten and their friends had gone home, Kurt had taken a long shower with his own shampoo and scents, and by the time he came out, Sebastian had built him an actual pillow fort in front of the tv in the living room, big enough for two. It was childish and silly and exactly what Kurt had needed to hide from the world.

A few days later, work and school started up again, and Kurt was still living with Sebastian.

It was amazing how quickly they had settled into a domestic routine in Sebastian's apartment. Within days, they knew how the other took their coffee and breakfast, and had adjusted their morning rituals around sharing the bathroom. Kurt insisted on paying his share of the groceries and helped with the cooking; Sebastian, for his part, chivalrously gave up his comfortable bed (despite Kurt suggesting they should alternate between bed and couch) and offered distraction whenever he noticed Kurt was feeling gloomy.

But Sebastian couldn't come to NYADA with him, so here, Kurt was left alone with his thoughts.

He was so preoccupied that he hardly noticed when his name was called. Blinking, he quickly took a better grip on his quarterstaff and stepped forward. He heard the other students whisper behind his back, and frowned. It wasn't like he'd been asleep!! But then, he realised it wasn't him they were talking about...
Madame Tibideaux had just walked in, holding a golden envelope.

The students parted in front of her like the Red Sea parting for Moses. She never got tired of the feeling this gave her. She loved being the bearer of good (and terrifying) news.

She walked towards Kurt, envelope clutched in her hand. She had picked him because out of his entire year he showed the most promise, but following the dance hall disaster, he had to prove himself. She hoped that he understood the message behind the invitation. This was his last chance.

She smiled at him. The dumbstruck look of shock that passed over his face as he realised she was heading for him made her smile smugly.

"Congratulations Mr. Hummel," she said quietly, handing him the envelope.

Kurt opened his mouth, gaped, then snapped it closed again. "I..." he started. He looked at the curly calligraphy spelling out, unmistakably, Kurt Hummel.

Madame Tibideaux nodded indulgently. "Maybe you should take it."

Kurt blushed and took the envelope from her hand, having to physically hold himself back from curtsying. "Thank you."

"You may invite up to six people to accompany you," Madame Tibideaux continued. "However-" she added sharply, narrowing her eyes a little. "None of these guests will be singing with you, do I make myself clear, Mr Hummel?"

Kurt blushed even deeper and nodded quickly, his hair flopping up and down on his forehead, making him look years younger. They were all so young to her - and yet Kurt Hummel had always seemed mature and responsible...until the ribbon cutting ceremony. She hoped it had been a one-time error.

Satisfied that he had gotten the message, she pivoted, robes swaying, and walked out of the hall through the throng of students.

Kurt looked at Mr Hura, not sure what to do now. His teacher was beaming at him. "You can take a break, Kurt. Go call your dad."

Kurt squeaked happily and hurried off to the side to get his bag.

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The school was abuzz with the news of Golden Tickets being delivered. Only ten people a year received one. They were literally gold dust. Just being invited was an honour, but if you went on to win, it was something that could launch your career before you even left school.

After his success with June Dolloway, Blaine fully expected to receive a ticket himself...Carmen would be insane not to invite him.

When news spread that she had handed out all of the tickets and that the final one had gone to Kurt, Blaine was shocked, annoyed and incredibly jealous.

Kurt always seemed to get everything handed to him on a silver platter. It wasn't fair.

Blaine had missed Kurt this last week. He was hungry, the apartment was a mess and even the men on his websites weren't doing it for him. The worst was: he still didn't know where Kurt was staying.
He had a feeling Sam knew, but his former bff had completely abandoned him too. Blaine had even entertained the idea that they were actually living together now, in some tacky motel somewhere. The whole situation irritated him. Sam was his best friend and Kurt was his fiancé, and the both of them were forgetting their loyalties.

An idea suddenly came to him that just might help him get Kurt back. It had worked before, surely it would work this time too.

Checking his watch, he secured his bag strap over his shoulder and hurried off to Kurt's stage combat class.

--

Kurt didn't have to think twice about his invitations. He had already promised Sebastian, Alex and the others that they'd get to come. Instead of calling his dad, he sent texts off to them before hurrying back to class. He wanted to get back in shape and catch up for lost time. The ticket had given him a new boost to do his best at school. He took his turn sparring with Mr Hura, and then they were divided up into groups of four to rehearse choreographies of three-on-one.

The others immediately suggested he take the hero part, fighting off the three villains. Kurt didn't mind, but as they started, he realised he had to ward off a bit more than their theatre swords.

Nick, Tim and Giorgio were all eager to join him to the Winter Showcase, and were competing for his invitations. Kurt wasn't sure what to say, and concentrated on parrying their attacks. They worked up quite a sweat until Mr Hura called them off, and breathing hard, Kurt walked to the side for his water bottle and towel.

Blaine hung back as the students started to filter out of class. He noticed several guys were blatantly checking Kurt out, and Kurt seemed to be preening under their attention, bending over to show off his ass. Why did he have to do that?

Slipping into character, Blaine approached Kurt hesitantly. He had to make Kurt feel sorry for him. As Kurt stood bent over his bag, rounding his spine to relax his back, a pair of familiar shoes stepped into his peripheral vision.

"Hi Kurt," Blaine said as softly as he could.

He waited for Kurt to stand up and face him before speaking again, smiling with big pleading eyes. "Umm, congratulations! The whole school is buzzing."

Kurt swallowed and straightened his back. "Wow, word sure travels fast around here," he said. "And thanks, I guess."

He dried the back of his neck with his towel. "You still know my schedule," he stated.

Blaine frowned a little but smoothed it into a smile. "Of course I do...it's only been a week, Kurt."

"Then you'll remember I have musical theory next, and I can't be late," he tried. He looked over his
shoulder. Tim and Nick also took that class, and they were still standing around, too. They still had time. It was more of an excuse than anything else.

Blaine felt irritation rise up but masked his face.

"Aww come on Kurt, you can be a little late...can't a man congratulate his fiancé?"

"You already did."

Kurt wished the others would leave. He was afraid Blaine might make a scene and embarrass him. His phone notified him of another message. Sebastian again. He'd probably have something to say about Blaine cornering him like this. As Kurt thought of his friend, he felt a little stronger.

"Look, Blaine, I told you I needed time before I could talk to you again. You don't get to decide how much."

Blaine ignored him. "I miss you Kurt, I said I was sorry for what I did...why can't you just forgive me and come home?"

He was getting tired of Kurt dragging out the inevitable. "I feel horrible not even knowing where you are staying! Suddenly you're just gone, and then stuff from our place goes missing. And then you show up for class like nothing's going on, like you didn't break my heart into a thousand pieces when you ran off."

"You know why I had to leave, Blaine," Kurt reminded him, tired of Blaine twisting the narrative.

Blaine ignored him again. "Hey, why don't we sing together? That always helps! Now that you've got the showcase coming up...we could sing together and show the world how strong we are as a couple."

Kurt stared at him for a moment.

"Please, Kurt," Blaine added, "I love you so much. Give me a chance to prove it."

Somehow, it felt like Kurt would never escape Glee club. Their life revolved around songs. A song to make Blaine fall in love with him. A song to break up. A song to bring them back together. A song to get engaged. And now, a song to once again prove their love.

Deep down, Kurt knew his life wasn't a musical. But the both of them had always dreamed themselves into one, and right now, Kurt could feel the pull of it, lulling him into sleep again.

"Maybe," he started softly, and he saw Blaine's eyes light up, "we can try singing together at open mic night somewhere, in a week, or two weeks from now, and see how it goes. I...I need more time. The showcase...it's too soon."

"But Kurt," Blaine started, and his tone cut Kurt to the bone. Kurt could tell from the way his name sounded on Blaine's lips that he wasn't happy. It used to make him want to cower and apologise. Not anymore.

A week, two weeks from now, that was not what Blaine wanted. He was expecting Kurt to offer to share the showcase.

"I was specifically warned not to sing with you, okay?! I could lose my place at NYADA."

The anger and impatience that had been building up inside Blaine toppled over the edge. "What does
Carmen Tibideaux know anyway?" he snapped. "So what if she said you can't sing with me, aren't I more important than some stupid school? We're soulmates, Kurt...what happened to what happens to one of us happens to both of us?"

He walked closer to Kurt, pointing his finger at Kurt's chest. "I gave up an entire set for you at a very important Gala, and yet you won't even let me sing one song with you at a school competition...I can't believe you're putting your work before me again..."

Kurt could feel the blood drain from his face. How could he have been so blind for so long?

"It's more than a school competition and you know it," he said, his voice nearly quivering with controlled anger. "If it was, you wouldn't be so desperately trying to get in." He swallowed. "If it was just about me, about us singing, you could have accepted my offer to sing at a bar. Or even here! No, you hate that you didn't get a golden ticket. You want this showcase for yourself, and if you get me back to warm your bed, that's just an added bonus."

"It's not like that," Blaine protested, but Kurt noted with bitterness that his presentation lacked conviction.

"Madame Tibideaux is just trying to break us up," Blaine tried weakly.

Kurt moved as if in a dream. "Well, I don't need her help for that." He reached for the ring on his hand and slipped it off his finger.

Blaine's eyes widened as Kurt took off the ring he'd given him and held it up for Blaine to take. He folded his arms over his chest and refused to take it. Taking it meant that he accepted that this was over and he couldn't do that.

He needed Kurt.

"I can't believe you're doing this to me, Kurt!" he said, his voice catching. "I - I came to New York for you. I came to this stupid school for you...everything I do is for you and yet you want to throw it all away...because I made a mistake...it's ONE mistake Kurt, you've made hundreds and I forgave all of them!"

"I know I am not perfect," Kurt said quietly. "But at least I can admit to it."

"This is ridiculous! Did whoever you are staying with put you up to this?" Blaine snarled.

"No...Contrary to popular opinion," Kurt replied, his voice shaking, "I do have a mind of my own. I am more than just one letter in your portmanteau." He took a deep breath. "I want you to move out of my apartment before Saturday. Take your stuff and go."

"Your apartment!?!" Blaine let out.

"Yes. I pay the rent, and my name is on the lease. As I recall, I signed the papers on a BLAM day. You were too busy to co-sign."

He offered the ring to Blaine again and, as he made no move to take it, let it drop from his hand. The moment Kurt let go of his ring, it was almost like the world came to a halt. It took forever for the small piece of jewelry to fall.

Everyone left in the room watched as the ring rolled through the air until it hit the floor with a faint clink. Kurt's sparring partners could hardly believe the scene they had just witnessed. None of them had ever imagined that anyone could think those things about Kurt, and were shocked to hear them
come from someone who claimed to love him.

The sound of metal hitting wood shook Kurt from his reverie. He willed his limbs into action and started to reach down to pick up his bag. Blaine grabbed his arm, pulling him back upright.

“I won’t let you go,” he snarled, his eyes blazing with anger and humiliation.

"Is there a problem here?"

Mr Hura, who had also been watching the exchange, had sensed danger and was now walking towards the two men. He was carrying a bundle of quarterstaffs under his arm and gave Blaine a menacing look. The reminder of his presence caused Blaine to slacken his grip on Kurt’s arm.

"No sir," Kurt said, looking at his teacher and shaking off Blaine’s hand. "We’re just about done here.” He looked at Blaine, who was still seething with anger. “Unless my ex-fiancé would like a demonstration of today’s lesson?”

Kurt held out his hand towards the bundle and Mr Hura gave him a staff. Kurt twirled it around his hand once before resting one end on the floor. On queue, Kurt's sparring partners walked up to form a ring around them. Mr Hura nodded. He looked ready to equip them all, if needed. The colour drained from Blaine's face.

"You wouldn't!" Blaine said to Kurt, nervously eyeing the wooden pole.

Kurt leaned on his staff and pretended to contemplate it for a moment before shaking his head. "No, I wouldn't," he said honestly. "But they might, if you don't let me leave."

Giorgio stepped up behind Blaine and and placed a hand on his shoulder. He was a good foot and a half taller than Blaine, so the effect was instant. The boy froze.

"I think he will," Giorgio said, putting pressure on Blaine's shoulder. “Won’t you, Blaine?”

Blaine cast an angry and betrayed look at Kurt before shucking out of Georgio's grip. “Yeah,” he muttered grudgingly. “I was already going to.”

Kurt handed his staff back to Mr Hura. His hands were shaking slightly, but he tried to keep himself together.

Nick saw Kurt’s troubled expression and glanced at Tim, who nodded. Nick picked up Kurt's bag and Tim linked his arm with Kurt's. "Come on Kurt, we'll walk you to class," Tim said gently.

Kurt took a moment to process what Tim had said before it clicked. He slipped into his confident stage persona. He needed to show Blaine he was not as easily cowed anymore. He raised his chin and put on a haughty smile.

"Ha! I'd better walk you. As I recall I just kicked all of your asses at three-to-one," he said playfully, linking his free arm with Nick as well so he had a boy on each side. Giorgio brought up the rear providing protection at every angle. They walked out of the class room, leaving Blaine behind, Kurt’s ring lying abandoned on the floor.

A calm had settled over Kurt. He still felt like it was all unreal somehow, but at least he was the protagonist again.

"Did I really just do that?” Kurt said out loud after they turned the corner.
"You sure did," Nick replied. "It was awesome."

"Absolutely brilliant," Tim agreed. "I never liked that slimy git."

"The look on Blaine's face was priceless," Giorgio added, walking up behind them. “I think he nearly pissed himself.”

Kurt shook his head a little at himself, still not completely believing it. The boys lead him to his class, turning quite a few heads before they reached their destination.

As soon as Kurt got his bag back, he reached inside to check Sebastian's messages. For a moment, they made him forget everything else.

From P.Martini (14:26)

OMG Kurt that's amazing!

-

From P.Martini (14:26)

You deserve this Kurt! I'm so happy for you!

-

From P.Martini (14:27)

We are SOOOOO celebrating tonight

Kurt smiled, that’s not the only thing we’ll be celebrating, he thought to himself. He couldn’t wait to tell Sebastian his other bit of news, but he would do that personally.

He checked the final text that had come through.

From P.Martini (14:32)

Okay so I spoke to the guys and they're all coming over to us this evening, Alex is bringing Champagne and the girls are picking up a cheesecake! Hurry home from class so we can get this party started x

Kurt smiled. *Home*. That place was no longer the cramped apartment with the buggy couch and the cheating fiancé. It was the living room that still smelled like waffles, with a friend willing to build a pillow fort and withhold all 'I told you so's'. He couldn't think of a place he'd rather be.

Chapter End Notes

You're welcome, we hope it was worth the wait ;}
Kurt shares the happy news with Sebastian.

Kurt didn’t hear much of what his professor was saying. He kept going over his talk with Blaine, comparing it to other times they’d fought, wondering if it had really always been like this and he had just never noticed. He was starting to fear that the answer was yes. It was the 'Jeremy Effect' Alex and Sebastian used to joke about - but much to their credit, they stopped doing that with the arrival of Brody.

Last week's sadness gave way to anger. At himself, for falling for it, but mostly at Blaine, for manipulating him like that. Share the Winter Showcase! So he could have that, too? No. Things were coming up Hummel, and he was not letting Blaine steal his spotlight anymore.

Kurt took his keys from his pocket and let himself into Sebastian’s apartment.

"I’m here," he called out.

Sebastian was in the bedroom. He’d just finished getting dressed after a shower and hurried out of the bedroom, his hair still wet and floppy.

"Hey!" he said swooping Kurt into a hug. "Congratulations! How does it feel?"

"Wet!" Kurt laughed, wiping a few drops of water from his face.

"Sorry," Sebastian said with a blush.

Kurt grinned and stepped back to look at Sebastian.

"I see you took my advice on that shirt," he said smugly. He had sent Sebastian a link to an outlet store auction with some things he thought would look good on his friend to make up for his vocal disapproval of Sebastian’s tacky bulldog print shirt. It was nice to see he had been right. It looked great on Sebastian; he wore a form-fitting bordeaux dress shirt with a navy piping and asymmetrical reverse; something Kurt would have chosen for himself as well (if he didn't have 20 shirts for this season already).

Sebastian looked down at his shirt a little self-consciously,"Yeah...does it look alright?" he asked "I like the colour.”

"It looks amazing," Kurt said earnestly. "It really suits you." He hopped onto his heels excitedly. "Maybe you should wear it to the Showcase," he offered. "I get to take six guests and you’re number one.”

Butterflies swirled in Sebastian’s stomach. "This one...or maybe the green one.” He blushed again. "I uh, may have bought a few in different colours...I couldn’t just pick one.”

Kurt gasped. "Oh, the green would look great with your eyes!” He couldn’t help but feel pleased for Sebastian’s show of trust in his fashion sense.
He reached into his bag and took out the invitation. "I'm more of a gold type, myself," he joked, fanning himself with the envelope before showing it to Sebastian.

Sebastian grinned as he looked at the ticket and saw Kurt’s name in a spiralled calligraphy written on the invitation.

"This is so amazing, Kurt. You really deserve it," Sebastian said, smiling happily.

"Thanks."

Wanting to make Sebastian smile some more, Kurt decided to tell him about Blaine’s visit before the others arrived. Sebastian should be the first to know.

"Blaine came to see me after class today," he started. "And...guess what? Your place is officially a bachelor pad again!"

Sebastian felt his smile falter. Oh...he took him back. Sebastian could understand how easy it must have been in the euphoria of being invited to the Winter Showcase...but he couldn’t help but feel disappointed.

"Oh um...so...you’re moving back with Blaine?” He asked, trying to not sound too disappointed.

Kurt blinked. "What? Oh! No! No, definitely not, I—"

He held up his hand, that still bore a pale stripe and an indentation where his ring used to be.

"I broke off the engagement and told Blaine to move his things out of my apartment."

It took Sebastian a second to register what Kurt was saying. He looked at Kurt’s bare hand and up to his face, a grin spreading across his face as it clicked.

"You ended it?" he asked, needing to hear Kurt say it again. He tried to school his expression as much as he could. He didn’t want to appear insensitive to Kurt’s turmoil, but he couldn’t help it that there was currently a line of little people doing the conga in his chest.

"Yes, I did," Kurt confirmed. Sebastian’s reaction made him blush a little. He knew it was hard for outsiders to understand why it had taken him so long to see what they had probably known all along.

To cover his embarrassment, Kurt told Sebastian everything - even that he had almost consented to giving Blaine another chance until he realised what Blaine was really after. Kurt told him about the ultimatum and about Tim and Nick.

"So... if you’re willing to put up with me one more week..." Kurt concluded, "I can move back to my own place again after that."

He laughed a little nervously. "Maybe until then we should agree on a privacy sign for the door," he joked. "You know, as single roomies..."

Sebastian grinned a little at Kurt’s suggestion, letting it squash the sick feeling that had crept up on him as Kurt had told him about Blaine. "I’m not really into the one night stand thing anymore," he confessed.

The thought of Kurt bringing someone home hurt, but he couldn’t blame Kurt for wanting to. After all, Kurt had never been with anyone other than Blaine. He was probably eager to play the field. He didn’t know Sebastian had feelings for him and there was no way Sebastian would stand in his way.
"Really?" Kurt asked in surprise. "I assumed I was just...cramping your style. I kind of hogged your evenings with all my crying."

He’d honestly said it more for Sebastian's sake than his own.

"Nah," Sebastian said, shrugging. "I just don’t really see the point in hooking up anymore. And I like having you here. I’m glad that you feel like this is somewhere you can come and be safe. But, uh... if you bring someone home, I get the bedroom.” He winked cheekily.

Kurt smirked. The idea of bringing someone here to have sex seemed a little ludicrous, but he enjoyed trying out this new, confident persona. "Of course. The comfy bed should go to the one actually doing the sleeping." He winked back.

Sebastian laughed. "Comfy bed and ear plugs."

Just then, someone knocked loudly.

"Open up you guys," Alex yelled through the door. "Got my hands full and I’m not sure how long I can hold it."

Sebastian smirked at Kurt and rolled his eyes fondly at Alex’s demanding voice. He hurried to the door to open it.

Alex, Steph, Alice and Brody all filtered in, handed various bags to Sebastian and made a beeline for Kurt crying shouts of congratulations.

Kurt basked in their praise, and invited them all personally to come and watch the Showcase. True to his word, Alex had brought real champagne, and curiously enough, a lot of chocolate bars. Apparently, despite Kurt's explanations, he still felt anything to do with ‘golden tickets’ required sugary treats. Luckily Alice and Steph had also brought some real food.

After they had toasted to the Winter Showcase, Kurt suggested another toast, and shared the news of his new bachelor status.

As the others cheered loudly and Alex hugged Kurt vigorously, Alice looked at Sebastian and offered him a small smile.

Sebastian blushed but returned Alice’s smile, a warm glow filling up inside him like a balloon.

Kurt seemed to be cheerful enough about the split with Blaine. From what he’d said had gone down at NYADA, Blaine had finally shown Kurt his true colours.

And yet Sebastian couldn’t help but feel a little apprehensive. It all felt a bit too good to be true.

But that was a concern for tomorrow. Tonight was about celebrating both of Kurt’s achievements and showing him that while his old ‘friends’ may have turned their back on him, this group of people would have his back unconditionally.
Sebastian helps Kurt make the most of his new-found freedom.

The music pulsed through them as they made their way through the throng of dancing bodies towards the bar. It was Tuesday night. Although technically Kurt could now hang out with Sebastian any night of the week, it had sort of stuck for the both of them to choose tonight to celebrate. The two of them had decided to try out a new club that had opened up a few blocks away from Sebastian’s apartment.

They were both already buzzing from pre-drinking at home and were now looking for further refreshments. Sebastian could not wait for the next three months to pass so that he could finally drink in public.

Sebastian reached the bar first and used the hand clutching Kurt’s to pull his friend through the crowd up to the bar as well. "It’s very crowded for a Tuesday," he said, bending down to speak into Kurt’s ear.

"Yeah! It's crazy!" Kurt replied happily. He reached into the pocket of his skinny jeans to take out his ID and order a drink. He flashed it at Sebastian and winked. "Do you still think I look like a fourteen year old?" he teased, striking a Vogue pose.

Sebastian rolled his eyes and grinned. "No Kurt I don’t, I never did…You know I was only joking back then." He glanced at the ID card. "I am so looking forward to drinking you under the table come April." He shook his head. "You’re gonna be so sorry."

Kurt chuckled. "It’s gonna be one epic birthday party," he said. "I can’t wait."

Kurt didn’t doubt that his friend would probably drink him under the table, but he didn’t mind. He had already had months of teasing out of the topic.

He ordered a gin and tonic for himself and a juice for Sebastian.

"To Tuesday night!" Kurt said, holding his glass up to Sebastian.

"To Tuesday night," Sebastian said smiling and chinking his glass against Kurt’s.

"I’m counting on you to show me the way home, by the way," Kurt joked, and downed most of his drink in one go.

“Don’t worry babe, I got you covered,” said Sebastian.

He sipped his pineapple juice and set the glass down on the counter. "So, this is your first night out as a singleton…you should know that I am an excellent wing man, and for my services all I ask for is one dance."

"Oh my god," Kurt let out, a little shocked and amused at the same time. He hadn’t been thinking much further than a dance or two with some guys like he had before on his Tuesday nights, only this
time without a guilty conscience. But...why not? Why shouldn't he take it further, if the opportunity presented itself? And with Sebastian on board, he suspected that would happen faster than he could say "twenty minutes".

Kurt downed the rest of his drink and looked at his friend. "Alright. Let me just get some more dutch courage, and then I'm good to go." He raised a finger. "But no one who isn't at least as tall as I am," he added, grinning. He could afford to be a little picky, couldn't he?

"Gotcha!" Sebastian said with a grin. "Only the best for you, Mr Hummel."

He scanned the bar, tweaking his gaydar settings up to full power as he scoped out the club. It was more of a challenge in a regular club like this. There were a few fairly hot guys that pinged on the map, but nothing spectacular, and as much as it may hurt himself, Sebastian wanted to do right by Kurt.

Just then, Sebastian spotted two extremely attractive guys on the dance floor.

"Oh there you go, what about one of them?" Sebastian asked, nodding in their direction. "They're hot!"

Kurt followed Sebastian's eyes and a small, devious smile formed on his lips.

"Yes, they are," he mumbled.

He took a long sip from his new drink at put it down on the bar next to Sebastian.

"Okay, I wanna give this a try by myself, first. Come rescue me if I give you the signal."

Kurt straightened his back, ran his hands down his jeans to pull the waistband just a little lower, and spontaneously kissed Sebastian's cheek. "Wish me luck," he whispered, then walked over, dancing his way through the crowd.

Sebastian watched with a mixture of pride and amusement as Kurt shimmied his way onto the dance floor.

He saw Kurt greet the two guys briefly. They both gave him a once-over and smiled appreciatively. Kurt spoke to them for a moment before they welcomed him to dance with them, sandwiching him close between their two bodies.

"Damn," Sebastian whispered with wide eyes. "Whatever he said...it worked."

Kurt pressed his face into the curve of Nick's shoulder, stifling a laugh. He could see the expression on Sebastian's face, and it was pure gold. It was a bizarre coincidence that Sebastian would find the only two people in the whole club Kurt actually knew - in a place like New York, what were the odds? - and Kurt hadn't been able to resist playing a little joke on him.

"So just how much are you trying to impress him?" Tim whispered in his ear from behind, running his hands up the sides of Kurt's body.

Kurt spun around and wrapped his arms around Tim's shoulders. "Just a little more...I want to make it look like I have game."

"You don't need to pretend Kurt, you have a lot of game," Nick said into Kurt’s other ear, his hands gripping Kurt’s waist.
As Kurt had approached them, he'd briefly explained his idea and asked them to play along as a favour, but something about their enthusiasm told him it was hardly a chore for them. He could feel Nick press against his back and wondered if this was a spur of the moment thing for them, or if he had been walking through NYADA with blinders on.

Jealousy flared up inside Sebastian as he watched Kurt dance with the two guys. He tried to squash it down by telling himself that Kurt deserved this attention. He’d been locked away unaware of the effect he had on people for far too long and it was about time that he saw exactly what he’d been missing. Sebastian was happy for him. But he couldn’t help but be envious that it was someone else - or rather two someones - that got to show Kurt that first.

Patience Smythe, he told himself. All good things come to those who wait. He’d really love to find the guy who said that and punch him.

"Ah, ah! Oookay, that’s enough," Kurt let out, putting a hand on Tim's chest to push his lips away from his throat before he'd lose control over his knees. "So," he asked, to distract himself a little while they danced, "are you two a couple?"


"We're good friends," Tim said.

"Best friends," Nick agreed.

Kurt couldn’t help but glance at Sebastian. He was still watching them, and their eyes briefly met. Kurt smiled at him to show he was okay. Sebastian had moved away from the bar to stand at a tall table by the dance floor. He looked a little lonely somehow. Maybe it was time to end this little charade.

"I'd better get back," he said, letting go of them. "Thanks for indulging me."

"Any time," Tim said.

"Seriously, any time at all," Nick added.

Kurt was pretty sure that that offer stood for more than dancing, and with red cheeks, he made his way back to Sebastian. "Whew, multitasking is hard," he let out, picking up a beer coaster and fanning himself.

Sebastian grinned. "Pretty sure that’s not the only thing that’s hard," he said, nodding at Kurt’s dance partners. "Damn Kurt, you had those guys eating out the palm of your hand."

Kurt cocked his head. "What can I say?" he said playfully. "I'm a natural..."

He tried to keep a straight face, and then laughed. "No...I'm not. I knew those guys, they're from Mr Hura's class. I sparred with them this morning." He suddenly blushed. "That wasn't a euphemism! We just practiced our new routine."

Sebastian raised an eyebrow.

Kurt smiled bashfully. "I'm sorry I tricked you. I guess I just wanted to impress you so I asked them to play along," he explained, hoping Sebastian wouldn’t be upset.

Sebastian’s smile softened. "Consider me impressed...whether you know them or not, they definitely want to know you."
Nick and Tim were looking at them, and as they made eye contact with Kurt, started coming over. "Hi again," Nick said warmly as he reached them. "I can see why you wanted us to impress your friend, Kurt. He’s hot."

Sebastian grinned and held his hand out for Nick to shake. "Sebastian Smythe," he said. "And you’re not so bad yourself."

"He’s my best friend," Kurt said automatically, moving a little closer. As understanding dawned in their faces and Tim and Nick exchanged a look, Kurt blushed. "Oh, not like that."

Tim smirked. "Are you sure?"

Kurt nodded.

"I’ll go get us a round," Nick suggested - he was gone before they could say anything.

"Do you know what you’ll do for the Showcase yet?" Tim asked conversationally.

Kurt smiled. "I’m thinking about doing a song I wrote for my song writing class, but I’m not sure it’s appropriate. Maybe I’ll also just pick a classic Broadway song."

"Oh man, my song for that course was shit. I dropped it right away." Tim looked at Sebastian to include him in the conversation. "My speciality is dancing. The theoretical classes aren’t really my forte."

Kurt bit his lip. "I got a pretty good mark for mine. But it was a flash of inspiration, I’m not sure I could follow it up with another. I’m a one-hit wonder," he joked.

"That song was amazing, Kurt!" Sebastian said to him. "It was amazing," he added again to Tim.

"I look forward to hearing it," Tim said. "you know...if we get an invitation."

Sebastian hid the smugness he felt at the knowledge that he did have an invitation. He liked Tim. He seemed like a nice guy. Sebastian also knew what it felt like to want Kurt and his attention. He didn’t blame either of the other two for trying.

Kurt bit his lip. "I kind of promised some people that I’d take them months ago."

"Months ago? But you only got your ticket yesterday, how would you know...?" Tim said, frowning. Then he went wide-eyed in awe. "Wow...you knew you’d get it..."

Kurt blinked rapidly as his mind caught up. "Oh! No, it wasn’t like that! I was just as surprised as anyone!! It was more like one if those hypothetical things, you know. Like if I ever win the lottery..." He blushed. "But there’s five of them and I also want to ask my dad, so...I’m kind of out of invites."

"Ooh, are we talking invites?" Nick asked eagerly, arriving with four shot glasses between his fingers. He handed each of them one. Kurt glanced at Sebastian and shrugged. Too late now to tell them Bas was under age.

"We’re too late!" Tim said.

Nick sighed a little. "Oh. Damn. Well, there’s always the NYADA bootleg blogs, I guess..."

"The...what?" Kurt asked.
Everyone took a shot and the four of them downed them at the same time. Sebastian pulled a face. He hated sours.

"You know, the bootleg blogs?" Tim said. "Pretty much all performances at NYADA are filmed and there are hundreds of blogs that host them."

"Yeah," Nick said, agreeing. "There’s a blog solely devoted to audition videos, there’s ones that celebrate the good performances and ones that rip apart the bad…I can’t believe you don’t know about this!"

Sebastian bit his tongue. He did know about those blogs. He’d done his own research on Kurt in the early stages of their friendship. Unlike Kurt however, he had kept his stalker-like behaviour secret. He had found both of Kurt’s auditions…He still had dreams about those gold pants sometimes. He wondered if Kurt still had them.

"Yeah, did you never google yourself, Kurt? You're a star!" Tim said eagerly.

Kurt froze. "Wait... my auditions are on there?"

"Of course they are!" Nick let out. "I heard Madame Tibideaux still gets hate mail about not taking you in after your first audition. It was flawless."

"So was your second..." Tim added bashfully.

Kurt swallowed. He didn't even know those were being filmed. Suddenly, it was like those nightmares of him walking through McKinley naked. "What...what else of me is on there?" he asked, bracing himself.

"Well, Midnight Madness, of course," Nick said pensively. "And some of our class midterm presentations for combat..."

"And there was this candid of you in Cassie's class spinning pirouette after pirouette, it was like.... insane! But... it got taken down because it violated the rules," Tim said, looking a little sorry.

"The bootleg blogs are tolerated by NYADA staff because they document official presentations, showcases, exams...anything else, like rehearsals, gets marked for deletion," Nick explained.

To distract himself, Kurt asked: "So are your auditions on there?"

"Oh yeah. We auditioned together with a pas de deux from Swan Lake. It was kind of risqué but we somehow made it in."

"A pas de deux?" Kurt asked, looking at the two of them.

Nick grinned. "I know what you're thinking, but Tim hadn't started working out yet back then-"

"Hey!" Tim cut in, but he smiled a little, "that's not true."

"Yes it is, you were a twig. You weighed like, nothing," Nick said fondly.

"I had the stomach flu for two weeks before our audition," Tim said quickly. "If you watch it -"

Kurt felt the sour shot swirl in his stomach. "Is the ribbon cutting ceremony on the blogs?" he asked quietly.

Tim winced. "It is, but you'd better not check that, Kurt," he said carefully. "It's not very...

He
looked at Nick for help.

"You know how it is," Nick said quickly, "the audience is fickle. They tear apart what they loved the
day before and love what they trashed last month."

Sebastian frowned. He hadn’t thought to check the blog for the June performance, though he wasn’t
really sure he should now.

"The bad reviews are mainly aimed at Blaine, for stealing your spotlight," Tim offered. "But it’s a
painful watch."

"And once you win Winter Showcase everyone will forget all about it," Nick added.

Kurt sighed. He couldn’t help himself. He had to check now. He took out his phone and, with a
nervous look at Sebastian, googled his own name.

The blogs almost sprang at him from the page. Tim checked over his shoulder. "Those are the main
ones," he said, pointing at the search results on top. "The others are just...fan blogs."

Kurt glanced at him for a moment, and then clicked one of the links. There it was. A video from the
ceremony, titled "No Milk Ever Again". Kurt didn’t want to see the video; he wanted to see the
comments. As he scrolled through them, he could see new ones were still appearing on top.

"These...these comments are all from yesterday," he said quietly.

"Yeah, I think some people reposted it in...celebration," Tim said carefully. "Word spread about your
break-up. Surely you noticed that Blaine isn’t exactly...the most popular guy at NYADA?"

"Yeah, I think quite a few people had a party in your honour last night, Kurt," Nick added,
exchanging a private glance with Tim. "Though no one expected you’d be back in the game the next
day." He winked.

"We had a little party too last night," Kurt said, nudging Sebastian with a smile. He closed the site.
He’d look at it later, now that his first curiosity was quenched. And Tim and Nick were right. Once
he’d done the Showcase, people would hopefully forget about that awful performance.

Tim watched the two of them. "I bet you’re invited," he said to Sebastian, a little enviously.

"He is," Kurt replied, and looked at Sebastian. "I already picked his outfit." He winked.

Sebastian felt warm inside. Yes, I am, he thought smugly.

Then he told himself off for being catty. Tim and Nick were nice guys and Kurt needed people in his
life who saw how amazing he was.

"So you guys dance?" Sebastian said. "I used to tap, back in the day, but I can do a bit of freestyle."

"Really? Me too!" Tim said enthusiastically. The two of them started a conversation about their
dance classes.

Nick smiled at them and collected the shot glasses. "Shall I get us another?" he asked Kurt.

"Uh, I’ll come with you, I think Sebastian would like something else," he replied. He held up his
own shot glass for Sebastian to see. Sebastian shook his head subtly and Kurt’s intuition was
affirmed.
They came back with a Long Island Iced Tea for Kurt and a soft drink for Sebastian. Nick had looked a little surprised when he found out Sebastian was only twenty, but Kurt had quickly explained it wouldn’t be much longer and that the shot hadn’t exactly been his first drink.

Sebastian and Tim were still talking when they got back. While they talked, Kurt drank. He couldn’t really get the blogs out of his head - or rather, the comments. People were actually discussing his love life online. How did celebrities deal with that?

As they stood around chatting and drinking, Sebastian couldn’t help but notice Kurt sipping steadily on his drink, eyes glazed over a little. He was clearly deep in thought and Sebastian had a suspicion as to what was wrong.

Fucking Blaine.

Setting his empty glass down on a nearby table, he turned to Kurt and nudged him gently with his shoulder.

"I think it’s the time for that dance you owe me," Sebastian suggested, offering Kurt his hand.

Kurt blinked. He wasn’t really in the mood for dancing, but he did owe Sebastian a dance for pointing out Tim and Nick to him, even if he did already know them.

"Yes," he said, draining his drink and putting his glass away too. He was feeling the alcohol already, and grinned to himself. Sebastian was definitely going to drink him under the table on his birthday. But it didn’t matter; if anything, it helped him stop thinking about how many of his fellow students had seen his auditions.

Sebastian turned to face Kurt and walked backwards onto the dance floor, leading him along. Once they found a patch with a little space Sebastian stopped and pulled Kurt towards him gently. He took Kurt’s hand in his and placed the other hand on Kurt’s back, spinning them around a little.

It felt so easy being this close to Kurt in a way that it hadn’t with anyone else. Nothing felt forced between them... ever. Sebastian wasn’t sure if it was just because he was the first friend he’d had that was his age and gay as well or if it was more... but it felt natural and real.

Once they were alone on the dance floor, Kurt let his guard down. He rested his forearms lightly on Sebastian's shoulders and just let himself dance. "I thought about asking the gang over for this Saturday,” he said after a while. “To my place, I mean. Kind of like a house-warming party."

The plan had formed the night before, but Kurt hadn’t broached the idea with Sebastian yet because he hadn’t yet wanted to talk about moving out. Still, the deadline he had set Blaine was coming closer and ignoring it wouldn’t change the outcome.

"That way, if Blaine hasn’t moved his stuff out yet, they could lend a hand. I really do want it all gone."

Sebastian looked down at Kurt and swallowed. He knew Kurt would have to move out eventually. Their current setup wasn’t a permanent solution - though if we were together, it would be. He’d really gotten used to sharing his space with Kurt. They worked well together.

“Of course!” Sebastian said sincerely. “We can get everyone over to mine beforehand and head over together - just in case Blaine isn’t alone when we get there.”

He secured his hands on Kurt’s lower back, holding him slightly closer as if to prove his point.
"Yeah," Kurt replied, touched by Sebastian's unwavering support. He tried to say something further but was a little distracted by Sebastian's sudden proximity. He linked his hands behind Sebastian's neck and hooked his chin over his friend's shoulder. Their bodies were close enough to touch if he took a deep breath.

Sebastian realised his mistake as he felt Kurt's breath tickle his neck causing goose bumps to erupt there. He needed to distract himself from the feeling so he slid his hands up to take hold of Kurt's and spun him around so that his back was flush with Sebastian's chest, their hands still locked around Kurt's stomach.

Kurt was no real stranger to spontaneous dance partners, either in the clubs or at NYADA, but it was something else now that it was Sebastian. Still, he didn't want to stop now.

He arched his back dramatically and swivelled his hips, letting his head drop back on Sebastian's shoulder and leading their joined hands to his thighs.

Sebastian's eyes widened and his grip on Kurt's hands tightened. Shit. He really hadn't thought this through.

The way Kurt moved his hips was sinful and it was all Sebastian could do to keep up. The barrier he had set up in his head to remain Kurt's friend this evening was cracking rapidly but he couldn't bring himself to stop it. This was definitely no longer within the duties of a wingman.

Sebastian ran his nose up Kurt's neck, breathing in his scent. He felt his head spin. Who needed alcohol to get drunk when he had this?

Kurt looked around the room with heavy-lidded eyes. He eyed the dancers around them lazily, judging some of the men's dance moves hard. Straight boys...He smirked and turned around to face Sebastian, pointing at one with his eyes.

'My dance teacher would have a few things to say about that one,' he whispered into Sebastian's ear, using French in case anyone overheard him gossiping.

Tim and Nick had come onto the dance floor again as well. Cassie might have an opinion on them too, but not one fit for the classroom - as their dancing was not either. He swallowed. They made a very attractive pair. But then, Kurt mused, so did he and Sebastian right now.

Sebastian looked at the guy dancing and laughed. 'He's got nothing on our moves,' he said, rolling their hips together to prove a point.

Kurt lengthened the move, arching his back and letting his head drop back, holding himself with one hand on Sebastian's shoulder. As he felt Sebastian's hands tightening on his hips, he lifted one knee up, dipping even further back before pulling himself up by his arm.

Sebastian swallowed hard as Kurt leant back, his leg sticking up in the air, half wrapped around him. He was so flexible.

'Absolutely nothing,' Kurt agreed as he came up again. His head spun from the move, and if it wasn't for Sebastian's hands, he would probably stumble. As it was, his friend held him steady.

Sebastian steadied Kurt as he stood back up, his hands sliding down into Kurt's back pockets as he held him close.

"You okay there, babe?" he asked quietly, looking down at Kurt.
"I’m fine..." Kurt breathed. "And a little drunk." He could feel the warmth radiating from Sebastian, with a only a thin layer of denim between his hands and Kurt’s skin. The room around them swayed, and Sebastian held him up.

Somewhere, in another lifetime, the boy Kurt had once been was waiting for something magical to happen to him.

Here and now, the man Kurt had become made it happen. He ran his fingers up to the back of Sebastian’s neck, reeled him closer, and kissed him.

Sebastian started a little. His heart rate quickened and he could feel the heat flood his cheeks as he realised that this was actually happening. He let his eyes shut and relaxed into the touch, returning the kiss eagerly. He kept one hand in Kurt’s pocket and slid the other up his back to draw him closer.

He opened his mouth a little and teased his tongue out to run along Kurt’s lips.

Kurt sighed. It felt amazing to be kissing Sebastian. He drew his friend’s tongue between his lips and sucked it experimentally. Sebastian tasted like pineapple. Kurt let go and met his tongue with his own.

Sebastian hadn’t had that much to drink but kissing Kurt was intoxicating. He pressed back into the kiss urgently, sucking Kurt’s tongue back into his mouth for a moment before tugging Kurt’s bottom lip between his teeth and pulling a little.

Kurt chuckled a little against Sebastian’s lips as his intoxicated mind provided the thought that this was his first real French kiss, but he didn’t want to ruin the moment by explaining, so quickly kissed Sebastian again, winding his fingers into the hair on the back of Sebastian’s head.

Sebastian moaned a little and his hips jerked forward reflexively.

Oh, hello, Kurt thought, meeting Sebastian’s hips with his own. He followed the pressure of Sebastian’s hands at his back, grinding down on him a little. It wasn’t really dancing anymore. Kurt’s rational mind caught up, and he decided to move them off the dancefloor before they were kicked out of the club.

He reached for one of Sebastian’s hands, broke the kiss, and pulled him along to the side of the dancefloor. There, past the bistro tables, was a large expanse of black wall. He turned to face Sebastian as he walked backwards, beckoning him into his arms like a siren, until he could feel the solid wall behind him.

Sebastian looked at Kurt with heavy eyes, taking over every inch of his glorious body and the wrecked look on his face.

Still holding him by the hand, Kurt pulled the very solid form of Sebastian against his front.

Sebastian complied, bracketing his hands on the wall either side of Kurt’s head. He kissed him again hungrily.

Kissing Kurt felt like a breath of fresh air. It was as if the room had been sucked of oxygen and the only thing keeping him alive was this kiss. He never wanted it to end.

Kurt let his hands roam up and down Sebastian’s back. They had a life of their own. He could not be held responsible, could he...? He wanted to feel Sebastian’s hips against his again and decided to try and provoke the same reaction as earlier by tugging his hair a little, pulling him away from the kiss. To make up for it, Kurt offered him his throat.
Sebastian let out a little growl and rolled his hips against Kurt’s. He could feel the hot hard line of Kurt through his jeans and shifted a little so that as he rolled his hips again, they aligned perfectly.

In the back of his mind he knew they shouldn’t be doing this. It was too soon for Kurt. He couldn’t offer Sebastian what he wanted. Blaine was still too fresh on his mind. Sebastian knew that if he had any sense he’d stop it now, but the noises he was pulling from Kurt were intoxicating and he couldn’t muster the strength to stop.

He buried his face in Kurt’s neck, sucking and kissing at the soft skin, needing to replace the kisses Tim had placed there earlier.

"Oh...oh god, Bas," Kurt whispered. "Please..."

Kurt wasn’t even really sure what he was begging for. Harder, softer, lower? He wanted everything all at once. He met Sebastian’s hips with his own, and could feel his blood pounding in his ears. Suddenly he knew what he wanted.

"I want more," he said hoarsely. "Take me home."

Sebastian jolted a little at Kurt’s request. The breathy, broken tone went right to his dick.

He stopped kissing Kurt’s neck and moved up to his mouth again. He kissed Kurt hard and held it for as long as he could without breathing.

The image of taking Kurt home, spreading him out on the bed and taking him apart piece by piece was so tempting. It was what he wanted, to see all of Kurt. To feel Kurt pressed against him with nothing between them.

But the little voice that had been in the back of his head all night was getting louder again. Too soon. Not the right time.

Sebastian broke the kiss and moved his hips back. Kurt sighed and moved with him, seeking out more friction. Sebastian placed his hands on Kurt’s hips to still them. He pressed his forehead against Kurt’s, breathing heavily.

"Kurt," He whispered, trying to delay the moment until he had to burst the bubble.

"Bas...?" Kurt asked, not sure why he was stopping. Had he said the wrong thing? Had he been reading it all wrong again? Up till now he had assumed Sebastian wanted this just as much as he did.

Maybe he had been too forward after all, and it had turned Sebastian off. He’d never done this before, had always waited and hoped...Vaguely, he could hear Blaine’s voice in the back of his mind, telling him that he wasn’t sexy.

Sebastian heard the confusion and hurt in Kurt’s voice and it broke his heart a little. He kissed Kurt again, trying to soothe the pain a little.

"You have no idea," he whispered against Kurt’s lips, "...how much I want this." His heart was beating wildly in his chest. "I want you so much babe...but you’re drunk, and if we do this tonight, I’ll never know if you really wanted this. I’d just be your rebound and I can’t do that. I’m sorry. I can’t make love with you if you’re still thinking about Blaine."

He kept hold of Kurt and pressed their foreheads together hoping Kurt would understand.

For a moment, Kurt was confused. He wasn't that drunk! And how could this be a rebound when it
had been *months* since he felt such passion? He wasn’t thinking about Blaine at all! But then he realised what Sebastian meant, and how it must look to him. It had only been a week since he left Blaine, and up until yesterday, even Kurt had sort of assumed he’d go back to Blaine eventually.

Guilt and shame washed over him.

He knew what this was. It was him being typically Kurt, falling for the guys who showed him kindness. Finn... Sam... Blaine... Sebastian. His friend had taken him in, had seen him cry and listened to him pouring out his heart for hours, had even offered him his own bed. And this was how Kurt thanked him - by making him feel like a replacement.

"I’m sorry," he offered, pulling away. "I...I got carried away."

Sebastian sighed and he dropped his hands from the wall to cup Kurt’s face. "Kurt," he whispered closing his eyes. "I’m sorry."

Kurt shook his head, releasing himself from Sebastian’s hands. The last thing he needed was his pity.

"Let’s just dance," he suggested, hoping he hadn’t damaged their friendship beyond repair.

Sebastian closed his eyes for a minute, hating the dejected sound in Kurt’s voice. He was having second thoughts already, if only to take Kurt’s pain away. But deep down he knew it was the right decision.

"Sure, babe," he said finally, putting on a smile and taking Kurt’s hand to lead him back onto the dance floor.

As soon as they returned, Nick and Tim walked up to them.

"We were about to send out a search party," Nick joked, grinning.

Kurt shook his head. "We just went to cool down a little."

Nick smirked. "Looked more like you were getting heated up..."

Tim, who had caught Kurt’s expression, nudged him in the side. Nick quickly wiped the smile off his face.

"Do you wanna dance?" Tim asked Kurt. Kurt nodded.

Nick looked at Sebastian. "What about you?" he asked, smiling. "Up for a *pas de deux*?" he winked.

Sebastian smirked at Nick’s poor pronunciation but shrugged. "Not sure this crowd could handle a *pas de deux*, but sure, I can dance."

He allowed Nick to reel him in and gave in to the beat of the music. It was nice to have someone else take the lead.

Kurt tried to turn his mind off and just dance. It worked, as long as he didn’t look at Sebastian. So he kept his eyes on Tim, who let him lead without protest, following his steps and cues flawlessly. As a slower song came on, Tim tentatively stepped up and wrapped his arms around Kurt's shoulders. Tired of being treated like a delicate flower, Kurt reeled him in.

"I won’t break," he mumbled.
"I know. I've seen you in class, remember?" Tim replied. "You're one of the strongest guys I know."

Kurt quietly disagreed, but it was nice to hear anyway.

Nick was a decent dance partner and under other circumstances, Sebastian might have been more game. They moved through a few songs seamlessly, but as the night wore on, he felt himself withdrawing, and as another song ended he stepped away from his partner.

"Thanks for the dance," he said smiling at Nick. "But I should get going...I've an early class tomorrow."

Nick let Sebastian go. He saw the look in his eyes and understood.

"Sure thing man, was great to meet you."

"You too!" Sebastian said with a small smile. He stepped away from Nick and walked over to Kurt.

"I'm gonna head home," he said, tapping Kurt on the shoulder. "Are you gonna stay out or do you wanna come too?"

Kurt looked at Sebastian, feeling a little caught. Tim had rested his head on Kurt's shoulder, and Kurt had just been thinking how much he missed going to sleep in someone’s arms.

"I..." he started. He wasn't sure if he was ready to go back to Sebastian’s room and be alone again. He was pretty sure Tim would come with him if he asked him to - but despite their jokes, Kurt knew he couldn’t take anyone back to Sebastian’s apartment.

"I want to stay," he said.

Sebastian swallowed and nodded. "Okay, I'll see you later then. Have fun." He smiled and winked before backing into the crowd.

Nick watched Sebastian go and turned to Kurt, sliding up behind him and putting his hands on Kurt’s waist.

"Everything okay with you two?"

Kurt pressed his lips together and nodded. "Sure."

Just then, Britney’s *Toxic* came on, and Tim straightened up to give Kurt more room to move. Kurt’s dancer memory was triggered, and he began to move his hips, remembering the hip circles and body waves Mike had taught them for this number in Glee club.

Nick immediately caught up in the rhythm and pressed up to his back. Tim watched the two of them for a moment before stepping closer as well, reaching around Kurt to put his hands on Nick’s thighs, trapping Kurt between them. Both of them were singing softly into Kurt’s ear, and Kurt could feel his heart beating fast.

Maybe a rebound -or two- wouldn’t be so bad after all.

Sebastian glanced back as the song changed and saw Kurt sandwiched between Nick and Tim. Both of them were looking at each other like they’d won the lottery and Kurt had his eyes closed, definitely looking like he was enjoying their attention.

Sebastian bit the inside of his cheek and turned back round, his heart sinking to his stomach.
Chapter Summary

Sebastian questions his judgement after leaving the club and calls Alice for help.

[the same night]

"Whaaaat? No way," Alex moaned as his girlfriend rolled yet another five-of-a-kind. Playing late-night Yahtzee with her was just no fun at all. But then, the girls usually beat him in most games, so he really didn't know why this particular game always got him so wound up. At least there was plenty of pizza left.

"I can't help it," Steph said. "It's just luck!"

"More like tampered dice, lady magic or astrophysics," Alex mumbled, his mouth full of pizza.

"Did he just say lady magic?" Alice asked. "What, we draw sixes to the table with our yoni or what?" She took a sip of her bio lemonade and noted Steph's score.

"You know, Brody doesn't get nearly enough credit for putting up with you," Alex mused. "I couldn't date a woman who drinks that crap and calls her lady parts 'yoni'."

"As opposed to 'lady parts' which sounds so-" Alice started, but then her phone rang. "It's Seb," she said, smiling at the picture of him that had lit up her phone.

"Oh um...hey guys," he said, trying to sound bright and cheerful but missing the mark by a mile. "Wh-what are you all up to?" He couldn't mask the shake in his voice.

"Nothing," Alice said right away, holding up a hand to silence the others. "What's wrong, Seb?"

She hoped he wasn't hurt - oh no. Maybe Kurt had made up with Blaine again. She braced herself.

"Nothing’s wrong," he lied. "I'm fine."

His voice caught on the last word and he choked back a dry sob.

"Yeah ok, even I can tell that's bullshit," Alex huffed. "Dude, what did you do?"

"I kissed Kurt," he said quickly. "Or rather...we kissed. He, uh, kissed me first."

He closed his eyes and touched his lips. He could still feel the press of Kurt’s against them.
"Wooh!" Alex yelled out.

Alice gasped audibly. "Wow," she said.

"How was it?" Steph asked, and looked at Alice. So jealous, she mouthed, and Alex glared at her.

Sebastian stopped walking at the sound of their cheering, tears welling in his eyes. Someone who’d been walking behind him pushed into him in annoyance and he stumbled, almost dropping his phone.

He stepped out the way and leant against the glass of a shop window.

"It was great…” he said thickly. "Until he wanted me to take him home and I said no."

"Oh honey,” Alice let out, sinking into her chair. "I am proud of you."

"That was the right thing to say," Steph agreed sadly.

"You dumb fuck !" Alex said loudly, brandishing a slice of pizza at Alice’s phone. "What’s wrong with you?"

"Alex!" Steph hissed, but Alex shook his head.

"No, Steph, it makes no sense! He’s been pining for this guy for months, and now he can finally have him, he turns him down?!"

"Because I didn’t want to be his fucking rebound, Alex!” Sebastian snarled. He already felt bad enough, he didn’t need Alex making him feel worse. "I - I’m in love with him. I don’t want him to fuck me and then move on to someone else tomorrow!"

Alex looked a little taken aback by Sebastian’s outburst, but nodded thoughtfully, backing down.

"Fuck guys, what have I done?" Sebastian whispered, closing his eyes again. "I’m pretty sure he won’t come home tonight…We met two guys from NYADA at the club and when I left they all looked pretty cosy…I think he’ll go home with them."

"Wait, with both of them?" Alex let out, unable to help himself. "He broke off his engagement yesterday! And now he’s having a threesome? Man, the guy’s got game..."

"Alex, for the love of god just shut up," Alice said. "You’re just making it worse. Can’t you see that that’s Seb’s problem? Kurt’s not exactly being picky right now."

She paused. "These guys, are they...will Kurt be alright?" she asked quietly.

"He’ll be fine,” Sebastian said honestly. "They’re good guys, and they worship the ground Kurt walks on…he’s in perfectly good hands."

They’re just not mine.

"Honey, do you want to come over?” Steph said softly.

"No, I should go home, just in case Kurt does comes back later…” Sebastian paused. "Guys, have I made a mistake?"

Steph glared at Alex so fiercely he kept quiet.
"No," Alice said, looking at Steph, who nodded, and Alex, who shrugged. "We think you did the right thing. Kurt can be glad to have a friend like you, and in time, once he gets over this...phase, he'll understand."

"How the hell did I get myself into this situation? I’ve never..." Sebastian broke off. "I’ve never felt this way about someone before. I have no idea what I’m supposed to do."

The gang exchanged glances.

"And what makes you think any of us do, Seb?" Alex said kindly. "We’re all just pushing through on a trial-and-error basis..." He looked at Steph. "Mostly error in my case."

Steph shook her head and took his hand, squeezing it.

"Yeah, it'd be nice if there were a handbook," Alice mumbled, for once agreeing with Alex. "But Seb, you're already doing all you can. You gave him a place to stay, you looked after him, and you did not take advantage of his situation. For the rest...he needs to make his own decisions."

Sebastian sighed. "This is why I don’t do fucking relationships," he said glumly. "Love sucks."

Alice wasn't sure what to say. She'd heard all the platitudes herself, and had never found them useful. 'plenty of fish', 'in due time', 'everything will be okay'. The situation sucked and she knew it, and there wasn't really anything they could say to make it easier for Sebastian.

She picked up her phone, took it off speaker function, and pressed it to her ear. "I really am proud of you, Seb. I'm gonna be home soon too. Call me whenever you want to, ok?"

Sebastian opened his eyes and looked up at the sky. There was too much light pollution to see the stars but he imagined they were there.

"Thanks Alice," he said quietly. "I think I’m just gonna go home and try and get some sleep. "I'll call you tomorrow yeah?"

"Ok. Goodnight, Seb." Alice ended the call, and looked at the phone in her hand. "Oh man," she sighed. "I feel so bad for him."

"I hope someday Kurt realises what he's got at home," Steph sighed. "Sebastian would be so good for him."

Alex shrugged. "No offense to Seb, but I think anyone would be better than his ex."

Alice sighed. "That's definitely true."

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The apartment was dark when Kurt let himself in. He tried to be quiet, taking off his shoes by the door. It took a while for him to focus on the zipper on the sides. After he had left the club with Tim and Nick, they’d had several more shots at Nick’s place.

Kurt tiptoed past the sofa, only to realise it was empty. He swallowed. Sebastian wasn't home yet? If he wasn't back now, he was probably spending the night elsewhere. Kurt couldn't repress the bitter taste of jealousy that rose in the back of his throat. So a one-night stand with someone else, just not with him? Maybe the rebound thing had just been an excuse to let him down gently.

He sighed. It didn't matter. He couldn't change it anyway. Kurt quietly walked through the bedroom
to the bathroom, not bothering to switch on the light. He didn't want to have to look at his own reflection right now. He had a pretty good idea of how drunk and wasted he looked.

By the light of the small window, he brushed his teeth and splashed some water into his face. Then, he made himself drink two glasses of water, stripped, and looked around for his sleep clothes. He sighed and remembered he'd put them with the laundry. He was going to ask Bas for a fresh shirt, but he forgot. Feeling too weary to be annoyed with himself, he put his underwear back on and padded to the bed. He slipped between the covers and fell asleep almost right away, everything spinning around him.

As Kurt climbed into bed, Sebastian froze a little. It seemed that Kurt hadn’t noticed that he had a bed partner. Sebastian could smell the alcohol from where he lay, and felt bad for the hangover he knew Kurt would have in the morning.

After his call with Alice, Sebastian had made his way home and headed straight for bed. Assuming Kurt would be out all night, he’d made the most of having his bed back and had sunk into the firm memory foam mattress and soft pillows gratefully.

Sebastian hesitated for a moment, wondering if he should get out of bed and go to sleep on the sofa. But the bed was warm and he was comfortable and as Kurt’s soft snores filled the quiet room, Sebastian relaxed and settled back down himself. Kurt was radiating heat and the pull was almost too much to bear, but Sebastian resisted and stayed put. It was likely to be awkward in the morning as it was; he didn’t want to add anything else to Kurt’s discomfort.

Before he fell back asleep, Sebastian thought about the feeling of being kissed by Kurt and wondered if he would ever feel like that again.
Kurt tells Sebastian what happened, and Sebastian tells Kurt how he feels.

Kurt woke up slowly and resisted it with every breath. He was warm and comfortable, spooning against Blaine, his arm wrapped around his waist and one leg snugly fit between his fiancé’s thighs - wait. Blaine?! Kurt opened his eyes and froze.

This wasn’t Blaine...He was lying half-entwined with Sebastian, who was still sleeping. How did that happen? And more importantly, what happened before they fell asleep? 

All Kurt could remember was coming come. His head was pounding. A terrible thought struck him. Oh god - did they have sex, and he couldn’t remember because he had been so drunk? He shifted a little and breathed in relief. He was still wearing his underwear, and Sebastian was fully dressed in his sleep clothes. That was something, at least.

Sebastian was pulled from sleep reluctantly. The warm comforting weight of the body wrapped around him shuffled. His first instinct was to freeze - he wasn’t used to sharing his bed. But then the memories from the night before made their way through the haze of sleep and he relaxed a little. Kurt. His relief was quickly replaced by nerves and anxiety. Would Kurt be mad that Sebastian had taken back the bed and not stayed on the sofa? 

Despite his intruding doubts, Sebastian kept as still as possible. It was nice being wrapped up like this and he wanted it to last as long as it could. It might be the last chance he ever got. Feigning sleep, he moved his arm to curl up and wrap around Kurt’s bicep, curling his body to press into the warmth.

Meanwhile, Kurt’s mind had caught up. Sebastian was in his bed because of their agreement - the one taking someone home sleeps on the sofa. Sebastian had assumed Kurt would bring someone back with him, as replacement for him.

Kurt felt slightly sick, and he wasn’t sure if that was residue alcohol in his system or something else.

The rest of his body started waking up too, and Sebastian would notice soon if he didn’t move right now. It didn’t help that his friend now held him more tightly against himself than before. Sebastian’s sleepy body was pliant and warm.

Kurt sighed. These thoughts were not helping. He carefully tried to pull his leg free, but it only caused more friction. "Bas..." he let out helplessly, tugging at his arm.

"Bas?" Kurt whispered again, "are you awake?"

At the whisper of his name, Sebastian sighed and pretended to be waking up, shuffling away from Kurt slowly. He missed the warmth instantly.

"Morning," he said timidly, rolling over to face Kurt.

"Hey," Kurt said, wincing as his own voice sounded loud and rough to his own ears. His head rung
a little. He cleared his throat. He suddenly felt quite naked in his underwear and pulled some of the blanket around him.

"I'm sorry," he offered, starting to sit up. "I must have moved while I was asleep. I'm not...used to sleeping alone yet."

Sebastian blinked at him a little and bit his lip, moving to sit up too. He propped one of his pillows against the headrest and sat back against it. "That's okay. I should have kept to the sofa but I didn't think you'd come home...You and the guys looked ah...pretty cosy when I left."

He hated the solemn tone in his voice but it was too early to put his walls up.

Kurt grimaced. "Yeah...I didn't really think I would either," he admitted, then sighed. He wished he could forget that part of the evening, but alcohol never let you pick.

Sebastian bit his lip. He didn't wanna know, but at the same time, he really did.

"So...how was it?" he asked, trying to sound suggestive but failing.

Kurt pressed his lips together and avoided Sebastian's eyes. He tucked the blanket in over his chest and crossed his arms over it.

"I chickened out," he confessed. "I went back to Nick's place with them, we had a couple more drinks-" He shrugged awkwardly. "Then we started making out, and I wanted to, until I didn't."

Kurt paused, his gaze turning inwards. "I thought about what you said, about not seeing the point in one-night stands anymore. And... about me still thinking of Blaine. And you were right. I mean, I wasn't thinking about Blaine when I kissed you!!" he added hurriedly, wanting to make that quite clear, "but...in general...I think going home with them was me trying to prove a point. I was trying to be someone I'm not."

He shook his head. "I'm so stupid. For the first time in...years! I can do whatever I want, and it as it turns out, what I want is...romance. Love. Which is what got me into this whole disaster of an engagement in the first place!" He paused. "I wanted to do it because I thought I could prove to myself I had learned my lesson about love." He paused.

"But all the while, I kept hearing my dad's voice in my head, telling me not to throw myself around, and then I thought: how well do I even know these guys? What will it be like to go back to class with them if we did this? What if they tell the others? What would I be to them? And once I asked myself that, I couldn't do it."

Kurt took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "So...I told them I was sorry, and that I wanted to go home." He smiled a little. "They were very sweet about it, though. Gentlemen. Nick called a cab and Tim made coffee and we just sat together until the cab came. It was awkward, but less awkward than going through with it and having to face them again in class tomorrow."

Kurt rolled his eyes a little at himself. "So that was the story about the time I almost had a threesome, and then didn't. Pretty dumb, huh?"

Sebastian breathed out in relief and closed his eyes for a moment. He longed to reach forward and hug Kurt but he knew in the light of the morning it wouldn't be appropriate.

"That's not dumb at all, Kurt," he said quietly. "You made the right decision for you and I'm glad they respected it. They seemed like pretty decent guys and they proved me right."
He shuffled a bit on his pillow and looked at Kurt. "I’m sorry I left. If I had taken you home like I had promised to, it wouldn’t have happened."

Kurt shook his head, which was a big mistake. He reached for it and moaned. After the bed stopped spinning, he looked back at his friend.

"I understand why you left...I was overstepping our friendship by about a mile."

Kurt frowned a little. "I’ve always had trouble interpreting signs. At some point, I even thought Finn was into me, somehow." He smiled thinly.

Sebastian felt his face go cold and his stomach turned over nervously. It appeared to be truth time.

"Kurt," he whispered, reaching for Kurt’s hand. He brought it to his lips and pressed a kiss to the knuckles. "I didn’t stop us last night because I wasn’t into you."

"But..." Kurt started, not sure how to finish. If Sebastian wanted him and he had been offering, why hadn’t he?

Seeing the confused look on Kurt’s face, Sebastian hurried to explain.

"The way I feel about you scares the shit out of me," he whispered, closing his eyes. "I have never felt this way about anyone before."

Kurt felt like a tidal wave had just swept him up and pulled him into the open water. What was going on? First Tim and Nick, now Sebastian?

Sebastian looked at Kurt. "Stopping last night was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do...I want you so badly. But I don’t just want sex...I want everything with you. The whole thing. Dating. Holding hands. Romance. A house, a dog." He grinned a little. "Fights, and hot make-up sex. Matching sweaters. Tacky nicknames. The complete hallmark Valentines Day card special." He added the last few things just to get Kurt to smile. It worked, a little.

He turned serious again. "I know it’s too soon. You need time to heal and have some space to be yourself before jumping back in the dating game."

Kurt’s smile faded as quickly as it had appeared. Sebastian was right. Despite his epiphany from the night before about wanting romance, Kurt wasn’t ready to be part of a couple again. He had only just begun to feel free again, to be accountable to himself and only himself. In his heart, he still longed for love, but to limit his new-found wholeness and adjust himself to accommodate someone else in return for closeness; he couldn’t do that yet. Sebastian wanted everything, and he deserved someone willing to give that to him. Kurt knew he was too selfish to give himself up again so soon.

To distract himself from this sad truth, Kurt focused back on Sebastian’s words.

"How long have you felt this way?" he asked.

"Months," Sebastian admitted, looking down at their hands that were still joined between them. "I think deep down it’s been since we met, but I really figured it out when we spent that time together over the summer. I didn’t say anything because I could see you were struggling to make your relationship with Blaine work and I didn’t want to put even more pressure on you."

Kurt closed his eyes. He wasn’t sure how to deal with all of this. It made him doubt everything he thought he knew. Since summer?
And Kurt had told him about Blaine over and over again, the most intimate details, the horrible truths...

Suddenly Kurt realised something else.

"Was that why you were so angry at me when our summer break ended?" he asked carefully. "Because I was going back to Blaine?"

Sebastian thought about Kurt’s question and tried to piece together a response.

"It wasn’t that you were going back to him," he said carefully. "It was the way you turned yourself into this completely different person for him. Tidying up the kitchen in case he noticed something had been moved, finishing the food, not planning anything that might interfere with Blaine’s plans..." He sighed sadly and closed his eyes. "I couldn’t bear to see it..."

Kurt shrugged uncomfortably. "I just didn’t want him to think I was cheating on him." He scoffed. "When he was the one cheating in LA."

He understood why Sebastian would have been jealous of the lengths he’d gone to keep Blaine happy, even if Blaine hadn’t deserved it at all. Somehow, he felt Sebastian would deserve it. Kurt wished he had the energy to give as much again. If he could, he’d make himself into the person Sebastian wanted.

"And that’s what got me the most." Sebastian said quietly. "You should be able to have friends over without being accused of cheating. You shouldn’t have to tread on eggshells in your own home, or make excuses for having friends and interests that aren’t the same as your partner’s."

He looked back up at Kurt, wanting to make sure Kurt heard him. "You are so amazing, Kurt. I hated that you tuned your whole self down for him." He paused. "For the record: I’d never make or expect you to behave that way..." He let out a shaky breath. "But me finally admitting all this to you isn’t a ploy or a wicked plan to get you into my bed-"

"Because I already am," Kurt remarked drily, falling back on his old habit of making jokes when he felt vulnerable.

Sebastian let out a chuckle. "Yeah. No! I mean...I just wanted to tell you how I feel so that... when you feel ready to start dating again, maybe you’d consider me. But if you decide that we’re better off as just friends, that’s okay too. I’m not going anywhere Kurt. I’ll still be your friend. I just want you to be happy, with or without me...okay?"

Kurt pulled up a corner of his mouth. Happiness did not have an on - and off switch. He couldn’t promise Sebastian when it would happen.

"I can try," he said quietly. "$But I’m a little afraid of what will happen now. All of my plans for the future involved Blaine. And now the future is just..." Empty? Big? Intimidating? "Uncertain," Kurt said.

He let go of Sebastian’s hand and hugged his arms around himself. "I’ve been the ‘K’ in Klaine for so long I am not sure there’s enough Kurt left in me to be complete on my own. I may mess up for a while, like I did yesterday. It feels like I’ve been...quiet...for a long time. I might get a little too loud before I find some kind of middle ground again."

"That’s what you have us for, me and Alice, Brody, Steph...even Alex," Sebastian said gently. "We’re your friends, Kurt. And we’re all here to support you...including helping you kick that
asshole out of your apartment."

Kurt closed his eyes for a moment and smiled. He knew they’d actually be there on Saturday, every single one.

"I think it’ll help when Blaine moves out and I can close that chapter of my life," he agreed. "God, I hope he moves voluntarily..." but he won’t, he added in his mind.

"You’ve told him to be out by the end of the week right?" Sebastian asked thoughtfully, an idea forming in his head.

Kurt hummed.

"So, why don’t we - meaning you and I - go there on Friday night and see if he’s packed yet? If he hasn’t, we can remind him together, and if he refuses, everyone else can come over Saturday and pack up his shit."

Kurt bit his lip and nodded. He really didn’t want to see Blaine again, but if he had to, it would be better if Sebastian came along. "That’s a good idea. Thanks."

He shivered. "I feel sick," he admitted, then groaned. "And I have to be at Vogue later. What was I thinking drinking that much yesterday?"

Sebastian grinned. "You needed to blow off some steam, everyone does once in a while. Why don’t you lay back down and I’ll go make you mine and Alex’s special hangover cure," he said, getting up. "It has saved my life and my grades on more than one occasion..."

Kurt smiled weakly. He hoped it didn’t involve any of Alex’ favourite ingredients (pizza and peanut butter) but even if it did, he’d try it. He needed to clear his head - not just for work, but to think about everything Sebastian had just told him.
Ultimatum Day

Chapter Summary

When Friday comes around, both Kurt and Sebastian are a little nervous about what will await them at Kurt's place.

After Sebastian's confession, Kurt had a lot to think about. In the days that followed, he kept wondering if he could have known. Deep inside, he knew their friendship had always felt a little too good to be true. But he hadn't noticed Tim and Nick's interest in him either. Maybe he was just oblivious to things like that.

Kurt felt awful now he knew how Sebastian had to be feeling. He remembered very well what it felt like to have feelings for someone and be forced to watch them focus on others -like Finn running after Rachel, Sam singing with Quinn, Blaine first asking him to sing for Jeremiah, and then making out with Rachel right in front of him.

He knew what he would have done if their roles had been reversed. Had Blaine kissed him or suggested doing more before they were officially together, Kurt probably would have done it, and not worried about what it would mean for their friendship or for them, throwing his dad's advice completely in the wind.

But that was years ago - and Sebastian had clearly proven he was more mature than that.

Feeling he needed to make amends somehow, Kurt moved to the sofa so Sebastian could sleep in his own bed again, and spent his free time cleaning up the apartment. With his move pending, he felt the need to help Sebastian by erasing proof he had stayed for so long. He also restocked the fridge.

Before he knew it, Friday had arrived. Kurt had told Blaine to have moved his things out by Saturday, which meant today was the last day he had to collect his stuff...Kurt suspected Blaine would refuse to do it, just like he had refused to take Kurt's ring back.

So, Kurt had asked his friends to come to his place on Saturday morning to help box it all up. Today, he would go to their apartment and wait it out... but not by himself. Sebastian had offered to join him, and despite feeling guilty for involving him in even more situations involving his ex, Kurt had accepted.

"Hummel! You're up!" Cassandra July called out. "Or," she added, threateningly sweet, "would you like all of us to wait until you finish daydreaming? I'm sure no one will mind staying an extra hour doing jumps?"

The group collectively groaned. Kurt quickly shook himself and took his place in the diagonal of the room. They were practising grand jetés, it was the end of the lesson, and everyone was exhausted. Kurt definitely did not want Ms July to make them start over on his account.

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Sebastian glanced at his phone as he walked through the grand halls of NYADA, checking the directions Brody had sent him to find Kurt's dance class.
He was surrounded by the strangest collection of students he'd ever seen. All around him, people were practising their vocal exercises, stretching their limbs out or else just randomly breaking out into song and dance.

As he neared the room, Sebastian thought back on the last couple of days. Despite his feelings now being out in the open, he strangely didn't feel like panicking. He knew where he stood and it hadn't affected his and Kurt's friendship.

He got to the room just in time to see Kurt leap across the room in a skin-tight black leotard. Sebastian almost dropped his bag.

Well that's just not fair, he thought to himself as he took in the smooth straight lines of Kurt's frame, the muscles in his legs flexing powerfully as they propelled him across the room. Not fair at all.

Kurt reached the end of the room and Cassandra July nodded briskly, which in her case was high praise. Two more students took their turns, and then she called the end of the lesson, reminding them to hydrate and stretch.

Kurt walked over to his bag for a towel, and as he came up again, saw Sebastian. He smiled and waved at him, and held up his hand, signalling that he needed five more minutes. He quickly joined the others at the barre, putting his leg up and going down in a plié, wincing at the pull on his muscles. Kurt wrapped his hand around his ankle, pulling it up to his shoulder as he came up out of his plié, lifting his free leg into the air at an almost vertical angle.

"Nice one," the girl behind him commented. Her leg actually bent behind her neck, but she was a dance major. Kurt wrapped the crook of his elbow around his knee to keep his leg up a little longer until he couldn't bear the pull any longer, then let go and shook his leg out before bending his calf backwards towards his thigh.

"So..." Ms July's voice whispered in his ear just as he laid his other leg on the barre, "are you having a masochistic day, or are you trying to impress your new boyfriend? Oh... maybe both? Does he like that sort of thing?" She stepped away and smirked knowingly.

Kurt blushed and glanced at the doorway, where Sebastian still stood waiting for him. He felt a little caught, but did his other leg as well. He didn't want to comment on her insinuations, knowing from experience that encouraging her would only make it worse.

With both legs stretched, he walked over to the bench and stepped into a pair of sweatpants, pulling them on over his leotard. He took a fresh shirt out of his bag and threw it on before hurrying to Sebastian. He didn't want to keep him waiting any longer and would shower at home.

"Hey," he greeted him. "Sorry about that, Ms July makes her own timetables. She decides when class is over, not the clock." He rolled his eyes a little.

"H-" Sebastian coughed, still trying to get over the show he'd just witnessed. "Hey...n-no problem at all...really." He winked in an attempt to cover up his blunder. I will so get you back for this one day, he vowed internally.

"They really work you guys hard here, huh?"

"Yeah," Kurt agreed, rolling his ankles before stepping into his shoes. "She has Dance 101 before this, a compulsory class with the first years. It tends to get her in a bad mood, and then she makes us pay for it."

He took a sip from his water bottle. "It's a good class, though. We get video feedback and one hour
of personal training a month. Which is...horror...but, you know, you learn loads."

He was slowly coming down, and shivered. "My coat's in the hall," he said, and lead the way. It wasn't far to the subway. Normally he'd change into outdoor clothes, but he was a little anxious to get away from Ms July's knowing eyes.

He also had his small travel suitcase in the hall, with the things he'd taken to Sebastian's place. With his heart more than a little heavy, he slid out the handle to pull it behind him. He was going home, but living there would be different without Blaine. Everything would be different.

Sebastian secured his overnight rucksack over his shoulder and fell into step next to Kurt.

The sight of Kurt wheeling his suitcase made Sebastian feel a little melancholic. He knew Kurt couldn't stay at his place forever, but he was definitely going to miss Kurt's presence in his apartment.

"At least you know you get your money's worth. It's a very good program!" he said, holding the main front door open for Kurt.

"Thanks. Yeah, we do. I hope it'll be worth the effort too," Kurt replied. "I've yet to land any role."

The cold air hit his face and he pulled the collar of his coat up.

"I got the Showcase though," he said, as if to remind himself. "By myself..."

Sebastian grinned at him. "Yes, you did!" he said proudly, bumping Kurt's shoulder. "And we're all gonna be watching from the front row! And when you get cast in a role, we'll be there too!"

"You mean if," Kurt corrected, but he returned the smile, the cold suddenly not so biting anymore.

"No, pretty sure I mean when," Sebastian said with a grin.

On the subway, Kurt asked Sebastian about his day and listened to him talk about his courses, but as his stop got closer and closer, it became more and more difficult to focus.

As Sebastian chatted away about his day and the occupational hazard of having Alex as a friend, Sebastian noticed that Kurt's attention seemed to be wavering. He stopped talking and nudged Kurt gently. "You okay, babe? I think I lost you for a second back there."

"I'm sorry," Kurt said immediately, shaking his head a little. "I was..." he sighed. "Yes. I was thinking of something else. I'm really sorry."

Kurt hesitated. He didn't want Sebastian to think he was contemplating something mundane or random while he talked, and so he started to explain.

"The last time I took Blaine back...I wasn't planning to. It sort of... happened. And even though this time feels different, I'm still worried, that-" Kurt broke off, frowning at himself. He tried to start over. "Somewhere along the line...I gave him the power to manipulate me." He shrugged awkwardly, hoping his friend understood that he wasn't afraid of Blaine- he was afraid of himself.

"If he's there at the apartment, and you notice I'm being...blainewashed..." Kurt said, "...just...I don't know. Punch me in the face or something." He chuckled mirthlessly. "I really don't want to take him back. But I remember saying that several times in the past and yet...it always happened somehow. It's like when it comes to him, I don't trust my own judgement."

He gave Sebastian a pleading look. "Please don't leave me alone with him."
Sebastian’s heart soared a little at the notion that Kurt didn't want to take Blaine back, but plummeted back to its normal place when he considered Kurt's words. Blaine really did have a lot to answer for.

He reached over and squeezed Kurt's hand. "Don't worry babe," he said with a grin and a wink. "Even if I have to fireman-lift you out of there, I won't let you take him back." He paused. "And, all joking aside: I promise that I won't leave you alone with him." He held Kurt's gaze after he'd stopped talking to make sure Kurt knew that he meant what he said.

"Thank you," Kurt whispered. He knew he should be more embarrassed about this, but because Sebastian didn't once make him feel like he should, he felt relieved instead.

"Okay. Please tell me again about your essay, I think I can focus now."

Put at ease, Kurt listened to Sebastian talk the rest of the way. They got off the subway at the correct stop, and walked up to the apartment building. Kurt's calm slowly evaporated. With every floor they climbed, Kurt felt worse. As they reached the fourth, Kurt took Sebastian's hand.

Sebastian felt Kurt's nerves radiate out of him as they climbed the stairs and Sebastian's own rose his his throat. This is silly, he thought to himself. It's just one guy who is shorter than both of us...we could totally take him if it comes down to it. Sebastian squeezed Kurt's hand reassuringly. It felt good that Kurt sought him out for comfort.

"Okay, here goes," Kurt said quietly.

With his heart beating in his throat, Kurt unlocked the door and looked inside. He saw no one. "Blaine?" he called out. There was no reply.

Kurt breathed out. "I guess it's just us," he said, and pushed the door open all the way. The apartment looked exactly the same as he had left it. Well, not exactly. There were more dishes in the sink, more clothes on the floor, and it smelled. But nothing was packed up or even tidied. Despite his low expectations, Kurt felt let down.

"God it smells like something died in here." Sebastian said pushing the door open. "At least he's not here, though?"

"Yeah," Kurt mumbled. He went to a window, turned off the heating below it, and opened it wide. Then he turned around to take it all in. The place was a mess. It hurt. He didn't know why, but it did. He had liked living here. They had moved in with big dreams, romantic dreams - their very own place, no roomies, just them. That Sam lived with them for weeks at the time in between jobs didn't really count. Kurt had painted the walls, found furniture; he'd decorated. He had tried to keep fresh herbs in the kitchen (he checked - they were all dead). This was supposed to have been their home, the place they could escape to at the end of the day and hide away from the world.

And this was how Blaine treated the place when Kurt was not there. As a final act of defiance, or so it felt to Kurt, Blaine had used his sewing mannequin to prop open the laundry hamper, which was overflowing. The mannequin itself was wearing an eye-scorching mustard coloured jacket.

It made Kurt feel utterly defeated. He shook his head, and dropped himself on the couch, hiding his head in his hands. "I don't even know where to start," he said softly.

Sebastian looked around the apartment, taking in the destruction. His eyes finally fell on Kurt and he felt anger rise up inside him at the look on Kurt's face. He suddenly wanted Blaine to come home. Sebastian would very much like to punch him in the face.

He let his bag drop to the floor and took off his jacket, hanging it up on the coat rack by the door. He
pulled the sleeves of his cardigan up and shut the front door.

"For starters, why don't you put some music on and make a pot of coffee, while I do the dishes. And then we tackle this place one disaster zone at a time." Sebastian walked towards Kurt and held out his hand. "You with me, Hummel?"

Kurt took a deep breath and nodded. "You're right. Yes, I'm with you." And if Blaine arrived while they were cleaning, he could take out the trash - and then himself.

Two hours later, the living area was livable, and the bathroom useable. Kurt had pulled the bedding off the bed and pushed the mattress off the frame and on its side to air it out - even if he had already ordered a new one, he'd still need to sleep on it one more night.

Now Bruce sat on the sofa in his one-armed glory, with Kurt and Sebastian sat either side of him, taking a breather.

"I'm really glad you came with me," Kurt said.

He looked around. "We'll have our work cut out for us tomorrow."

Sebastian smiled at Kurt. "There was no way I was gonna let you do this by yourself, Kurt. I've got your back! And tomorrow the others will be here too. It'll fly by and you'll be Blaine- free in a matter of hours."

Kurt pressed his lips into a thin smile. He was grateful, yet sad that all of this was necessary at all.

Sebastian looked at the pile of Blaine's dirty clothes that sat in an old blue IKEA bag.

"What are you going to do with that?"

Kurt glanced at the bag of laundry. His own things were already washed and hung up to dry.

"I guess...if he doesn't show up tonight." Kurt checked his watch. It was getting late. "I'll pack his clean clothes in a suitcase, with his personal stuff, and ask Sam to come and get it. And I'll have charity pick up the rest of the stuff I don't want."

Kurt shrugged. "I know I told him I'd throw it all out, but... I can't make him homeless and throw away all of his clothes. And there's things... photo albums, keepsakes, all of that... I don't know if he'll want them but it's not up to me to throw them away. I think I owe him that much."

Sebastian pursed his lips but nodded. He didn't see why Blaine deserved so much courtesy after the state he'd left the apartment in, but Kurt's grace was one of the things that Sebastian admired the most.

Sebastian nodded. "Okay," he said simply.

He relaxed back into the sofa. "So... what do you fancy for dinner?"

Kurt closed his eyes. As soon as Sebastian had mentioned food, his stomach had started rumbling. He did not want take-out, or his freshly aired out place would immediately smell like grease again. It appeared Blaine had lived entirely on fast food and cereals, as the only things in the fridge that hadn't expired were milk and a few eggs. There was nothing left in the cupboards except an opened box of Cheerios and some non-perishable supplies Kurt kept stocked and Blaine hadn't touched because
they would have required cooking.

"I don't know," Kurt sighed. "We have nothing. But I can't bear to eat pizza again..."

Sebastian smiled. "What do you mean we don't have anything? There's milk, eggs, flour and sugar...sounds like a meal to me."

At Kurt's confused look Sebastian chuckled. "I'm gonna make you crêpes."

Kurt looked at him as if he had just turned into Gordon Ramsay. "For real?" he asked hopefully.

Sebastian grinned and stood up. "For real, come on, I'll share my secret recipe."

Kurt didn't hesitate. Suddenly, he found a reserve of energy to get up.

Half an hour later, the kitchen was smelling like eggs and cinnamon.

"I wish we had some Courvoisier," Sebastian sighed.

"Next time," Kurt promised. He had been thinking about getting a bottle. He didn't even know what it tasted like, but the box promised 'a taste of Paris' and that sounded pretty good.

Their dinner was ready before Kurt even realised he hadn't thought about Blaine since they started.

What would he think if he saw them now; Sebastian was wearing Kurt's apron, they had laid out the table for two and Kurt had found a few candles.

A small, resentful part inside Kurt kind of wished Blaine would come to see it.

Sebastian had made a crêpe for both of them, and there was plenty of batter left to make more. He had looked a little scandalised at Kurt's suggestion to stack them, insisting that they should always be eaten fresh. Once they'd finished the first, he'd make more.

"They're a bit on the small side because of your pan," Sebastian commented apologetically, "and not as thin as I wanted because you don't have a spreader."

'Ah yes, the French,' Kurt teased, 'always blaming their tools instead of themselves...' He winked.

"I'm sure they are delicious. Thank you."

He had set the fillings down on the table too - he'd found an unopened jar of strawberry jam in one of the cupboards and there was half a jar of peanut butter as well. Together they sat down to eat.

"Have you ever tried savoury crêpes?" Sebastian asked as he loaded his crêpe with peanut butter.

Kurt wrinkled his nose. "I thought this-" he gestured at their meal, "was kind of like dessert for dinner day...There are savory crêpes? With what?"

Sebastian grinned. Every single one of his friends in the US had had the same reaction when he mentioned them.

"With anything! They're really good with spinach, cheese and mushrooms. But you can also put tomatoes with them or ham...pretty much anything."

Kurt looked down on his crêpe and considered it. The batter was actually quite neutral. The same ingredients, in different proportions, made a savory pie crust...so why not?
"That sounds pretty good, actually," he admitted. "though I'm fine with this too." He sprinkled some more cinnamon-sugar mixture on his plate. The crêpes were thin and crisp, and not greasy at all. It felt like he could eat twenty and still have room for more. "I wish we had ice cream..." he pondered.

Then, they both sat up as someone rang the doorbell. Kurt looked at Sebastian and paled. Was that...?

He wiped his lips on a napkin and rose, walking to the door slowly.

Sebastian felt his heart rate quicken. He half-rose out of his chair, not knowing if he should get up and go with Kurt or hang back and give him some space.

Kurt opened the door and breathed out.

"Mrs Zukovsky!" he let out. He had never been happier to see his least favourite neighbour.

She narrowed her eyes at him, and tried to peer inside around him.

"Kurt. I saw you come in-" she started, and Kurt wasn't surprised. She saw everything, because she was always perched by her window. "And I just wanted to tell you that your roommate needs to stop that intolerable racket in the middle of the night! I cannot take it anymore! Whatever machine is making that noise, it has to go!"

Suddenly, Kurt understood, and looked over his shoulder at Blaine's SodaStream.

"It will. It will go, together with my... roommate, Mrs Zukovsky. Today. I promise."

His neighbour deflated a little, like she had been preparing for a fight that was suddenly cancelled.

"Well, good!" she huffed, turned around, and left.

Kurt closed the door and leaned against it with his back. It was clear from Sebastian's expression that he had been expecting to see Blaine's face too.

"He wouldn't have rung the bell," Kurt mumbled, belatedly realising it.

Sebastian nodded. Blaine had never shown any respect for Kurt's space or wishes. Why would he suddenly do so now by ringing?

With that came another realisation. Blaine had a key.

"I need to ask my landlady to change the locks," Kurt said, coming to the same conclusion.

It made him sad all over again, but it had to be done. He could not stay here if Blaine could literally let himself back into his life at any moment.

"That might be wise," Sebastian said softly, walking over to Kurt. "I'm sorry this is all happening."

Kurt sighed. "Saying 'it's over' was easy. Actually following it up with all of this..."

He looked around the place. "This is just not where I intended to be, you know? I need time to make new plans."

He looked at Sebastian, and wondered. Kurt's plans would include him, one way or another. He just wasn't sure if he could go through something like this again. He had no illusions over keeping someone like Sebastian tethered to his side for very long. Would a brief relationship with him be
worth the sacrifice of their friendship, and the pain of another break-up?

Sebastian put his hands on his friend’s shoulders gently. It hurt him to see Kurt so torn up and lost.

"Kurt, there's no timeline or manual on how to do this...I'm pretty sure if you wrote one you'd be an overnight billionaire." He added the last as a joke. "You don't have to have things figured out or planned down to a T. Just take each day as it comes and lean on your friends when you need us."

Kurt smiled a little watery smile. "Well, I definitely know who to call if I need food magicked out of a near empty fridge now," he joked, and nodded at their plates. "And yeah, I'm going to eat everything that's left now, including yours."

"Be my guest," Sebastian said fondly. It might take some time, but he knew Kurt would be alright, even if Kurt didn't know it yet himself.
Blaine didn’t turn up in the end. Sebastian and Kurt had eaten their way through the rest of the crêpes, and then spent the evening watching some films and chatting. Sebastian had tried to keep Kurt’s mind off the next days activities and hoped it had worked.

They had a fairly early night, knowing that the next day would be a long one. Kurt took his room and Sebastian slept on the sofa.

Sebastian was woken up the next morning by an insistent ringing of the buzzer. He groaned and blinked against the harsh sunlight pouring in through the open windows.

"Kurt," he called. "Someone’s here." He knew it was unnecessary. There were probably people on the moon who knew someone was outside Kurt’s apartment at that moment in time.

Sebastian blindly reached for his glasses. He’d run out of his last pair of contacts, and making a mental memo to pick up some new ones, put his glasses on.

"Kurt," he called again, rolling out from under his blanket and sitting up.

"Could you get it? I'm still in the shower!" Kurt called out, turning off the spray and reaching for a towel. He had slept well, and felt rested and ready to face the day. It was mostly thanks to Sebastian. His friend had done everything possible to make him feel at ease, apart from maybe tucking him in. He probably would have done that too, if Kurt had asked.

"About fucking time!" Alex muttered as Sebastian buzzed them in. He had his arms full of paper bags of breakfast bagels and a cardboard tray of coffee cups. The girls hurried up the stairs before him. Time to put everything Blaine owned in a box to the left.

The door on the fourth floor opened just as they reached the landing, and Alice went in first. "Good morning, boys! We brought breakfast-" she called out, but faltered as she saw Sebastian standing in the middle of the room with his tousled hair and sleepy eyes. The vision was completed by Kurt emerging from the bathroom wearing a silk bathrobe that clung to his back and thighs from where he’s clearly still been wet when shrugging it on. He was drying off his hair as he walked to the kitchen.

"Oooo-kay," Alice said slowly, "Should we...come back in a bit?"

"Only if you leave breakfast," Kurt replied, grinning.

"No way," Alex said, pushing in. "I've had to smell these bagels all the way from the shop without eating any and I am having one now, whether they go for round two or not."
Sebastian blushed. "We didn’t...there was no round one...I slept on the couch!" He stammered a little. "It’s your fault I look like this!" he added, recovering slightly and ignoring the wide grin on Alice’s face. "You woke me up, man, why the fuck were you leaning on the buzzer?"

"Bagels Seb, warm bagels," Alex replied before biting in to one.

They did smell divine. Sebastian scowled at his friend and grabbed one from the bag that had been set down on the table.

"So Kurt, what’s the plan of action?" Steph asked sitting down on one of the chairs and helping herself to a bagel too.

"Well, I got these," Kurt started, taking a block of multi coloured post-its from the kitchen drawer, "and I thought I’d make a quick round of the furniture, making it yellow for ‘out’ and green for ‘keep’? And then the boys can carry the heavy shit out while we pack the rest in boxes."

Alex glared at him.

"Yes, I know," Kurt admitted. "I am a boy. I'll help with the really heavy stuff. But we have to multitask a bit here and the girls need to know what to pack." Kurt didn't mind lumping himself in with the girls' team if it was convenient- and by his choice.

He took a bagel and devoured it as if he didn't have several crêpes the evening before. Alice handed him a coffee. Not knowing how he took them, she'd just ordered two the way Sebastian drank it. Kurt thanked her and took it without complaint.

Alice looked around. "You guys sure had a lot of stuff for such a small space."

Kurt sighed. "It’s because we moved to a smaller place. You should have seen the loft. It was amazing. This stuff actually fit in there with room for our egos. I am still bitter we had to give it up."

"Why did you?" Steph asked curiously.

Kurt shrugged awkwardly. "It was a coming and going of roommates, and they only sporadically remembered their part of the rent. We couldn't afford it anymore." He sipped his coffee. "And by we I mean I. Blaine didn't have a job. I couldn't afford it without Rachel's dads, so when she finally diva'ed out, we had to move."

"No offence dude," Alex said, sipping his coffee. "But why the hell were you friends with these people?"

Steph kicked him.

"Ow!" he exclaimed. "You know you’re all thinking the same: they leached off him, bitched about him and then turned on him in his time of need...who needs enemies with friends like that?"

Kurt looked at Alex for a moment, deciding on how to answer. He chose the truth. "To be honest? I don’t know. I read somewhere that on average, people only stay in touch with one friend from high school, two at the most. So maybe this idea that the Glee club would somehow exist forever was dumb, anyway. And we only joined Glee because none of us had any other place to go to in the first place."

He smiled. "One day, you'll meet Mercedes, though. And when you do, you'll understand why it was worth it."
"I'm not in touch with anyone I went to high school with." Alex shrugged. "They were all a bunch of assholes."

"I still stay in contact with one or two," Alice said thoughtfully. "They do say though that the friends you make in college can stay with you for life...so you're all stuck with me whether you like it or not."

"Damn," Sebastian said snapping his fingers and winking at her. She grinned.

"Where's your beau, by the way?" Kurt asked, looking at Alice. "My bed isn't gonna carry itself out..."

Alex snorted, and Alice gave a heavy sigh.

"He's chronically late. If he wasn't so good in bed I would *not* stand for it."

"Tell me more, tell me more," Steph sang, wiggling her eyebrows.

"Tell me less, tell me less," Alex groaned. "Before Kurt and Sebastian join in as well and this whole thing turns into one big slumber party gossip story."

"You might learn something," Kurt remarked idly, tipping his coffee cup up to drain the last drops.

"Ha. Ha. Why don't you go put some clothes on, pretty boy?" Alex replied. "Learn something, indeed." He took the last bagel without asking and bit into it with a vengeance.

Sebastian, now a bit more alert after food and coffee, cleared away the rubbish from their breakfast and folded up his blanket on the sofa.

"How was he last night?" Steph asked Sebastian quietly once Kurt had left the room.

Sebastian shrugged. "Okay...Blaine was a no-show and this place looked like a bomb had hit it, but I tried to keep him distracted."

"Do we think ass hat will show up today?" Alice asked.

"I doubt it. I think he's waiting it out somewhere to see if Kurt will really go through with it. Joke's on him though - Kurt is getting the locks changed today."

"And then we set fire to his stuff!" Alex said eagerly.

Sebastian grinned. "I wish. But Kurt wants to box up some personal items and clothes for him. He's gonna get Blaine's friend to come pick them up."

"He, what now?" Alex asked, frowning. "Seriously?"

Steph sighed.

Alex couldn't tell if she was just exasperated with him again, or sad for Kurt, but he pushed on.

"Why don't we just gather it all up and piss on it? To be honest, I'm surprised *he* hasn't done that to Kurt's stuff." Alex made a face. "Tell me he didn't."

Alice rolled her eyes. "We can't do that, Al. For one, Blaine was *his* fiancé, not ours."

"Kurt's our friend!" Alex protested.
"And Kurt clearly doesn't want his things destroyed. Maybe there's stuff in there he got for Blaine, or that holds some kind of memories. Please, just be a little sensitive for once, okay?"

Steph frowned at her boyfriend. "I agree with Alice...Blaine may be the biggest ass in the world, but we can't destroy all his things...or are you saying that's what you'd do to my stuff if we ever break up?" she asked, folding her arms.

"No, of course not!" Alex said, backtracking quickly. "But then who says we're ever gonna break up?"

"You never know what's gonna happen, Al," Steph said. She was still a little annoyed but mollified at the reassurance that he wasn't planning on breaking up with her.

"At the end of the day," Sebastian said, cutting in, "what we think doesn't matter. It's Kurt's decision and we're here to do our part to make this easier for him. If that means putting Blaine's things in a box and allowing someone to come and pick it up, then that's what we're going to do."

"Just how many bowties does one guy need?" Steph asked, opening up another drawer with even more of them.

Kurt smiled wearily. "Depends on who you ask." He got up from his seat on the floor folding shirts, and walked over. "Blaine collects them. I'm kind of surprised he didn't take any." He paused. "I don't even know where he's staying right now..."

Alice looked at him. "Do you want to take a break?"

Kurt shook his head. "No. No, I'm okay," he said, more determined than he felt.

"These are actually kind of cute," Alice said, holding two identical black-and-gold bowties over her head like hair bows.

Kurt grinned. "Do you want them? I don't think Blaine will notice. He has so many..." He picked up a light blue one in hand painted silk, running his fingers over it. "I think I'll keep this one," he said to himself. "I gave it to him, and he never wore it. It cost 70 dollars."

"WHAT?" Steph gasped, lowering the ties in her hands.

"Oh, not those, they're polyester," Kurt reassured her quickly. "They're from Nationals, I think. All of the boys had one. So one of them is mine, anyway. It's ok, you can take them."

He put the silk tie with his things, and tipped the rest of the drawer into a cardboard box. Going through Blaine's things with the girls was a lot better than doing it by himself. They were pretty merciless in their judgement of Blaine's clothes, and if Kurt was completely honest to himself, he had never liked Blaine's post-Dalton wardrobe either. Primal colours were not his thing, and there were only a few men in the world who could wear 7/8 pants without looking like they were wearing their old elementary school clothes... and Blaine was not one of them. (Neither was Kurt, but that was why he did not own any).

Kurt did Blaine the last favour of their relationship- by sorting out the most hideous of his things and folding them for a box that'd go to charity. What landed in the suitcase for Blaine was, in Kurt's opinion, suitable for everyday wear, school, job interviews and sport. It would be enough to give him a start into a new look. He saw the looks Steph and Alice exchanged when he was laying out pants and shirts on his bed to see if they matched, but once he had decided to do this, he wanted to do it
well. A few other things, like Blaine's wristwatches, hats, ties, novelty socks and underwear, landed in the box with the bow ties. Kurt doubted the homeless had any use for a bright orange fedora or suspenders with tennis rackets on them.

"Look at all this closet space," Alice marvelled. "Maybe I should think twice about letting Brody move in with me."

"Ooooh!" Steph let out. "Really? You're moving in together?"

"Maybe," Alice said, smiling. "He's at my place most of the time, anyway."

Kurt bit his lip. His head told him to warn her from rushing into things, but his heart wanted her to be happy. He kept his comments to himself, and pulled a stack of shoe cartons from the closet to see which shoes he was packing in the suitcase.

"Hey, what's this?" Alice asked, and Kurt turned to look at her. She was holding a small, square jewelry box. Kurt breathed in sharply.

"Can I open it?" she asked. Kurt nodded. He knew what it was.

Alice frowned. "I don't get it," she mumbled. "A ring out of gum wrappers?"

Kurt walked up and took it from her. "I thought I had thrown that away," he mumbled. God, how long ago had that been? He couldn't imagine Blaine sitting down to do origami anymore. They'd both changed a lot. It suddenly felt like he was packing for a stranger. He ran a finger over the small silvery circle.

Steph and Alice exchanged another look.

"Maybe we should go check how far Alex and Brody got with packing the car for the recycling centre," Steph suggested carefully.

Sebastian, Brody and Alex all walked back into the apartment as Steph and Alice shut Kurt’s bedroom door behind them.

Sebastian could tell something was up instantly. Both girls were ashen faced and quiet.

"What happened?" he asked immediately.

"Kurt just found something and uh...needs a minute." Steph said quietly. "I think now is a good time for us to run the first load of stuff to recycling."

"I'll stay here," Sebastian said and they all nodded in agreement. The guys patted Sebastian on the shoulder and the girls hugged him briefly before they all head out the door, shutting it behind them.

Sebastian took off his jacket and shoes before walking over and knocking lightly on Kurt’s door.

"Kurt, it's me," he said quietly. "Can I come in?"

"Sure," Kurt replied. He was sitting on the bed, bent over the nightstand with a concentrated look on his face and his tongue trapped between his teeth.

On the nightstand lay his phone, a website with origami instructions opened.

Kurt flipped the small wrapper around and folded it once more, as per the instructions, and smirked at the result.
He placed the tiny origami penis in the box, and threw it into the suitcase with Blaine's things.

"Petty, I know," Kurt said. "But I could do a lot worse to his stuff."

"Inventive," Sebastian said with a grin, joining Kurt on the bed. "Is it a true likeness? Or a metaphor?"

Kurt snorted. "Neither. It's just a joke." He paused, eyeing the box. Blaine never liked dick jokes, but Kurt had spent too much time with Finn and Puck to avoid them popping into his head every now and then. Blaine would survive, and it gave Kurt an odd feeling of gratification to send him his ring-promise back as a fuck you.

The doorbell rang, and Kurt checked his watch.

"That must be the landlady," he said, getting up.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to charge you for this," the landlady said as she inspected the lock of Kurt's apartment. "If you give someone a key without adding them to the lease, it's basically like losing it. Our insurance doesn't cover loss."

"I understand," Kurt said. "That's okay." He wouldn't be making that mistake again. He watched with a grim satisfaction as she picked her tools and started taking apart the lock to replace the cylinder. After this, the place was really his. No more Kurt-and-Blaine's...or The Andersons', as Blaine had suggested they'd call it after they got married.

Sebastian hung back a little awkwardly as the landlady changed the locks. He busied himself with folding up the laundry they'd done the night before.

Once the locks were changed the landlady stood up and handed Kurt a new set of keys. "Just you, then? Or do you need to add anyone else to the lease?" she asked, glancing not-so-subtly at Sebastian.

"Just me for now," Kurt said, offering Sebastian a bashful look. He wouldn't mind if Sebastian had a key, but he doubted his friend needed the responsibility of being on the lease.

Sebastian blushed a little too. The thought of living with Kurt, particularly after the last two weeks, was an appealing one. But as they weren't actually together it wasn't the time or the place to be making big steps like that.

"Alright then." She said picking up her toolbox. "Please try not to lose them, Mr Hummel."

"I won't," Kurt promised dutifully.

"I'll send you the bill for the new lock."

Kurt nodded and let her out. He looked at his new keys and let out a long sigh.

"Well...I got my own place," he said. "For the first time ever."

Sebastian smiled at him. "How does it feel?"

Kurt looked around. He had taken the opportunity to part with several pieces of furniture he had never liked in the first place, and the result was...daunting. The place looked empty, even though it still had plenty of stuff in it.
"Like a challenge," Kurt said honestly. His phone buzzed, and he checked it. "Oh! The delivery van with my new bed will be here soon." He looked at Sebastian hopefully. "I don't think they'll carry it up to the fourth floor, shall we go meet them downstairs?"

"Sure! But you’re not gonna do a Ross on me are you?" he asked, sticking his tongue between his teeth a little in a grin.

Kurt laughed. "Oh god, please don't. Rachel is always making Friends comparisons...it drives me mad. Of course, I am not even Ross...I'm Rachel."

He rolled his eyes.

"Though I guess I'd rather be her, actually." He shook his head to dispel the mental image. "Anyway, it's not assembled yet. It'll just be the planks and the headboard, and a rolled up mattress. I think the two of us can navigate it around the stairs without killing each other."

His own bed, with no memories. Kurt couldn't wait.

"I hate that your ‘friends’ always plopped you into the ‘girl’ role..." Sebastian said quietly. "I promise I won’t ever do that, okay?"

Kurt stared at him for a moment. "Thank you," he finally said. He wasn't sure why his heart suddenly felt heavy and light at the same time. There was nothing wrong with being a woman - but he identified as a man, and most of the time, the comparison was a misogynistic one designed to make him feel lesser.

His phone buzzed again, and it saved them from delving deeper. "Let's go get my bed, and the next time you see Nick and Tim, you can brag you were the first to see it," Kurt joked.

Sebastian laughed. "Is that a promise?"

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"Urgh, I hate this bed!" Alex exclaimed loudly. "And I hurt myself."

"That's because you're doing it wrong," Brody commented. "That's not supposed to go there."

"Oh yeah, then where would you put it, Mr Know-It-All?"

"I know where I'll put it soon if you don't stop-" Brody started.

"Guys!" Sebastian said, sighing and looking up from the instructions. "You put the side beams on the wrong way round, those holes are supposed to be on the inside, not the outside."

"That doesn’t make sense!" Alex said shaking his head.

"Who reads the instructions anyway?" Brody added.

"People who want to do it properly?" Sebastian suggested.

"We are men, we don’t need instructions." Alex said affirmatively.

"We do unless we want Kurt to come in here and find us still arguing over a fucking piece of wood two hours later..."

"Pretty sure he wouldn’t mind discussing a bit of wood with you," Alex said winking.
"Not cool, Alex!" Sebastian said frowning. "Now stop fucking around and let’s put the bed up so that Kurt has somewhere to sleep tonight!"

By the time Kurt, Alice and Steph came back from the second trip to the recycling centre, the bed frame was ready, and the guys were just lifting Kurt's new mattress into place.

"Hmmm...A spanking new bed filled with attractive boys," Alice said, grinning and cocking her head to check out Brody bending over it to tuck a fitted sheet over the corners. "What more do you want, Kurt?"

Kurt shook his head, but he was grinning as well. Their company had made this day bearable- and at times even fun. "Cheesecake," he replied. "There's a deli at the corner. One of us should go while I call Sam to come pick up Blaine's stuff."

"I'll go!" Alex said immediately. "I'm a cheesecake expert!"

"And I shall go with you." Steph said. "To make sure you don’t scarf the lot."

Alex rolled his eyes. "Honestly, it’s like you don’t trust me at all."

"We don’t," Alice said winking at her friend. "With food."

Alex huffed and stomped out of the apartment. Steph rolled her eyes and followed after him.

"Is there anything else you need us to do babe?" Sebastian asked, plumping up a pillow he’d just covered with a new sheet.

Kurt sighed and looked around. Like the living room, the bedroom looked empty, even though half of it was still filled with his stuff. But by now, Kurt could already see the possibilities; he could disassemble an entire closet to make the room look bigger...maybe put some kind of decoration on the wall...or he could go shopping and fill the closet with new clothes from winter clearance sales. Both options sounded pretty good.

"I think we got it for now," he said. "I'll send Sam a text."

A while later, they were sitting around the small coffee table, sharing a range of New York's finest cheesecake, and Kurt realised he was actually happy.

"Thank you all for this," he said. "It really means a lot to me."

He wanted to say more, but someone knocked on the door. "That'll be Sam, I guess," Kurt said, getting up. He smiled at Alex. "If you want more cheesecake, you'd better secure a piece now."

"Have you met this Sam before?" Alice asked Sebastian.

"I've not met him directly but he stole a trophy from us once..."

"He stole-"

"We stole it first...or rather, Hunter did."

"Maybe we should give Kurt some privacy?" Steph said. "He surely doesn’t want an audience."

They all agreed and got up from their seats, Alex swiping another slice of cheesecake. Sebastian
remained in his seat.

"I’m not going anywhere!" Sebastian said. "I wanna make sure this guy doesn’t try any funny business."

“Also check it’s not Blaine in a Sam mask!” Alex said enthusiastically, miming pulling off his face with a swooshing motion Mission Impossible-style.

Brody shook his head and headed into the bedroom. Steph took Alex’s hand and dragged him in too. Alice placed a hand on Sebastian’s shoulder and squeezed it before following her boyfriend and friends into Kurt’s bedroom.

"Sam was my friend long before I met Blaine," Kurt told Sebastian. "They brought out the worst in each other...but on his own, I always liked him."

He didn’t expect any trouble. Still, it was good to have Sebastian as back-up. The mask idea was ridiculous, but what if Sam actually brought Blaine?

Kurt opened the door. It was just Sam. He offered Kurt an apologetic smile.

"Hey," he said.

"Hey," Kurt replied. "Come in. I have everything packed, but there's cheesecake if you want."

Sam's eyes lit up. "Really? Awesome."

He stepped inside, then faltered. "Oh. Hi," he greeted Sebastian. "Um, I'm Sam." He walked up and held out his hand.

Sebastian stood up and shook Sam’s hand a little warily.

"Sebastian." It felt odd introducing himself to someone he felt like he knew, but they had never officially met.

"Sebastian...wait...Sebastian Smythe?" Sam said, a little taken aback. Now that he took Sebastian in a little, he could recognise him as the guy he’d seen from afar at school, though he did look very different with glasses on, and without his uniform.

"The one and only," Sebastian replied, pulling his hand away.

"You...still hang out?" Sam asked.

Kurt nodded. "We met again by chance a few months ago here in New York and have been hanging out ever since."

"Oh," Sam said, nodding a little. "Is it like a Warbler thing?"

Kurt looked at Sebastian and smiled warmly. "It's like a best friends thing."

Sebastian returned Kurt’s smile and moved to stand next to him.

"Kurt needs all the friends he can get right now," Sebastian said to Sam in a judging voice. "Since all of his other friends have abandoned him."

"Bas..." Kurt said quietly, but to his surprise, Sam cut in.
"You're right," he said. "I know I already told you a few times, but I really am sorry. Especially about L.A."

Kurt swallowed thickly.

Sebastian placed a hand on Kurt’s shoulder and glared at Sam. He was fed up of the New Directions causing Kurt pain - whether indirectly or not. Kurt had suffered enough.

"Do you know what exactly...I mean, how many..." Kurt closed his eyes and shook his head. "No, forget it."

"I only know of one guy," Sam said quietly. "He was, uh, a friend of Cooper's I think. At a party."

Kurt nodded. It didn't matter anymore, but not knowing haunted him. He still didn't understand how Sam could have been so gullible. What kind of a guy had he thought Kurt was, to let something like that slide? But Kurt knew the answer to that. The kind of guy who had let Eli C. slide as well. Kurt had given him precedence and Blaine had used it to his advantage. Kurt wondered what else Blaine had said about him, and to whom.

Sam looked from Kurt to Sebastian, and back at Kurt. Suddenly he seemed to connect a few more dots.

"On New Year's Eve... when we played that game...you defended Sebastian," he said. "Because you're friends."

Kurt crossed his arms. "Well, also because I am a decent human being, but yes. That, too."

Sebastian squeezed Kurt’s shoulder and looked at him, his heart rate quickening. 'You defended me to your friends?' he asked in French, touched at Kurt’s thoughtfulness.

'Of course I did,' Kurt replied, before switching back to English so Sam could understand. "It was a childish game. I wouldn't have wanted anyone to talk about me like that either."

Sam looked very uncomfortable. "It was just-

"A bit of fun, yeah," Kurt finished. "If I had a dollar for every time I heard that in school, I wouldn't need 2 jobs to pay my rent."

Suddenly, he didn't care if Sam understood him or not. He turned to Sebastian. 'Don't worry about it. They know nothing about you, and their opinions do not define you."

"Yeah," Sam agreed. "Uh, what he said. I hope."

Sebastian looked at Kurt with wide eyes.

'Thank you,' he said quietly. 'I don’t really care what they think about me, but thank you for having my back anyway."

"Uh guys?" Sam said awkwardly.

Kurt nodded briefly and then turned to Sam. "Have some cheesecake, Sam. I am not angry with you."

Sam sighed in relief and sat down on the sofa, helping himself to a large piece.

"So...where are you staying now?" Kurt asked carefully, sitting down as well.
"I'm staying with Artie," Sam said. "He told me to say he feels really bad too, about New Year's Eve."

Kurt nodded. "And are you still...hanging out with Blaine?"

Sam shrugged. "Not really. I mean, I hate that our whole club seems to be falling apart, but I don't know if I can believe anything he says anymore."

Kurt snorted. "Welcome to the club," he said softly. He hesitated for a moment.

"Do you know where he is now? I kind of expected him to be here today."

Sam suddenly looked very uncomfortable. "Well, when I texted him about where to bring his stuff, he wrote to bring it to Tina’s…but his facebook has him checked in at Cooper’s...in L.A." He gulped for air. "It could just be a family thing?"

"Yeah," Kurt mumbled. "It could be." But we all know it's not.

Sebastian moved to sit on the arm of the chair next to Kurt. Kurt may be ready to forgive Sam, but Sebastian wasn’t so sure...he didn’t understand how anyone could be so clueless.

Sam looked at Sebastian and noticed his protective stance. He was glad that Kurt had someone in his corner and was ashamed that he hadn’t done more. Kurt had helped him out so much in high school, and again after he had just come to New York, Sam felt awful for having turned his back on him.

"So...do you need any help sorting stuff out here?" Sam asked. Looking around, he noticed subtle differences already.

"I've had help, thanks," Kurt said. He nodded at the suitcase, the box and the Ikea bag. "That's for Blaine. The rest is gone. I had the lock replaced, so he can throw away his key, if he hasn't yet."

Sam winced, but nodded. It seemed harsh, but he did feel Blaine kind of deserved it.

"If you want," Kurt added, "You can tell him my friends wanted me to throw all of his stuff away." He looked up at Sebastian. None of them had said so, but he wasn't blind. "So this is my way of saying goodbye."

Sam swallowed the last of his cheesecake. He wanted to ask if this was a goodbye to him as well, but he didn't really dare.

"I'll let him know..." He stood up, trying not to drop crumbs of cheesecake base on the floor. "I really am sorry Kurt, for everything. I hope in time you can forgive me."

Kurt smiled softly and nodded. He didn't make any promises, but he knew he would. If anything, Sam had been just as taken in with Blaine as he was; and breaking up with him as a friend had probably hurt as well.

"Take care of yourself, Sam," he offered, and rose to bring him to the door. "Do you need help getting all of this down?" He nodded at Blaine's things.

Sam shook his head. He hauled the Ikea bag onto his back and put the box up on a table so he could grip it under one arm and take the suitcase in his other.

And that was it. All of Blaine's things would be gone.

"I'll keep an eye out for modelling jobs at Vogue," Kurt said.
"Really?" Sam asked, a little surprised. "That would be great! Thanks, Kurt."

Kurt shrugged and let him out. After closing the door, he let out a long breath. "Was that okay?" he asked Sebastian. "I kind of felt bad for him."

Sebastian got up and walked over to Kurt. "He seemed genuine enough..." Sebastian said quietly. "I still don’t trust him though."

"They're not all bad," Kurt said. "Selfish maybe, and a little clueless, but...I am not a completely bad judge of character."

"I know you’re not," Sebastian said quietly. "I didn’t mean it like that."

Kurt smiled at Sebastian. "Thank you, though."

He still couldn't really believe Sebastian genuinely had his back, no matter what.

The bedroom door opened and everyone tumbled out of the room.

"How do you feel?" Steph asked Kurt.

"Relieved," he said honestly. "For a moment I was afraid Blaine would come with him with some kind of serenade to sweep me off my feet." He straightened his back. "But I got my sweep guard." He winked at Sebastian.

"Always, babe."

Kurt felt his heart leap in his throat.

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But a while later, Kurt's own words still echoed in his head.

I was afraid Blaine would show up and try and sweep me off my feet.

A voice he could not drown out - not even with the tv show they were watching or Alex and Sebastian's constant commentary - would add: but he didn't come. Blaine just lay waste to the apartment until everything was used up or dirtied, and then left for LA's greener pastures.

If that didn't describe their relationship, Kurt wasn't sure what would.

Kurt tried to focus on the tv, but it was no use. His eyes were filling with tears. He wiped at them furtively.

Steph felt Kurt move next to her and glanced at him. She was startled to see tears running down his face.

"Kurt?" she asked softly, her heart breaking for him.

On Kurt's other side, Alice had turned to face him too. "Kurt, what is it?" she whispered, taking his hand.

"Nothing," Kurt said quickly. "I'm fine. This...this show, huh?" He blinked a few times and looked straight ahead at the screen.

Alice and Steph exchanged glances. "Do you want to turn it off?" Steph offered.
Kurt shook his head, not trusting his voice to speak.

Steph and Alice sat back, not sure if they should push or not. For a moment, none of them spoke.

Kurt tried hard to hold it back, but he couldn't. He curled into himself, covered his face with his hands, and started crying.

Simultaneously, Alice and Steph wrapped their arms around him. Steph slid one arm around his waist and her other hand curled around Kurt’s arm. Alice rubbed his shoulder and placed her other hand on his leg.

Kurt gave in to the need for comfort and slumped sideways, resting his head on Steph’s shoulder.

Steph nudged Alex gently where he was sat on the floor by her feet and he looked up. He quietly got the others’ attention.

Sebastian felt the colour drain from his face as they all gathered around Kurt. He wasn’t surprised that Kurt had finally cracked. He’d been half-expecting it all day. He longed to be the one to comfort Kurt, but the girls had it covered.

Brody reached for the control and switched the tv off.

"I'm sorry," Kurt hiccoughed, and sniffed. "It's just stupid. I'm being stupid."

"What? No, Kurt, you're allowed to be sad," Alice said softly. "You've been through a lot."

Kurt shook his head a little. "That's not why I'm sad," he confessed. "It's just...When Bas and I came here yesterday, I expected Blaine to be here. Then he wasn't...and I was sure he was going to show up today."

"Yeah, I'm disappointed we didn't get to kick his ass, too," Alex offered helpfully. "But we'll get him soon, with interest-"

"No," Kurt cut him off. "I just thought...I expected..." He broke off again and clasped his hand over his mouth. He was so embarrassed he wasn't sure he could tell them. He couldn't look Sebastian in the eye.

"He didn't even fight for me," he finally whispered, looking at the girls with a pleading look.

"Huh?" Alex let out.

Kurt shook his head again. He knew it was messed up. "I wouldn't have taken him back if he had! But for him to not even try..."

He let out a shuddering breath. "It feels like...I am not even worth the effort."

"Oh Kurt," Alice whispered back, tears in her own eyes. She couldn’t help but think back to Jeremy. "I’m so sorry."

She didn’t know what else to say. None of them did.

Steph closed her eyes and hugged Kurt closer, moving the hand that was on his arm to stroke his hair softly.

Alex’ fists were balled and he looked ready to head off to the airport. He gave Brody a helpless look.
Brody pressed his lips together and patted Alex’ arm. There was nothing they could do about Blaine right now.

Kurt took a few steadying breaths. "I guess the universe just wanted to send me another sign to prove that my life is not a fairy tale," he said softly. "Time to wake up, Kurt, and realise you’re not Meg Ryan."

Alex frowned and opened his mouth, but Brody shook his head.

"Kurt," Sebastian said brokenly, shuffling forwards to crouch in front of his friend. Brody and Alex subtly moved away and gave Sebastian the floor.

Steph and Alice remained seated but fell silent and allowed Sebastian to speak.

Sebastian placed his hands on Kurt’s knees and squeezed gently.

"Kurt," he started again. "He knows nothing. You are worth it. You are worth fighting for. And the fact that he doesn’t see that shows that he never deserved you."

Kurt bit his lip and nodded. He knew that was what you were supposed to say in situations like this. He also knew he was being melodramatic, and that he mattered; to his family, to his friends. But none of that helped.

The man whom he once considered the love of his life, and whose opinion used to matter to him above anyone else’s, by his iccold absence had made him feel worthless. It was not something that could easily be erased with kind words.

Kurt looked at Sebastian’s pained expression and knew it was his fault. 'I'm so sorry, Bas,' he offered softly in French, 'I'm trying, I really am.'

Sebastian longed to hold him and kiss the pain away, but that would not help anyone in this situation. Instead, he took both of Kurt’s hands in his and held them tightly.

"I want you to listen to me carefully, Kurt," he replied in English, wanting to make sure Kurt understood him. "This is not your fault. This is him, this is all him and the next time I see him he’d better watch it."

"Hear, hear!" Alex chimed in. Brody elbowed him.

"We are all here for you. We all want to help you heal. It’s not going to happen over night and none of us are expecting it to. I know it doesn’t feel like a lot right now, but we are here and we care about you."

"I know," Kurt replied, feeling hollow. He fixed his eyes on a blackened part of the wall behind Sebastian, where Blaine’s old standing lamp used to stand. Another stain he had left, Kurt thought bitterly.

"Maybe we should call it a night," he suggested carefully. He didn't want to hurt their feelings, but what he really wanted was for everyone to leave him alone so he could cry it out without feeling guilty.

Sebastian felt his heart sink. He didn’t want to leave Kurt on his own. He knew from personal experience that misery loved company, and he wanted to be there to support Kurt in his grief.

But he also knew his friend and would honour Kurt’s wishes if he wanted to be alone.
"We can leave," he said quietly. "If you want to be on your own?" He looked up at his friends helplessly.

"Yeah, let's go, it's been a long day," Alice agreed, making it sound like it was her idea so Kurt would feel less bad about it. Brody, Steph and Alex got up as well.

Kurt took a deep breath and had to hold himself back not to apologise again. He felt awful that their day had to end like this, but he couldn't hold the aching sadness at bay much longer. He just nodded at Sebastian, not for the first time wishing he could give him what he longed for.

Sebastian cast his eyes down for a moment before smiling sadly at Kurt and nodding. He let go of Kurt’s hands and stood up slowly.

"You know where I am if you need anything, right?" he asked quietly.

"I do," Kurt promised.

Alex looked like he was just as unwilling to leave as Sebastian was.

"Hey, uh... you know, it's my birthday in a couple of days...and uh...that new movie Focus looks pretty good. Wanna go see it?"

"Ugh," Steph and Alice groaned together.

"I was actually talking to the boys," Alex said, rolling his eyes and looking at the other three. "How about it, gentlemen? Fancy a guys’ night? I feel it is long overdue."

"Sounds great! I've been wanting to go see that," Brody agreed.

Sebastian nodded. "I'm in!" he said, then they all looked at Kurt.

Kurt blinked. "Me?"

"Yeah, you - you're a guy, right?" Alex said, reminding him of his own words from earlier.

"Yeah...yes!" Kurt stammered. "Ok, sure, I'd love to."

"Alright!!" Alex said happily. "It's gonna be awesome!"

At Alex’ enthusiasm at having him there, at guys’ night, a tiny crack in Kurt's heart healed over instantly.

Chapter End Notes

...Sorry to everyone rooting for a Big Confrontation...All we can say is: not yet?
The Winter Showcase

Chapter Summary

An important call, a surprise guest, an intruder, heart-eyes and a big round of applause.

The night of the Winter Showcase was finally upon them. Alice and Brody were the first of their friends to arrive. They had decided to go and see if there was anything Kurt needed and Brody used the time there to tell Alice more about the school.

"I can't believe you have your own gym," Alice mumbled, still in awe.

Brody shrugged. "It saves time. I think basically everyone at this school works out one way or the other, and having a place to do it at directly after class instead of having to go somewhere else is really practical. It's not free, though. You have to apply for membership and it gets added to your fees."

"And it's not open 24/7-" Kurt added, as he saw them arrive. "They kick you out at 11 pm." He hugged Alice in greeting.

"Still...No wonder you are all so fit." Alice smirked, as she released Kurt and took her boyfriend's arm. "And who trains after 11 anyway?"

"I used to, when I took evening shifts at the diner," Kurt said. "I got a membership at a place not far from my apartment that's open all night. But I cancelled it now." He sighed. "Quitting the diner was the right thing to do, but I really need to get a move on finding something new. My funds are running out."

Alice smiled. "Worry about that later! Tonight's your big night! The Winter Showcase! You should be focusing on that only!"

Contrary to her expectations, this didn't cheer Kurt up very much. "I wish I could," he said. "But my dad's in the hospital today, getting scans and talking about his remission." As he caught Alice's eye, he quickly added: "It's a routine check! Nothing happened. I'm just worried. And a little sad, I guess, because he can't be here tonight."

"We're here for you, man," Brody said. "Whatever you need."

Kurt smiled. "Thanks. Actually, I could really use some warm tea. I was going to bring a thermos, but I forgot."

"No problem," Brody said, looking pleased he could help. "I know a guy who knows a guy...I'll be right back."

He kissed Alice on the cheek and left for the NYADA cafeteria.

"Okay...we'll just...wait here, I guess," Alice said dryly at his retreating form.

Kurt smirked. "It's ok, I can take the tour from here. I also go to school here, you know."
Alice smiled and linked her arm through his.

"It is rather impressive." She said, looking up at the high vaulted ceilings. "The elite of the elite, us mere mortals could never match up." She smiled at him.

They walked on in an amicable silence for a couple of minutes, broken occasionally only for Kurt to point out a particular feature. They came to a halt outside a large dance studio and Alice looked around. With Brody out of earshot, she had a few minutes to discuss something with Kurt that she'd been meaning to for a while.

"Kurt?" she asked, looking up at him. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Um...sure," Kurt replied. He wondered if this was about him and Sebastian. Had he told her about their kiss? He probably had; but Alice didn't seem angry with him.

"I just wanted to say thank you, really..." she said nervously. "For not telling me about Brody's past upfront...if you had, I might not have given him a chance, you know?"

"Oh! Yes," Kurt let out, a little relieved. "No, of course. It was not my story to tell. I didn't even tell Bas."

Alice smiled at the little nickname Kurt used for Sebastian.

"Well, thank you. I'd never have gotten to know the wonderful man that he is otherwise...and I'm so glad I did."

She had been shocked when Brody had told her, but after thinking about it, she decided it didn't bother her.

"He's so amazing," she sighed with a little smile.

Kurt smiled. "So...are you two okay?"

Alice nodded. "He promised me he doesn't do that anymore and he got tested, so..."

Kurt bit his lip. He was really curious, but wasn't sure they were close enough to ask yet. He decided to go for it anyway.

"What's it like?"

Alice smirked at him. It wasn't like Kurt to ask for details...She liked this new single Kurt.

"Incredible," she said, slightly breathless. "He knows exactly what he's doing and isn't afraid to do it...honestly. He's only the second guy I've ever been with and while I always enjoyed sex...I never knew it could be this good."

Kurt felt his cheeks burn, but he'd gotten his answer. "Good for you," he said honestly.

He wondered what it would be like to sleep with someone other than Blaine. He'd thrown away a perfectly good chance at finding out. Maybe someday he might feel ready to open himself up to someone like that again.

"Maybe I should ask Brody for a referral," he joked, winking at her.

Alice smiled at him knowingly.
"I'm sure there is great love to come in your life Kurt, and it will come with all the benefits."

Kurt smirked. "What, no palm reading first?"

He was about to say something more when Brody caught up with them.

"Here you go," he said, handing Kurt a large tea to go. He glanced at his watch. "We've still got about half an hour before you’re expected backstage. Do you want me to help you warm up?"

Kurt couldn’t help himself. His mind was still at their previous topic, and one glance at Alice told him she was the same. He bit back on a reply of Santana-worthy epicness.

"Thanks, I’ll be ok. You just show Alice around a bit more."

Brody smiled and nodded. "Sure. Come on, Angel." He offered Alice his hand.

Alice kissed Kurt's cheek. "Break a leg!" she said, before taking Brody's hand and following him down the hall.

Kurt watched them go and smiled. They were good together. He was glad Alice knew about Brody's past and accepted him. It was one less worry he needed to have for his friends.

Other worries, however, were still there. He had told Alice and Brody his dad's check-up was just routine, but it was still scary. Kurt took out his phone. No new messages. He sighed, and went to the dressing rooms to do his vocal warm-ups.

-  

"Oh my god it is so cold!" Steph said, brushing snow out of her hair as they walked into the building.

She was wearing a pretty black and gold dress, good heels and her dark hair was swept to one side and curled so it fell over her shoulder in soft ringlets.

"New York in January Steph, it's not gonna be sunny," Alex said, rolling his eyes but continued to rub his hands up and down her arms over her coat to warm her up.

"There you guys are!" Alice said, walking towards them, Brody in tow.

"Sorry we're late," Alex said. "Someone couldn't decide what to wear." He nodded at Sebastian.

"Hey! It's Kurt's big night and I wanted to look good," Sebastian said, scowling.

"And you do, Seb," Alice assured him, for Brody's sake trying to minimise the heart eyes. Her friend really looked amazing.

"Yeah man, very nice," Brody agreed. He turned to Alice. "Hey, look, could you guys go up ahead and get us seats? I have to make a stop at the little boys' room before."

"Not that little," Alice replied, and winked. Brody blew her a kiss as he hurried towards the restrooms. Alice joined Steph's side, complimenting her on her outfit and admiring her hair.

"This is a really fancy place, huh?" Alex commented to Sebastian, looking around. "I guess now I feel underdressed after all." He was wearing a dark sweater and jeans; a step-up from his usual wear, but not really up to par with Sebastian's suit and tie.
"You look fine, Alex," Sebastian said, smiling at him. "At least you're not wearing that red hoodie."

"I love that hoodie." Alex replied.

"Yes, but a time and a place, Al."

"We should really get in there, guys," Alice said. "We don't wanna be stuck at the back."

They all agreed and followed Alice towards the hall.

- 

Brody walked out of the bathroom and headed back towards the hall. As he walked passed the front doors, he spotted someone that made his blood pressure rise and a sinking feeling erupt in his stomach.

"What the hell do you think you're doing here?" Brody asked Blaine.

"Me? I should ask you that, rent boy," Blaine replied, a wild and fierce look in his eyes. "I am on a mission of love. Today Kurt will come back to me. We are meant to be."

His stance was tense and defensive. His hands curled into fists. Nothing was going to stop him - nothing.

"I'm here to support my friend," Brody said, stepping in front of Blaine to block his entrance.


"Tonight is a very important night for him and there is no way I'm letting you ruin his chance to win this," Brody replied, ignoring Blaine's insinuations.

Blaine scoffed. "Kurt is getting the biggest prize of them all: me. Now let me in before I alert security."

Brody stood his ground, refusing to move.

"I think you need to calm down and stop trying to push your way in, before I call security. Tonight is by invitation only. You do not have a ticket nor is your name on the guest list. Now back off if you know what's good for you."

"How would you know who's on the list? Blaine snapped, "You're just a student. You can't stop me!"

Even if he wasn't on the list, Blaine mused, Kurt would change his mind once he heard the song Blaine had prepared for him.

This whole scene reminded him so much of Moulin Rouge; Christian was also stopped from entering the theatre, but then he pushed through and ran up to Satine on stage, and they sang *Come What May*, and Satine cried a lot and...well, she died. Of course that would be the wrong ending. In Blaine's version, Kurt would only cry, and then apologise and take him back. Yes. That was what was going to happen.

Blaine made an attempt to push Brody away, shoving him with all his might.

Brody merely laughed at Blaine's attempts to move him out of the way.
"You're not getting passed, hair gel boy," Brody said simply. "You threw away your chance to make up with Kurt. As I recall, you were off in LA partying after Kurt broke up with you. Do you really think he's just waiting around for you to realise you fucked up and want him back after all?"

"You know nothing about me! About us!" Blaine yelled angrily. "I was giving him time and space to get over it!"

"Oh, he got over you, alright," Brody replied. "Do you have any idea how many guys are just chomping at the bit to get a chance with him? And now that you're finally out of the picture, Kurt is starting to look around - and I think he likes what he's seeing."

"What are you saying?" Blaine asked. "Is he cheating on me?"

"You can't cheat on someone you're not in a relationship with," Brody replied smugly.
Even if Kurt wasn't seeing anyone right now, it wouldn't hurt for Blaine to realise how utterly replaceable he was.

"Are you fucking him?" Blaine hissed, narrowing his eyes.

People around them were starting to stare.

"Please," Brody replied. "You're embarrassing yourself in front of everyone. Just accept that Kurt broke up with you and has no intention of taking you back. You can stand there making insinuations as much as you want, but it's not going to work. I'm not telling you anything about Kurt's private life, because it's no longer your business, and there is no way in hell that I'm letting you get in."

Blaine felt his cheeks redden. This stupid jock was actually going to stop him? Too bad he didn't know Blaine had grounded his own Fight Club in Dalton. Balling his fist, he took a swing at Brody's face.

Brody saw what Blaine was going to do before he did it and stepped out of the way just in time.

Blaine had put so much force into his punch that the loss of his target caused him to stumble. He put his foot down to try and steady himself, but Brody shoulder-checked him, sending Blaine crashing to the ground.

The few people who had lingered to watch the exchange started laughing.

Blaine landed painfully on his ass, and flushed with humiliation. "You'll pay for this," he mumbled, scrambling to his feet. "This is not over."

Brody shook his head. Blaine sounded like a cartoon villain. In the real world, all Kurt would have to do was get a restraining order. Maybe he should suggest it to him. But not tonight. Kurt did not need to know for now. He had enough on his mind as it was, and this ludicrous display was hardly the chivalrous attempt to gain back his favour that Kurt had wished for.

Brody waited to make sure Blaine left the building, then quickly hurried inside and looked around for Alice and the others.

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Backstage, Kurt was starting to panic. It was ten minutes until show time and he'd still not heard from his dad. Things around him were starting to get hectic as nerves and tension rose in the performers, and it was doing nothing to stem his own anxiety.
Just as he was considering ringing his dad himself, his phone started vibrating. He answered it straight away.

“Dad?” he greeted urgently.

"Hey buddy, it's me. I'm okay," his dad reassured him, cutting straight to the chase.

Kurt let out a very deep sigh of relief and closed his eyes. "Oh, thank god..."

"Now listen up, you know I'm sorry I couldn't make it today-"

"Your health is more important than a showcase, dad," Kurt cut him off.

"No, hear me out," his dad insisted. "I didn't want you to be singing up there all by yourself, so I invited someone to come and see you for me."

Kurt felt like someone had just poured a slushy down the back of his shirt. Please, not Blaine, he begged silently, not again, dad. His ex-fiancé was the last person he wanted there tonight, not with Sebastian in the audience. Blaine might make a scene and ruin everything - and get Kurt kicked out of NYADA.

"So I got Mercedes a plane ticket-" his dad continued, and Kurt's spirits soared.

"Mercedes is here?!" he nearly yelled into the phone. He hadn't seen her in months. They'd talked on the phone, but it wasn't the same.

"Yeah, she should be. Last I heard she landed at JFK a couple of hours ago."

"Oh my god, dad, thank you. Thank you so much!"

Someone tapped Kurt's shoulder and signalled for him to hang up.

"I have to go, dad. I'm so glad you're ok. I'll call in the morning, okay?"

"Have a good time, son," Burt said. "And go win that thing."

Kurt said goodbye and hung up the phone, still grinning. He opened up a new message and sent a quick update to Sebastian.

To: P. Martini (20:13)

My dad's ok!! :D

Sebastian felt his phone vibrate in his pocket and pulled it out. He smiled at the message and sent a quick reply.

To Kurt (20:14)

Yay! :) That's such great news babe!

Everyone's here, we can't wait!! Go out and smash it xx

Kurt smiled warmly at the little x-es, butterflies swirling in his stomach. He couldn't believe he actually had five guests - six! if Mercedes had made it - who had come to see him. And more would have come, if he'd had more invitations. He looked at the message once more, then switched off his phone.
"Kurt's dad is okay," Sebastian announced to the group. They all cheered quietly in relief.

Just then Brody appeared, looking apologetic.

Alice narrowed her eyes. "What took you so long?" she whispered, taking her coat off the seat next to her to free it for Brody. "I was afraid you were gonna miss it!"

"I uh...had to put the trash out," Brody replied, sitting down next to her.

At her quizzical look he sighed, sliding his arm around her waist to pull her closer. "Blaine showed up, he was trying to gate crash," he whispered in her ear, not wanting any of the others to know just yet.

"Oh my god!" Alice let out. She kept her voice down and glanced at Sebastian and Alex. If they heard, she was pretty sure they’d go outside now and find him, and then someone might really miss Kurt’s show.

She kissed Brody's cheek. "Thanks. Sorry I was snappy with you."

Alex looked over to them, grinned, and put his arm around Steph as well. If PDAs were allowed at such a fancy place, he wanted some too. Steph looked amazing...

Steph smiled and leant into Alex's side a little.

Sebastian glanced at his friends. He was happy for them. They were all with people that they loved and it felt good to be surrounded by such good energy.

He couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to have someone to share such little moments with.

Just then the lights dimmed and a short black woman wearing a colourful dress and turban walked into the middle of the room.

"Who's she?" Steph whispered to Alice.

"The Dean of NYADA," Alice replied quietly.

They watched Madame Tibideaux hold her welcome speech, and then the first student was up. Every single one of them was more talented than the next. It was hard not to be impressed - or not to feel like your life up until then was not worthy.

"Who are these people..." Alex whispered in awe.

"Kurt's kind of people," Steph whispered back admiringly. "This is where he belongs."

Finally, it was time for Kurt's song. Alice wasn't sure if she only imagined it or not, but it was like the whole room sat up just that little bit straighter as he walked up.

"Oh my god, that suit is amazing," Steph mumbled. Kurt was wearing royal blue, and it stood out against all of the black and grey in the room.

Sebastian felt his insides melt into a puddle at the sight of Kurt walking out into the centre of the room. Steph was right, the suit was amazing, Kurt had tailored it perfectly to suit his build. But what got to him most of all was Kurt’s confidence. He knew at least a part of it was acted - Kurt had admitted he was often quite nervous when he sang and Sebastian remembered what it was like to walk onto a stage himself, too; it was like slipping into a role. But it looked so good on Kurt to see...
him own his talent and take up his rightful space in front of his audience like he had never done
anything else in his life.

Kurt looked out over the room. With all of his friends there, he no longer felt as nervous as the last
time he had sung at the Winter Showcase. Knowing he was actually admitted to NYADA helped
too, of course. He saw Mercedes in one of the front rows, beaming at him in a spectacular gold
sequined dress, and a little ways behind her, Sebastian and the others.

Sebastian saw Kurt glance their way and they made eye contact with each other. Sebastian grinned at
him and winked, nodding a little. You got this babe, he thought in his head.

Kurt gave him an excited smile before nodding at the rest of his audience in greeting.

"Hello, my name is Kurt Hummel. I am in my third year, and...by special request-" He glanced at
Steph and Alice, "I will be singing Memory from the musical Cats."

The girls smiled, and Steph took Alice's hand and squeezed it. Finally, they'd get to see it. They were
not disappointed. Kurt's angelic voice carried through the room enchanting everyone.

Sebastian couldn’t take his eyes off Kurt for the duration of the song. He wasn’t even sure if he
blinked. He’d seen Kurt sing many times in the previous months and had always been captivated.
But seeing him perform like this, in a place where he was celebrated and at home, was breathtaking.

As Kurt upped the volume for the song's climax, Alice just sat and stared. How could he just stand
there, hands clasped modestly in front of him like a school boy, and yet reach the high notes with
such power, seemingly effortlessly?

People were already rising from their seats on the last tones of the piano, and Kurt could see
Mercedes was one of the first. She was wiping at her eyes, careful not to smudge her make-up. Kurt
smiled, taking a small bow, and he made to leave the stage.

Madame Tibideaux walked up to him and gave a small shake of her head, demanding his presence.
Kurt swallowed, but froze in his steps.

"Thank you, Mister Hummel," she said. "Now, as most of you present here today know, I have been
in this profession for a long time. I was singing on Broadway before any of the performers on the
stage tonight were even born. I have heard my share of songs, seen dancers and performers of every
calibre, and I have seen original scores from many of the great writers of this age. What they all had
in common, even before winning Tonys and Oscars, was soul. What makes a good performance
great is complexity and depth; vulnerability. The time of slick, soulless routines is over. What we as
the audience wish to see is heart. We wish to be moved."

Kurt's smile faded. He had heard this speech before, shortly before Carmen Tibideauxs rejected his
second audition tape. Was this the part where she said, in front of all these people, that she had made
a mistake inviting him tonight, because in her opinion, he lacked all of these things?

"I think I speak for all of us here tonight, when I say that this last performance has moved us most of
all."

What?

Kurt blinked. The audience applauded. Someone whistled between their fingers from the audience,
and Kurt was pretty sure it was Alex.

"Which is why I would like to ask Mister Hummel to oblige us, and present, as an encore, his
songwriting project from the last semester." She turned to face him. "The orchestra has the sheet music."

"Um..." Kurt started. His eyes sought out Brody in the crowd, who nodded and gave him the thumbs up. "Okay," he mumbled, and nodded, his hair wobbling a little.

The audience applauded again and Kurt felt his cheeks redden. Why was she always putting him on the spot like this? Madame Tibideaux, he decided, was definitely evil. Still, he couldn't back out now.

He turned to the orchestra, nodded, and waited for the music to begin.

"You say you want the truth, but you can't take it... so I give you lies..."

Next to her, Alice could see Brody take a deep breath. He was focused on Kurt completely, and seemed to be in sync with him somehow. Then she remembered he had coached Kurt through this song for his project presentation. She smiled softly. He was so amazing, and it was all because of Kurt and Sebastian that she had found him.

As Kurt sang, Sebastian closed his eyes and let the music move through him. He felt a hand curl around his and looked down to see Steph's hand in his. She was reaching out over Alex's lap. She had tears in her eyes and a smile stretched across her face. He knew how she felt. This second performance was just as powerful as the first but there was a lot more control and technique to this. Brody really knew his stuff and together he and Kurt had turned the song into an anthem.

Sebastian and his friends were the first on their feet as the song drew to a close. Alex wolf-whistled again and Steph and Alice were jumping up and down, tears in both of their eyes.

As the song ended the rest of the room rose as one to applaud Kurt and god did Sebastian want to kiss him.

"Think we can safely say that Kurt just won this thing," Alex shouted over the crescendo.

"If he didn't I'm burning this place to the ground!" Sebastian shouted back.

Kurt clasped his hands over his mouth and nose as the applause went on and on, bowing his head a little to each side of the audience in turn.

Sebastian could tell that Kurt was moved by the response. With the song over, Kurt's stage persona had been pushed to the background again, and he simply waved modestly, looking overwhelmed. It was still difficult for Kurt, Sebastian knew, to see the effect he had on people...He placed the entire blame on Blaine and the New Directions for never giving him a chance to shine before. If it had been up to Sebastian, he would have given Kurt all the solos at every competition, ever.

As the applause finally died down, the lights in the room came back on, and Kurt looked around for his friends. He saw Sebastian again and forgot how to breathe for a moment. Now that he had risen from his seat, Kurt could see what he was wearing. He looked amazing. Kurt started towards him.

Then, in a rustle of golden sequins, Mercedes nearly bowled him over with a hug. Shaken from his trance, Kurt put his arms around his friend and hugged her back, the post-performance high starting to take hold. For a moment, they both just held each other, letting out very screechy high pitched noises. Finally, they managed to form actual words.

"Oh my god that was perfect-"
"I'm so glad you're here-"

"I can't believe you wrote a song!"

"That dress is a work of art!"

They talked swiftly and simultaneously, and yet somehow got everything across. Within seconds, they had exchanged more compliments than Kurt heard a month.

"Step aside everyone," Alex announced importantly, "best friends coming through! Yeah, that's right, we're Kurt Hummel's entourage."

A little taken aback, Mercedes let go of Kurt to look at the newcomers.

Sebastian seized the opportunity and pulled Kurt into a hug.

"Incredible!" he half-shouted over the noise. "That was incredible. And you look incredible. God I'm so proud of you."

Kurt let himself be hugged, still feeling overwhelmed. He moved back a little to look into Sebastian's eyes. "Thanks," he mumbled. He wanted to say a lot more.

How happy he was that Sebastian had been here to see it, how amazing it had felt to sing knowing they were all in the audience for him, and how breathtaking Sebastian looked in his suit, but no words seemed to want to roll off his lips. Just now, he had been ready to run into Sebastian's arms and kiss him, and, in his imagination, it had looked like Sebastian had wanted the same thing.

But then Mercedes had been there, giving him a much-needed wake-up call; this was not a movie, there were no slow-motion effects or crescendo of romantic music in the background, and a movie-kiss would not solve his issues. Thinking like that was what had kept him tethered to Blaine for so long.

"Hey, leave some for us," Alice said pleasantly, nudging Sebastian. She and Steph were beaming at Kurt, and as soon as Sebastian let go of him, Steph snatched him up in a hug.

"That was amazing, Kurt. You're brilliant."

"Yeah, that was really good," Brody said, clapping Kurt on the shoulder. "Even better than we practised."

"I guess Madame Tibideaux knows how to force my best performances out - by giving me zero time to over-think it," Kurt admitted.

"Well, whatever it was, it worked!" Alice said. "Honestly Kurt, you're amazing!"

Mercedes watched as this group of strangers engulfed Kurt with hugs and praise. They seemed to genuinely love him and Kurt was beaming at them all. It warmed Mercedes' heart to see Kurt so happy.

When she had heard how the New Directions had treated him she was livid. She'd been on tour and had been unable to make it down to New York to be with him. To see now that he wasn't alone made her feel better. Then she focused on the man who had hugged Kurt first. He looked familiar.

"Sebastian?" Mercedes said quietly next to him. "Is that really you?"

He looked so different, so mature - But it was him, Mercedes was sure of it. She didn't understand.
why he was there, or why Kurt had been hugging him, but it was very clear from Kurt's expression that he had really wanted to.

Sebastian offered Mercedes a small smile. "Yes, it's me," he said with a nod. "Mercedes, right?"

She nodded. Just Mercedes, she noticed. No insult, no taunt. No flying slushies.

"Mercedes, you know I told you I made some new friends?" Kurt said, smiling.

"Hmm-mmm," she replied, her eyes still on Sebastian.

"One of them is actually not that new...but he is, as a friend." Kurt took Sebastian's hand and squeezed it softly. "I ran into him again last year and it was...a game-changer." He looked at Sebastian. "And he came with three complimentary friends in tow," Kurt joked.

Sebastian squeezed Kurt's hand back and smiled at him.

"I'm Alice," Alice cut in, smirking. "Kurt has told us a lot about you, Mercedes. It's nice to finally meet you."

"I'm Steph." Steph held out her hand.

"And I am Alex, and will you guys finally move so I can get to my bro Kurt? You're hogging the star, here," Alex mumbled grumpily.

Everyone chuckled and made way for Alex. He swept Kurt up in a bear hug, being careful to not ruffle his clothes too much.

Mercedes watched the exchange, feeling warm inside. She shook herself a little when she realised she had ignored Alice and Steph.

"Hi!" She said with a smile. "It's nice to meet you too, thank you for taking care of my boy."

"We take care of each other," Steph said with a smile. "We're his fierce firsties gang! Even though we're now in our second year...so maybe we need a new name?" she added a little flustered.

Mercedes smiled. "He told me about you, too," she said fondly. She looked at the boys, who were standing around Kurt now, each telling him what parts of his performance they liked best.

"But I understand why he didn't tell me about Sebastian yet...it's kind of hard to believe if you've seen him in high school."

Alice swallowed, and her smile dimmed a little. "Seb told me. He's still very sorry about that."

Mercedes looked at Sebastian and Kurt. "I think we all grew up a little since then. If Kurt is happy, so am I." She smiled a little. "So...are they a couple?"

Steph and Alice looked at each other and then glanced at Kurt and Sebastian. They were holding hands again.

"No," Steph said quietly. "Not...yet."

"It's complicated," Alice said. "They've both been through a lot."

Mercedes looked at the two boys.
Mercedes sighed. "I know; well, Kurt's side anyway."

"We are so going out to celebra-" Alex announced, but faltered as someone came their way.

"Mr Hummel."

Alex was cut off by Madame Tibideaux, who had made her way through the crowd towards their group.

Kurt braced himself once again. Her face gave away nothing, so he let his own expression go blank as well.

"Thank you for that outstanding performance," Madame Tibideaux said simply, "and for obliging me with the encore of your own material."

"Um, thank *you* for giving me the opportunity," Kurt let out.

"When you are finished here," Madame Tibideaux continued, "and you may take your time, of course-". She smiled benevolently at his friends, "I would like to introduce you to a few of my guests. Please join me whenever you are ready."

She was about to turn around, when Alex stopped her.

"Wait! So...did he win? Did Kurt win this thing?"

Kurt half-expected Alex to mention the chocolate factory again, but he didn’t.

"Yes, he did, Mr. ...?" Madame Tibideaux replied.

"Uh, Hartline. Alexander Hartline." He straightened his back a little as he said it.

"Well, Mr. Hartline, you can rest assured that Mr. Hummel won this Showcase, and as such will reap the benefits."

Alex grinned. "Nice. Just wanted to make sure."

Madame Tibideaux nodded and walked away.

"Oh my god, Kurt!!" Steph squeaked. "You won!!!"

Sebastian watched the stunned look on Kurt's face as it sunk in and felt his heart swell with pride.

"Dude," Brody said squeezing Kurt's shoulder. "You should follow her!" Everyone else nodded and voiced their agreement.

"Give him a minute," Sebastian said gently.

Kurt tried to wrap his head around what just happened. Madame Tibideaux had thanked him. No comments, no pointers, no ‘...but’. And he had won - years after Rachel, which she would probably always rub in his face, but still. He had won, with his own song, and now Madame Tibideaux was going to allow him to network her contacts.

Was he dreaming?

But his friends were all beaming at him, and he was sure he couldn’t have dreamed up Sebastian looking *this* handsome...it had to be real.
He looked at the retreating form of Madame Tibideaux and hesitated. His friends had all come to support him and he was loathe to leave them. He didn't want them to think he was ungrateful.

"Why don't we just go somewhere and have a drink?" he suggested.

"Dude..." Alex began shaking his head and Sebastian stepped in.

"This is your night babe," he smiled. "You earned this, go and bask, we'll wait."

The others all nodded. "And then we will go get drinks!" Brody promised him.

"He's right," Mercedes added. "This is your chance. You earned it."

Looking from Sebastian's determined eyes to Mercedes', Kurt knew they were right. He lifted his chin and nodded. "Wish me luck," he mumbled, and went to see Madame Tibideaux.

When he was out of earshot, Mercedes mustered Sebastian thoughtfully. "We are a long way from Ohio, aren't we?" she mused.

Alex frowned. "It's not that far, Alice's folks live in..." he trailed off when no one paid him any attention.

Sebastian half smiled. "I never liked it much anyway."

"Neither did Kurt," Mercedes replied, smiling. It was clear he had changed, and if that was enough for Kurt it was enough for her, too.

"I heard you were on tour?" Brody asked conversationally. He'd never met her, but Rachel had always talked about Mercedes with that special tone she reserved for people she envied, and Kurt had mentioned her often as well (though more respectfully).

"I was, yes. Testing material for an album," Mercedes replied modestly. "It went pretty well so we'll start work in the studio soon."

"That's amazing! What's LA like?" Alice asked.

"Do you have a pool?" Alex asked eagerly.

Mercedes frowned a little at Alex. She couldn't quite make him out yet, but he did seem to love Kurt. In fact, they all seemed to love Kurt and accepted him period. No questions asked.

It warmed her heart to see Kurt finally surrounded by people that cared for him.

"LA is amazing," she replied. "And no, I don't have a pool."

"Aww damn, I thought everyone in LA did."

"Only those that have the money. Singing back up and recording demos doesn't really pay the big bucks," Mercedes said kindly. "But I'll get there one day."

"Maybe you should record something with Kurt," Alex suggested.

Mercedes smiled. She remembered how wonderful it had been to sing with him in Glee club, the few times Mr Schue let them.

"That would be great," she agreed. "He's so talented. I always knew he'd kill it at NYADA. Though
I wasn't surprised he got in at Vogue either."

"Kurt can do anything," Steph said.

Mercedes looked over to where Kurt stood. "Yes...yes, he can."

They stood around chatting for a while as Kurt was introduced to several influential people in the theatre scene.

Sebastian couldn't help but watch with pride.

Eventually Kurt was released from the group and they watched as he floated back towards them, a stunned look on his face.

“So?” Sebastian asked grinning.

"So..." Kurt echoed, looking around at his friends with a gleam in his eyes, "Don't look now, but that elderly gentleman in the red tux, and the guy that looks a bit like the vampire dad from Twilight... they are Sidney Green and Rupert Campion, a Broadway producer and director looking around for new talent. They were going to do a revival of Funny Girl, but they've been casting for months and couldn't find anyone to play Fanny, and then the investors dropped off. And now they are scouting for a Broadway version of Les Liaisons dangereuses... and asked if I would be interested. I played it cool, of course."

Kurt paused for dramatic tension. "And then I said yes, yes, yes and I may have begun gushing about all of Campion's previous work, until Madame Tibideaux saved me and introduced me to a few other producers and scouts." He grinned and fanned himself with his hand. "No concrete offers but they all did promise to keep me in mind if something came up in the future."

"That's my boy!" Alex let out. "High five!"

Kurt smirked and slapped Alex' hand. Then he looked at Mercedes. "I told them I had good connections for female leads as well," he said.

Mercedes grinned at him and rolled her eyes. "Can't you just think of yourself for once?" But she kissed him on the cheek and hugged him. "I'm proud of you, baby," she said.

“Does that mean you're going to forget about us when you're a big Broadway star?” Alice said, though she was smiling.

"Of course not, Alice," Kurt said airily, "I'd need someone to answer my fan mail and to hold my man-purse." He winked at Sebastian. "That's where you come in."

"Is that gay slang for something?” Alex whispered in Brody's ear.

"Why are you asking me?" Brody replied.

“Only if you provide us with an encore!” Sebastian said, winking back.

“Have I ever said no to that?” Kurt asked rhetorically.

He sighed happily. "I have done my duty for tonight, and now I want to party," he announced. "Callbacks?"

He offered Mercedes his arm.
"Is that the karaoke bar?" she asked. Kurt nodded.

"Count me in! My flight isn’t until tomorrow morning."

A little while later the group walked through the doors of Callbacks and they were met with cheers and applause. Word had spread quickly that Kurt had won and everyone wanted to congratulate him.

"Baby, you're like a celebrity." Mercedes beamed. She was so happy for him.

"Come on guys, let's grab a table before they all go!" Alex said heading towards a large table near the stage. "We might need to put a couple together."

"I'll help!" Sebastian said, following Alex over.

As soon as he was out of earshot Mercedes turned to Kurt.

"Okay, you have five seconds to explain how you failed to mention that the Bas you've been telling me about for months is Sebastian Smythe," she said. "And also, how you forgot to tell me how hot he is."

Kurt glanced at Sebastian, then looked back at her. "I didn't want you to worry," he said quickly. "He's changed, Mercedes. He's like a whole different person. Or maybe he always was like this underneath and just didn't give anyone a chance to find out."

Mercedes was connecting the dots between what he had told her about his new friends, and the knowledge who his friend actually was. "Yeah, I guess if you told me you were staying at Sebastian's after your break-up, I really would have worried," she admitted. "He didn't...try anything funny, did he?"

Kurt blushed. "Absolutely not. I'm afraid I tried something... but he was a complete gentleman about it."

"Oh boy, the things you get up to without me in the Big Apple..." Mercedes mumbled, shaking her head. "But as long as you're happy..."

"I am," Kurt confirmed. "I mean, I just won the Winter Showcase...what more could I possibly want?"

"Well," Alice started suggestively, but Kurt silenced her with a look.

Mercedes looked between the two of them. She couldn't help the flash of jealousy she felt at seeing these other people share inside jokes with her best friend. She wouldn't begrudge them though. Kurt deserved all the happiness in the world.

Sebastian and Alex finished putting the tables together and everyone filtered in around them. Sebastian found himself between Kurt and Steph.

"Drinks!?" Alex said and everyone shouted their orders to him.

"I'll help," Brody said as Alex looked a little worried.

"Kurt introduced me to Brody," Alice said with a fond look as she watched Alex and Brody head to
the bar. "I knew it was a good call, since he'd already seen him naked." She winked.

Kurt shook his head. "I'll explain later," he promised Mercedes. "You're staying at my place, right?"

Mercedes beamed. "I was gonna check into a hotel but-

"Yes, Maison Hummel," Kurt joked. "four star meals, the fluffiest towels, the latest gossip and optional makeovers on the house."

"You had me at fluffiest towels," Mercedes replied, "But I'd take a makeover any day."

Kurt hopped up and down in his seat and made a soft squeaky noise.

"Ow, can we come too?" Steph asked longingly.

"Hell yes! I want a makeover too!" Alice said.

"You don't need one, Angel," Brody said, heading back to the table. "You're perfect the way you are." He kissed her cheek. "And they don't have any of that disgusting lemonade you like, what would you like instead?"

"It's not disgusting, it's delicio-"

"It's disgusting!!!" everyone but Mercedes chorused.

Alice slouched a little and rolled her eyes. "Surprise me."

Brody grinned and headed back to the bar.

"So, what's this about you handing out makeovers left, right and centre, babe? We've been friends for almost a year and I've still not seen the Vogue Vault." Sebastian winked at Kurt playfully.

Kurt looked back at Sebastian and smiled. "The way you look tonight, you don't need one either."

He seemed to realise what he'd implied and quickly turned to the girls. "Neither do you, of course!" he hurriedly added, and Mercedes chuckled.

She was definitely seeing heart-eyes on her best friend, and hopefully, a girly night was just the thing to find out what exactly was going on there.

"Okay, so no one said anything about my outfit yet and I must say, I'm disappointed," Alex stated, preening a little, until Steph took his face between her hands and kissed him. As the kiss drew on, the others started cheering, and Brody whistled between his teeth as he came back.

Kurt rested his head on Mercedes shoulder. "They're nerds, but they're my nerds," he said softly. "Can I keep them?"

Mercedes smirked. "I think so. They seem nice. I'm happy for you, Kurt."

Alex and Steph broke apart, a little red faced and breathless.

"Thank you for coming up for air!" Sebastian said, reaching over to straighten a strand of Steph's hair.

"Aww, come on Seb, you're just j-" Steph put her hand over Alex's mouth and looked at him in a don't ruin the moment kind of way.
The atmosphere got a little awkward for a moment. Mercedes saw Sebastian and Kurt both freeze and glance at each other a little shyly. *Ah...Kurt's not the only one with heart-eyes*, Mercedes realised.

"Alright, what does a girl have to do to sing in this place?" she asked, trying to break the tension.

"I'll introduce you to Pascal," Kurt offered hurriedly, and got up.

When they returned, the awkwardness was already forgotten, and Kurt sat back down next to Sebastian. Brody got up to use the restroom.

"You're in," Kurt said happily. "You, me, Mercedes - after her solo. It's gonna be great."

Sebastian grinned at Kurt. "So what are we singing?" he asked, leaning in a little so he didn't have to shout.

"The Lumineers," Kurt replied. "Mercedes picked it. You know, that...ho! hey! song. Pascal said he got the chords and a guitar, so...we'll bring the house down."

"Oh yeah, I like that song," Sebastian said, smiling.

Alice watched them and nudged Mercedes. "I have to go to the bathroom. Anyone?"

Mercedes nodded.

"Me too!" Steph said right away.

Alex rolled his eyes. "What is it with girls and going to pee in throngs? Do you, like-" He stopped as he caught Steph's look and he glanced at Kurt and Sebastian. "Yeah, I gotta pee too. Not at the ladies'. Just...gonna go. *Not* to meet up with Brody." He got up.

Sebastian barely noticed their friends leaving. He turned on his stool to face Kurt. "I know I already said it...but you were incredible tonight, Kurt."

"I don't mind hearing it another time," Kurt said honestly. His smile wavered a little. "It makes a nice change from getting 'constructive' criticism-" he made air-quotes with his hands, "from Blaine after every performance." He took up his drink and sipped it.

"And I'm not done being incredible, anyway. We still have songs coming up. The night is young!"

"I'll drink to that!" Sebastian replied.

If someone were to ask him, he'd say Kurt Hummel didn't have it in him to be done being incredible.
Kurt's Turn

Chapter Summary

Everything's coming up Hummel.

Kurt sat at his desk at Vogue, drawing little stick men in fabulous jackets in the margin of his notebook. He had so much to do he was loathe to start. It made him feel a little down and counter-productive, but he had promised himself he'd start soon. He looked at the stack of magazines he'd have to scan and digitalise for Isabelle's files and sighed.

Wanting to delay work just a little longer, he took out his phone and looked at the selfies from the night of the Showcase. He smiled as he looked at one of him and Mercedes on his couch, in facial masks and pjs.

-[3 nights earlier] -

It was late by the time they got back to Kurt’s. They’d stayed at Callbacks until closing time; singing, dancing and drinking.

A lot of the time Mercedes had been content to sit back and watch as Kurt interacted with his little group of friends. The girls were clearly in love with him and in complete awe of his talent, and the boys all respected him and welcomed him in as one of them - in a way that the glee guys never had.

The thing Mercedes had watched most of all, was the way Kurt and Sebastian interacted with each other.

They seemed to gravitate towards each other, even while in separate conversations or across the dance floor; it was like there was an invisible tether between them.

She couldn’t wait to get the details.

They stood in the little kitchen of Kurt’s apartment while Kurt made them tea and she noticed a photo of their group, taken in summer, the Coney Island sign in the background. She smiled.

Kurt followed her eyes to the Coney Island selfie. “That was the day we really started to open up to each other,” he said quietly. “I unintentionally hurt him, and it led to us to talk. We shared our scars and it brought us closer...” He paused. "Sebastian had a really rough time back in school, more than he let on. It was why he behaved the way he did. But he takes full responsibility for his actions, and he has apologised several times.”

Mercedes smiled warmly. "They do say to forgive is divine..." She hesitated. "I think...from what I saw...you could make a good couple."

Kurt swallowed and bit his lip. "I think I have too much baggage for that," he confessed. "I still...hurt."

Mercedes walked over to him and smiled sadly. "I know. I swear to god if I ever see Blaine again–" she cut off and shook her head. “I am so sorry that I wasn’t here when everything went down with him. But I’m glad you weren’t alone."
"Thanks." Kurt smiled a thin-lipped smile. "They were a lot more supportive than I deserved, holding on as long as I did," he said. "Alex already told me to dump Blaine last summer."

He shrugged awkwardly. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you about all that stuff. It was hard, on the phone. I rather just listened to your stories about life on the road."

Her smiled dimmed. It had hurt, knowing that all the time she’d been gushing about her life, Kurt had been struggling in his own. Even now she could see the damage that Blaine had inflicted on Kurt.

"I understand why you didn’t, but I really wish you had...I’m always there for you Kurt, you’re my best friend."

"I know. I'm sorry. It won't happen again." He looked at her and offered her a smile. "I'm fine," he assured her.

"It better not!" She said pointing her finger at him. But she smiled and leaned her head on his shoulder. "I forgive you."

They picked up their tea mugs and carried them out into the living room.

"So, how do you feel about him? You know...in time...could you see yourself falling for him? Because damn he is fine, I never noticed it before..."

"Mmm-mmm." Kurt settled on the couch, taking his time to straighten one of the pillows and pluck invisible lint off it.

"I really like him," he said finally. "He's my best friend in the way I always hoped Blaine would be. He’s funny, and sweet, and considerate. And he speaks French, Mercedes. It's so hot."

Mercedes smiled. "He used to live there, didn’t he?"

"Yes. For nearly fourteen years," Kurt confirmed. "He's more French than American, really. You should see how he is about cheese." He chuckled.

"Worse than you?" Mercedes teased.


Mercedes smiled. He had it bad, she thought to herself. She bit her lip, hesitating. Finally, her curiosity got the better of her.

"At Callbacks, you said something almost happened between you and Sebastian, but that he was a gentleman about it?"

"Yeah.” Kurt quickly filled her in on the events of that fateful night, and the following morning, after he had officially broken up with Blaine. He shook his head a little. "He said he just wants to be around me and be my friend, even if it never becomes more-" Kurt finished. "It must be frustrating for him. I remember what that was like."

"So do I," Mercedes replied, winking at him.

Kurt blushed. "I still feel bad about that. I honestly didn’t know!"
Mercedes chuckled. "I know that. It wasn't your fault."

Kurt thought about their high school days. The thought that a girl might fall in love with him had been so foreign he hadn't noticed Mercedes' crush on him until she crushed his windshield.

"Facial next?" he suggested. Their past was settled between them with nothing but love. "We can put some Grey's Anatomy on while it dries, I have Sebastian's box set here."

"Sounds perfect. Popcorn?"

"Definitely."

--

Kurt smiled. It had been so good seeing her again. He sighed. He really needed to stop procrastinating and get some work done.

Just then, his phone rang. It was an unfamiliar number. Kurt looked around. The office was quiet.

"Kurt Hummel," he said, picking up and hoping he sounded confident.

"Hi Kurt? It's Joe...from Satire, are you free to talk?"

"Oh! Hi!" Kurt replied, a little surprised. "Yes. Yes, I am!" He looked around again, but even if someone overheard him, they could hardly blame him for interviewing for a paying job during an unpaid internship. He had handed in his written application with Marc a few days ago. He hadn't really expected a call this soon, but the sooner the better, because he'd really need a new job soon to pay his rent.

"Great!" Joe replied. "Listen, I've got your application form here and I have it on good authority from Marc and Sebastian that you're a natural...are you free this afternoon to come down and have a chat?"

"I am!" Kurt said eagerly. "Uh, I am free, I mean. I'm not sure I'm a natural, but Sebastian has been teaching me, and I do have some experience from the diner, and-" Kurt stopped himself and took a deep breath. "Yes. I can come down."

Joe chuckled a little. "Brilliant, shall we say three-thirty?"

"Perfect. Thank you so much."

Joe said goodbye and hung up, and Kurt sat staring at his phone for a moment, just grinning. Then, he sent a text to Sebastian. Almost right away, his phone rang. Assuming it was his friend, he picked up jovially.

"Hello future colleague!" he said cheerfully.

"Oh umm...hi," a nervous female voice said down the phone. "Is that K-Kurt Hummel?"

"Oh, I’m sorry! Yes! Yes, this is Kurt Hummel! I’m so sorry, I was expecting someone else!" Kurt hurriedly said.

The girl sighed in relief and spoke with a surer voice. "Great! Sorry I thought I’d got the wrong number. My name is Amanda and I’m calling on behalf of Roland Cartwright. He says you met at your Winter Showcase performance and he would like to speak to you regarding the position of Willy Wonka in his Off Broadway production."
"Um, really?" Kurt stammered, before shaking his head. He forced himself to envision a confident star actor taking a phone call from his agent. It helped; his body relaxed and he put on a cocky smile - not that they could see it on the other side. "I mean, sure. Should I prepare an audition?"

"No no...he wants you to come and read for the part, you’ll be given the script when you get here...He was very adamant that I convince you to come."

Kurt swallowed. "Could you give me some details on the production?"

As Amanda rattled of dates, theatre, cast-size, production budget and wages, it hit home for Kurt. This wasn't a shot in the dark for them. They weren't inviting just anyone here - they wanted him, based on what they had seen at NYADA - He remembered meeting Roland after the show, he had been one of the directors that promised to keep him in mind. He had never expected anyone to actually honor that. The show would run for 4 days and 5 showings before moving to another town with a local cast. He'd have a few weeks to prepare and for those 4 days would earn roughly what he used to make at the diner in a month.

"Okay, I'll do it," he said, and they made an appointment. Just as he hung up the phone, Isabelle and Chase walked into the office.

"What a day. I have a conference call with Lagerfeld at twelve and then lunch with Fiona at one and at some point I need to speak to Tristan but maybe Kurt can...Oh Kurt! Do you think you could..." Isabelle said, cutting off mid-sentence at the sight of her assistant.

"What’s wrong? You look like you’ve seen a ghost."

Kurt looked down on the phone in his hand and then back up at them. "I, uh...just got offered a job. Two jobs, actually." His head was still spinning.

Chase raised his eyebrows. "We were down at 6th for like, twenty minutes and you get two job offers?" He looked at Isabelle. "I told you we should have made him come with us!"

Isabelle stared at him for a moment as Kurt’s words sunk in.

"Kurt, you can’t leave me!" she wailed, pushing the papers in her hands into Chase’s chest. She hurried forwards to Kurt’s desk and grabbed his hand.

"You’re the best intern I’ve ever had! What am I going to do without you? Oh god, what do you want? Money? I know we don’t pay you and I feel awful about that. I can speak to legal again and try to get you a contract...Give me another chance, please, just..." she broke off, her eyes wildly looking around as if she could pull something out of thin air that would make him stay.

Kurt listened to her ramble for a moment and then decided to end her misery. "One of them is a night shift and the other's just for a week...if I even get it," he said, patting her hand gently. "I can still come here."

He glanced at Chase and smirked. "Though if it helps negotiations with legal, I can officially threaten to leave so you can offer me a contract..."

Chase sighed in relief. "I thought you were going to leave me here alone with the girls," he said, winking.

Isabelle sat down in a chair next to Kurt’s desk fanning herself with her hand. "Oh god Kurt, don’t do that to me!"
Kurt grinned. "Sorry, I only just got the news myself. I didn’t have time to process it yet."

Mainly to calm himself down, he filled them in on both of his possible new jobs.

"Can you believe it?" he asked. "My first show!"

Chase shook his head. "No, sorry, I’m still at the first one...you’re going to be a flaitender at Satire?" He was looking at Kurt as if he’d just revealed he was setting up a kissing booth.

As Isabelle calmed down and listened to Kurt, she couldn’t help the surge of pride that rose inside her.

"Oh Kurt, this is amazing! And so well-deserved! You have to tell us when the show is! We’ll be there in the front row cheering you on!"

"I will," Kurt said happily. His phone buzzed again. This time it was really Sebastian.

"Can I? It’s not a third offer, I promise," Kurt said, holding up his phone to show the picture of Sebastian that lit up.

Isabelle smiled. "Of course. Come on Chase, I need you to help me wrangle legal. I hate that it’s so, but those guys down there only take me seriously if I’ve got a man backing me up."

Chase rolled his eyes. "I know. They’re awful."

He grinned at Kurt. "We’ll get you a good deal. Say hi from me," he added in a whisper, nodding at Kurt’s phone and winking.

Kurt blushed and picked up his phone. "Bas? You won’t believe who else just called..."
The Rookie

Chapter Summary

Kurt starts his first night as Sebastian's trainee at Satire

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was Tuesday evening and as per the norm, Satire was quiet. Sebastian and Marc were the only bartenders on shift and in amongst serving patrons, they busied themselves with restocking the fridges.

It was Kurt’s first night at Satire and Sebastian’s first night as a full member of staff. The fact that Marc and Joe trusted him enough to promote him while he was still underage meant a lot to him. It was another stitch over the hole that had been left inside him after his exile, and he couldn’t wait to prove to them both that their trust was justified.

Sebastian was knelt on the floor, stacking a mixture of vibrantly coloured alcopops into the fridge that ran along the back wall under the bar. He didn’t understand how anyone could stand to drink the stuff. They were almost as awful as Alice’s bionade, and yet they were surprisingly popular.

Kurt approached the club, greeting Terry with a smile.

"Welcome to the team, kid," Terry said happily.

"Thanks," Kurt replied. "I’m happy to be here."

"Thanks," Kurt replied. "I’m happy to be here."

Terry let Kurt through, and he made his way to the bar. Kurt looked down on his outfit once more, hoping he would fit in. The other bartenders all seemed to have their own personal style, so Kurt had chosen something distinct for himself as well; a short sleeve, patterned dress shirt from Alexander McQueen and a red tie. Maybe it would help patrons recognise him and, maybe, head in his direction if they wanted to order. He shook his head at his own fantasies. He knew he was still a long way from acquiring regulars. Still, it never hurt to have a goal.

After some negotiations about hours and wages, Kurt and Joe had agreed on a trial month, during which Kurt would wait tables in peak times and learn the basics of bartending on the slow days. Kurt looked forward to the change in scenery and patrons. He had already started practising with his empty bottles at home again, and tonight, he would start with cocktail mixing.

Kurt didn’t see Sebastian yet, but it was still early. He caught Marc’s eye and waved nervously. Marc smiled and nodded his head to the floor. Kurt was confused for a moment, until he heard the chinking of glass bottles. He put his hands on the bar and leant over it a little.

"Hey," Kurt greeted Sebastian. "I am ready to learn the Triple Orgasm."

Sebastian almost dropped the bottle he was holding. He put it away and stood up, dusting himself off in an attempt to hide his blunder. Once he had composed himself, he turned to Kurt with a leer. "Bit ambitious, babe," he said with a wink. "Don’t want to tire you out too early."
"Oh, I have amazing stamina," Kurt replied cheerfully. He peered over the bar. "Shall I help you with that?"

Sebastian grinned at him and looked down at the half empty crate.

"No it’s okay," he said. "Marc’s going to talk you through the official stuff and then we’ll get you started on learning the layout of the club and its bars."

Sebastian nodded at Marc, who put down the bar towel he had been cleaning with. "Alright. If you follow me into the office, the boring bit doesn’t take long and then I’ll hand you back over to Seb here."

Kurt smiled at him and did as he was asked.

As they walked away, Sebastian looked after them for a moment. He hoped working with Kurt wouldn’t be too distracting. He didn’t want Joe to think he’d made the wrong decision promoting him.

Marc had been right, the talk - which was mostly covering the staff rules and fire procedure - didn’t take long and soon after Kurt found himself following Sebastian and Marc around dutifully as they showed him around the club. Though he knew most of the place already; the office and the staff room were new to him, and he also hadn’t been in the smaller club room often, as it was usually booked privately. Sebastian showed him how the intercom worked and where the panic buttons were located.

"Panic buttons? Have you ever used those?" Kurt asked, eying the switch.

"Maybe three, four times in my time here," Marc said. "Most of the time it’s enough just to call in a bouncer."

Kurt swallowed and nodded. Up until now, he hadn’t considered why a place that was open until the early morning selling high-percentage alcohol needed more security measures than a broadway fan diner.

Marc caught the look on Kurt’s face. "We honestly very rarely need to use them," he said, trying to reassure him.

Kurt smiled. "I got you guys too, right?" he joked nervously.

"No one mans the bar alone, Joe’s rules," Marc agreed. "Especially not as a trainee."

He grinned at Sebastian. "Right, Seb?"

Sebastian grinned. "Right. The only bar that gets manned on its own is bar two, and that’s only ever Danny or Marc, the rest of us work out here."

Kurt smiled a bit more at that. He was one step closer to his original vision from way back when they had just met: him and Sebastian behind the bar together, juggling bottles and wooing the club’s patrons. He would practise every day from now on to make that a reality soon.

"Right, well, maybe we’ll get you an apron and you can try your hand at our basic cocktails," Marc said. He looked at Sebastian. "Start him on something easy, okay? And call me when you think I can try one without being poisoned." He winked at Kurt.

Sebastian picked up the apron he’d taken for Kurt out of the clean laundry at the beginning of the
evening and handed it to him. “I think the safest option to start with is a Cosmopolitan.”

He picked up a martini glass with a long stem and handed it to Kurt. “Fill that with ice,” he instructed nodding to the crushed ice bucket behind the counter. “It cools the glass down if it’s just come out of the dishwasher.”


Sebastian watched as Kurt acquainted himself with the layout of the bar and started pulling the various bottles out that he’d need to show Kurt the basics.

"Don’t worry too much about being fancy with the mixing!” he said, as he started guiding Kurt through making his first drink. "That’ll come with time. The important thing is getting the quantities right so it tastes good...flairs will come later."

Kurt nodded, occasionally asking Sebastian to repeat something or let him try it. Finally, they had five near identical-looking drinks standing in a row.

Marc walked over. "Five? Are you trying to get me drunk?” he joked, and took a sip of the first one.

Kurt could tell by his expression that it was too sour. Marc dutifully tried the others, and nodded approvingly. "The last two were fine," he said. "Good job."

Kurt hopped on the balls of his feet, looking very pleased. "It’s one of my favourites," he admitted. "Though I like that cowboy one Bas makes too."

He beamed, and so did his teacher. Marc smiled. Letting Sebastian train Kurt had been a good decision. He looked genuinely proud of his promotion and his new responsibilities.

"Alright, you can pour the rest of those out before someone accidentally serves them," he said, and walked back to his side of the bar.

Kurt emptied the glasses in the sink. "So what’s next?"

This was definitely more interesting than refilling ketchup bottles. Kurt knew there’d be mundane tasks at the bar too, but he was used to that.

As it turned out, the most ordered drinks at the bar were fairly straight-forward. They practised Manhattans, Daiquiris and the Old Fashioned. Sebastian was patient and dedicated to explaining and guiding him. It reminded Kurt of their reading sessions in summer, where he’d indulgently played dictionary for Kurt, or when he explained something about his studies. And even though Kurt's first Daiquiri was more of a melted slushy than a cocktail, Sebastian never so much as laughed.

"I think you’re getting the hang of this, babe," Sebastian said proudly.

Teaching Kurt to make cocktails was the most fun Sebastian had had in a long time. He was an attentive student and learned quickly.

"Next, we’re making a Tequila Sunrise," he said with a smile, and set about instructing Kurt how to mix the drink and to add the grenadine in last, "So it looks like a sunrise," he said quietly as he poured.

Kurt kept his eyes on the glass and watched as the color trickled into the glass, but not mixed with the other liquids. It looked a bit like magic. Very aware of Sebastian’s eyes on him, he took a fresh
glass and mixed the ingredients together. Then, he reached for the grenadine.

He trapped his tongue between his lips as he slowly poured. For a moment it looked good - then he overdid it and the sunrise became a swamp.

Sebastian bit his lip at the disappointed look on Kurt’s face. He was far too adorable.

"Not bad for your first attempt..." he said, trying to be diplomatic. "But more of a late summer evening than a sunrise."

He handed Kurt another glass. "Try again and go easy on the grenadine. You want it to sink to the bottom and then rise to create the mixed hues," he said gently. "You can do it."

Kurt almost felt a little awkward with the praise and trust Sebastian was showing him. He wondered if he’d been like that as leader of the Warblers as well. It would explain why the group worked so well - unlike the "you need booty camp / you are not masculine enough to play Tony" tactics of Mr Schue.

Determined to get it right, Kurt tried again. The drink set in perfect layers. Kurt looked at it and smiled. He took out his phone and snapped a picture of it. "For if I ever get Instagram," he said, then aimed the lense at Sebastian. "Try not to look too unimpressed," he teased, and snapped a picture. That one was just for him.

He held his hand up to signal Marc he had another one to try.

Marc nodded approvingly at the look, and sipped it. "Perfect. You're a natural, Kurt."

Kurt shook his head. "I've just got a good teacher."

Sebastian beamed at Kurt. Marc was right, he was a natural.

"You’re too modest, babe."

"He’s right Kurt. It took Seb at least a week to get this particular drink down," Marc said, setting the glass back down.

"It wasn’t that long," Sebastian protested, rolling his eyes.

Kurt chuckled. "I guess it’s harder if you’ve never had one...officially." He winked at Sebastian.

"Soon, though," Marc said. "Do you know what you'll do for your birthday yet? Apart from getting drunk, that is."

Sebastian froze for a moment and then shrugged evasively. He couldn’t wait to be twenty-one but wasn’t big on celebrating his birthday. "I don’t know...half my friends aren’t twenty-one yet either so I doubt they’ll be up for clubbing..."

Kurt took in Sebastian's expression. It wasn't the excited look people normally showed when they thought about upcoming festivities, or even the wary look of someone who felt too old for this world. It was something else, and Kurt suspected it had something to do with his past. Maybe he was thinking about his last birthday in Paris.

Of course, Kurt couldn't take him across the ocean to party like in the old days, but maybe they could arrange for something special for him here.

"I'm usually up for clubbing," he said carefully. Their last evening out dancing had taken a little
awkward turn and ended with a confession from Sebastian the next morning. Kurt thought about that every day. He was drawn to Sebastian, and he knew he had developed a major crush on him, but his own past was against him, and so like a burned child, he stayed away from the fire.

Sebastian half-smiled at him, remembering the last time they had gone clubbing too. It had taken all of his willpower to break that kiss and he’d been sober. He didn’t think he’d be able stop himself next time - particularly with the influence of alcohol. Keeping his feelings at bay was becoming harder every day. He didn’t ever want to put pressure on Kurt and he had meant what he had said about just being friends...Too bad his heart didn’t get that memo.

"I’m sure we’ll have plenty of opportunities to go clubbing together," he deflected.

Marc noticed the subtle change to Sebastian and sighed. Something’s up with him, he thought to himself.

"Seb, we’re running low on ice, why don’t you go fill up the bucket while I show Kurt how to use the cash register," Marc suggested.

Sebastian shrugged, glad the for the opportunity for a breather. He was starting to become uncomfortable with the discussion. He grabbed the white tray and headed out the back.

Kurt watched him go, his eyes lingering on the door.

"So..." Marc started. Kurt was still distracted, and Marc knew the register could wait. "Are you two okay?"

"Huh?" Kurt let out, having expected something about tips and bills.

Marc nodded at the doorway. "I thought maybe, now that you’re not longer engaged...

Kurt sighed and lowered his head. "I wish I could, but I’m..." too selfish? too scared? too messed up? "I’d rather be single for a while," he finally said. "It's for the best."

Marc nodded carefully. "That’s fair enough..." he said. "If you’ve been in a relationship for a long time it can be good to have some time by yourself."

He winked at Kurt. "Or so they say anyway. I never took that route myself. I head-dived out of my marriage with Isa directly into a relationship with Paul…but that’s a bit different I guess."

Kurt smiled thinly. "Isa supported you. You stayed friends. I can't exactly say the same about Blaine. I..." He trailed off, not sure how to explain.

Then he shrugged. "Sometimes I catch myself doing things, or not doing things...the way Blaine wanted. It’s like he programmed me, and I haven’t found the off-switch yet. I got rid of half my furniture and yet so much still reminds me of living there with him it's like a ghost of him still haunts me. If I got together with someone else now, they'd only just take his place. And I don't want another Blaine. I know that much."

He looked at Marc a little helplessly, hoping it made sense.

Marc’s heart ached for Kurt and he could see that he was right to want to be single for a while. He placed a hand on Kurt’s shoulder and squeezed it gently.

"You don’t have to explain Kurt, though you can always talk to me if you need to," he said softly. "As for Sebastian…I don’t think you need to worry about him turning into another version of your
He glanced towards the back door. Sebastian was taking longer than usual to collect the ice but Marc figured he maybe needed a minute to put some more armour on, too.

"So... while he's gone... Seb's birthday..."

"Yeah!" Kurt said, snapping back to the present, "I was thinking we should throw him a party."

Marc nodded. "Me too. You only turn 21 once, after all." He smiled. "We could have it at my place! I think he'd like that. He was gonna have a party there last summer while we in Capri, but I don't think he did in the end."

Kurt bit his lip. "No, he didn't," he said.

"How about you and Alice round up his friends, and me and Paul take care of catering?"

Kurt's face brightened. "And I'll do decorations, too!"

"Isa is a really good baker so I'll get on to her to bake him a cake," Marc said, smiling at Kurt's enthusiasm.

He saw Sebastian come out through the swing doors, looking relaxed again. He set the refilled ice bucket on its tray and turned to face them.

"Did you not do the register yet? You're still in exactly the same position you were just now." Sebastian eyed them suspiciously.

"The world stops turning when you're not here, Bas," Kurt said fondly.

Marc shook his head. It was cute, in a way, but maybe Kurt should watch what he said around Sebastian. He only had one heart to break, after all.

Sebastian blushed a little, trying not to read too much into Kurt's words. He was probably just teasing.

"Don't ever forget it," he said with a wink, his mask securely back in its place.

"I'm gonna go for a smoke," Marc said, glancing between the two boys. "Why don't you show him the register Seb?"

"Sure," Sebastian said, smiling at Kurt.

A few hours later, their shift was drawing to an end, and Kurt had mixed more Tequila Sunrises than he could count. To give Kurt the opportunity to practise, Marc had declared it the cocktail of the night, offering a discount to everyone who was willing to order it with the rookie. At the end of the night, Kurt felt confident enough to pour it on instinct without any measurement aides.

Kurt was glad he'd opted for practical shoes. After several hours on his feet, his legs felt like lead. He was used to long shifts at the diner, but not at this time of night. It would take some getting used to.

"You alright?" Marc asked, putting some tips from the last remaining patrons in the tip jar.

Kurt nodded, rolling his shoulders back. "Just tired. I'll be alright."
"You did well tonight," Marc said. "You too, Seb."

Sebastian smiled. "He’s right, Kurt. You did do well." As the night wore on Kurt had really come into his own and the growth in his confidence stood out. "You made some good tips too!" he added, nodding at the tip jar.

Kurt scrunched up his nose a little and looked down on his shoes. "I think that was just the guys taking pity on me on my first night," he refuted modestly.

Marc shrugged. "Hey, tips are tips. And one-third is yours tonight."

Kurt smiled a little brighter at that. He hadn’t counted on any tips, not with his cocktails being sold at a discount and him being a trainee. He was sure Gunther would have used it as an excuse to dock his pay. "For your feet," Marc added, noticing Kurt shifting his weight between each leg, "Try a warm salt water soak and then some thick socks."

"Thanks," Kurt replied. Any advice to taking care of his body - the instrument of the artist - was appreciated.

"You boys wanna go home? I can lock up," Marc offered, starting to count out the tips.

"Are you sure?" Sebastian asked Marc.

"Absolutely! There’s not much to do and I think you both deserve an early night."

Kurt offered Sebastian a smile. "Walk me to the subway?" he asked.

Sebastian returned the smile and nodded. "Sure thing babe."

They pocketed their tips, said goodnight to Marc and headed to the staff room to collect their jackets.

"So," Sebastian said as they made their way out into the night. "Did you have a good evening?"

"I did!" Kurt replied. "It was great." He smiled. "Thank you. You’re a good teacher."

Sebastian returned the smile, "You’re a quick learner, though I’m not surprised. Steph is right, you can do anything…" Except bowling, he added in his head.

"Except bowling," Kurt mused out loud.

Sebastian laughed. "Yeah, but I’m with you on that one." He winked.

They reached the end of the block and with it, the entrance to the subway. Sebastian shoved his hands into the pockets of his jacket as they came to a stop.

"Goodnight, Bas," Kurt offered, instinctively moving towards him for - he wasn’t exactly sure. A hug? A kiss? Something awkward in between? I shouldn’t be doing this, he realised as he was already wrapping his arms around his friend. It’s not fair to him, and it’s not good for me either. I should have just said goodbye at the club. Should have...could have. But there he was, and it was too late to pull back now.

Sebastian hurriedly pulled his hands from his pockets. He exhaled as he returned the embrace, closing his eyes at the touch. It's pathetic, really, he thought to himself. He knew it was a bad move. He knew Kurt couldn’t give him what he wanted and if he was smart he’d step away and keep some distance between them. But he couldn’t help it. It was like Kurt was his oxygen, he needed him to
breathe and he’d take whatever hit he could get.

He tightened his grip and turned his face down into Kurt’s shoulder.

"Good night Kurt," he whispered.

Chapter End Notes

3
Chapter Summary

After Kurt has the basics of flairtending down, Marc and Sebastian show him a trick to bring in bigger tips.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Keep the change, honey."

Marc smiled and winked at his customer and deposited the money into the register, counting out the change to add to the jar behind the counter.

It was a Friday night and even though it was still early, the club was filling up fast.

Sebastian was down the other end of the bar flirting and putting on a show for a group of guys who looked like they wanted to climb over the bar and rip his clothes off. Kurt was situated in the middle of the bar between them so that he could call for help with his orders if needed.

Kurt had been working at Satire for almost two months now and was settling in well. He was getting the hang of the recipes and had started getting a little more confident with his tricks.

There was one thing that he seemed to struggle with however, and that was accepting compliments and phone numbers from the patrons.

Marc knew that Kurt had broken up with his fiancé, and the new attention seemed to be flustering him. He watched as a man tried to slip Kurt his number and saw the look of disappointment on the guy’s face when Kurt declined. The man walked away without leaving much of a tip.

Marc waited for an opportunity to talk to Kurt, and when orders died down for a few minutes, approached Kurt with a smile.

"How are you getting on? That bottle spin you pulled off just now was spectacular!"

"Thanks!" Kurt said enthusiastically. "I've been practising a lot." He was slicing lemons into thin slices to be frost-shocked.

"So, uh, that guy over there gave you his number, huh?" Marc started, nodding his head in the direction of Kurt's last customer.

"Oh yeah," Kurt said, rolling his eyes a little. "That was not gonna happen. Did you see his cuticles?" he mimed biting his fingernails and gave an exaggerated shudder.

Marc grinned and shook his head. "Yeah, I wouldn’t wanna tap that either,” he winked and then paused. “But this isn't speed dating, you know. You don't actually have to hook up with them or anything."

Kurt frowned. "What do you mean?"
Marc smiled and dug his hand into his pocket, pulling out a handful of various slips of paper. All had scribbled notes and numbers on them.

"I have no intention of calling any one of these men," he said gently, "and they know it, but they always offer anyway...it’s like a game, just on the slight chance that I might."

"Don’t you feel weird leading them on like that?" Kurt asked. He tried not to sound judgemental, but Marc was married.

Marc held his hand up showing Kurt his wedding ring. "I don’t hide the fact that I’m married. I don’t see it as ‘leading them on’ because I know and they know that it’s never going to happen," he replied in the same gentle voice.

"And what does Paul think about that?" Kurt asked carefully.

"Paul finds it hilarious...he always asks how many numbers I got. We trust each other." Marc shrugged.

Kurt swallowed and offered him a smile. It was still a little hard to believe that things like that were possible in other people's relationships. When he remembered Blaine’s reaction every time Kurt so much as looked at another guy, he shuddered a little.

"Consider it a compliment to them. It makes them feel good if you pretend to consider their offer," Marc said.

Kurt bit his lip. He still looked hesitant.

Marc offered him a sympathetic smile. "Look, you don’t have to do it. Hell, the guys will probably see it as a challenge if you’re the only one who holds them off! Be Satire’s unattainable Ice Prince." He winked. "But tips will probably be better if you play along."

Kurt glanced at Sebastian, who placed a drink in front of a customer and pocketed a business card.

"Ask Sebastian about it, at the moment he probably gets the most out of anyone because he’s actually available..." Marc suggested.

Sebastian turned away from the bar and spotted Marc and Kurt looking at him. Kurt looked a little awkward.

"Everything alright?" Sebastian asked, walking over.

"I was just telling Kurt about our little black books," Marc said, grinning. "Or, you know, the tissue trash." He held up the scribbled napkins he’d shown Kurt and pushed them back into the front pocket of his jeans. Then, he patted the wad in his pocket suggestively.

"A little extra padding never hurt anyone," he said with a wink.

Kurt chuckled. "Marc was telling me how to get better tips," he added. "He said you’re the maestro of maybe-somedays."

Sebastian grinned and emptied his pockets. "I do alright." He winked.

"Come on now, Seb, no false modesty," Marc chided him. "You usually beat me 2:1."

He looked at Kurt with one eyebrow raised. "Of course, Seb cheats by actually taking one or two home now and then. Of course word spreads about that."
Kurt blushed, ignoring the flash of jealousy. His attraction to Sebastian was growing more by the day, but the nagging doubt about starting a new relationship and falling into old habits was still the most dominant thing in his mind. To hide his embarrassment, he put on a smirk. "Alright. Let's see it then," he said, suddenly curious. He picked up a few of the napkins.

"So this is from Ben," he said, giving Sebastian a stern look, "Please let me be your - oh my!" Kurt broke off. "Ben does not beat around the manscaped bush. What about this one...Jamal. ‘No condoms, no limits’. Sorry, Jamal, that's a dangerous game you're playing." Kurt crumpled the napkin up in his fist and threw it in the trash. "Here. Antonio says he's 'yours forever'. He drew a little heart. Aww."

Marc chuckled. "You sound a little jealous, Kurt," he teased.

Sebastian shook his head and took them back. "It's just a bit of fun babe, it's a sure fire way to get them to ‘buy you a drink’. You don’t actually have to drink the drink, but you can deposit the cash."

"That's right," Marc said. "And everyone's happy. So. What do you say, Kurt?" He took out his wallet and held up a fifty dollar note. "This goes in to the tip jar if you manage to get more numbers than me tonight, starting now." He grinned and fished out another note. "Plus this if you beat Sebastian as well."

Kurt gasped and looked from one to the other. "And if I lose?" he asked.

Marc exchanged a mischievous look with Sebastian. "Then Seb will mix you a Smythe Special."

Kurt blushed heavily. He had to play now, and win.

"Okay," Sebastian said. "Clean slate from now, we all start with none and count them up at the end."

Marc did the same and winked at Kurt. "You in?"

Kurt bit his lip and then nodded. "Alright. I'm in." He put on a cocky grin and gave them an obvious once-over as he popped a few buttons on his shirt. "Shouldn't be too hard..."

He picked up the limes and sauntered off to the freezer, hips swaying.

"Oh, it'll be hard, alright," Marc mumbled.

Two hours later and the club was almost at maximum capacity. Sebastian had just finished serving a couple of guys, one he recognised as a previous hook-up.

The guy had slipped him a note and a familiar longing gaze. Sebastian winked at him and pocketed the piece of paper. He hardly ever did repeat dates with bar hookups, but this guy would have been one that he’d make an exception for - if it wasn’t for a certain someone along the bar from him.

He moved to put his tip in the jar and slid up behind Kurt. "That's a round dozen, babe," Sebastian said with a wink. "How you getting on?"

"I'm getting there," Kurt replied bravely. He was only at half a dozen, but every little note boosted his confidence a little. He began to move easier, smiled more freely - and the guys were picking up on that.

"Hey gorgeous, when do you get off?" one of them yelled over the bar.
"Whenever I can," Kurt replied smoothly, stroking the neck of a bottle suggestively.

It was actually kind of fun, if he really treated it like a game.

A good song came on and he started moving with the beat, swivelling his hips to the rhythm.

Sebastian bumped his hip against Kurt’s and walked back to his section to respond to a new customer, desperately trying to ignore the flash of jealousy he felt at Kurt’s flirting.

It was just a game. It didn’t mean anything. It was nice to see Kurt so relaxed and confident…or so Sebastian tried to tell himself.

"Hey, hot stuff." A particularly attractive man called to him as he approached. "I’ll have a blowjob, please."

Sebastian winked and grabbed the relevant bottles to make the shot.

The hour got later and the patrons’ drink orders raunchier. Kurt had to look up a few of them, as he only had the basic orders memorised. If he needed time to leaf through the handbook, he’d distract his customers by twirling his mixing gadgets. It worked, but he soon found out that tips (and very indecent proposals) really came in when he left the handbook where it was and just put on a wide-eyed, innocent look and asked what a ‘ménage a trois’ was.

Offers to teach him, on - and off - hours, came flying in.

Marc shook his head in mirth. "Now that’s something we couldn’t pull off anymore," he joked fondly.

Sebastian shook his head and grinned as he watched Kurt pull the innocent school boy act. They were lapping it up.

As the night wore on and the raunchiness moved into tiredness, the bar started to empty.

Sebastian walked back down towards Kurt with an easy grin on his face. "Nice moves.” He winked.

"Really? You think so?" Kurt replied breathlessly, turning his little act on Sebastian. "I’m sure you can teach me a lot more..."

"Oh yes," a slightly older man at the bar let out with a sigh, looking longingly at the both of them.

Sebastian winked at the guy with a grin and slid up behind Kurt, recognising the moment for what it was and going along with it. "You’d be amazed at the things I could teach you, babe."

He was playing with fire but it wouldn’t hurt to get a little burnt.

"Oh, I have a very vivid imagination," Kurt replied, swivelling his hips against Sebastian and closing his eyes in mock ecstasy.

Marc watched from the side and shook his head. If Sebastian was playing along voluntarily, he wasn’t going to stop them. They were both adults - or, almost, anyway.

Sebastian grinned and pressed up into Kurt’s back, his hands moving to squeeze Kurt’s hips. "Hmm, think about me often, do you?"

Kurt glanced from under his eyelashes to see if the guy at the bar was still watching them. He was. Time to get another number.
"Every night," Kurt replied on a sigh, and opened his eyes to look at the stranger.

The man swallowed. "Why don't you... both come back to my place after your shift?" he suggested. "I've got this big jacuzzi..." He scribbled an address down on a piece of paper.

Kurt smirked. Score. "I'll take that." He held out his hand. "My mom always said three's a crowd..."

He glanced over his shoulder at Sebastian. "Down, boy."

Sebastian grinned and stepped back, knowing he'd been played so Kurt could pocket another phone number, but not caring. It had been too hot to stop it from happening even if he had wanted to.

"So," Sebastian said as the man left. "How many numbers did you get in the end? Including that one?"

"Let's see," Kurt replied. He was blushing a little. It hadn't even been that much of a lie. He did think about Sebastian...a lot.

He counted out the slips he'd collected. "Fourteen," he stated.

Marc walked up and put his on top of Kurt's. "Nine," he said, looking impressed with Kurt's score.

Sebastian counted out his and put them down on top of the pile. "Fourteen too... Well done, babe! I'm impressed."

"Alright, Kurt!" Marc said, grinning. "Here, you earned this." He put one of his two fifties in the tip jar and held the other up between his fingertips. "This stays mine though. You didn't beat Seb." He folded it up and put it back in his wallet.

"But!" Kurt protested, looking from Marc to Sebastian.

"Get mixing, Seb," Marc said ominously. "Kurt is surely thirsty after all of his hard work..."

Kurt paled. He hoped he'd manage to drink whatever Sebastian was going to mix for him without embarrassing himself.

Sebastian chuckled and started making a show of mixing the drink, adding extra flair in an attempt to tease and intimidate Kurt.

He served the drink in a tall glass over crushed ice and added a purple straw before sliding it in front of Kurt.

"They you go Mr Hummel, drink up," he winked.

Kurt eyed the drink warily. At least there was no special ingredients, as far as he could tell. He looked at Marc. He wouldn't let him drink anything dangerous, would he? But tabasco, limes, salt... none of these were really dangerous and could still make for a very rough drink if mixed in the wrong proportions.

Kurt bent towards the straw, narrowed his eyes and took a sip, already wincing a little.

He waited for the kick.

Then, he blinked. "This is orange juice with grenadine."

Sebastian and Marc laughed. "What did you expect?" Sebastian said fondly. "I'm not twenty one yet... my specialty drink can't have alcohol in it."
Marc snorted. "The look on your face when you were trying it!"

Kurt’s mouth fell open and he gave the both of them an indignant look. Then he laughed.

"Alright, you got me." He took another sip and smiled. "I had a good time tonight," he said, mostly to Marc, as it had been his idea.

Marc smiled warmly at him. "Good," he said. "It’s supposed to be fun."

"Right, I’ll get Terry to get help get rid of the stragglers and then it’s closing time!" Marc said, clapping his hands together. "Can you two start washing down and restocking the fridges, please?"

"Sure thing," Sebastian said with a nod.

Kurt finished his drink, certainly enjoying it much more now he knew it was harmless. Then he remembered the pile of phone numbers on the counter.

"So, um...how about these? Do you...want them?" He asked carefully, looking from the heap of napkins and cards to Sebastian. He hoped there weren’t any more barebacking offers in there. He wanted his friend to be safe.

Sebastian shook his head and swept all the numbers up in his hands - including the discarded ones from earlier, and dumped them in the ice bucket.

"We never just ditch the ones we don’t want," he explained kindly. "Joe’s rules. We’ve gotta protect our customers’ safety. So we destroy them, soaking them in water first turns it to indecipherable mush."

"That’s good," Kurt commented, secretly a little pleased that Sebastian had thrown all of them away without so much of a glance. It was stupid - Sebastian was single and free to hook up with whoever he wanted...and yet a small part of Kurt was glad he wasn't. He thought about their flirting earlier and blushed a little.

Smiling, Kurt reached into the bucket and wrung the papery pulp out before throwing it in the trash. "Better luck next time, guys!" he said cheerfully.

Kurt still couldn’t believe it. He had flirted. As a game. And...he’d liked it. It made him feel good. He’d felt attractive and wanted. Of course, he only needed to look at Sebastian to feel that way...but it had been different with the guys in the club; more superficiality, less consequences. It had been fun, without weighing his conscience down.

He glanced over at Sebastian. He appeared to be in a good mood too. As they started to clear up, Kurt couldn’t stop his hips from moving to the rhythm of the music still playing out through the club’s sound system.

Sebastian was in a good mood. Seeing Kurt relax into his own and flirt his way through customers’ orders made him feel proud. Kurt had come out of his shell a lot this evening. There was still a way to go until the damage Blaine had inflicted upon his friend was gone - but tonight he’d watched as another layer was shed and it made Sebastian happy. It gave him hope.

He filled a bucket with warm soapy water, grabbed the mop and started mopping the floor. A familiar song came on and he grinned, closing his eyes as he let the opening beat flow through him. He spun around on one foot, using the mop in his hand as a balance and came to a stop facing Kurt. He grasped the handle of his mop with both hands and bent forwards, using the top of the mop as a microphone.
"I wanna hold 'em like they do in Texas plays, fold 'em, let 'em, hit me, raise it baby stay with me..."

Kurt grinned and curled his index finger and thumb to a circle, held it over one eye and peeked through it. With his other hand, he picked up the towel he had been using and slung it over his shoulder with a dramatic snap.

"Love Game intuition play the cards with spades to start - And after he's been hooked I'll play the one that's on his heart...Oh-oh oh!"

If there was anything that worked even better for making cleaning fun than Mary Poppins singing - it was Lady Gaga.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh-oh-e-oh-oh-oh, I'll get him hot, show him what I've got”  They sung together keeping eye contact as they cleaned. Sebastian picked up the mop and nodded at Kurt. He threw the mop towards him as Kurt threw the towel, they both caught them with ease and moved into the chorus.

"Can't read my - can't read my - no he can't read my poker face!"

Marc walked back into the club to find his younger colleagues singing along to the music at the top of their lungs, spinning around each other in a spontaneous choreography as they wiped off the bar and sorted bottles back onto the shelves. Each move seemed perfectly timed to the beat; whether it was the closing of a shelf or the cleaning rag landing in the bucket with a wide arc.

"p-p-p-poker face, p-p-poker face!"  Kurt sang, gathering up the stained beer coasters from the bar and playfully holding them in front if him like a fan of playing cards for Sebastian to see before dumping them in the trash.

Marc was loathe to interrupt...but he had been hoping to close up soon.

Sebastian had never had so much fun washing down the bar before, but then, everything he did was better when Kurt was by his side.

As the next verse started, Sebastian caught Marc’s eye and froze, coughing slightly. He placed his hand on Kurt’s shoulder to stop him and at Kurt’s confused look he nodded at Marc. Both boys turned to face their superior with guilty eyes.

"We were just-"

"Looked like fun to me, don’t let me stop you. Though I was hoping to get home to my husband at some point this evening." Marc winked.

"Of course," Kurt let out. "Sorry, Marc." He glanced at Sebastian with a badly repressed grin, and turned back to loading the dishwasher trays, a little faster this time.

Marc shook his head. He kept forgetting how young they were.

"It’s fine, Kurt," he said. "I’ll help, then we can all go home sooner."

- 

Paul sat stretched out on the large corner sofa in their living room. Lola was laying next to him, her head resting next to his thigh, and Poppy was laying across his feet. He had the latest Daniel Silva novel propped up in his lap and a glass of red wine on the coffee table.
Every so often, he’d glance up at the time displayed on the music system that was quietly playing Beethoven in the background. It was after two am. The club must have been busy tonight.

Marc always teased him for it, but Paul liked waiting up for his husband to come home. He liked listening to tales of the night’s events and also knowing that his love was home safely.

As if Paul’s thoughts had conjured Marc into existence, the sound of the front door closing sounded through the penthouse. Both dogs’ ears pricked up and Poppy’s tail started to wag.

Marc walked into the living room moments later, still in his leather jacket. His hair was tousled and he smelled of stale alcohol, but he was smiling. "Hey," he said, his voice a little gravelly. The dogs sprang up to meet him, and he ruffled their ears, speaking soft endearments. Poppy and Lola nudged him for more, but he walked over to Paul instead, sitting down on the sofa beside him and leaning over to kiss his lips. "I’m late. Sorry," he mumbled against Paul's lips.

Paul smiled and cupped Marc’s cheek, holding the kiss for a moment longer. "Busy night?" he asked, stroking Marc’s cheek with his thumb. He noticed the faint musky taste of smoke on Marc’s lips but didn’t say anything. He wasn’t in the mood for a fight now - it was too late in the evening for that.

"Yeah, I helped the boys clean up. Then Joe wanted to talk to me for a bit." Marc sighed, concentrating on Paul's touch for a moment. Then he sat back and took off his jacket, draping it over the sofa before putting Paul's book away so he could recline against his husband’s chest. "He’s a bit worried about the numbers," he mused.

Paul’s hand automatically found Marc’s hair, knowing that this was what his husband craved after a long shift.

"Things not going so well?" Paul asked, carding his long fingers through the thick locks.

Marc sighed deeply, closing his eyes. "Hmm... I don’t know. It felt busy enough tonight. And it’s always slow in the first quarter of the year... I’m not too worried. Still, it’d be good if, ah... I don’t know. We got some good publicity or something."

He opened his eyes and looked up at Paul... "What about you? Save any lives today?" Marc spoke idly of his husband’s job, but only because if he didn’t, he’d never stop praising him. What Paul did on a daily basis was bloody amazing.

Paul smiled, "We did. There was a crash involving a car and a motorcycle. Everyone made it."

“That’s amazing. Bikers usually draw the short end.”

“Mmm-mmm,” Paul agreed. He was glad Marc’s affinity for motorcycles only extended to leather jackets.

Marc sighed again, stretching his back. Lola was nudging his arm and he gave her his palm to nuzzle. "Midnight snacks are bad for you, baby," he mumbled. "But I’m kinda hungry too. We’ll go see what’s in the kitchen in a minute, okay?" Lola barked, and he grinned. Then he returned to the problem with Satire’s revenue.

"At least we have found replacements for the guys that left. Whatever Joe's numbers say, we did need them to man both bars." He smiled. "You know, Seb's friend Kurt? He’s settling in really well.”

“Is that the boy with the horrible ex-fiancé?” Paul asked.
Marc nodded.

“Seb has really stepped up to the challenge of teaching him. It's good for him, I think. And Kurt, he’s this super-talented musical theatre student, and tonight as we were cleaning up, he was *singing*. With dance moves and everything. While he and Seb mopped the floor!” Marc shook his head. "I was half-expecting him do enchant the mop and buckets to do the work for him."

He grinned. “Sebastian was singing too. And they were doing these tricks, using the whole bar as a prop - I don’t even know, I certainly never taught them that…”

Paul smiled. They both cared a lot about Sebastian and had been worried last year when he had seemed to spiral out of control. To hear he was doing better and was handling himself well with more responsibility gave Paul a rush of pride.

"I’m glad," Paul said quietly. "So...are Kurt and Sebastian together?"

Marc shook his head. "I think they’d be right for each other, and Seb’s been crushing on him for the longest time...but Kurt needs more time to get back on his feet. His ex really messed him up."

Paul hummed a little sadly. "Poor kid."

Marc nodded. "Seb didn’t tell me the whole story, but Kurt would have this subdued look sometimes...at first I thought he was just a shy, quiet kid- but he’s not. *At all.* It was just this guy, holding him back. Now that he’s out of the picture, Kurt is slowly showing us what he’s made of."

Lola yapped impatiently.

"Lola," Marc said sternly, "daddy is talking."

She lowered her head and nuzzled his hand again. Marc patted her head.

"Sounds like Kurt needs some positive people in his life," Paul said.

“Well, he has some now,” Marc said. He angled his head and reached up to kiss his husband. "Sometimes it takes a while to find your true self."

Paul nodded. He chuckled at Lola’s impatience as she whined again. Then he thought of something.

"Maybe if they can both sing and work so well together, they could do some kind of performance at the bar to draw in some more patrons...would Joe go for that do you think?"

Marc gave it some thought. "Maybe, yeah. I’m not sure how the guys would go for Broadway, but maybe some more charts stuff...I don’t want to make Kurt feel like he has to, though. I think they work him pretty hard at school already.” He paused. "Though it might be a nice way for them to get a little closer..."

Lola and Poppy barked. Marc rolled his eyes. "Not a moment of peace," he joked, and made to get up.

"Wait," Paul said as Marc sat up. He tugged Marc’s hand gently until his husband looked at him. "I love you, you know that? The last fifteen and a half years have been the best of my life. Hyperactive dogs and all.” He leant forward and kissed Marc softly. "Even if you do smoke when you’re at work." He grinned and kissed his husband again.

Marc smiled against Paul’s lips. "Busted. I’m sorry, I know you hate it," he whispered. "My new
year’s resolution kind of went nowhere. Maybe I should try that acupuncture thing you told me about."

“You should! Vanessa at work tried it and it works! She’s not had a cigarette since Christmas,” Paul replied. “And I just want you around for as long as possible…”

"I love you too, my brilliant doctor," Marc said, and got up.

Lola tugged his sleeve.

"Come on, girls. Let’s find something to eat."

Chapter End Notes

2.
The Birthday Surprise

Chapter Summary

Sebastian's 21st birthday has finally come and he is ready for a night on the town.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sebastian had always loved his birthday growing up. Other than Christmas Day, it was the one day that his grandparents cancelled everything in their schedules to spend the day with him.

They would wake him up in the morning with hugs and kisses and presents and then they would go out and find an adventure together. It didn’t matter that he didn’t have his parents, he had them.

It was one of the many things he had lost after coming out. His first year at Dalton, he’d not received so much as a birthday card. It was the final nail in the coffin of his childhood.

After that, he had stopped caring about his birthday, and numbed his misery with sex and alcohol.

His first birthday in New York had been better. Alice had taken him out for dinner and they’d watched a movie from an international film festival. Still, the emptiness remained.

In the week leading up to his birthday, each day had weighed a little heavier. He had wondered if his grandparents might send a card this year at least - it was his twenty first after all - but he wasn’t too disappointed when it didn’t come. Deep inside, he had known it wouldn’t.

And now he was officially an adult. Emancipated from any family ties…alone.

--

"Happy Birthday man!" Alex said, walking into Sebastian’s apartment when the door opened. "Tonight is going to be sick."

Sebastian grinned at Alex’s enthusiasm. At the sight of his friend dressed up for the occasion in black jeans and a short sleeve button down, Sebastian decided to forget about the past and focus on the present. Alex was right, tonight was going to be sick. He and Alex were heading out to meet Kurt and Brody for a good old fashioned bar crawl. He felt a little bad that the girls couldn’t come, but he was also really looking forward to finally being able to drink legally.

"I can finally teach you how to drink!" Alex said eagerly.

Sebastian scoffed. "You know I can drink you under the table, right?"

"Shh!" Alex said patting him on the shoulder. "Let me have this moment...I can finally pass all my knowledge down to you, baby brother."

"Knowledge of what?" Sebastian laughed. "How to throw up?"

"THAT WAS ONE TIME!" Alex protested, then laughed. "Oh man, that was epic, though. I am
"definitely staying away from Ouzo for the rest of my life!" He chuckled. "Not that Steph would let me touch it anyway. She actually had to throw away her shoes, you know." He looked a little embarrassed for a moment, then brushed it off.

"But Steph's not coming tonight, so all I need to do is steer away from Kurt's designer shoes, and we're good!" He grinned. "I wonder how much Brody can take. He seems like a tough guy, but you never know."

Sebastian laughed. "I think Kurt would actually murder you if you threw up on his shoes. As for Brody...we shall see!"

His phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out and saw Marc’s name flash on the screen.

"Marc, hey!" he said answering.

"Hey hey, happy birthday, Seb!" Marc said, his smile audible over the phone.

Dogs barked in the background and Marc laughed.

"Lola and Poppy say hi too. Look, I know you have plans for tonight, but could you drop by my place before? I won't be back at the bar until Wednesday and I accidentally took a registry key. You've got a shift tomorrow, right?"

"I do, yeah," Sebastian said reluctantly. "Can’t I come get it tomorrow?"

"Who’s that?" Alex mouthed.

Sebastian put the phone against his chest. "Marc, he took a register key from work and wants me to come pick it up."

"Isn’t he the one with that massive luxury apartment?"

Sebastian nodded.

"Sweet. I’m game, we don’t have to stay long...I’ve always wondered what those places look like inside!" Alex gave him an eager look.

Sebastian bit his lip and sighed, putting the phone back to his ear. "Fine...we’ll be about half an hour."

"Perfect. Thanks, Seb."

Marc hung up and looked at Kurt and Alice. "He took the bait. We’ve got half an hour."

Kurt and Alice exchanged high-pitched, excited noises. Sebastian had no idea.

"Okay, I’ll double-check the room," Kurt said.

"And I’ll tell people to get ready and get themselves a drink to toast with when he comes," Alice said.

"And I’ll just...let you guys do your thing," Marc said fondly. "You seem to have everything under control."
Alice beamed at Marc and spun on her heels, heading for the bar area where Brody and Steph were putting out the final touches.

"We have incoming in T-minus thirty minutes," she said. "We need to make sure everyone is in the main room and has drinks."

"Oh, I’m so excited!" Steph said happily. "I can’t wait to see his face!"

"Me neither," Alice said beaming. "Paul is on standby with his camera to capture the moment."

"And we have the Polaroid cameras set up on the tables for instant party selfies, too. That was a really good idea," Brody said.

"I know, it was mine," Kurt said from the corner of his mouth, breezing by.

He was incredibly excited. He had told Sebastian they’d meet at the first stop of their bar crawl because he was stuck at Vogue, but in reality, he had been decorating Marc and Paul’s living room with flowers and large prints of New York from Sebastian’s Instagram.

They had moved furniture to other rooms to accommodate bistro tables and a rented bar with tap. Marc and Paul’s living room was huge, and had a beautiful view. Kurt had hoped to find a place like that with Blaine one day...but now?

He pushed that thought far back into his mind and concentrated. This should be the best surprise party ever.

--

"Woah." Alex said, looking around the large, brightly lit lobby. "This place is huge!"

"Wait till you see the apartment," Sebastian said, smiling at his friend. Alex’ reactions to everything made their detour not so bad. He now kind of wished he’d had his summer party here last year after all.

Sebastian spoke to the concierge to sign them in and while he was occupied, Alex sent a sly text.

To Kurt (19:06):

Incoming

"Okay, places everyone!!" Kurt shouted, and people sprang into action.

Alice checked if everyone had a glass.

Kurt had two; one for himself and one for Sebastian. Butterflies were fluttering in his stomach. He glanced at Alice. She was holding their presents. Brody was holding both their glasses. She looked as excited as Kurt felt.

The doorbell buzzed.

"Ok, quiet down," Marc said, and made his way to the door.

"The birthday boy!" he said happily, opening the door. "Come in, come in. Hi, I’m Marc." He held his hand out to Alex.

"Alex. Man, your place is sick," Alex said, shaking Marc’s hand. "Can I look around?"
"Sure," Marc said. "Seb, can you show Alex the living room? I'll just go get the key."

Sebastian rolled his eyes fondly at Alex and nodded his head towards the living room. "Wait till you see the v-"

"SURPRISE!!!!!!"

Sebastian jumped a little as a room full of people shouted excitedly. He blinked rapidly a couple of times, trying to catch up with what was happening.

Slowly the room came into focus. There were decorations strung up around the room, pictures he recognised from his Instagram, and flower-arrangements in tall vases. There was a sea of faces that he recognised from various places and there, in the middle, stood Kurt, Alice, Brody and Steph. They were all beaming at him.

"I-" he said, speechless.

"Gotcha, bro!" Alex chuckled, coming up behind Sebastian and squeezing his shoulders.

"Happy birthday, Bas," Kurt said, offering him a glass of prosecco.

Steph handed Alex and Marc a drink. Brody gave Alice hers.

"To Sebastian!" Alice said happily, raising her glass. The other guests, friends from NYU, the bar, and a few of Kurt’s friends from NYADA, echoed her and raised their glass too.

Sebastian accepted the glass of prosecco and took a large sip, his mind racing as he tried to take everything in.

His eyes fell on Marc and he tried to form words. "You-you did all this? For me?"

Marc smiled and shook his head. "Nope, I provided the venue, but this is all Kurt and Alice."

Sebastian looked back at his two best friends, eyes wide. He didn’t know what to say.

Kurt smiled a little shyly, and sipped his drink. Sebastian was definitely surprised. He just wasn’t sure if his friend liked the surprise or not.

"Are you okay?" he asked carefully.

Sebastian swallowed and nodded a little before moving forward purposefully and hugging Kurt tightly.

'Thank you,' He whispered in French. 'I just...thank you.'

Kurt hugged him back. 'You’re welcome,' he said quietly. He didn’t let go for a while, feeling Sebastian needed this as much as he did.

Alice smiled softly as she watched them and walked over to Steph. "We’ll do this later, I think," she whispered, nodding at the presents. "It might be a bit much right now."

"Yes," Steph agreed. "We have all night. Here, I'll take them."

"Thanks." Alice handed Steph the presents and walked back to Kurt and Sebastian. She cleared her throat.
"My turn!" she announced loudly.

Sebastian grinned and pulled away from Kurt, turning to hug Alice instead. "Thank you." He said. "You guys are amazing...I never...never expected this."

"Well it would be a lame surprise party if you did," Alice joked, squeezing him with all her might. "Happy birthday, baby. I'm so glad we met."

Sebastian grinned and pulled back to kiss her forehead. "I am too...not that you gave me a choice in the matter."

"She never does," Brody joked, walking up and grinning. Alice let go of Sebastian and Brody pulled him in a one-armed hug while reeling Alice in as well.

"No kiss for me?" Brody teased.

"He's not drunk enough for that yet, mate!" Alex chipped in from the back. "Let's get him a refill."

"Wait!" Sebastian said, pulling away from Brody. He placed his glass to his lips and tipped it backwards, downing the rest of the prosecco in one. "There," he said with a grin, holding his glass out.

"Yeah!" Alex cheered, grabbing a bottle from the bar. "That’s what I’m talking about! And next week, bar crawl for real, alright? Because I got myself all hyped up now."

"You're so method," Steph commented, shaking her head. "My big thespian."

"I was very convincing, you heard the man!!" Alex said proudly. He filled Sebastian's glass to the brim. "Chugg, dude! Twenty-ommen! Woo!"

Sebastian shook his head and grinned, sipping his drink instead.

"Maybe you should have a drink too," Sebastian said. "I thought you wanted to show me how it's done?"

"Oh he didn’t say that, did he?" Steph groaned.

"Yep."

"Way ahead of you, dude, I'm on my third!" Alex said proudly.

"What - when did you even...?" Steph started, turning around to look at her boyfriend.

Alex just grinned.

"The drinks are sponsored by Joe, by the way," Marc said, smiling fondly. "He says he’ll raise a toast to you at the bar tonight. He's taken my shift."

Paul joined them. "Such a rare treat, having my husband here on a Saturday...thank you for that, Seb."

Sebastian grinned and held up his glass. "My pleasure." He sipped his drink and shook his head. "I can’t believe you went to all this effort for me?" He ended the statement like a question.

"You're worth it," Kurt said simply. "We wanted to make you happy." He looked at Alice. "But we're not the only ones. There were a few guys who couldn't make it today..."
Alice nodded, and quickly went to Steph to get one of the presents. She came back and handed Sebastian a dvd. He looked at it confused. What on Earth had they planned now?

Marc held out his hand to lead the way to the large flat screen on the wall, and the sleek installation below it. He took the dvd from Sebastian and put it in.

Sebastian sat down on one of the couches and stared up at the screen feeling a little apprehensive.

'It's nothing embarrassing,' Kurt quickly told Sebastian. 'I've already seen it.' He wanted to minimise Sebastian's discomfort. He was among friends, but it seemed to Kurt he was still a little shaky. Everyone gathered around the screen and Marc pressed play.

The brightly beaming faces of Jeff and Nick appeared on screen. Sebastian’s eyes widened. He’d not been expecting that.

"Oh captain, my captain," Jeff said dramatically, and Nick nudged him in the ribs.

"Stick to the script," he whispered.

Jeff cleared his throat. "Dear Sebastian," he started.

The scene skipped to another room, with a radically different view outside of the window- dramatic high rises as far as the eye could see.

"You are now officially of age," Wes said, sounding every bit the law student that he was. "Which means-"

The screen split, and Jeff and Nick popped up on the side. "PARTYYYYYY!"

Wes looked to his left and pretended to be annoyed. "Responsibilities," he corrected scholarly. Sebastian grinned.

From the top, a third screen popped in with David.

"Drinks!" he said, sitting on a beach, holding up what Kurt now recognised as a Daiquiri.

Wes looked up as if he could see him from his office. He made shoving movements with his hands and both screens disappeared again.

"And yes, alright, parties and drinks," Wes conceded.

"Thad edited this," Kurt said softly, grinning. It was cute, and they really did their best.

Sebastian took Kurt’s hand and squeezed it in a silent thank-you.

"To celebrate, we rehearsed a little something for you over Skype and conference calls across the States, and I daresay, across continents - and here's the result. Enjoy."

The next shot showed the Dalton common room. A group of Warblers, neatly coiffed and in uniforms, sat and stood around a large leather couch. Someone off screen softly counted down, and then they started into a smoothly harmonised acapella version of "Happy Birthday".

After one verse, the screen suddenly split, and several of the graduated Warbler beatboxers appeared, starting up a rhythm for another, slightly funkier version of the song.
Every few seconds another screen was added, with more ex-Warblers chiming in with all different kinds of backgrounds and video qualities; some clearly filmed with phones and selfie sticks, until the flat screen was full of little squares of singing young men, layering their voices into a perfect harmony...It sounded like they were all in one room together, while it was clear that they weren't.

"Holy shit," Steph said loudly, then quickly covered her mouth with her hand. "I'm sorry, that's just amazing."

The credits started to roll, with a little message from Thad behind a big desk with four flat screens, several keyboards and a mixing board. He had added a few blooper takes (most of them from Nick and Jeff) as well.

Sebastian watched the screen and felt tears prick his eyes. He swallowed thickly. He was so touched and a little overwhelmed at how much effort they’d all gone to.

He looked at his friends in the room. They had not only thrown him an amazing party but had taken the time and effort to get in contact with his old team for messages...and people had actually responded.

He was utterly speechless.

Alice nudged him a little. "I used to think you were the hot one in your choir," she teased. "But having seen the others..."

Kurt smirked. She was giving him a way out of his emotions.

Sebastian relaxed a little and grinned at her, slipping easily back under his mask. "Oh, I was the hot one...why do you think they made me captain?" He winked.

“How did you get anything done?” Steph asked.

Sebastian laughed. “Most of them are straight Steph,” he said kindly. “Thank you,” he added, turning to Kurt.

“You’re welcome,” Kurt replied bumping his shoulder against Sebastian’s gently. “Happy birthday."

Sebastian smiled at him and nudged him back.

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Kurt walked around the party, pleased that everyone seemed to be having a good time. Marc and Paul’s place was amazing. Their bathroom was bigger than Kurt’s living room. It had a huge bathtub, and somehow Kurt didn’t think they got it to bathe their dogs. The kitchen was a dream. A part of the party had moved there, and people were taking turns playing with Poppy and Lola, who were begging for treats.

There was alcohol in abundance from the bar, and Kurt had hand-picked a French catering service for finger food.

After checking in with Alice, Kurt slowly started gathering everyone back into the living room. It was time to give Sebastian his other present. He walked over to where Sebastian was sitting on a couch with some of his friends from NYU, and put his hands on his shoulders. He leaned over. "We have something for you," Kurt said. "Could you come with me for a moment?"

Alice was standing by the bar, holding a flat, gift-wrapped box. She was looking both nervous and
excited.

Sebastian looked up at Kurt and smiled. He was starting to feel a little soft around the edges from the alcohol but was mostly still all with it.

"Sure," he said softly. He excused himself from the group he was with and followed Kurt over to Alice who had now been joined by Alex, Steph, Brody, Marc and Paul. Kurt guided him to a bar stool and sat him down.

"This is from all of us," Alice said, handing Sebastian the gift.

He looked at them all for a second and took the gift off her. It was heavy. More presents? He shook his head, it was all too much.

"You guys, really didn't have to-"

"Dude, shut up and open it," Alex said shaking his head.

Sebastian swallowed and carefully unwrapped the wrapping paper. A thick, leather bound book was exposed. He opened the front page and was met with a picture of their group that they had taken on the day they went to Coney Island.

He looked at Alice and swallowed again.

"It's a collection of our favourite pictures of you," Alice explained. "Kurt and I got everyone to send them in"

"Mine’s the one with the hotdog eating contest, do you remember?" Alex said eagerly. "And that one we took at the taxi stand just before we nearly got arrested-"

"It's like a family album," Kurt said.

Sebastian felt tears well in his eyes.

"Yeah, because your own family sucks," Alice added. "But we’re your family now and we love you."

Marc slipped his hand in Paul’s as they watched. Kurt wondered if this felt a bit like a proud dad moment for them.

Sebastian flicked through the album a little. There were dozens of photos of all of them together. He spotted some with the Warblers, and several sportive looking guys with screenshots from emails and text messages next to them; Sebastian's old Lacrosse team sent their love.

His throat constricted and the tears threatened to fall. Unable to do anything about it, he let them; one rolled down his cheek and splashed onto the page. Sebastian quickly closed the book to protect it.

"Thank you," he whispered thickly. "Thank you so much."

Kurt smiled, visibly moved. They’d talked about gift ideas in the group, and this was what had come out as a winner. (Alex had suggested hiring a stripper, but that idea had only come second). Kurt had contributed several pictures he'd taken of Sebastian petting dogs in the park, and a candid of him with his eyes closed, enjoying food.

Kurt had been shocked to discover Alice had bought their rollercoaster picture; the one with him and Sebastian holding hands. It made him feel the same way as it had then - it looked right, but he still
wasn’t sure how to deal with that. She had given him a copy, and every now and then he’d take it out and look at it.

Marc and Paul had added pictures of the Christmas they had Sebastian over, and several of him at the bar.

Kurt hoped the album would help Sebastian feel a little less homesick.

"I don’t know what I’d do without all of you," Sebastian said, looking around the group. "Thank you for this," he touched the book. "This," he waved his hand around the room at the party. "For everything."

He wiped his eye and let out a shaky breath.

"Happy Birthday, Seb," Steph said smiling at him, and then they all converged in a group hug with Sebastian in the middle. Sebastian hadn’t felt so loved in a very long time.

"And wait till you see what else we got you," Alex whispered secretively.

Kurt frowned. They didn't get him another gift...did they? He blushed as he realised what it might be. If so, it was going to be a very interesting evening.

"So...drinks?" Brody suggested, as they let go.

"DRINKS!" Alex echoed.

Marc rolled his eyes and looked at Kurt. Kurt shrugged, as if to say 'yep, he's like that all the time.'

"Actually," Marc said calmly, taking a small red box from his husband. "Paul and I have something for you too." He handed Sebastian the box.

Sebastian took it and heard something move inside as he shook it softly. He frowned up at them.

"What is it?"

"Why don’t you open it and find out," Paul said with a grin.

Sebastian took the lid off the box and looked inside. It was a plain silver key.

"Wh-"

"It’s for a car," Marc explained. "That’s not the actual key - it’s symbolic." He rolled his eyes. "I just wanted to buy you a hot ride, but Paul’s being a grandpa about it and insists you get your licence first."

Sebastian stared at them as if they’d grown two heads. He didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

"Traditionally kids get cars for their sixteenth, but we missed that. So, once we know you’re safe on the road, you can pick the one you want," Paul said.

"I-" Sebastian was lost for words. He suddenly stood up, putting the album and box down on the seat and threw himself forwards, hugging Marc and Paul tightly. They both wrapped their arms around him and hugged him tight.

None of them noticed the flash of Kurt’s camera.

Sebastian pulled back and turned to face his friends. "Thank you, thank you all so much...I love you
guys.”

“We love you too Seb,” Steph said thickly, the others all nodded their agreement.

“I don’t even know what to say.”

“You don’t need to say anything else, Sebastian,” Marc said kindly. “Just enjoy the rest of your party.”

"Who's up for a drinking game?" Brody asked. "I'm the newest in your gang, and I always felt those are a great way to get to know each other..."

"Or the contents of each other's stomachs," Steph commented drily, but she didn't look completely disapproving.

"Drinking games!" Sebastian agreed, picking up the album and hugging it close to his chest. "Let me put this somewhere safe."

"I can do that," Paul offered, reaching for it. Sebastian paused for a moment, then nodded and handed the book over.

"So...any ideas?" Alice said, sipping her drink. She was already starting to sway a little.

"BEER PONG!!" Alex exclaimed.

--

Beer pong, as it turned out, was the first game Kurt had ever played that involved balls that he wasn’t spectacularly bad at. In fact, he seemed to sink every single throw.

Maybe it helped that the others were slowly getting quite drunk. Kurt had managed to stick to diet coke after their first toast, having agreed to be their designated driver home if the need arose. Paul didn’t drink at all, so the two of them would be ready to take their friends home safely. Kurt also wanted to have his wits together to pay the catering staff and the guys who’d come pick up the tap later.

"Un-be-lievable!" Brody shouted as Kurt got another ping pong ball in a cup, making the other team chugg another one.

"I can’t help it!" Kurt let out. "I've never played before!"

Sebastian grimaced as he downed another cup of beer.

"I don’t buy it." Sebastian said, burping a little. He hated beer. "I think you’re trying to get me drunk."

"I don't think you need my help for that," Kurt replied. "You were well on the way before we started." He winked and stepped back, not wanting any beer to splash on his outfit while Sebastian made his shot.

"I think you're doing great," Steph said. "I'm glad you're on my team." She took Kurt’s arm and squeezed it. She was doing the drinking for the both of them, but she hadn't needed to drink more than two beers yet.

"You're going down, sweetheart," Alex said stepping up to the table in Sebastian’s place. He aimed the ball and threw it across the table towards Kurt and Steph’s cups. It missed.
"Fuck," Alex said, drinking another cup.

Kurt snorted. The other team had only one cup left, and they had eight. If Steph missed, he'd get them on the next turn. Either way, the boys were gonna lose.

"Maybe we should have played with shot glasses," he teased. "Might have been more of a challenge for me."

Steph threw her final ball and it missed the cup, bouncing off the rim and into the watching crowd.

She grinned and downed her own cup.

Sebastian, swaying slightly, replaced Alex at the table. He threw his ball and cheered as it went in. Steph drank again.

"Bring it on, Hummel," he said, making a ‘come on’ movement with his hands.

Kurt smirked. His confidence had gotten an incredible boost by all the hits he’d already sank, and he walked over to Sebastian's side of the table, plucked a shot glass from one of the spectator's hands, and set it up behind their remaining cup. Then, he sauntered back to his side of the table.

A murmur went through the crowd.

"Can he do that? Does it count?" Alex asked Brody.

Brody shrugged. "He's a flairtender, I'm sure he can. And we make our own rules."

Kurt looked at the cup, held the ball between two fingers, and sent it off in a wide arc. He didn't see his target, but he saw Alex' face, and that was enough.

Sebastian shook his head in amazement and accepted his fate, drinking the final cup of beer and putting the empty cup face down on the table.

"You win, babe," he said, staring at Kurt a little cross-eyed. "You’re lucky you’re hot."

"Lucky? I work hard to look this good," Kurt quipped.

"Baby, you’re hot without even trying," Sebastian blurted out without thinking. The alcohol was really starting to kick in.

"What's next?" Steph asked eagerly. "I want to beat the boys at something else too!"

Alex snorted. "You just want revenge for karaoke!"

"Maybe I do," Steph replied. "So?"

"Never have I ever," Brody suggested, wiggling his eyebrows at Alice.

Marc rolled his eyes. "I'm out, guys. Have fun. I'm too old to get that drunk."

"I'm in!" Sebastian said. "But I need something to eat first...I fucking hate beer."

"Light weight!" Alex jibed. "What happened to ‘I’m gonna drunk...dr-...drink you under the table’?"

"I still will...doesn’t mean I can’t eat some food," Sebastian replied, sulking a little.

Alex checked his watch. "Yeah, ok. Just be back here by midnight. You don’t want to miss our
"Let me guess, you turn back into a mouse," Kurt suggested playfully. Then he nodded at Alex to join him for a brief chat while Sebastian got something to eat.

"So...idea number two?" he asked, once they were out of earshot from the others.

Alex nodded. "Steph found him online. It's gonna be a-mazing."

Kurt frowned. "You think...a male stripper...stripping for a guy's birthday...is amazing?" He was happy Alex wanted their friend to have a good time, but he looked like he was personally invested, too.

"Fuck yeah," Alex said eagerly. "Steph loves strippers. Do you have any idea how laid I am gonna get tonight? She may watch her Magic Mike guys but she's coming home with me."

Kurt snorted. "Alright. Well, when he arrives, let me know. I want a word with him beforehand."

Alex waggled his eyebrows. "A word or a sneak preview?"

Kurt looked a little offended. "A word! I am the party planner, not a pervert!"

Alex chuckled. "Touchy, touchy...that was a joke, Kurt my boy."

--

Seeking a moment of quiet, Sebastian loaded a plate of cheese from one of the platters in the kitchen and wandered into the dining room, plopping himself down against one of the floor-length windows.

Lola, smelling food, wandered over to him and put her nose in his ear, licking his cheek. Sebastian grinned and offered her one of his crackers.

"Hey beautiful girl," he said, leaning into her warm fur. "How amazing is this party? Everyone is here...for me? And it was Alice and Kurt who put it together." He shook his head. ‘I never really realised how much they all care about me,’ he said quietly, slipping into French. ‘Alice said we’re a family...Alex called me his brother...Kurt, he...he...’ he broke off, not knowing what else to say. ‘You don’t speak French, do you? Or is it all just human to you? I always wondered if dogs can speak different languages like we do, or if you just speak dog and we speak human? ’ He chuckled as the dog sat down next to him and rested her head on his shoulder. He fed her another cracker. ‘Thanks for listening, anyway.’

He closed his eyes and ate quietly, his mind trying to process the events of the evening.

--

"Kurt, he's here," Alex said, giving Kurt a little scare as he suddenly spoke directly into his ear from behind while Kurt was straightening one of the New York pictures. Someone had walked into it and nearly knocked it over.

"Oh! Okay. Good." Kurt cleared his throat and let out a sort breath. "In the foyer?"

"Yep." Alex still looked very excited.

"Is he hot?" Kurt asked, running a hand through his hair.
"Yeah," Alex said eagerly, then frowned at his own words. "I mean, I _think_ so? Steph mostly picked
him because his stage name is _White Chocolate_. She loves that stuff. We actually have that as edible
body p-"

"Alright, alright!" Kurt interrupted him, throwing up his hands. "I'm going. You just get Bas and, I
don't know, park him on a chair or something." _White Chocolate_...why did that sound so familiar?

Chapter End Notes

For the Warblers song, imagine the first verse like this
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4Ei6x1ofCk] and then

***

End of Part 1 - Part 2 is gonna be long. Take a break. Hydrate. Rest your eyes. Take a
nap. Leave us some kudos. OR SKIP STRAIGHT TO PART 2!!! XD

1...
Kurt walked out to the foyer, feeling more than a little giddy. He stopped when he saw the man standing before him.

Sam was wearing an olive green fighter pilot uniform, with, as far as Kurt could tell from the opened zipped, not much underneath.

Kurt swallowed. "Sam?"

Sam looked around at the sound of Kurt’s voice in surprise. His eyes widened.

"Kurt? What are you doing here?"

"Um...I'm the party...planner..." Kurt said slowly.

"But some guy called," Sam checked the back of his hand, where something was written in smudged ink, "Stephalex booked me here." He frowned. "Not sure if that's a real name or if I just mixed up the letters again."

Kurt shook his head. "Steph and Alex. Yeah, they're my friends. They're here too." He bit his lip. Alex was going to be very disappointed that his gift would fall through, but Kurt would try to explain it to him. "It's Sebastian's birthday. But it's okay, you don't have to do it."

Sam frowned at the smudge on his hand, annoyed with himself for the mix up. He thought about it for a minute. He could bow out and head home. But he was counting on the money and Sebastian was important to Kurt, and Kurt was his friend.

"If it’s all the same...I don’t mind doing it," he said with a little shrug. "I really need the money."

"Are you sure you're ok with this?" Kurt asked carefully. "I mean, dancing for a guy...?"

Sam shrugged. "It can’t be any different than dancing for girls."

Kurt considered his funds. With Wonka coming up next month, he could afford to be generous. "I can pay you anyway," he offered. "I mean, if you need it...you're not in trouble, are you?"

Sam shook his head. "No, I’m not in trouble. I uh…signed a lease on an apartment," he said, scratching his head. "It’s only a shoebox studio...but after the whole fiasco with Blaine, I kinda realised that I can’t just keep couch surfing you know?" He looked at Kurt. "You know I’m really sorry about all that, don’t you?"

Kurt smiled. "I know. You told me quite a few times already. And I doubt I would have found out the truth without you." He shook his head. It would have gone on and on...He might even have married Blaine! Sam spilling the beans was the best thing that could have happened. It could have happened sooner, but at least it did.
"You seem happier..." Sam said observing his friend. "How are you?"

Kurt looked over his shoulder to the living room and his high spirits returned. "I am happy, Sam. I feel welcome here. It feels like, for the first time, I have friends who are not competing against me."

Sam smiled at Kurt as he spoke. He really did belong here with these people. They accepted him without question, in a way the New Directions never had.

"I'm happy for you," he said honestly.

Suddenly there were a lot of things Kurt wanted to tell Sam. About Wonka, about karaoke and cooking and Coney Island, and he longed to reconnect with his friend. But first, there was this gig.

"I think everyone's waiting for you in there," he said shyly. "Do you want me to wait out here?"

Sam looked towards the room, feeling his game face come back on.

"Nah, I don't get my junk out and you're paying for the show..." Sam said smiling. "Come watch...unless it'd be too weird for you."

Kurt blushed. "A little weird, yes, but...from a dancer point of view...I might learn something." He hoped the excuse worked. "Nice suit, by the way," he offered as a distraction.

"Thanks. Alex or Steph must have picked it. I have a few outfits on the website and this was the one requested. I stole most of them from Glee club, to be honest. This was Joe's from when Mr Shue made us do 80s film theme songs," Sam said, putting on a pair of mirrored aviator shades and picking up a boombox. "I feel the need...the need for speed."

Kurt smirked. "Take my breath away."

Sam put his music on. The first few bars of the Top Gun soundtrack started playing loudly, before being replaced by a pumping fast remix of Danger Zone.

Kurt watched him go and followed behind, trapping his lip between his teeth. Time to indulge in one of his high school fantasies come to life.

Alex had found Sebastian and set him up on a loveseat in the middle of the living room. At the sound of the music Sebastian looked up at Alex.

"You didn't?" he asked, his mouth going dry.

"Damn straight I did, you're my bro and it's your birthday...Steph picked him out though."

Sebastian felt his alcohol buzz fade away as realisation of what was about to happen hit him. Then he caught a flash of a uniform and oh if he didn't love a man in a uniform...wait - wasn't that Sam?

Sam walked into the living room and put the music player on the floor. He spotted Sebastian on the loveseat and lowered his sunglasses for a moment, giving him a small nod as they made eye contact. Then he pushed his glasses back, popped up his collar, and effortlessly slipped into a choreography of body rolls and undulations that ended in bodybuilder poses at each beat, each a little more suggestive than the next.

Kurt was amazed by Sam's control. His isolations were perfect, and he could drop to his knees and veer back up onto his feet seemingly effortlessly. Kurt swallowed as he saw where this was headed - every move, every roll of Sam's hips brought him closer to Sebastian, until he was right in front of
him. With the last beats of the song, Sam struck a rigid pose, saluting Sebastian. As the next song
started, Sam slowly lowered his hand to pull down the zipper on his fighter coverall down to his
waist, and revealed that he was, indeed, not wearing anything but dog tags and a pair of camouflage
briefs.

He took a few steps back, spun on his heels, and pulled the sleeves down off his shoulders, one after
the other, until the coverall hung off his hips. A few people in the audience cheered and whistled. He
struck a few more poses to the beat of the song, letting his muscles roll, and then walked back to
Sebastian, putting one foot up on the seat next to Sebastian's thigh.

Sam pushed his glasses up in his hair to look Sebastian in the eyes, and slowly pulled the rest of his
zipper down to his crotch. Perfectly timed to the music, he set his foot down on the floor and the
coverall fell to his ankles, allowing him to step out of it. He took Sebastian's hand, and placed it flat
on his abs, rolling the muscles under his fingers to the beat as he pumped his arm up and down,
flexing his biceps.

Kurt frowned. Was touching even permitted?

Sebastian ran his hand down Sam’s well-defined chest. He was gorgeous. It had been months since
Sebastian had touched another man, and boy did he feel it.

Sam was hot.

He brought his other hand up to join the one caressing Sam’s skin and ran both hands around his
waist, his brain short-circuiting a little.

Alex whistled between his teeth and pulled Steph closer to his side. Kurt noticed that all the couples
at the party seemed to be getting a little more touchy-feely, and he clenched his jaw. He watched
Sam slip his sunglasses back over his eyes, and felt his stomach turn to lead. It was like he was
slipping into anonymity, and Kurt felt the worst was yet to come.

Sam lead Sebastian's hands to his buttocks and flexed, pumping his hips suggestively.

Sebastian stared up at him. He remembered what Kurt had told him about Sam. It was hard to not be
attracted to him. Well, Kurt was right. Even if Sam was straight (which Sebastian doubted a little
more every second), he was making it nearly impossible for Sebastian not to want him.

Sam stepped out of his grip, and Sebastian realised he still had his hands up for a few seconds before
quickly dropping them into his lap. Sam was making a little round for the rest of the audience, and
then lowered himself to the floor, rolling his hips in a full body wave.

Kurt wondered if there was any one in the audience, from any orientation, who weren't imagining
themselves down there on the floor with Sam on top. He was; and one look at Sebastian's face told
him he was too.

Sam got up on his hands and knees, and slowly made his way back over to Sebastian. He placed his
hands next to Sebastian's legs and pushed himself up, rubbing his face over Sebastian's thighs as he
came up, and then did a series of very impressive push-ups to the music, each one grazing
Sebastian's legs with his chest.

Sebastian couldn't resist. He ran his hand through Sam's hair, winding his fingers into it and holding
on for a moment, closing his eyes. God, he wished he could just pull him closer, press his face into
his crotch and get a blow job. It had been so long, not counting the aborted thryst in the Satire mens'
room.
But *fuck*, they weren't alone; his friends were all looking at him, and this was a hired *dancer*, not a prostitute - and Kurt's friend. *Kurt*, he thought. He made himself let go again, caressing Sam's face instead, and running his thumb over his full lips with a sigh.

Sam smiled a little and blew him a kiss before straightening up.

The music faded out and it took a minute for Sebastian to come back to Earth.

The room was applauding and a few people came forward to speak to Sam and offer him their phone numbers as he stepped back into his uniform.

Steph and Alice were clutching each other's hands and fanning themselves and Alex plopped himself down on the sofa next to Sebastian.

"So, did I deliver or did I deliver?" he said grinning smugly.

"Oh, you delivered!" Sebastian said shaking his head. "And now I need alcohol...lots of alcohol."

A whisky tumbler appeared by his hand. "I thought you might. Here," Brody said. "Whew. That guy has some *skills*."

"Yeah, my girl can pick 'em," Alex said a little proudly. "Even *I* was feeling a little tingly and you know I don't swing that way."

On the other side of the room, Kurt made himself calm down. He wasn't even sure why Sam's dancing had gotten him so worked up - well, any more than it had intended to.

Somehow, seeing Sebastian like that, practically drooling over another man, had made him feel incredibly uncomfortable. He knew he had no right to feel jealous, but damn...he did.

To distract himself, he walked over to Sam, who was just zipping up.

"Wow, that was certainly something else," Kurt offered. "Where did you learn all that?"

Sam shrugged. "Some of the guys I modelled with also work as private strippers. The money's better than at the club, though some of the clients get a bit too possessive when it takes place in their own home."

He saw Kurt's eyes widen and quickly added: "I'm okay. I've never *not* been able to handle it. There's...playful ways to decline someone's avances that just make it part of the dance."

Kurt nodded. "Do you want to stay? We have food, and drink...?"

Sam hesitated. "I am kinda hungry...and I brought my civilian clothes."

Kurt smiled. "Then go change, and help yourself. You can stay as long as you like."

"Thanks, Kurt."

Sebastian downed the whiskey in one and handed Brody the glass, silently asking for another. Brody had brought the bottle with him and topped up the glass.

"Fuck, it's been so long since I had sex," Sebastian said longingly. He glanced at Kurt. He looked so good tonight and kept throwing furtive looks Sebastian’s way - he’d noticed. He downed his second glass of whiskey.
"I need a distraction before I do something stupid." Sebastian said.

"Yeah, sorry, there was an actual clause in the contract about th—" Alex started, then followed Sebastian’s eyes to Kurt. "Oh!"

As if summoned, Kurt walked up to them. "Everything okay here?" he asked, "or do we need to bring back the ice bucket challenge?"

Brody smirked. "We were about to play Never Have I Ever," he said smoothly. "You in?"

Alex quietly mumbled "were we?" before agreeing that, "yes, we were!"

Kurt pressed his lips together in a smile. "I’m your ride home...I can play, but not with alcohol."

Alex shrugged. "S’okay, we can drink yours. It’s more about the gossip than the booze."

"In that case, sure. I'll ask the girls."

--

Twenty minutes later, the small group of friends were sat on the floor by the big windows in the living room.

After the excitement of the strip tease, the party had slowly started to wind down; people filtering out in little groups. Marc and Paul had personally helped a few into a cab and were now sat consoling a very drunk young man in the kitchen.

Sam stood by the pictures of New York, talking to Kurt’s NYADA friends about his dance moves...at least that’s what Sebastian assumed.

"Okay." Brody said clapping his hands together. "I’m assuming everyone knows how to play?"

"Yes yes!" Alex said waving his hand.

Brody rolled his eyes. "Who’s going first?"

"Okay, okay: here’s one that I personally find very important," Kurt said, smiling. He knew the game was bound to get a little raunchy later, but he thought he’d start with something harmless.

"Never have I ever not tipped at a restaurant."

No one drank and Sebastian felt a little proud of his friends.

"Ok BORING!" Alex said. "Never have I ever...gone skinny-dipping."

Brody looked at Alice with a smile and they both raised their glass, toasting together.

Kurt smiled. He was happy they found each other. They were such a good match.

He had gotten a few cans of energy drink for the game, but didn’t drink. The idea of skinny dipping was enticing, but also a step too far for him. He was only still getting used to showering at NYADA. He saw Sebastian raise his glass as well, and blushed a little.

Marc, who had walked in to check if everything was okay in the living room, let out jovially: "That had better not been in MY pool, Seb! You know the house rules."
Everyone laughed.

"Okay," Alice said, "Never have I ever screamed because of a bug."

"Ha, ha," Alex said, taking a drink. "You'll never let that one go, will you?"

Kurt took a drink too, and shared the story of Blaine's buggy couch.

Sebastian drank as well. He hated bugs.

Lola walked over to him and laid down in front of him, laying her head in his lap. He smiled and stroked her head softly.

"Never have I ever...had a crush on a teacher," he said, grinning at Alice.

"Oooh, he was so hot," Alice mumbled, hanging her head. "Cheers!"

"Do substitutes count? Because, oh my god," Kurt moaned, taking out his phone. He figured if he wasn’t drinking, he might as well volunteer stories. He scrolled through his albums until he found a candid of Mr Martinez, and handed Sebastian his phone. Alice scooted over to look.

"Oh my god, Kurt! Did you hook up?"

"What?!" Kurt let out, a little scandalised, "He would have lost his job!" He shrugged uncomfortably. "And I was with Blaine, anyway."

Sebastian looked at the picture on the screen and felt his eyes go wide. "Fuck," he said.

The man was gorgeous. Tall, built...packing. Sebastian looked at Kurt and handed him back his phone. "They never had substitutes like that at Dalton. How the hell did you concentrate in class?"

"To be honest, I didn’t. I can barely recall what subject he was teaching," Kurt admitted. "But it was the best week at McKinley ever."

Almost as good as when Blaine’s brother Cooper came to town, but that wasn’t the question so Kurt kept that one to himself for now.

"Never have I ever used a fake I.D.," Brody suggested, looking at his friends deviously.

"Cheers, Bas," Kurt said, sipping his drink.

Sebastian laughed and nudged Kurt’s shoulder with his own. "Cheers, Chad Donaldsworth." He sipped from his own cup too.

Alice didn’t drink for this one but Steph did. Alex looked at her with wide eyes.

"What?" She asked with a shrug.

"Nothing just...impressed," Alex replied. "I just didn’t realise you were such a rebel."

She winked. "There’s a lot you don’t know about me, honey." Alex felt a pull in his belly and drank quickly.

"Okay!" Alice said trying to bring her friends back to the game. "Never have I ever...shoplifted from a store."
Steph blushed and drank. Alex’s eyes widened in shock. "Well it’s all coming out tonight."

"I was seven and really wanted this glow in the dark silly putty, but my mom wouldn’t buy it for me and it was a shop the didn’t have alarms or anything…so when no one was looking, I pocketed it."

Kurt cocked his head and smiled. It was adorable. He remembered how April has taught his friends how to shoplift. Mercedes told him all about it, but also about how she felt afterwards, so he hadn’t been tempted to try it.

"Never have I ever...done it in a public place," Steph countered.

"I’m a little relieved now," Alex mumbled as his girlfriend didn’t drink.

Kurt avoided Sebastian’s eyes and took a sip of his drink, hoping no one would notice.

Sebastian did notice but swallowed down his jealousy. Kurt and Blaine had been together a long time...they were bound to have been a little adventurous. And he couldn’t exactly throw judgement. He drank too. Most of his early encounters had been in the bathroom stalls at Scandals.

Alice and Brody drank too, their hands finding each other between them.

"You two as well?" Alex exclaimed.

Alice grinned. "Oh yes...you know that little nook in the library?"

"Well, great! Now I can’t go there anymore!" Alex let out.

Steph rolled her eyes. "Like you ever go to the library!!"

"Well, I’m not gonna, now," Alex replied grumpily.

Sebastian laughed loudly, causing Lola to jump and look up at him reproachfully. He scratched her ear.

"Never have I ever..." he said thoughtfully. "Fantasised about someone else whilst having sex."

"Oh come on!" Alex protested. "Everyone does that, right?"

"I don’t!!" Steph said vehemently. Alice didn’t drink either.

Brody shrugged and drank, but added a bashful "Not anymore," for Alice, kissing her lips.

Kurt felt his heart beat in his throat. It was as if Sebastian knew - but he couldn’t! It was just a silly game, a random question...How could he possibly know that more than once, Kurt had thought about him at Satire, wearing his bartender outfit (or parts of it anyway) while he was with Blaine?

He sipped his drink, trying to banish the memories of the things he had done with Blaine, especially after summer. He wouldn’t have done any of that if he’d known about the cheating.

Sebastian looked at Kurt and raised his eyebrows a little, a teasing glint in his eyes. He longed to know, but at the same time, wasn’t sure if he did.

"Have you really never done that, Seb?" Alex asked. He’d been sure Sebastian at least would have.

"Never. Not once," Sebastian said, holding up his glass. "I always give my partner my full and undivided attention.” He winked.
"Okay...never have I ever...gone down on a guy!" Alex said proudly.

Sebastian rolled his eyes and drank. "Really original."

The girls and Kurt exchanged exasperated sighs and all drank, too. Much to Alex’ surprise, so did Brody.

"But...you're straight!" he let out.

"I am," Brody confirmed. "And thanks to a summer of experimenting, I’ve been sure of that since high school senior year." He winked at Alice.

Neither Kurt or Sebastian could repress a brief sigh and a sudden onslaught of inappropriate thoughts about their friend.

Alex took a bit longer to understand, and ducked his head when he did. "I'm sure without trying, too," he mumbled.

Kurt smiled. He knew Alex didn’t mean anything by it; he would be at least equally uncomfortable thinking about doing the same to a woman.

"Never have I ever been in a threesome," Kurt said, offering Sebastian a small smile.

"Liar!" Alex yelled, and Steph poked him in the side.

"No, it’s true," Kurt said honestly. "I chickened out at the last moment."

Alice caught Sebastian’s eye and smiled.

Sebastian returned her smile and nodded a little. He’d not told any of his friends the outcome of that evening, nor about the conversation after.

He sipped his drink, blushing slightly, and avoided Kurt’s gaze. Across the circle, Brody drank too.

"Bro...is there anything you haven’t done?" Alex said shaking his head.

Brody winked. "Never have I ever been on the receiving end of anal sex."

Sebastian, Kurt and Alice all drank - the latter with a glare at her boyfriend, her face a little red.

Steph nudged Alex a little. "Play fair, honey," she reminded him.

Alex frowned. "But that doesn’t count," he protested in a whisper. "It’s not like I was with a guy!"

"That wasn’t the question," Steph said sweetly.

Grudgingly, Alex took a sip of his drink.

Kurt smiled indulgently. "It’s hardly like we’re going to judge you, Al," he offered. "Or any Al," he added, winking at Alice.

Sebastian grinned at his friends. "Personally, I don’t see why there such a big taboo around it," he said, shaking his head. He was really feeling the effects of the alcohol now.

"Taboo around what?" Marc asked walking into the room. He smiled a little at the sight of Sebastian surrounded by his friends. They were all looking a little worse for wear.

"Ah. Not on my carpet please, it’s just been steam-cleaned." Marc winked at the group. "Are you all okay for drinks and food? Most of the others left now...that stripper guy just left with your NYADA friends, Kurt...well one of them anyway."

"Really?" Kurt asked. "Like...they were gonna share a cab?"

Marc smirked. "Ah, it looked like they might have been planning to share a bit more than a cab…"

Kurt looked at him with wide eyes. Sam?! "This evening really is full of surprises," he mumbled. "What did the other guy look like?"

"Uh, this big, buff guy with dark skin," Marc replied. "I’m not good with names."

Kurt blinked. "Georgio?" He shook his head. The more he thought about that, the more he was amazed.

"Oh my god, that’s so hot," Steph whispered quietly.

Sebastian smirked. "He always pinged on my radar."

"Is that actually a thing?" Alex asked. "I know there’s a lot of jokes about it but like...is it really a thing?"

Sebastian shrugged, "I don’t know...but I’ve never been wrong yet."

"I did think he was gay when I first met him," Kurt mused. "I guess it’s just...a feeling of belonging, or something. It’s hard to explain. But he dated half the girls in school, so…"

"So, he might be bi or pan," Steph said, shrugging, and yawned. "I’m sorry, but I think I should get to bed soon."

Alex seemed to perk up at that suggestion. "Yes! Me too!" he said eagerly.

Kurt got up and brushed down his pants. "Your designated driver is ready," he said. He turned to Brody and the others. "Shall I make two trips or do you want to go home as well?"

"There’s still so much cheese to eat," Sebastian said, dragging the e sound out.

Kurt smiled at him fondly. "Okay, I’ll take these two home and come back for you."

Steph and Alex said their goodbyes and headed out.

Alice got up and retrieved the plate of cheese from a nearby table, bringing it over to Sebastian. She sat down next to him. He grinned and picked up a piece of cheddar. "I love cheese," he said happily. He leant his head against Alice’s shoulder as he ate.

Alice smiled and wrapped her arm around Sebastian. She looked covertly at Brody who took the hint and followed Marc into the kitchen to help clear up.

"Did you have a good birthday, baby?" she asked, stroking his hair.

"I did, thank you so much...you guys are the best."

"Good. I had a good time, too," she said, resting her head against his.
She thought about their evening, and the drinking game.

"Kurt seemed okay," she mused. "He still makes that...sad face...when he talks about Blaine, but he no longer seems as fragile as before. He’s pretty when he’s sad, though. So pretty…” She shook herself. "I’m sorry. I’m very drunk," she sighed.

Sebastian smiled. "He is pretty...he’s..." he tried to form the words. "I’m in trouble Alice...I can’t stop these feelings I have."

Alice sighed. "I know." She sat up. "He didn’t sleep with those guys, though. Isn’t that a good sign?" She frowned. "Or did he just mean...he didn’t sleep with them at the same time?"

She shook her head. "Forget it, I don’t know what I am saying, Seb. But I know he cares about you a lot. He really put a lot of work in getting all of this right.” She waved at the room. "He even picked an outfit for Alex!"

Sebastian smiled. "I hope he does..." he closed his eyes and buried closer to her. "You’re really comfy."

He sat in silence for a moment wrapped in comfort before something else that Alice had said registered in his brain.

"He didn’t sleep with those guys...not together...or separately either..."

"Seems you know something we don’t..." Alice said, starting to feel a little sleepy.

Sebastian smiled and didn’t respond, just content being in her company. He’d never had a sister, but he supposed that this is what it might have felt like.

- 

Kurt looked down on Sebastian and smiled.

One of the dogs had curled up next to him. He had looked so happy and relaxed, it almost seemed a shame to wake him, but Kurt did so anyway, knowing that waking up hungover in your own bed was better than waking up on someone’s floor. And Sebastian was bound to feel more than a little nauseous in the morning.

"Hey, sleeping beauty. Your carriage awaits."

Sebastian blinked awake and looked at Kurt until he came into focus.

'You really are pretty,' he thought and allowed Kurt to help him up.

Lola shuffled out of his way as he got up and looked at him reproachfully.

Kurt smirked. 'Thanks,' he replied in French, lifting Sebastian up from the floor.

Sebastian blinked again. He hadn’t been aware he’d been speaking out loud.

"Fortunately I’m also pretty strong." Kurt finally got his friend up and wrapped an arm around his waist. "Brody and Alice are already waiting in the car."

"Mmm super strong," Sebastian said, letting Kurt bear his weight.

"Happy Birthday Seb!" Marc said ruffling his hair gently. He and Paul were standing by the door
"Thank you for an amazing evening!" Sebastian said sleepily, raising a hand to clasp Marc’s shoulder. "You’re the best step-dads anyone could ask for."

Marc and Paul exchanged a look.

"Stay safe, boys," Paul said, putting an arm around his husband.

Kurt led Sebastian to Alex's car. They had agreed he'd use it to drive everyone home, and Alex would come pick it up at his place in the morning. Brody and Alice were already in the back. Kurt rapped the window to get them to stop making out. He didn't want to spoil their fun, but everyone wore seatbelts when he was driving.

He carefully lowered Sebastian into the front passenger seat, cupping the back of his head to stop him from hitting it against the roof getting in. "Tell me if you're gonna be sick, okay? It's probably best not to fall asleep again."

"I won't be sick..." Sebastian replied drowsily. He slumped in his the seat, giggling a little as Kurt reached over him to buckle his seat belt.

In the backseat Alice rested her head on Brody’s shoulder, a content smile on her face as she watched Kurt look after her best friend.

"I’m so sleepy," she whispered, closing her eyes and snuggling in to her boyfriend’s warmth.

Kurt stood up and closed the door of the passenger side, shaking his head. He was used to being the designated driver, but that didn’t make it more fun to be the only sober person in the room. Or in the car, in this case. He walked around to the driver’s side and slid in. To keep himself awake and focused, he put some music on. Not wanting to change Alex's radio channel, it played the Beatles. Kurt’s heart gave a little twinge. It was one of his mother's favourite lullabies, Beautiful Boy. He hummed along softly and thought about their evening.

You really are pretty.

Kurt wondered what Sebastian had been dreaming about before he woke him.

Despite Kurt's advice, Sebastian did fall asleep again. The combined mixture of the car engine, soft music and Kurt’s angelic voice sent him into a sweet slumber. It wasn’t until the car came to a stop and the engine cut off that he stirred, realising that they were home...or rather he was.

He swallowed. He didn’t like the idea of going in alone. Tonight had been amazing and he’d been shown just how loved he was...he didn’t want to lose that feeling just yet.

"We're here," Kurt said quietly. He had driven slowly, somehow reluctant to wake Sebastian again.

Sebastian slowly sat up and turned to smile at Kurt. He found he couldn’t say anything...there were not enough words that he could use to express how much tonight had meant to him. He didn’t even know where to begin.

"I..." he said quietly. He shook his head, unable to get the words out. "Kurt...thank you...so much for tonight...for everything."

"You're welcome," Kurt said, smiling. It was hard to imagine that they had once flung such biting insults at each other. Kurt would take them all back if he could. There was definitely nothing wrong
with Sebastian's features. *He is a beautiful boy,* Kurt's mind supplied, filtering back the lyrics of the song he had just sung.

"Shall I...Do you want me to help you up?" he asked. It wouldn't do if Sebastian had to spend the night on the floor in front of his door because he couldn't manage to get the key into the lock.

Sebastian smiled and relaxed at Kurt's question. "Yes please..." He felt silly for requesting it. He'd come home in far worse states than this before and managed just fine. But the idea of Kurt looking after him, at least for a little while longer, was a nice one.

Kurt nodded, springing into action. He rounded the car and helped Sebastian out of his seat, draping his friend's arm around his shoulder so he could lean on him. "I'm glad I got everyone out of Alex's car without any incidents that required a clean-up," he commented idly. "Though Alex himself had the closest call on my first trip."

They made their way up to Sebastian's apartment. "Okay. Keys?" Kurt asked.

Sebastian's expression was a little vacant. Kurt bit his lip. Shifting his weight to hold Sebastian up, he awkwardly patted the front pockets of Sebastian's jeans with his free hand until he felt something that might be a keychain. He took a deep breath, held it, and slipped his fingers inside to fish it out.

Sebastian sucked in a breath as Kurt slipped his hand into his pocket but made no move to stop him. The little dregs of reason left in his brain told him that doing so would likely cause more of an issue. He giggled as images of what could go wrong flickered in his mind.

Kurt smirked. Either Sebastian was ticklish, or he also saw the absurdity of what they were doing. That night in the club, Kurt had felt a lot more of what was in Sebastian's jeans than just his keys, so how come he was suddenly so embarrassed? Telling himself to get over it, he pushed his hand in further, grabbed the keys, and pulled out again, flicking them over his hand to get the right one for the lock.

With one hand, he opened the door, put the keys on the table so Sebastian would find them in the morning, and navigated his way to the bedroom by memory, not wanting to blast Sebastian with bright lights.

"So, here we go," he mumbled, lowering Sebastian onto the bed.

Sebastian sat on the bed for a second before flopping backwards. He looked up at Kurt in the dark.

"Thank you. Would you...could I have a glass of water please?" he asked quietly, trying to think of a reason to keep Kurt there as long as possible.

Kurt looked down on him. "I'm not brushing your teeth," he teased, walking to kitchen to get a glass. He filled it and carried it back into the bedroom, stopping to grab a strip of aspirins from the cabinet in the bathroom on his way passed. As an afterthought, he also took out a fresh towel in case Sebastian would get sweaty or sick. He placed everything on the night stand and looked a last look at the drunk boy on the bed.

"I should go-" Kurt started, just as Sebastian said "-Please stay."

Kurt swallowed. "For the night?" he asked quietly.

"Forever?" Sebastian whispered so quietly he wasn’t sure if Kurt would hear him. After he’d said it he wondered if he’d said it at all. But he knew he meant it.
Kurt paused. For a moment, he was reeling, his shields completely shattered. "Bas..." he started, not sure what his next words should be.

Sebastian closed his eyes and swallowed, he rolled on to his side and pushed himself up.

"Kurt," he whispered, looking up at his friend with wide eyes. "I know it's complicated and I really don't want to pressure you. But...I'm running out of ideas about why we shouldn't be together?" He made a valiant effort to stand up but failed, sitting back on the bed.

Kurt's shoulders slumped a little. He sat down on the bed too and looked at his hands for a moment. The skin on his finger no longer showed an indentation where his ring used to be, and the pale stripe was gone, too. But the pain wasn't, and opening himself up just to be hurt like that again...it was daunting. He had been willing to throw all of his fears overboard in the club, but the more time he'd had after Sebastian's rejection, the more he had come to see it had been the right thing to do.

"You know why, Sebastian," he said gently. "You said so yourself."

Sebastian turned to look at Kurt.

"I know...I know what I said and I still believe it, and if you need more time then I understand...but I can't be the only one that senses that there's something between us and whatever it is, it's real..." he said almost pleadingly and reached for Kurt's hand. He was relieved when Kurt accepted his touch and curled their fingers together.

"I know you have baggage and scars...but I have baggage and scars too. I can't promise I'm going to be any good at being a boyfriend. I've never been one before and I'm terrified of fucking it up and losing you. But I love you and I want to try."

Kurt took in a sharp breath. Sebastian had already told him how he felt months ago, but not as directly. They'd talked of attraction, desire...but love? Kurt didn't realise how much he had longed to hear those words again and actually dare to believe them. "You've already been a better boyfriend to me - without being my boyfriend - than Blaine ever was," he admitted. He had no doubts about Sebastian's capabilities - just about himself.

"I'm more worried that I'm...not enough."

Kurt shrugged, feeling awkward. "Never have I ever...had more than one partner," he said bashfully. "I don't know what I'd have to offer to keep you interested, and I'm not sure my heart can handle being broken all over again."

Sebastian closed his eyes and brought Kurt's hand up to his lips, kissing it softly. Then he looked into Kurt's eyes.

"Kurt...I would never, ever cheat on you, you are enough...you're everything...I know I am incredibly drunk right now," he said shaking his head. "...but I really mean every word."

Kurt pressed his lips into a thin smile. He believed that Sebastian meant his own words - right now. But he also knew how quickly "never" could shift to "okay, so it happened once but never again, I promise".

And yet there was this tiny, tiny voice inside that whispered maybe it really wouldn't be like that. Maybe he would stay, and they could make it work.

Should he really risk losing this chance over potential pain in the future? Maybe it was time he took his future into his own hands, instead of waiting for some kind of cosmic sign to tell him he was
"Never have I ever...wanted to kiss you more," Kurt said quietly, finally giving into the emotions he’d been ignoring for the past few months.

Sebastian looked at Kurt in wonderment and a grin slowly spread across his face. "Then you should."

Sebastian's smile broke the tension, and Kurt smirked. "I will. Just don’t puke on me." With that, he leaned towards his friend and kissed him, softly at first, simply pressing their lips together and pulling back.

Kurt knew plenty of kisses. One-sided ones, that simply pressed angrily until it felt his teeth might cut into the back of his lips. Showy ones, with hands on the side of his face, that stated 'this is mine'. Perfunctory pecks, thank-you-dear’s, and open-mouthed, invasive ones. Kisses that marked the start of a journey down to the place that made him agree to anything. And one kiss, burned into his memory, full of passion and I-don't-care's and please-make-me-forget's.

None of them had been like this.

Only their lips touched, and for the first time, Kurt felt like it was entirely on his terms. He kissed him again, more urgently, letting go of Sebastian's hands to wrap his arms around his shoulders. He breathed in deeply and leaned in again, first capturing Sebastian’s bottom lip, then the top between his own.

Kurt's eyes slipped closed. Sebastian kissed him back. Every touch started tentatively, as if asking for permission. Like this? Is this okay? Can I do this, here? Am I really allowed, now?

Sebastian melted further into the kiss, hardly daring to believe it was happening. He let Kurt take control, matching his movements and pressure.

It felt like coming home.

Kurt's lips parted, and he breathed in, tasting the alcohol on Sebastian's breath as their tongues slid against each other sensually.

Sebastian pulled away slowly, pressing back in to kiss Kurt again, their lips slotting together as if they were two pieces of a puzzle. He opened his eyes and smiled, pressing their foreheads together. "Best birthday ever."

Kurt opened his eyes too and returned Sebastian’s smile. It felt like a weight was lifted off his shoulders just by making a decision.

"We'll need to talk about this in the morning, when you’re sober," he whispered, kissing Sebastian again just in case he wouldn’t get to anymore the next day, then pulled away and got up.

"I’m tired. I want to stay...but on the couch, okay? I don’t want you to wake up and not remember why I am in your bed." Kurt offered Sebastian a shy smile.

"Mmm, okay," Sebastian hummed. Bed it was, then. Suddenly, he was eager to sleep so it would be morning sooner. Never had he ever...looked forward to sobering up as much as he did now. He started fumbling with the buttons on his shirt.

Kurt shook his head. "You’d better not be faking this just to get me to undress you, Mr Martini," he mumbled fondly, swatting Sebastian’s hands away to make quick work of his buttons.
Sebastian let his hands fall to the bed and looked at Kurt. "Why are you so amazing? What did I do to deserve you?" he mumbled.

He shivered as the shirt slipped off his arms, exposing his bare chest.

"Well, you do make a great Cocksucking Cowboy," Kurt joked feebly, a little distracted by the sight of Sebastian's skin. He put the shirt to the side and considered how to get off his friend’s jeans. He decided for the easiest way, and simply pushed Sebastian onto his back on the bed.

Sebastian smiled happily and flopped back onto the mattress, arms spread wide. "Mmm kinky," he chuckled as his back hit the bed. Kurt started unbuttoning his jeans and he lay very still. There was too much alcohol in his system for him to get too worked up about the position he was in, but somewhere in the back of his mind a fire ignited.

We’ll talk in the morning. Kurt was scared that he wouldn’t remember...or that he would and regret it. Something else ignited inside Sebastian that had nothing to do with Kurt tugging his jeans open.

He reached up to stroke Kurt’s arm. He didn’t say anything - words at this point seemed to be beyond his brain’s capability. But he wanted to reassure Kurt that he did mean what he’d said, drunk or sober.

Kurt closed his eyes, for a moment just concentrating on Sebastian's touch. Now that he'd made his decision, it was hard to wait until morning, but he wanted to do this right.

"Come on," he said, more to himself than to Sebastian, and made himself get on with it. He tugged Sebastian's jeans down over his hips, and got off the bed to take hold of the cuffs and pull them down his legs. Kurt took a last, longing look at the beautiful body sprawled on the bed in front of him. No wonder Isabelle thought he was one of the Vogue models, he thought vaguely. Then, he pulled the covers free from under him, and tucked them around Sebastian.

"Goodnight, Bas. I'll be just outside if you need me."

"Good night, Kurt," Sebastian whispered, already slipping into a peaceful sleep.
Is This The Real Life?

Chapter Summary

Sebastian wakes up from the best dream he's ever had...and realises it might not have been a dream after all.

The first thing Sebastian knew in the morning was a blinding headache and a dry mouth. He blinked against the harsh light coming in through the window, groaning a little.

He pressed his head into the soft pillows and closed his eyes again, breathing deeply.

He mustered as much energy as he could and leaned up on one elbow to reach for the glass of water on his nightstand. He sipped it greedily before resting the cool glass against his pounding head.

That was when he noticed the slip of aspirin and hand towel on the nightstand. He thought it odd that he'd had the sense to bring those things in to the room with him. Then his brain caught up and he remembered.

Kurt.

Kurt bringing him home, looking after him...agreeing to try. Kurt...kissing him like he had never been kissed before. It all felt a bit like a dream.

Suddenly, Sebastian wasn't sure if it really hadn't been a dream. Was Kurt still at his place, on the couch, or had he just dreamed it all up? He should get up and check. But the pounding in his head grew with every passing minute and stopped him from doing so. He set the glass down and popped a couple of aspirin out, swallowing them quickly followed by more water.

He closed his eyes and flopped back down into the warm sheets, the soft pillow helping relieve the pressure on his head. It didn't take long for him to drift back into a deep sleep.

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Kurt had stayed awake for quite some time after putting Sebastian to bed. The first feeling that had hit him after he realised what had just happened, was claustrophobia. A relationship, again. Conformity, rules, adjustments. But as he had all night to think about it - Sebastian wasn't going to wake up anytime soon - he slowly dissected that feeling, and was able to calm himself.

How would their becoming a couple limit him, really? Sebastian knew how much he worked; he had never urged him to work less just to spend time with him, and Kurt couldn't imagine he would start doing that now.

Sebastian worked nights as well, so that wouldn't be a problem either. He also knew how strict Kurt was about his physical regime, and so far, had only expressed admiration for it; rather than calling him a manorexic or a gym-addict.

Sebastian understood the sacrifices Kurt made for his chosen profession. He also knew all about Kurt's quirks and hobbies already - Kurt had hidden nothing from him. And while they didn't share all of the same passions, Sebastian had never mocked him for them, or told him to quit pursuing what
made him happy.

He would also never tell Kurt to stop seeing his friends, because his friends were Sebastian's friends as well, and they did things together. And since they both had their own apartments, he would still have his own safe space to retreat to if he needed it. Kurt was pretty sure that no matter how much Sebastian loved him (had he really said that? Sebastian? In love?) he wasn't ready to move in with him. And neither was Kurt.

So what would change for them, apart from - quite possibly, no, most definitely - adding sex to a great friendship?

Nothing, a tiny voice whispered in the back of his brain. They'd still be Bas and Kurt, best friends.

As he figured that out, Kurt suddenly couldn't wait until the morning. He just hoped Sebastian wouldn’t change his mind after he sobered up.

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The second time Sebastian woke up he felt a little more human. The aspirin had reduced his headache to a dull throbbing and he found he could sit up without the room spinning - though he still felt pretty rough.

Slowly, he sat up fully and swung his legs out of the bed, letting his feet rest heavily on the floor. He winced a little at the cold wood under his skin.

He stood up carefully and was grateful that it didn’t make him want to throw up. He padded softly towards the door and stumbled into the bathroom.

Once he had relieved himself, he brushed his teeth and splashed some cold water on his face, peering at himself in the small mirror. He’d definitely had worse hangovers. He headed for the kitchen in search of coffee, as he passed through the living room he noticed Kurt sleeping peacefully on the sofa...Wait. Kurt? Kurt had actually stayed? It hadn’t been a dream?

He wondered what it meant for them now. Were they together? Would they be? Kurt had promised he’d think about it, and they would talk. What was he going to say?

The over-thinking made his head hurt so he walked to the kitchen and began preparing a pot of coffee. Coffee made everything better.

--

Kurt woke up to the sound and smell of coffee brewing, and smiled. He wasn't disoriented or lost - he knew exactly where he was. He'd lived here, with Sebastian, before. And right now, this was exactly the place where he wanted to be.

He sat up, pushing the oversized vest he had found and used as a blanket off himself, and ran his hands over his face and through his hair.

"Hey," he said, his voice a little lower from sleep.

"Hey," Sebastian said a little shyly. "I’m sorry you had to sleep under that! There’s a blanket in the box in my room."

Kurt shrugged and ran his hands over the vest. He remembered Sebastian wearing it in winter. "I like it. And I didn't want to disturb you." He looked at Sebastian. He looked a little worse for wear, but
not like he was shocked or unhappy to see him on his couch. That seemed like a good start.

Sebastian sipped his coffee, letting the warm liquid infuse with his blood, giving him energy.

"Did you sleep okay?"

"Sure. Like old times," Kurt said, smiling. "How are you feeling?"

"Rough as fucking nails...but I’ve been worse," Sebastian said gruffly.

He set his mug down and reached for another, pouring some coffee into it and adding creamer and sugar in the way Kurt liked it. He picked up his own and walked over to the couch, handing Kurt’s to him before sitting down next to him.

"I really want to thank you, Kurt," he said looking at him. "For yesterday...going to so much effort...it really meant a lot to me and I want you to know that."

Kurt gratefully accepted his mug, wrapping his hands around it. "So you said...quite a few times last night," he reminded Sebastian gently. He paused. "We, um... also said a few other things..."

Sebastian bit his lip and nodded. "We did..." He was suddenly feeling very nervous. "Though when I woke up I thought it had all been a dream."

Kurt smiled. "A good dream, hopefully?"

"The best," Sebastian said, curling his legs up underneath him and hugging his mug.

He knew he should say something, make a move...but he was so scared that Kurt had changed his mind that he couldn’t. He didn’t want to be the one to pop the bubble.

Kurt closed his eyes briefly and sighed in relief. When he opened them again, Sebastian was looking so vulnerable Kurt was afraid a wrong breath might undo him.

"We also kissed..." he started carefully.

Sebastian nodded, feeling butterflies swirl in his stomach. "Seems to be a habit of ours...kissing when one of us is drunk..."

Kurt blushed. "Yes. Think our subconscious is trying to tell us something?"

"Maybe..." Sebastian said softly.

"You were a lot surer of yourself last night," Kurt teased. "In fact, you were...pretty convincing. I thought, after Blaine, I was, um, inconvinincible, but...Consider me a convinced person. A convincé. Is that a thing? I don’t know." Kurt chuckled nervously. He was babbling and he knew it, but he had to make up for all the things Sebastian wasn’t saying.

Sebastian frowned a little as he tried to comprehend what Kurt was saying. "So...you..." He said slowly, hardly daring to believe it.

"So...I...want to be your boyfriend. If you still want me to be," Kurt finished. He wanted to say it out loud and make it official, so there were no misunderstandings.

Sebastian thought his chest might explode from the sudden rush of emotion that swelled inside him. A grin that he couldn’t control spread across his face and he stared at Kurt.
"Yes...yes!!! Of course I still want that...it’s all I’ve wanted for months!" He reached for Kurt’s hand, needing to feel him to be sure he really wasn’t dreaming.

Kurt smiled; a little at first, then more and more. Really? he wanted to ask, but he could tell Sebastian was genuinely happy. He knew his friend. He didn’t need to ask. He squeezed Sebastian’s hand, and tried to curb his own enthusiasm for one moment longer. There was one more thing that needed to be said.

He took a deep breath and gathered his courage. "But Bas...If we do this...I would want the both of us to be exclusive. I can't...I couldn't bear."

Sebastian’s smile softened and he kissed Kurt’s hand. "Of course, Kurt," he said reassuringly. "I want that too! Call me selfish, but I want you all to myself," he added with a wink.

Kurt felt a surge of love for this man, who, instead of assuming it meant he couldn't see other people himself, interpreted Kurt's words to mean that Kurt wouldn't have a second lover on the side.

The implication that he thought Kurt could, instead of making him feel he had no other options? It was balm to Kurt's soul.

"Me too," Kurt said softly, unable to express how happy this made him yet. "You'll break a lot of hearts at the club if this gets out..." he teased instead.

Sebastian shook his head. "I haven’t been game at the club for months...and I don’t care about any of them. All I want is you...as long as you’re sure this is what you want."

"I just had the longest night of my life to think this over," Kurt said honestly, "and I am sure." He took a deep breath and let it out. "And if you're not too hungover, I'd really like you to kiss me again now."

Sebastian grinned, uncurling his legs so he could sit up properly. He took Kurt's mug off him and set both down on the coffee table before lacing their fingers together and leaning forwards.

"I will never be too hungover to do that," he said softly, pulling Kurt towards him. He paused for a moment, looking at Kurt. He had a boyfriend. For real. Then he bridged the gap and kissed Kurt softly at first, just a faint brush against his lips. He pulled back for a second, unable to keep the smile off his face, before closing his eyes and leaning back in to kiss Kurt again.

Kurt breathed into it, closing his eyes.

Sebastian let out a breath through his nose as the kiss deepened. The angle was slightly awkward but he didn’t want to stop. He slid one hand up to cup Kurt’s cheek, the other gripping his waist. He broke the kiss only for a second to catch his breath before pushing back in, opening his mouth a little to tease his tongue against Kurt’s lips.

Kurt made a small, needy sound against Sebastian’s lips and met his tongue with his own, opening his lips to encourage him in. Sebastian tasted of coffee and toothpaste - an odd combination, but it didn’t matter - Kurt wanted more.

Something on the table made a buzzing noise. Kurt ignored it, too busy winding a hand in Sebastian’s hair...Kissing him was just as amazing as it had been the night before.

It buzzed again. Annoyed, Kurt broke the kiss and opened his eyes. His phone screen was lit up with a picture of Alex giving him the finger.
"Oh, shit!" Kurt let out, letting go of Sebastian to scramble for the phone. As soon as he picked it up, Alex spoke.

"Dude! Where’s my car?"

Sebastian chased after Kurt as he pulled away. He felt lightheaded and dizzy, as if all the air had been sucked from his lungs. Why was there no more kissing? It took his brain a moment to comprehend what was happening and then he heard Kurt say Alex’s name and he remembered. Kurt had Alex’s car.

Sebastian took Kurt’s hand and shook his head, silently indicating for Kurt to not tell Alex about this, about them yet. It was still so new. He wanted to enjoy it as just the two of them for now.

Kurt squeezed Sebastian’s hand softly, showing that he’d understood.

"No, I’m still at Sebastian’s," he told Alex. "He was so drunk last night I was afraid he wouldn’t make it into his apartment. By the time I convinced him to go to bed, it was so late I crashed on the couch. Just stay put, I’ll drive over now."

He shot Sebastian an apologetic look. He really wanted to stay, but Alex needed his car back. Before hanging up, Kurt told Alex to treat himself to something from the deli across the street while he waited. That bought Kurt at least a few more minutes.

Kurt lowered his phone. "I’m sorry," he said. "I have to go."

Sebastian smiled and squeezed Kurt’s hand, bringing it to his lips to press a kiss against his knuckles. He was disappointed, but he knew Alex, and if Kurt didn’t turn up soon he would come to Sebastian’s and the cat would be out of the bag instantly.

"It’s okay," he said softly. "Thank you for not mentioning this yet." He lifted up their joint hands. "I want to enjoy our bubble for a while without letting the world in."

"Me too," Kurt said softly. "Alex would have told everyone in minutes."

He looked at Sebastian and tightened his hand. "But I do want everyone to know, when we are ready. I’m not hiding you again."

Sebastian grinned, feeling like a balloon of warm air was inflating inside him. "We can shout it from the rooftops babe. I want the world to know, too...when we’re ready."

Kurt’s eyes glittered, and he licked his lips. "How long do you think Alex needs to eat his way through the deli pastries?"

Sebastian followed the path of Kurt’s tongue and longed to trace it with his own. He leant forward and kissed Kurt again, sucking his bottom lip between his own for a moment. "Not as long as I would like," he said quietly. "But I’ll see you this evening." He kissed Kurt again. "We have work...and, maybe after?" He felt a little thrill at the idea.

"I’ll pack a toothbrush," Kurt whispered, leaning in for one more kiss. His stomach fluttered. He knew what everyone said about putting out on the first date...but they had kind of been dating for a year, hadn’t they?

Sebastian hummed happily against Kurt’s lips. "I can’t wait," he whispered.
Glad You Came

Chapter Summary

...in which the title gets a whole new meaning ;)

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter contains (fairly) graphic descriptions of sex, as well as a continuation of our ongoing plot.

If you'd rather skip the naughty bits, let us know in the comments and we can summarise the rest of the chapter's plot for you.

Alex was perfectly happy when Kurt arrived, and didn’t ask any awkward questions. In fact, he was more eager to talk about his night than ask about Kurt’s. Clearly Sam’s dancing had been very inspiring for them. Kurt listened indulgently and let his mind wander to Sebastian.

Kissing him felt right. It felt amazing. The prospect of staying the night - and not on the couch - made him feel giddy.

As had become evident in their drinking game, Sebastian had done everything. The idea was titillating and daunting at the same time. What if he couldn’t keep up? What if Sebastian would be disappointed?

Kurt pushed those thoughts away. He was a quick study and had a vivid imagination. Bas was just going to have to tutor him. Now that thought was very distracting.

"Kurt? Kurt!"

Kurt blinked. Alex was looking at him, and Kurt had no idea what he just said. "Uh, yeah. Yes," he replied, hoping it was the right answer.

"Really?" Alex replied, in surprise.

Kurt winced. "I’m sorry, I don’t know," he offered instead.

"It’s okay, I’ll just ask Steph," Alex said. "Thanks for driving us! And don’t forget, Thursday’s karaoke, yeah?"

"Yes. I won’t forget," Kurt assured him, and yawned. Maybe he should get some more sleep before work. And a very long shower, and manscaping, and - they were really going to be doing this, weren’t they?

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After Kurt left, Sebastian had gone back to bed and slept well into the afternoon.

When he woke up, he had a long, hot shower and made himself an omelette. By the time he left for work, he was feeling more or less human again.

He still couldn’t quite believe that he and Kurt were now officially a couple. He had wanted it for so long and thought it would never happen. Now that it had, it somehow didn’t seem real.

He couldn’t wait for their shift to end...he was looking forward to spending time with Kurt, completely uninterrupted.

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It took 2 spilled drinks and one jet of ice water hitting the floor for Kurt to admit he was very distracted. He was losing a lot of potential tips tonight, but he didn’t care. He just wanted his shift to end. It wasn’t until someone complained to Sebastian that his trainée was slacking off, that Kurt realised that he was being unprofessional and had to get a grip.

The next hour went better, but as the clock ticked on, Kurt started getting nervous again. He wondered if Sebastian felt the same way. He knew Sebastian used to hook up after his shifts a lot, so this was probably a little less exciting for him.

Although...Sebastian had said he hadn’t done that for months. Kurt looked at him from the side. He was so attractive. Butterflies swirled around in Kurt’s stomach again and he poured a shot over his hand instead of in the glass.

Sebastian could see that Kurt was struggling. He’d already had a couple of complaints and had managed to deter them, but as he saw Kurt spill another shot, he knew he had to say something.

He slid up next to Kurt with a cloth and wiped down the counter, wiping it over Kurt’s hand too. "Are you okay, babe?" he asked quietly.

"I’m f-" Kurt started, but caught himself just in time. If they wanted this to work, there would be no false I’m fines between them. "...freaking nervous," he admitted instead.

Sebastian smiled softly. He placed his hand on Kurt’s arm and guided him away from the bar a little.

"You know...I’m not expecting anything to happen tonight, Kurt," he said quietly. "I just want to spend time with you. We don’t have to do anything we’re not ready for."

Kurt looked up on him, his pupils blown wide in the dimly lit bar. "But I want to," he said in a low voice.

He smirked, hoping to diffuse the awkwardness with a joke. "After all, back in school, you used to walk around like you were God’s greatest gift to gay men..." He winked.

Sebastian swallowed. Oh. He coughed and felt himself blush a little, suddenly feeling nervous himself. “You know that was a front right?” he said quietly.

Kurt smirked. “I know, but you still have a lot more experience than me.”

“Technically yes, when it comes to sex…but I’m running on empty when it comes to experience with relationships.” Sebastian swallowed again.
Kurt relaxed and looked at his boyfriend. He could see the worry and nerves in Sebastian’s eyes. He smiled softly. “So, we take it slow, and see what happens?”

Sebastian returned Kurt’s smile. “Sounds like a plan. But first, we have a shift to finish and it’d be really good if we could stop wasting alcohol,” he added with a wink.

Kurt offered him a warm smile. “Right, of course.” He blushed a little, nodded at Sebastian and headed back to his customers.

"I hope your boss wasn’t too hard on you,” one man offered.

"Not yet,” Kurt replied, smirking. "But he did threaten to make me work overtime tonight." He took up a bottle of vodka. "Let me try that shot again."

Sebastian heard Kurt’s remark and laughed out loud before catching himself and pursing his lips together to stem the sound.

The rest of the shift passed without any further spills…except one. At some point, Sebastian looked over at Kurt. He was throwing a bottle up in the air, and as he did, his shirt tightened over his arms and chest. Sebastian wanted to run his hands all over them, and peel off that tight shirt to taste the skin underneath. Suddenly, he realised that he might be allowed to do that tonight. As that thought struck him, he dropped an entire bucket of ice on his own shoes.

Kurt saw and smirked a little. They really were in it together. Knowing that made Kurt feel better, and he managed to get through the rest of his shift without any more accidents.

Kurt ended up offering to put his share of the tips in the register for all the spills, but Joe told him he was still in training and nights like this happened. Kurt was surprised by his leniency, but as they walked home, Sebastian assured him Joe was really just a great guy who wanted his employees to enjoy work. Kurt told him about Gunther and the time he’d gone off at a new girl for dropping plates, and was once again happy he had switched jobs.

After a while, Kurt took Sebastian’s hand, swinging it between them a little and smiling. Working at the bar had more benefits than just having a comfortable working environment…at the end of his shift, he had someone to walk home with.

They picked up some fried noodles and vegetables to share. It was almost 8 hours since either of them had eaten, and after all that time on their feet, they could both use a little break and something to eat before bed. Bed...

The prospect of staying over no longer made Kurt nervous. Either they would, or they wouldn’t, and either way, he’d get to spend more time with Sebastian.

They arrived at Sebastian’s place and Sebastian went into the kitchen to get glasses and water while Kurt cleared the coffee table to put the boxes of food on. Kurt liked the way they worked without him having to divide chores or doing everything by himself.

When they were set up, Kurt took off his shoes and curled his legs under himself on the couch, grabbing a box of noodles and chopsticks.

Sebastian sat cross-legged next to Kurt and started on some noodles. He hadn’t been sure what to expect with the shift in their relationship. He had somehow thought it might make things awkward or change their dynamic in someway. But sitting there with Kurt eating the food they had bought was
as normal as anything, and he didn’t know what he’d been worrying about.

"Was Alex pissed this morning?" he asked. "That you weren’t at home?"

"No, not at all," Kurt replied. "I think he was just anxious to tell me all about his ‘epic sexcapades’ of last night..." He wrinkled his nose a little and faked a shudder. "I congratulated him, of course, as I guess guys do..."

He winked at Sebastian. Having straight friends who actually told him details about their love lives just because they were friends...it was a new thing. He was still getting used to the responses that were expected of him.

Sebastian laughed. "Yeah...he can get carried away with details sometimes." He shuddered a little. "I tend to block him out when he starts. I don’t want to know those things about Steph. Or him, really. I have no idea why he thinks he needs to share all of that with the world. I don’t spill the gory details on my sex life." He added. "Maybe it’s a straight thing?"

"Maybe. And...good." Kurt said shyly. He hadn’t even thought about that yet, but knowing how much Sebastian and Alice liked to talk about sex, he was glad of the assurance Sebastian didn’t kiss and tell. Then, something occurred to him and Kurt frowned. "I wasn’t really listening, but he said something about getting donuts?" He had actively tried to block it out. If Steph and Alex had some kind of food fetish, he’d rather not know.

Sebastian chuckled a little at Kurt's expression. "Celebratory sex donuts!" he let out. "Oh god, I forgot no one told you..."

Kurt raised an eyebrow, his chopsticks hovering between his box and his mouth.

"It was something I inadvertently started. Back when I used to hook up at the club, more often than not, I would pick up baked goods on the way to school. It was generally because I’d not eaten anything and needed breakfast. But it kind of became tradition...that sex meant donuts for the group. Then the others just kind of started doing it too."

Kurt took a bite of his noodles as he mulled over it. Then he looked up at Sebastian. "Wait. So all those times you brought pastries...?"

Sebastian smirked as he watched Kurt figure it out.

"Oh." Kurt ducked his head, suddenly very interested in picking the last vegetables out of his noodles. It did explain a lot, actually. Alice had been bringing a lot of boxes along to their group activities since summer, too. Sebastian had stopped getting them sugary snacks months ago...around New Year's Eve. Kurt had assumed it was just a good resolution. Maybe it was...but not the way he had thought.

Sebastian finished his noodles and set his plate down on the coffee table. He stretched his arms up over his head and bent his back so it cracked satisfactorily.

Kurt shivered. "I really hate that sound," he said.

Sebastian smirked. "Sorry...it just feels really good." He put his arms down, resting one along the back of the sofa and the other in his lap.

"We might have to come up with a new system now that everyone’s in relationships." He said
"Yeah," Kurt said, smiling a little. He put his noodles down and copied Sebastian's pose, putting his hand over Sebastian's on the sofa. "Or maybe everyone just minds their own business," he suggested, but there was no venom behind his words.

The thought of the others knowing when he'd had sex - or himself knowing when his friends had - didn't make Kurt as uneasy as it would have with his other friends. He'd bought a noise machine especially to block Rachel and Brody out. But somehow, with Alice, Alex and Steph, he was just happy they had found someone they were comfortable with. That didn’t mean the details weren’t TMI though.

He licked his lips. "I'm kind of craving a sweet dessert now," he admitted. "All this talk of donuts..."

Sebastian grinned and sprung up from the sofa. "I bought Ben and Jerry’s the other day...I have Caramel Chew Chew or Cookie Dough."

"Either is fine," Kurt said, resting his head back on the sofa. It was late, but he had no classes in the morning.

Sebastian pulled both tubs out of the freezer and took a bowl out of the cupboard. He scooped some of each into the bowl and grabbed two spoons, making sure to put the tubs away before heading back to the sofa.

"We can share," he said, handing Kurt a spoon as he sat back down, closer to Kurt this time so they could both access the bowl.

Kurt beamed at him. "A shared desert is half the calories, right?" he quoted, remembering their lunch at the Italian restaurant in summer.

He scooted forward a little as well, wanting to be closer to Sebastian, and took up a spoon.

This close up, it was even more distracting to watch Sebastian eat. His new boyfriend closed his eyes a lot to concentrate on his taste buds, and whenever he did, Kurt looked at him longingly.

The scoops were getting smaller and smaller, and so were the bites on their spoons, as both were reluctant to take the last of the ice cream. Finally, Kurt scooped up the last, and held it out to Sebastian. As his boyfriend leaned forward to take it, Kurt quickly licked it off his spoon, and then kissed Sebastian.

Sebastian’s eyes widened in surprise before he chuckled and kissed Kurt back fondly. "That’s unfair," he mumbled with a grin. He blindly set the bowl down on the coffee table and moved his hand up to Kurt’s cheek, drawing him in for another kiss.

"All is fair in love and war," Kurt whispered cheekily. He opened his lips a little, letting Sebastian chase the taste of their desert. They did agree to share, after all.

"I’ll take this over ice cream any day," Sebastian replied. He pressed back into the kiss, taking Kurt’s invitation and sliding his tongue into Kurt’s mouth.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sebastian’s shoulders and Sebastian slid his free hand around Kurt’s waist and pulled him closer, deepening the kiss.

There was some quippy retort on the back of Kurt's tongue, but he let it go. His tongue was busy

thoughtfully.
doing other things.

Kurt shifted further still until he couldn't get any closer unless he crawled onto Sebastian's lap. There was no saying he wouldn't yet do that. No parents, no roomies, no guilty conscience...literally nothing was stopping him now.

Almost like he read Kurt's mind, Sebastian tugged Kurt closer and shuffled so that Kurt could climb into his lap. He ran his hands down Kurt's back to pull him closer, not wanting to break the kiss. He untucked the back of Kurt's shirt from his jeans and slid his hands up under the material to splay across his skin. Kurt giggled a little and broke the kiss.

"Sorry," he whispered. "Ticklish." Sebastian's fingers had brushed his ribs and he couldn't help it. He kissed the corner of Sebastian's smug grin. "Don't you dare," he warned.

Sebastian grinned wickedly and dug his fingers into Kurt's side, tickling madly. "You shouldn't have told me that, babe." He laughed as Kurt writhed and jerked, laughing and squealing.

"Oh--...oh my god, stop, you--...evil bastard!" Kurt wheezed, pushing at Sebastian's chest helplessly, and squirming on his lap under the torment of Sebastian's merciless fingers.

Sebastian grinned and continued to tickle Kurt.

Kurt gasped for breath and pushed a little harder and with more conviction. "Stop. Just stop, okay?"

Sebastian immediately ceased. Kurt's voice had changed, and his urgent tone had sent shivers down Sebastian's spine. "I'm sorry. Are you okay?"

Kurt took a moment to catch his breath. Then, he stuck his tongue out at Sebastian. "Yes. I'm fine. But I did tell you not to." He kissed his boyfriend's lips softly, glad he'd stopped when Kurt asked.

Sebastian's heart started beating again and he relaxed a little into Kurt's kiss. He had hated the distressed tone of Kurt's voice, as if he was scared that Sebastian wouldn't stop.

"I thought you were joking," he whispered, rubbing his hands soothingly up and down Kurt's arms. He wouldn't make that mistake again.

"I was, at first," Kurt said softly. "And then I just had enough." He kissed Sebastian again. "It's fine. I'm not mad. And I don't mind tickling, as long as you stop when I ask you to. And you did. So we're okay." He pulled away to look into Sebastian's eyes. "I just didn't want to hiccough icecream on you, okay? And I was getting pretty close." He offered his boyfriend a smile.

Sebastian smiled and closed his eyes, sliding his hands down to Kurt's hips. "I'll always stop when you tell me to...I'm not that guy."

"I know," Kurt said softly. He bit his lip. There were a few things that ought to go without saying, but maybe, now was a good time to say them anyway.

"Promise me you'll also tell me to stop if you want me to?" he asked. "I don't want to be that guy either, but I can't read minds."

Sebastian leant in to kiss him with a soft, reassuring pressure. He wound his arms tightly around Kurt in a hug and pulled him closer. "I promise," he whispered against Kurt's lips.

Kurt's heart, still beating fast, sent a rush of warmth through his chest. It felt like they had just passed
some kind of test. He knew it was probably dumb, but he felt just a tiny bit safer in Sebastian's arms...even more than he already had.

Kurt let his lips wander to the rest of Sebastian's face, placing small kisses on his cheekbones and temples and the small birthmarks that speckled his skin.

Sebastian hummed happily, closing his eyes, content to let Kurt explore.

Kurt’s lips grazed his ear lobe and Sebastian’s hips jerked up involuntarily.

"Mmmhmm," Sebastian hummed with a chuckle.

Mmm, indeed. What was that? Kurt smiled deviously, trying to figure out what exactly had made Sebastian twitch like that. He kissed the sensitive skin under Sebastian's ear and nipped his earlobe with his teeth.

"Fuck," Sebastian moaned, his hips jerking up again and his eyes slipping closed as another laugh escaped his lips. "Okay…so you found my weak spot…it's both a turn on and ticklish as hell…"

"Noted," Kurt said in a low voice, kissing him there once more before relenting and pulling back. "Your Achilles heel, huh?" He chuckled. Then he moved his lips close to Sebastian's ear again, not quite touching it. "I'll tell you a secret...I have one of those too...And trust me when I say you'll know when you've found it..."

Sebastian grinned, shivering at the feel of Kurt's breath on his skin. He tightened his grip on Kurt and tipped him backwards so that Kurt was laying down along the length of the sofa with Sebastian hovering above him.

He settled himself between Kurt’s legs. Kurt moved to accommodate him, curling one leg around behind his thighs and bending the other down to press his foot to the floor for balance, bracketing Sebastian with his thighs.

Sebastian grinned down at his boyfriend and kissed him hard on the lips. "Challenge accepted!"

Kurt looked up at him with lust in his eyes. Such a kiss was a good place to start, but he wasn't quite there yet. Kurt ran his hands up Sebastian's arms and down his back, enjoying his new position on the sofa very much.

Sebastian slid his tongue into Kurt’s mouth, chasing the last traces of ice-cream that mixed in with something that was purely Kurt.

As things started to heat up, he moved away from Kurt’s mouth and kissed down his jaw, grazing his teeth lightly against the skin. Kurt was writing and moaning softly beneath him, but he could tell he had not found the illusive spot just yet. He continued his path down, kissing under Kurt's jaw and down his neck. There was a faint scar on the side of Kurt’s throat. He brushed his lips against it and felt rather than heard Kurt’s moan. He smirked. Jackpot.

It had been a long time - far, far too long. Kurt arched up against him, turning his head to the side and raising his chin, offering him more room to continue. Kurt had no idea what it was about that particular point over his pulse, but ever since Blaine had accidentally discovered it, Kurt had become addicted to being kissed there. He could feel himself going hard at the faintest touch, and harder pressure was nearly unbearably delicious.

Sebastian flicked his tongue out to tease the groove of the scar and blew gently over the wet mark.
“Oh dear god please yes…” Kurt let out, shivering with need.

Sebastian grinned at Kurt’s reaction before grazing his teeth over the skin and sucking it into his mouth. He kept kissing and mouthing at the spot, varying pressure and approach as his fingers started undoing the buttons of Kurt’s shirt.

Kurt was panting and writhing underneath him, seeking more friction. He tugged at Sebastian's shirt as well, freeing it from his jeans and slipping his fingers under his waistband instead, grabbing Sebastian’s backside to push his hips down against his own.

Sebastian moaned and pressed back into Kurt’s hands before rolling his hips forward. "Ah," he moaned at the delicious pull the movement caused. He sucked harder at Kurt’s neck and rolled his hips down again.

"Oh, Bas," Kurt whispered, tightening his hands. "I want you so much."

Sebastian growled his approval and moved back up to capture Kurt’s lips in a scorching kiss. "God, Kurt you’re so hot," he moaned into the kiss. "I want you too…so so much…"

Kurt swallowed hard, and ran one hand up the small of Sebastian’s back. "Shall we move to the bedroom? I, uh, noticed you keep your supplies there." He blushed a little. "I was looking for aspirins, I wasn’t just going through your stuff."

Sebastian shivered at Kurt’s touch. "Yeah-yes," he said eagerly. He kissed Kurt again before pulling away and getting up. He offered Kurt his hand to help him up and pulled him back into a kiss once he was on his feet.

He slid his hands into Kurt’s open shirt, sliding it off his arms so that it fell to the floor. Slowly, without breaking the kiss, he started walking Kurt back towards the bedroom.

Kurt’s hands tugged at Sebastian’s t-shirt as they walked and he broke the kiss long enough for the offending item to be pulled up over his head before surging forwards again.

Sebastian moaned against Kurt’s mouth at the contact of skin on skin and suddenly wanted more.

Kurt closed his eyes and relished the feel of Sebastian’s skin against his. Before he knew it, his knees hit the back of the bed. He sat down and scooted back, pulling Sebastian down on top of him. He breathed in the familiar scent of Sebastian's sheets, and smiled. He felt at home here.

"You know, I'm still a bit disappointed there's no mirrors on the ceiling," Kurt joked idly, glancing up. It was a tired cliché, but how hot would it look to see as well as feel the muscles of Sebastian’s back move while he had him pinned like this? Like his own personal pay-per-view…

Sebastian chuckled and took a moment to appreciate the sight of Kurt spread out on the bed beneath him.

"I can always put one up there," he whispered, kissing Kurt’s lips.

Kurt moved his hands down to Sebastian’s waist again, reaching between their bodies to work at Sebastian's fly. Once his jeans were undone, Kurt tugged them down and Sebastian wriggled out of them. One of the legs got caught around his ankle and he kicked out to free it, laughing lightly. He reached back to unhook it and slid the jeans to the floor. He sat back on Kurt’s thighs for a moment and looked down at him.
"You're so gorgeous," he said, taking in his boyfriend’s bare chest, his powerful shoulders and his strong arms. Kurt’s cheeks were flushed with arousal and the hue was creeping down his neck over the normally pale skin of his chest.

Sebastian reached for Kurt’s jeans and started to undo them.

Kurt smiled and sucked in his stomach a little, tightening his abdominal muscles. He lifted his hips obligingly to help Sebastian tug down his skinny jeans and grinned when he had the same problems getting the narrow cuffs off his feet.

Finally, Kurt was freed of his clothes, leaving only his boxer briefs. He looked at Sebastian, longing to feel the warmth of his skin on top of him again.

Sebastian slowly crawled forwards. He placed one hand next to Kurt’s head to brace himself and slid the other around the back to Kurt’s head, leaning down to kiss him.

Slowly he lowered his body down, rolling his hips in one long movement against Kurt’s. He sucked in a gasp at the feeling and did it again, changing the angle slightly until…”Oh!!” he moaned as the movement caused the most delicious drag.

"Oh god, yes," Kurt let out, arching up. He reached down to direct Sebastian’s hips again, slipping his hands under Sebastian’s briefs and gripping him tightly.

Sebastian moaned and pressed back into Kurt’s hands before rolling his hips down again. He moved his mouth, kissing down Kurt’s jaw to his neck and found that spot again. He bit into the skin and sucked hard as his hips continued to roll down.

He slid his hand down to thumb over one of Kurt’s nipples, pinching it slightly.

Kurt’s hands stilled and a shudder racked through him. It was almost too much, and yet his body craved more. He ignored the little voice inside berating him about how little it took to make him undone. He couldn’t help it, so it was no use feeling ashamed.

And- he noted with satisfaction- it looked like Sebastian didn’t mind.

Sebastian grinned and slid his hand down Kurt’s chest, teasing along the waistband of his briefs before palming him over the soft cotton. His previous suspicions, from glimpses over the summer, were confirmed as he felt Kurt’s length under his palm. Yeah, his boyfriend was packing. Sebastian suddenly needed to see.

He kissed his way down Kurt’s chest, pausing to pay attention to each of his nipples, before running his tongue all the way down. He hooked his fingers into the waistband of Kurt’s briefs and looked up at him.

"Can I?" He asked. He wasn’t surprised to hear the wrecked tone to his own voice.

"Uh," Kurt huffed out, looking down at his boyfriend in a haze of lust. "Yes. Yes!"

He lifted his hips again, biting his lip as his erection sprang free from his underwear.

Sebastian stared at Kurt, completely entranced. "Oh, Kurt," he whispered. It sounded like something out of a bad porno but there was no other reaction he could give to the sight of Kurt resting long, thick and hard against his abdomen. It made his mouth water.
Kurt blushed hotly. "I told you you’d know when you found the right spot..." he joked, hoping to alleviate some of the awkwardness. He remembered Blaine’s reaction to seeing him naked for the first time painfully well, and while Sebastian was older and more experienced, Kurt couldn’t help but feel a little self-conscious. Blaine had been intimidated and annoyed. Kurt hoped Sebastian would be okay.

"You’re...god, Kurt, you’re beautiful...Can I?" Sebastian bent down to press a kiss on the shaft. "Please?"

Kurt blinked in surprise, and swallowed. "Yeah..." he whispered hoarsely. "If...if you really want to?" He knew he needed to stop comparing but he couldn’t help it, his mind was an echo chamber of Blaine would never’s.

"Why on earth wouldn’t I want to?" Sebastian asked confused, stopping what he was doing and sitting up a little.

"I just...I don’t know," Kurt mumbled, reluctant to mention the name of his ex in Sebastian’s bedroom. "With...Before, it was usually me who’d...do that."

Sebastian frowned and crawled back up the bed to kiss Kurt’s lips.

“You can say his name, Kurt,” he said gently. “I won’t be angry. You were with him a long time. We don’t have to pretend we were saving ourselves for each other.”

Kurt nodded, avoiding Sebastian’s eyes.

“So...Blaine never gave you a blow-job?” Sebastian asked curiously.

Kurt shrugged awkwardly. “Yeah, but he didn’t like it much,” he said. Only for very special occasions, like when he wanted something he knew Kurt didn’t really want, would Blaine reward him with something like this. Sebastian’s offer made Kurt a little anxious about what might be coming after.

"I’ll...I’ll do you too," he quickly offered, reaching down to run a hand over the front of Sebastian’s briefs. "I, uh...I do like doing it." It felt a bit weird to him to say it out loud, but it was true. That, at least, was something he knew he had plenty of experience with.

He palmed Sebastian through his underwear.

Sebastian closed his eyes and pressed down into Kurt’s hand, moaning softly. He kissed Kurt again.

“Well, I like doing it too. And I promise I’ll never ask you do something that I’m not willing to do myself," He kissed Kurt. "You have a gorgeous cock and I want it..." he closed his eyes as images filled his mind. "God, Kurt, I want it everywhere." He took hold of Kurt’s hand and slid it round to his backside, hoping the convey the message.

Kurt stared at him for a moment before it fully hit him what Sebastian meant. Everywhere?

Kurt swallowed. Was Sebastian for real? He looked at his face. It seemed too cruel a joke to play on him right now. Maybe he really did want to. Last summer, at Callbacks, he did seem to imply he was versatile.

"I’ve never topped before," Kurt admitted. "But...I’ve wanted to."
Sebastian kissed Kurt slowly. "Then why haven’t you? Was Blaine not into that either?"

Kurt shrugged. Then he took a deep breath and started to explain.

"We were each other’s first. And when we were...deciding who would do what, he...Blaine figured, since I was bigger than him, it’d hurt less if he was the one making love to me. I didn’t mind either way. After a few times, I asked if we could switch, but he didn’t want to, and I respected that."

Sebastian frowned, confused. "What do you mean, hurt less?"

"Well, you know," Kurt sighed, frowning a little. "We’d never done it before, obviously it was gonna be a bit..." He broke off at seeing the expression on Sebastian’s face. "It was okay," he added. "It didn’t deter me."

Sebastian closed his eyes for a moment and shook his head. "Sex is supposed to feel good...it isn’t supposed to hurt at all. That’s what prep is for...” He broke off and swallowed.

Sebastian could tell Kurt felt awkward at the topic and the mood had dropped a little, but he had to know. "He didn’t just...force it in, did he?"

Kurt pulled away a little. He couldn’t help but feel a little lectured. "No," he replied defensively. "I read the flyers. We had lube. We prepped. He never-" He broke off frustratedly. "I always came, ok?"

Sebastian closed his eyes again and kissed him, trying to soothe and reassure him. "I’m sorry," he said, stroking Kurt’s cheek. "I didn’t mean anything by it...I was just worried."

"I feel stupid," he whispered. "I loved him, Bas. I wanted to be close to him. The rest didn’t really matter. I know it could probably have been better, and I tried, but it’s not like you get a manual when you discover your sexuality. I did the best I could." He left out that it hadn’t been enough - Sebastian already knew that.

Sebastian nodded sadly and kissed him again. "But it’s also supposed to feel good. When it’s right it really is the best feeling in the world."

He rubbed his nose against Kurt’s and kissed him sensually, hoping he hadn’t completely ruined the mood. "We can do whatever you want. I prefer bottoming, but I enjoy topping as well. We can also stick to first or second base...I just want to make you feel good."

"I want that, too," Kurt said. He didn’t feel ready to top - he’d be far too afraid of messing up and hurting Sebastian - but his earlier fantasy of being taught resurfaced, and he gathered all his courage. ‘Make love to me,’ he whispered in French. ‘Show me how.’

Sebastian closed his eyes and felt his cock twitch at Kurt’s words. He closed the gap between them and kissed Kurt again, sucking his bottom lip between his teeth and tugging a little. He tried to put as much into the kiss as he could, letting Kurt know how much he wanted him.

As Kurt started to loosen up again and relax under his touch, Sebastian kissed back down along his
jaw and neck.

He didn’t linger though, he was on a mission.

He trailed kisses, scratches of his teeth and tongue down Kurt’s torso until he reached Kurt’s erection. He wrapped his hand around it and pumped a few times before wetting his lips and wrapping them around the head.

He moaned happily at the taste and teased the ridge with his tongue before sucking in a breath through his nose and sinking all the way down. He felt Kurt hit the back of his throat and fought off his gag reflex, relaxing the muscles so he could sink further, taking all of Kurt in. He hollowed out his cheeks and pulled back up, taking in a breath before sinking back down again.

Kurt was trembling with desire. He stared down at Sebastian. He saw himself disappear between Sebastian’s lips, felt the head hit the back of Sebastian’s mouth, felt his throat constrict and spasm around him in panicky reflex, opening and closing swiftly, felt himself being pushed back and drawn in - yet none of it showed in Sebastian’s face. His pupils were blown wide and his nostrils flared, but he held on, softly moving his lips and tongue to add to the sensation as he started to pull off, then sank back again.

It was nearly too much to handle. Kurt’s hands were roving restlessly, caressing Sebastian’s face, running through his hair. He shifted his legs, trying to open them underneath Sebastian’s body.

Sebastian felt Kurt trying to move. He pulled off for a minute to help Kurt stretch out his legs and settled himself between them. At this new angle he could reach Kurt’s balls and he sucked each of them in turn into his mouth, teasing the sensitive skin with his teeth as his hand pumped up and down Kurt’s cock.

Kurt was writhing in the sheets, needing more. Another reason he’d been nervous to have sex with Sebastian was the inevitable memories of being with Blaine resurfacing. But already that had been negated; his ex had never spent this much time unselfishly taking care of him, always seeking a short-cut to his own pleasure. There wasn’t a single cell in Kurt’s body thinking of Blaine now - all his mind could provide was a constant stream of Sebastian Sebastian Sebastian.

The sounds Kurt were making stirred something inside Sebastian and it was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore that and focus on Kurt. He pulled off, replacing his mouth with his hand to look up at him with lust-filled eyes.

"Lube and condoms," he said, holding his boyfriend’s gaze, "...in the drawer."

It took a moment for Kurt to realise Sebastian wanted him to do something, but then he understood and started to move. He knew which drawer Sebastian meant and took his supplies out. Back when he’d discovered Sebastian’s stash, he’d felt a little awkward about the assortment of brands and sizes he’d found; right now, he didn’t waste time thinking about that. It simply meant Sebastian cared about his safety, and that was good.

He handed his find to Sebastian and reached down to touch him, feeling it was time to reciprocate a little until Sebastian told him what to do next.

Sebastian batted Kurt’s hand away gently. "Let me take care of you," he said. He set the supplies on the bed next to him and placed his hands on Kurt’s knees, guiding them up so that Kurt’s feet were planted on the bed, his legs spread wide.
Sebastian grabbed the bottle of lube and pumped some onto his fingers, spreading it around a little before trailing them down to tease Kurt’s entrance. He sunk his mouth back down over Kurt’s erection and slowly pushed his index finger through the ring of muscle.

Distracted by Sebastian’s mouth, Kurt accepted the intrusion easily. It only heightened what he was already feeling, and he pushed back against Sebastian’s hand.

Sebastian slid his finger in further, encouraged by Kurt bearing down on it. He pulled it back, twisting a little, warming the muscle up. Kurt was tight and warm and Sebastian’s cock twitched at the thought. He rutted against the bed a little to relieve the pressure.

Kurt heard the sounds of Sebastian moving against the mattress and understood he was getting impatient. He caressed the side of Sebastian’s face and whispered: "I think it’s okay like this. I’m ready."

Sebastian looked up at him with a frown and pulled off of Kurt with a lewd pop. "I’m just getting started, babe," he said with a wink. He swallowed down the bitterness he felt about Kurt’s experiences with Blaine. No wonder it hurt, if this was all the prep they did.

"Just lie back looking gorgeous and let me take care of you."

Kurt let his head fall back into the pillows and closed his eyes. It felt like a very elaborate fantasy, having such a skilled and selfless lover. The kind you read about in cheap novels. Was Sebastian trying to prove a point, or was it always going to be like this with him?

Either way, Kurt gave up trying to interfere with Sebastian’s plans and relaxed into the soft covers. Sebastian grinned happily and went back to the task at hand.

He pulled out his index finger and replaced it with his middle one. It slid in easily and he thrust it in and out a few times before pushing it all the way in and curling the tip towards himself, seeking out the other magic button he knew Kurt had.

Kurt lifted his hips off the mattress, following the pressure of Sebastian's hand. Keeping still seemed impossible; his body wanted to move, rub against the feeling inside of him and push up into Sebastian's mouth at the same time. He pulled out a little and swivelled his hips experimentally, grinding down on Sebastian's hand. "Oh god, Bas..." he breathed out.

Sebastian moved to mouth at Kurt’s balls, flicking his tongue under to rub his perineum as he pulled his finger out and pushed back in with two.

He took it slow to start with, pulling the outer ring of muscle so that it expanded and contracted before sliding his two fingers in slowly, scissoring them back and forth to work Kurt open.

The noises Kurt was making were torture; the whisper of Sebastian’s name, the high breathy whines and the deep low moans of pleasure rippled over Sebastian’s skin. He couldn’t believe he was this lucky.

He curled his fingers back towards himself and felt the moment he found his mark. Kurt’s whole body shook and Sebastian grinned up at him, doing it again as he re-took Kurt in his mouth.

"Oh...!"
Kurt's voice rarely came out so deep from his chest. His body vibrated with it. "Oh, I'm not sure I can--...I think I might come soon," he warned Sebastian. It felt like he'd been holding back for hours, when in reality it was probably only minutes. Blaine never lasted this long, and Kurt usually made himself come long before this point.

Sebastian took the hint and pulled his fingers out. He took Kurt all the way down before hollowing his cheeks and pulling back off. He grinned at Kurt and crawled back up the bed to kiss him, blindly reaching for a condom and the bottle of lube.

He slid the rubber over himself, wincing slightly at the sensitivity of going untouched. and had to hold himself at the base to steady himself, pressing his forehead against Kurt's to remain grounded. He coated himself in lube.

"You ready baby?" He asked, teasing Kurt's hole with his tip.

Kurt nodded. He looked up into Sebastian's face. His cheeks were splotchy and his pupils were blown wide with desire. His hair was falling onto his forehead and sticking to a thin sheen of sweat. At least I'm not the only one feeling unravelled, Kurt mused in satisfaction.

He lifted his knees a little higher and splayed them apart, bracketing Sebastian's thighs, and put his hands flat on Sebastian's abs. Maybe he didn't need it, but he wanted to have the option of holding Sebastian back if he pushed in too quickly.

Sebastian closed the gap between them to capture Kurt's lips in a kiss, holding the connection as he slowly pushed inside. It was torture to move so slowly but he wanted to give Kurt time to adjust to the stretch.

"Are you okay?" he asked, holding his breath a little in an attempt to control himself.

"Uh-huh," Kurt let out eloquently, nodding, letting his mouth hang open to breath deeply and make himself relax. But true to Sebastian's word, it didn't hurt. He shifted his knees again, resting his feet on Sebastian's calves and letting his hands wander up his sides. Sebastian pushed in deeper and Kurt sighed, his eyes slipping closed for a moment. "I've never felt this way," he said softly.

Sebastian peppered Kurt's face with tiny, soft kisses as he bottomed out. He stilled his hips, breathing heavily to calm himself. "Me neither," he said honestly.

If there was still any reserve lingering inside of Kurt, he let it go now, and he kissed Sebastian deeply. This was all he wanted to hear - to know that he actually had something to offer that wasn't just routine for Sebastian.

"You can move now," he whispered cheekily against Sebastian's lips. "Before you fall asleep on me..."

Sebastian laughed and kissed Kurt again. "Believe me babe. I am in no danger of falling asleep."

He pulled his hips back, eyes closing at the drag the movement caused, and thrust them forward again. 'Oh god,' he gasped in French. He did the movement again, a little faster than the last time. 'Oh Kurt.'

"Bas," Kurt breathed, letting out a huff of breath through his open mouth every time Sebastian pushed in, mouthing silent 'ah!' s. He was looking into Sebastian's eyes, seeing the longing and the concentration there. Sebastian shifted a little, allowing him to thrust in deeper, and a vocal "Ah!" escaped from Kurt's lips.
Sebastian stilled immediately, checking in with him. Kurt kissed his lips, encouraging him to go on. When he felt he could take it, he raised his knees, allowing for Sebastian to lay his legs over his shoulders. With a cheeky grin, Kurt locked his ankles behind Sebastian's head and reeled him in for a kiss, nearly bending himself double. Ballet class had to be good for something, after all.

The new angle caused Sebastian to slide in even deeper and he almost lost his control. He picked up the pace of his thrusts and buried his face into Kurt’s neck, mouthing and biting at the skin. ‘Oh god,’ he moaned again.

Kurt’s reply was a simple series of short breaths and grunts as he tried to hold on for this ride. Sebastian was making him see stars. On instinct, he began reaching between them to give himself the last tip over the edge, but Sebastian took his hand instead, clasping it firmly. Kurt arched up instead, contorting his body to rub up against Sebastian’s abs.

"Oh... Oh!"

Sebastian felt Kurt’s muscles contract around him as he came and thick white ropes of come hit his chest. Kurt’s breathy, broken moans were enough to tip Sebastian over the edge too, and he thrust hard into Kurt a final time, stilling his hips and crying out Kurt’s name as he came. The force of his orgasm caused his vision to black out for a second.

He shivered a little as he started to come down from his high. Kurt’s legs fell from his shoulders and Sebastian collapsed against his boyfriend’s chest, panting heavily.

Kurt felt Sebastian’s heart beat rapidly against his chest. He took a small inventory of his body. The skin of his neck throbbed. His legs felt like jelly. He was still locked together with Sebastian, but despite their frantic lovemaking, he didn’t feel sore. He hugged Sebastian tightly, kissing the side of his face, his ear and his neck; everything he could reach.

"That was amazing," he whispered into Sebastian’s ear. "You are amazing."

Sebastian grinned and kissed him softly. He held the kiss as he pulled out, stroking Kurt’s thigh as he did. "So are you," he whispered. "I’ll go get a cloth, stay there."

He kissed Kurt again and got up, his legs a little shaky, and moved to the bathroom. He disposed of the condom and wet a wash cloth with warm water. He cleaned himself up quickly before wetting another one and hurrying out to Kurt in the bedroom.

He gently wiped down Kurt’s stomach and legs, dropped the cloth into the washing basket and climbed back up onto the bed, curling up against Kurt’s side.

"How are you feeling?" Sebastian whispered, kissing him softly.

"Like Alice," Kurt mused drowsily, then chuckled. "It's a good thing. I'll explain some other time. Right now, I just want to bask in the afterglow." He kissed Sebastian languidly. "Thank you, for this."

Sebastian kissed him back, smiling. "You’re welcome? Though you don’t have to thank me...I enjoyed it too," he said with a wink before settling down with his head on Kurt’s chest.

Kurt wrapped his arms around him. He didn't want to ruin the mood by sharing the bitterness that had filtered into every memory of him being intimate with Blaine. Like many things in their relationship, it seemed he had settled for less without knowing there was an alternative.
"A part of me still expects all of this is a dream," Kurt confessed. "I am not sure I want to risk going
to sleep." Kurt's body disagreed and he had to suppress a big yawn. He shifted against Sebastian,
burrowing further against him. "Don’t go," he mumbled, closing his eyes.

Sebastian kissed Kurt softly on his forehead, then moved to kiss each of his eyelids, then his cheeks
before finally settling on his lips.

"I’m not going anywhere, Kurt," he whispered, settling down on the bed next to him and curling in
so that their bodies were intertwined.

They started at each other smiling until their eyes got heavy and they both drifted off to sleep.
Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of These)

Chapter Summary

Practise makes perfect.

Chapter Notes

Another 'sexy' warning for this chapter; but don't get used to it, we haven't forgotten about our other characters…! ;)

Kurt writhed in his sheets, sighing softly.

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He was wearing his Dalton uniform. As he looked around, he recognised the hallways of Dalton Academy, but something wasn't quite right. The marble on the floor was black and white like the NYADA corridors, and there was a sign-up sheet for an after class singing group called the Apples on the wall. The clocks on the wall were melting like in a Dali painting. Kurt frowned. He heard voices. Sebastian?

He followed the sound to the marble staircase. A group of boys in uniform stood and sat on the steps. He immediately recognised the boy who had his back to him. It made no sense. Sebastian hadn't been at Dalton at the time Kurt was.

"...and then he said 'no, I read the flyers, we used lube'," Sebastian drawled, and the others laughed. "Man, he had no idea."

"So what did you do?" one of the Warblers asked eagerly. Kurt didn't recognise his face.

"I rocked his little world," Sebastian laughed.

"Perfect," a familiar voice said.

Kurt moaned in his sleep.

"Now break his heart so he'll come running back to me," Blaine added.

"Do you have the ticket?" Sebastian asked. "I'm not giving up such an easy fuck for free."

Blaine handed him a golden airplane ticket. It glittered in the light from stars overheard, shining through the skylight above the staircase. It had the words 'Paris - one way' on it.

"Consider it done."

Blaine laughed, sounding comically like a cartoon villain, and the Warblers joined in, keening like
hyenas.

Kurt's eyes flew open. What the hell?

The first thing he saw as his vision focused was Sebastian. He was lying next to him, still fast asleep, a smile on his lips.

Kurt sighed. A dream, nothing more. He reached out and softly caressed the side of Sebastian's face. Unable to resist, he followed the touch with a featherlight kiss, curled his hand into Sebastian's palm, and went back to sleep.

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When Kurt woke again, his nightmare was already forgotten. The man next to him was real. No matter what his subconscious cooked up, Kurt knew their relationship was not a game to Sebastian, or a bet, or some nefarious deal. This was the real thing.

In his sleep, Sebastian had rolled onto his back. Kurt rose up on one elbow to look at him. He was so beautiful. Kurt gently traced the small freckles and birthmarks on his face with his fingers, playfully connecting the dots. Sebastian stirred a little, but did not wake. He looked very happy. Kurt let him sleep for a while, but then grew impatient.

An idea formed in Kurt's head about how to wake his boyfriend, and smiling, he let his fingers wander lower, to Sebastian's throat and his collarbone. The little specks of colour were everywhere, and he longed to memorise each and every one. Kurt licked his lips and placed a soft kiss on one of the tiny spots on Sebastian's chest.

"I can't do it, papa!" a little voice said next to him. Sebastian blinked, and looked up. He was sitting at a table that looked like the one in Marc and Paul’s kitchen. A young girl with beautiful chestnut hair and piercing green eyes frowned at the book in front of her. She reminded him of someone.

Sebastian looked around. In front of him sat a stack of papers and a red pen. One glance at the words told him it was an essay on the French Revolution. He caught his reflection in the window pane. He was wearing his glasses. His hair was parted, and had a streak of grey.

The girl groaned in frustration.

"Can I help you?" Sebastian offered, turning back to her and moving his chair over to her side. As he did, a soft yelp came from under the table, and he realised there were two large dogs lying under it.

"Here," Sebastian said gently, reaching a hand out to place his finger over most of the word in the girl’s book, leaving just the first two letters. There was a ring on his finger.

"What does that say?"

"Be," the girl said straight away.

Sebastian smiled at her. "That's right!" He moved his finger to cover the first two letters.

"And then?"
“A and U.”

"Very good, now...what sound do these three letters make when they’re together?” he asked, pointing to ‘eau’.

"I don’t know!” the girl said, frustrated. “Not ‘jou’ like it’s supposed to, anyway."

Sebastian realised that when she scrunched up her nose like that, she looked exactly like Kurt.

"Eau,” he said, making the sound. She repeated him, rolling the sound around her tongue.

He moved to the second half of the word.

The girl sighed, but sounded out the ‘c’.

“And then?”

“Oh...u..p. Oop!” She grinned. “Like ‘oops’."

Sebastian smiled. “And together? B-eau-c-oup,” he said, breaking the sounds down and stringing them together slowly. “Beaucoup. Very much. Like, I love you very much.” He suddenly knew exactly where he was, and whom he was talking to.

A key turned in the lock and the two dogs jumped up, barking happily. The girl looked up as well, a happy smile lighting up her face. “Daddy!”

Kurt opened the door and was nearly overrun by the dogs. “Not the suit-” he tried to protest, but it was no use trying to hold back the avalanche of wagging tails and eager, jumping fur. He sighed and knelt, putting the portfolio he was holding down on the floor and hugging the dogs. “Alright, I missed you, too, you hairy drama queens.”

After a moment, he got up again, brushed himself off, and walked to the kitchen table.

"And how are my two favourite spelling bees?” he asked, smiling fondly. When he put a hand on the girl’s shoulder, Sebastian felt a flutter inside when he noticed that Kurt was wearing a ring, too.

"We just learned to read the word beaucoup!” Sebastian said proudly, leaning his head up to accept a kiss. Kurt’s touch and scent was familiar, even if everything around them was different.

"You did?” Kurt asked with a smile. “Well done, caterpillar.” He ruffled the girl’s hair.

The girl pouted - though less dramatically than before. Sebastian suspected it had less effect on Kurt than on him.

“I don’t see why I have to learn to read French anyway,” she sulked. “It is beaucoup stupid.”

Kurt smiled softly. “Because it’s papa’s language, Millie, and we love him very much. Besides, you want to go to Euro Disney, don’t you? Now what would we do if you got lost there and you can’t read read the signs?”

"Disney!!!” Millie said excitedly.

Kurt smiled at Sebastian over their daughter’s head.
“How was your day?” Sebastian asked his husband.

“Productive,” Kurt replied. “But I can’t wait till we’re in Paris. It’s been too long.”

“Yeah,” Sebastian replied with a little twinge in his heart. “It has.”

- 

Sebastian was pulled from sleep slowly as Kurt kissed along his collarbone and down his chest.

It took him a moment to realise what was happening. He shivered a little under Kurt's kisses. "Mmm." He hummed, stroking his hand through Kurt's hair. His ring finger felt empty, but he somehow knew that wouldn’t be permanent. "Morning babe."

Kurt raised his head for a moment and smiled. "Good morning," he said, before resuming his exploration of Sebastian's skin.

He placed another kiss over one of the spots. "It's like you've been cooking in the buff and had an accident with chocolate batter," he joked, and slowly licked over a spot just under Sebastian's nipple.

Sebastian chuckled, shivering a little at the touch. "They're just freckles Kurt...I've had them all my life."

Kurt lifted his head again and rested his chin on his hand, splayed on Sebastian's chest. "Have you seen my skin?" he asked rhetorically. "It's a blank canvas. Yours is...different. Interesting. You have no idea how much time I spent wondering about how far these little things go..."

He grinned and playfully lifted the covers, turning his head to peek under it down Sebastian's body. He was already half hard, which suited Kurt's plans well. He came back up.

"The answer is: a lot more time than I probably should have, being engaged to someone else at the time. Or in class...or at work..."

He lifted the covers further and scooted down a bit so he could mouth at the birthmarks around Sebastian's belly button.

Sebastian sucked in his stomach as Kurt continued to kiss him. He'd never met someone so fascinated by his freckles before. He hadn't even known it was a thing.

"I like your skin," he said quietly, dancing his fingers across Kurt's shoulder.

Kurt looked up again, offering him a small smile. He ran a hand up the inside of Sebastian's leg, stopping mid-thigh, and licked his lips. He longed to return last night's favour, as he had said he would. He searched Sebastian's eyes for permission.

Sebastian's eyes widened at the sight of Kurt between his legs, looking up at him with such adoration that he didn't know whether to moan or cry. It was layered with the vision he had seen of Kurt in his dream, older, but with the same love in his eyes. Nothing else in the world mattered to him in that moment, all that mattered was Kurt.

Silently he nodded and licked his lips, indicating that Kurt could do whatever his heart desired.

Kurt smiled, feeling a little giddy and very pleased that Sebastian wanted what he had to offer.
He started slow, using his hand as well as his mouth, teasing Sebastian with irregular strokes and licks, and listening to the sounds Sebastian made. He enjoyed being in control like this. He loved trying new things he'd read about in magazines or online, figuring out if it worked. It was why he'd taken a tongue piercing a year ago, wanting to introduce an extra level to his skills. But instead of being thrilled, Blaine had lectured him on self-mutilation and oral hygiene, and Kurt had taken it out again. He wondered what Sebastian would think of it...A thought for later. For now, he lowered his hand and took Sebastian into his mouth as far as he could, relaxing his throat and tapping into the breathing exercises from NYADA. If only his vocal trainer knew...

'Oh Kurt,' Sebastian moaned as he felt himself hit the back of Kurt's throat. He leant up on his elbows, staring down at Kurt with lust-filled eyes as he watched himself disappear between Kurt's lips.

Every so often Kurt would do a particular movement with his tongue and it shot spasms of pleasure through Sebastian's body. 'Oh baby, keep doing that,' he urged his boyfriend on.

Kurt smiled and let out a short huff of breath against Sebastian's skin. He had no intention of stopping, not when Sebastian was encouraging him like that. He reached blindly for Sebastian's hand and found it, squeezing in assurance before focusing back on what he was doing. As they found a rhythm that no longer required his hands, he slipped them under Sebastian's hips and gripped his backside, massaging him with strong hands.

Sebastian's arms gave out and he flopped back on the bed in ecstasy. He pressed back into Kurt's hands, moaning softly before thrusting up into the hot channel of his mouth.

'Oh fuck.' Sebastian blindly reached for the bottle of lube they'd discarded the night before and pressed it against Kurt's hand on the bed. He followed quickly with a condom, hoping Kurt would get the hint.

Kurt only faltered for a moment. He remembered how Sebastian had touched him last night. He also knew how he liked to touch himself. A combination of both would surely work.

He slowly pulled off, replacing his mouth with one of his hands while he sat up and picked up the bottle. With a smirk, he looked at Sebastian and flipped the bottle once over his wrist as he would a cocktail mixer, before flicking it open and squeezing some in his palm. He winked, and settled down between his lover's legs again.

Sebastian shook his head. Flair-prep. Kurt really could do anything.

Kurt sank his mouth back down around Sebastian's erection, applying pressure with his lips while he rubbed his hands together to coat his fingers in lube.

As he came up for air, he gently pressed the tip of his finger inside.

Sebastian's eyes rolled back in his head. "Oh yes, he whispered, his head spinning. He moaned deeply as Kurt pushed his finger all the way in and did the thing with his tongue at the same time. "Oh baby, please…"

For a bizarre moment, Kurt was reminded of Sebastian's ringtone when they had just met again, but he pushed the laugh down, not wanting to choke himself. He started working his finger in and out, pushing up and in the way Sebastian had done, first with one, then two fingers. The effect was immediate. With a gasp, Sebastian thrust up into his mouth and Kurt saw stars behind his eyelids. He held on until Sebastian pulled back and then immediately came up for air. Okay, he needed to time
that a little bit better - but still, he had definitely hit the right spot. Kurt took a deep breath and tried again, this time not curling his fingers in until he came up, and setting a rhythm that pushed and pulled alternatingly.

Sebastian didn't know whether to thrust up into Kurt's mouth or push down onto his fingers. It was a sweet and delicious torture and he never wanted it to end. When Kurt found his prostate Sebastian’s mind exploded. He couldn't stop the sounds coming out of his mouth. Breathy moans, pleads for more and terms of endearment rolled into one until it was barely intelligible.

As Kurt added a third finger and used his pinkie and thumb to press down on his perineum from the outside, Sebastian let out a stream of rapid French.

'Oh god, Kurt! Fuck me please just fuck me. I need you, I want you so bad.'

Sebastian's words shot straight down through Kurt's body. He hadn't touched himself until then, focusing on making Sebastian feel good, but he was very aroused and the prospect of getting to do something about it with Sebastian made him groan with need.

He pulled away, giving Sebastian one more lick with his tongue, and carefully withdrew his fingers.

Sebastian lay panting before him. The sight was incredible.

Just to see it from a new point of view, Kurt pushed his fingers back into him, curling in and up as he had done before.

A shudder wracked through his lover, and he bore down on his hand needily. 'Please,' Sebastian begged in French.

It made Kurt's mouth go dry. Sebastian really wanted this, and after last night, Kurt understood why. He took hold of himself, thrusting into his hand a few times, moving his fingers in time, watching Sebastian closely, and then let go to put the condom on.

His fingers were shaking. He looked at Sebastian and paused, reminding himself to calm down. "How..." he started. "What's your favourite position?" he asked, figuring Sebastian would know best how he'd want this to go.

Sebastian, though lost in his haze of arousal, heard the nervous tilt to Kurt's voice. He smiled at him. "Just like this babe. I wanna see you." He reached out his hand towards Kurt.

Kurt smiled back and moved closer, lying down next to Sebastian again. He kissed him tentatively, not sure if he was allowed to after what he'd just been doing. As Sebastian kissed him back, he relaxed into it.

He felt around for the bottle of lube, found it, and took some more to slick over himself, leaving the bottle tricks this time. The slide into his own palm was already making him moan softly. He hoped he would last long enough to give Sebastian what he needed.

Not making him wait any longer, Kurt moved between Sebastian's legs, holding himself up on his forearm, and used his free hand to line himself up to Sebastian's entrance. He pushed in slowly, looking at Sebastian's face for guidance.

Sebastian wrapped his legs loosely around Kurt's waist and ran his hands up and down Kurt's sides. The dull pressure as Kurt pushed into him was exquisite. Sebastian’s eyes slipped shut and he hummed happily, pulling Kurt into a kiss.
"That's it baby," he said encouragingly, baring down. "God, you feel amazing."

"Yes," Kurt whispered, panting a little. His arm was trembling, and he rested his other arm next to Sebastian as well, thrusting his hips forward. The friction was almost painfully blissful. Finally, he slid all the way in, chasing the feeling further with a small push, and their bodies were flush together.

Sebastian knew it was a corny thing to think; but as Kurt bottomed out, giving Sebastian his entire length, Sebastian had never felt so complete. He could feel Kurt everywhere and the sensation made him feel drunk; with love, desire and a need which he'd never felt with another lover before.

Kurt kissed Sebastian hard, trying to express both need and gratitude in his kiss, before starting to carefully rock into him, undulating his hips.

"Oh Kurt," Sebastian let out, tightening his legs around Kurt's waist, encouraging him on.

It was everything Kurt had imagined and more. It wasn’t just the feeling of being inside of him; it was the sight of his lover coming undone because of him. Watching Sebastian while he moaned and shuddered with pleasure was like watching porn, only better. Knowing it was he who was making him feel so good, that he was the one Sebastian was begging for, made Kurt feel invincible.

After years of being told, verbally and nonverbally, that he would never be attractive to anyone, the message had taken route that he'd always only be granted favours despite himself, if he was lucky (and showed the appropriate amount of gratitude).

Now, he was finally understanding that he did have something to offer, and that he'd found someone who really, really wanted it. It was intoxicating.

Kurt started moving with more confidence, pulling back further to thrust back in, picking up the pace. It felt incredible. He reached for Sebastian's legs to hike him a little higher up around his waist, and changed the angle of his thrusts. "Oh, fuck, Bas-" he cursed, panting, letting his head fall forward to rest on Sebastian's shoulder. He looked down between their bodies, watching their hips slam together. It was the most erotic sight he had ever seen.

The new angle caused Kurt to brush against Sebastian’s prostate with every delicious drag. His hips sped up and the power behind each thrust grew.

'Yes,' Sebastian almost sobbed in French. 'Yes, yes. Kurt.' His hands scratched down Kurt's back, drawing him closer. 'Kiss me,' he begged. 'Kiss me, please.'

Kurt did not need to be told again, and he kissed Sebastian hungrily. It was messy and wet, both of them panting and sharing one breath between them. Kurt lost his rhythm and slipped out, suddenly thrusting in air, sliding against Sebastian's stomach. He groaned and reached down, securing the condom and pushing back in. His apology was swallowed up in kisses and melted away.

They easily found their pace again, and Kurt's thrusts became more needy. He was clenching his buttocks and working his thigh muscles to give it all he had. He broke away from the kiss to breathe, and licked his way to the side of Sebastian's face, finding his ear. Whispering soft French compliments, he nipped at Sebastian's earlobe before kissing his throat, shoulder, and anything he could reach.

'Oh fuck, K-Kurt,' Sebastian moaned as he listened to the things Kurt whispered to him. He felt the coil wind tighter and tighter inside of him and his balls constrict. 'T-touch me, please...I'm gonna c-'

He panted, cutting off to moan loudly as Kurt hit his prostate dead on.
Kurt gasped. Sebastian was clenching around him, giving him so much more pressure and friction that he could hardly take it. He lifted himself up a little and reached down between them. He closed his hand around Sebastian's erection, smearing the drops of precome around over the head, and began moving his fist in time with his thrusts. He wanted to look, but the sensations became too much and he closed his eyes tightly instead, concentrating on not losing his pace again.

Kurt had barely stroked him three times before Sebastian’s muscles contracted and a rush of pleasure crashed over him as he came harder than he had in a long time. Sebastian continued to roll his hips down, meeting Kurt thrust for thrust and tightening his muscles around him, working his boyfriend up to his own orgasm. 'Come for me baby,' he whispered, capturing Kurt's bottom lip with his teeth and tugging it. 'I wanna feel you come inside me.'

Kurt moaned into Sebastian's mouth. He'd never watched a French porno before but this was probably what it would sound like.

He sped up his hips, reducing the movement to small, deep thrusts, feeling tension rise until he came as well, his hips stuttering with little aftershocks. He shivered, and lowered himself down on Sebastian's chest, pushing his hands between the mattress and Sebastian's shoulders to hug him tightly.

Sebastian wrapped his arms around Kurt tightly, holding him close. He buried his face in Kurt's neck and gently lowered his legs back on to the bed.

"Are you sure you’ve never done that before?" Sebastian joked shakily. "Because that was fucking incredible...and some incredible fucking."

Kurt laughed breathily against Sebastian’s skin. "I had a very good teacher," he said, grinning.

Sebastian chuckled and ran his hands down Kurt's back. He shook his head. “It’s all you, babe...you’re perfect.” His breathing was erratic and he tried to calm it down. "How did I get so lucky? I never thought this would happen and yet...here we are."

Kurt smiled. He wasn't sure how to answer. He no longer believed in 'fate' and 'soulmates'. Sebastian had become his best friend because he was a kind, gentle person with intelligence and empathy. It wasn't until later that Kurt had allowed himself to notice he was also damn sexy. But none of these things had anything to do with some sort of cosmic plan.

"Yes, here we are." He kissed Sebastian's lips. "And here is where I want to stay."

Sebastian kissed him back softly. "Good. Because I’m never letting you go."
It's Kurt and Sebastian's turn to bring the doughnuts.

"So did everyone else see Sebastian's cryptic Instagram photo this morning?" Alice asked as she placed the tray of coffees on the table.

"No? I saw his tweet but I've not checked Instagram...what was it?" Steph asked, adding sweetener to her latte.

Alice brought the picture up on her phone and showed her friend. It was a picture of a breakfast tray clearly set for two and the caption. *'How do you like your eggs in the morning? I like mine with a kiss.'*

"What the hell does that mean?" Alex asked, looking over his girlfriend's shoulder at Alice's phone.

"That is the question of the day," Alice said, putting her phone away.

"Maybe he met someone at the bar last night?" Brody offered. "He was working."

"He hasn't done that in months and he's never posted about it." Alice said shaking her head.

"Maybe he and Kurt finally did it?" Alex said.

"Ooh, I hope so!" Steph said excitedly. "Seb's quote of the day was *'Love is just a word, until someone comes along and gives it meaning!'"

Alice nodded thoughtfully. It *would* make sense. She couldn't imagine him posting a quote about love unless it was about Kurt.

"God, I hope Kurt doesn't change his mind," she murmured. "I'm not sure we could pick up the pieces if he lets Seb down again."

Steph pressed her lips together and frowned. "I don't think he did that on purpose," she said softly. "Blaine really messed him up."

"I know," Alice said, sighing. "But the result was the same."

Steph squeezed Alice's knee comfortably. The bell on the coffee shop's door rang and they all looked up. Steph smiled.

"It doesn't look as if he's about to change his mind," she said fondly.

Kurt and Sebastian had entered, holding hands and looking rosy and happy. They were talking French, focused on each other.

"YES!" Alex let out loudly, startling everyone. "DOUGHNUT TIME!"

Sebastian looked away from Kurt at the sound of Alex's shout and rolled his eyes fondly at his
friend, unable to keep the happy grin off of his face.

"Such a child," Sebastian said, smacking Alex around the back of the head.

"Yeah, a hungry child," Alex argued, rubbing his head. "It's only fair!"

Kurt grinned. "You know, Sebastian only told me the secret about the doughnuts yesterday. All this time, I thought you guys were just really passionate about sugar."

Alice smirked. "Sorry about that, Kurt. But it was just too much fun not to tell you."

"Especially because you kept saying you'd get them next round..." Steph added, chuckling.

"And finally, you have come - I mean, your time has come!" Alex winked.

"Well, we come empty-handed at the moment..." Sebastian started and Alex's face dropped.

Kurt rolled his eyes and shook his head before reaching into his bag and pulling out a bakery bag with an assortment of pastries in it.

"Yeah!" Alex exclaimed. He reached for the bag but Kurt snatched it back.

"We can't eat them here because we didn't buy them here."

Alex groaned. "You tease me, Hummel! Sebastian, you need to get your man in check."

Sebastian laughed. "Like I have any say in the matter."

"He really doesn't," Kurt confirmed with a wink. After that morning, he couldn't help but feel a little cocky.

"We'll get the next round of coffee to go and have them in the park," Kurt promised.

Slightly mollified, Alex took up his coffee and took a large sip.

Alice scooted to the side to make room on her bench and gave Sebastian a little smile. She knew she couldn't ask for the juicy details in front of Kurt, but she wanted her friend next to her anyway.

Sebastian sat next to Alice, beaming happily.

"When did this happen?" she asked the two of them.

Kurt exchanged glances with Sebastian. "Well, you know I drove Sebastian home after his birthday party..." he started, and Alex lowered his empty cup.

"Hold UP!" he shouted. "You said you stayed at Seb's because he was so drunk!"

"Wait, you slept with him when he was drunk?" Alice asked accusingly, frowning at Kurt.

Sebastian's smile disappeared and he scowled at his friends.

"Absolutely not! If you'd all shut up and let us explain!" Sebastian snapped, coming to Kurt's defence immediately. "Yeah, I was drunk. And he looked after me! I...tried to initiate something, but he was a gentleman and looked after me till I fell asleep..." he looked at Kurt with a smile and reached for his hand.

"And then yesterday morning, we talked. And decided to give this thing a try...and see where it
goes." He was still looking at Kurt with a soft expression and Kurt was looking back at him.

Alice and Steph looked at each other, sharing a soft smile and squeezed each other's hands.

"I'm sorry, Kurt," Alice offered. "I jumped to conclusions."

Kurt shrugged. "It's okay. I can't say I wasn't tempted... But I knew Bas would do the same for me - he already did, actually, after I had just broken up with Blaine." He squeezed Sebastian's hand. "I didn't want him to regret it in the morning."

"That would never have happened," Sebastian reassured him. "But...it was worth the wait." He winked at Kurt.

"Okay, less details, more doughnuts," Alex muttered, making a 'wrap it up' gesture at their coffees. He looked a little uncomfortable.

Kurt shook his head, remembering how detailed Alex had become two days ago.

Brody smiled. "I'm happy for you guys," he said. "Maybe now Alice can stop worrying about you two." He winked.

"Hey, I just want them to be happy," Alice said defensively.

"Oooh! Triple dates!" Steph cut in happily, hoping to diffuse an argument.

Sebastian smirked. "Isn't that what this is now?" He joked. "I think we need to come up with some sort of system for the doughnuts thing...now that we're all in relationships...we can't all be bringing treats every time."

"Why not?" Alex asked, and Steph rolled her eyes.

"Well, I have one more reason to stay in shape now," Kurt said, winking at Sebastian. "Maybe we should starting bringing celebratory celery."

Alex made a nauseated face. "That's enough of a threat to make us all celibate."

They all laughed. With Alex urging them on, they finished their coffees and ordered another round to take with them.

Once the order was ready they collected it and headed out into the spring sunshine. Alice took Sebastian's arm and hugged his shoulder. She deliberately slowed their pace and let the rest of the group walk on ahead.

"So," she asked, keeping her voice low and glancing at Kurt, "was it everything you'd hoped it would be?"

Sebastian smiled. "It was more," he said happily.

Alice raised her eyebrows and waited.

Sebastian shook his head.

"Come on...that's all you're going to give me?" Alice let out, looking crestfallen.

"Yep," Sebastian said firmly. "It was perfect, and that's all you're getting." He smiled at her.
"Ugh, come on, I told you all about Brody!" she protested, but she could tell it was a lost cause. She looked at him from the side.

"You really like him, don't you?" she said. "I mean, really."

"I really do..." Sebastian said smiling at her. "I think this is it, Alice. It's him. He's the one." His subconscious had even confirmed it.

Alice sighed. Things were going to change. It had already changed their friendship. She knew it was bound to happen eventually, and yet...

"I am happy for you," she whispered. "But if he breaks your heart I'll kick his ass."

Sebastian kissed the top of her head. "I know," he said quietly. "And so does he."

"Good," she confirmed. "But I'm just saying."

Sebastian looked down at his friend and saw a flicker of sadness cross her eyes. He placed his hand over hers and squeezed it.

"Hey," he said quietly. "You're my sister, Alice. I'm always gonna need you, you know that, right?"

Alice put on a brave smile. "Yeah, I know," she replied. "It's just...I'm gonna have to share you now. You'll be wanting to do things without the gang, and that's ok! But..." She sighed. "I'm sorry, I'm getting sentimental. I really do want you to be happy."

"Things won't change that much," Sebastian said, smiling. "You're still around all the time even though you and Brody are together...and you guys still do stuff with just the two of you. Kurt and I will be the same. He knows how important you all are to me, and you're important to him too."

Alice smiled a little watery-eyed. "He really is amazing Seb, I'm so happy for you."

"I'm happy for me too," he said, beaming. "And for you. Brody is great."

Alice looked at her boyfriend and caught his eye. He winked at her and she felt butterflies in her chest. "Yeah, he is."

A little further up ahead, Brody glanced over his shoulder. "You think they're comparing notes?" he joked.

Kurt smiled. "I don't think so," he said, remembering how Sebastian had promised he wouldn't. "I think they're just making sure they're ok."

"If we ever break up with them, we're in trouble," Brody mused.

"Oh yeah," Kurt agreed. "We'd better not elope together." He winked at Brody.

"Four against two?" Brody said to Kurt. "Much as I love you dude, I don't fancy going up against The Scoobs with those odds."

Kurt snorted. "Me neither. I do value my life a bit more than your abs, no offence."

Brody shook his head in mirth, and Kurt realised, once again, he was genuinely happy. He fit into this group. None of them had ever made him feel awkward or out of place because they were straight. And they cared. Boy, did they care. He knew all of them would have his back, even Alex - especially Alex, in fact.
Brody looked round at his girlfriend and they smiled at each other, holding the gaze. “Thank you, Kurt. For introducing us...I don’t think I ever said it before.”

“You kind of introduced yourself by coming over to us at Callbacks,” Kurt reminded him. “But I am glad you did. I felt bad for the way things ended between you and Rachel. I wish I could have done something, but Santana kind of set the avalanche off and then Finn got wind of it…” He hesitated. “And by the time I got back together with Blaine hanging out with other guys was kind of taboo.” He sighed. “I’m sorry I let that stop me. I shouldn’t have.”

Brody shrugged and smiled at Kurt. “You’ve got nothing to apologise for, Kurt. I remember all too well what being around those people was like...I understand. We’re friends now, and you and I have to stick together, we really are outnumbered.”

Kurt snorted. “Yeah.”

“What are you boys grinning about?” Alice asked curiously, catching up with them.

“Our plans to elope,” Kurt joked idly, winking at Brody. He left it to him to explain, and went to join Sebastian.

"I think that went well," Sebastian said, taking Kurt's hand.

"Yes," Kurt replied with a smile. He hadn't expected any real trouble, though he was quite sure he knew what had just passed between Sebastian and Alice. His smile dimmed a little.

"It might be a little different with the Ohio crowd," he said carefully. He didn't really care what they'd say about him, but he didn't want them to attack Sebastian on social media if he posted anything about it.

Sebastian pulled Kurt closer and moved the hand that was holding Kurt's to wind around his boyfriend's back, hugging him closer.

'I don't care what they say about me, babe,' he said in French. 'They can't ruin what we have...they've been shit friends to you and their opinions of me don't matter…'

Kurt nodded. He knew how Sebastian felt about that. He wished he could say the same.

They crossed the street and walked into the park. There was a nice spot in the grass where they could catch some afternoon sun, and Kurt put their bag down. As soon as he did, Alex was there, pulling Steph along. He let himself fall into the grass and began opening Kurt's bag.

Kurt smiled. He looked around for a spot to sit down that wouldn't completely ruin his white jeans, and wished he had brought a blanket or a jacket.

As the group all settled into the grass and dug into the bag of pastries, Sebastian saw Kurt hesitate. He smiled fondly and slid up to his boyfriend wordlessly, brushing his finger down Kurt's arm.

"Here," he said quietly, sitting himself down on the grass with his legs stretched out. He patted his lap and grinned up at Kurt.

"Here," he said quietly, sitting himself down on the grass with his legs stretched out. He patted his lap and grinned up at Kurt.

Kurt smiled gratefully. He couldn't remember the last time he'd actually sat in anyone's lap in public. “Thanks,” he said, kissing Sebastian's cheek as he sat down on Sebastian's legs sideways, so they could both still see the others. "Tell me when it gets too heavy," he added, wrapping one arm around Sebastian's back to keep himself steady. He picked a croissant from the bag and handed it to Sebastian, before taking out a cupcake for himself.
Steph watched them with little hearts in her eyes, and immediately sought out Alex, cuddling up closer to him.

"I'm eating, honey bun," he said with his mouth full. Steph ignored him and put her head on his shoulder anyway.

Alice sighed happily. "I think it's group selfie time," she pronounced, and reached into her purse for her extendable selfie stick. This was one for the next family album.
The Birds and The Boys

Chapter Summary

Sam asks Kurt and Sebastian for some advice.

Sebastian couldn't take his eyes off his boyfriend. He also couldn't wrap his head around the fact that Kurt now was his boyfriend. Every time the thought crossed his mind a stupid grin spread across his face.

They were at Kurt's place, legs intertwined on the couch, watching reruns of America's Next Top Model. After coffee and cakes with their friends, they had decided to spend their night off in together, relaxing after a busy weekend.

"I love it, but I can't believe they put those girls through such radical makeovers," Sebastian commented as he watched a girl break down on screen at the sight of her new drastic haircut.

"It's awful," Kurt agreed gleefully. "They always cut one of the girls' hair and then send them home, it's so cruel." His eyes glinted. "I love it."

He nudged Sebastian playfully. Watching ANTM with Sebastian had easily become one of his favourite things. It turned out Sebastian had actually seen a few seasons as well, and was just as biting in his critiques as Kurt. From the couch, they made a perfect bitchy second jury.

The doorbell rang. "Oh! Pause it," Kurt said, "I don't wanna miss Tyra."

Sebastian paused the show and Kurt got up to open the door. From his seat on the couch, Sebastian watched as a Kurt opened the door and was surprised to see Sam. Sebastian immediately had a flashback to his birthday. He may have been drunk but he remembered that part of the evening most vividly. It had definitely become clear why Kurt had had a crush on him at school.

But at the nervous look on Sam's face, all thoughts of lap dances evaporated and a sense of dread swept over Sebastian. What if Sam was there to ask Kurt to give Blaine another chance?

Then he kicked himself. Sam had already proven that that was not on his agenda.

"Hey Kurt..." Sam said. "Oh and Sebastian, you're here too, uh..."

Kurt looked over his shoulder at Sebastian. "Yeah...um...we're a couple now. We got together the day after the party," he explained, giving Sebastian a fond smile. "Which was probably long overdue. It just took me so long to see it."

Sam looked at Sebastian, and noticed the way he looked at Kurt. It felt right that someone looked at Kurt like that. It was different from the way Sebastian had looked at him while he was dancing...though Sam was sure they'd share that kind of looks too, in private. He still stood in the doorway, feeling hesitant.

"Are you okay?" Kurt asked carefully. "You can come in, you know. You're not interrupting." He smirked and shot Sebastian a wink. "Our next sex marathon isn't due for at least an hour, we're not 18 anymore..."
Sebastian grinned and winked at him. "We do alright babe."

Sam shuffled into the apartment but hung back just inside the doorway. He had no idea how to approach the reason for his visit. He never thought he'd be in this position.

"Umm...actually," he stammered. "Sex is kind of why I'm here."

Sebastian raised his eyebrows at him.

Sam blushed. "I don't mean-" He started. "Not with you guys! I just uh mean...in general...I um met someone...at your party and I..." He looked between them helplessly.

"Come and sit down," Kurt coaxed gently, leading him to the couch. "You mean Giorgio, right?"

When Sam looked at him with wide eyes, he quickly added: "Marc saw you two leave together, that's all. That's all I know. I haven't talked to him since that night."

Sam sighed in relief. He sat back on the couch. "Yeah. We got to talking at the party, and it got kinda late and we were both hungry, so he suggested we'd go to this all-night kitchen, and it was close to his place, and um- yeah."

He ran a hand through his hair. "I wasn't drunk," he said, "I knew what I was doing." He wanted that to be clear. "...But it was also kind of...confusing. He was nice, and interesting and very hot, I guess, I don't know." He shrugged his shoulders and let his hand fall into his lap. "Hot, like, I wish I looked like that, but also hot like...I wanted to touch him. I couldn't tell the difference."

Sebastian heard the confusion in Sam's voice and couldn't help but feel sorry for him. He had always known that he was gay, before he even knew what the word for it was. He'd never had any interest in girls. For someone like Sam who had dated girls and liked them...it had to be confusing to realise that he liked guys too.

Sebastian looked at Kurt, who had sat down on Sam's other side.

"Have you...ever had similar thoughts before? Or is this the first time?" Sebastian asked gently.

"I've asked myself that every day since your party," Sam let out frustratedly. "I don't know. I mean, I've looked at guys' bodies before, but I don't think...I mean, it was just at the gym, or when I stripped. But I didn't get...you know." He gave Sebastian an awkward look and nodded down at his crotch.

"But, um, that happened after the party?" Kurt prompted.

"Yeah," Sam replied, blushing. "When we started kissing. And then Giorgio asked if he could blow me. And I was like, yeah...I mean, I thought, like, it's kind of the same as when a girl does it, right? Only..." He paused and chewed his lip. "It was so much better."

Kurt exchanged glances with Sebastian and smiled. "Maybe it kinda helps when you've had all of your life to figure out how the equipment works," he offered lightly, hoping to make Sam feel more comfortable.

Sebastian nodded. "I know when I first started having sex...I had no idea what I was doing, but I knew what felt good for me. So I just went with that, and then over time I figured out how to read my partners' bodies."

Sam nodded. That made sense. "But..." He started. "I...I love girls. Boobs are amazing...and their
curves. I don't get how it could feel good with Georgio and then I still find myself checking out a girl on the subway..."

Kurt shrugged. "Maybe you just like both. I mean, I can't really tell you anything about that and neither can Sebastian, but...you know. It's a real thing. Or maybe it's just Giorgio. It doesn't have to be 50-50...they call it a scale for a reason."

Sam sighed. "Yeah, I guess."

"So...do you think you want to see him again?"

Sam fidgeted. "I do. And we've texted, but...what if...we meet up, and he wants me to do something else? I don't know the first thing about gay sex. And I don't want him to think that, I don't know-"

He looked at Sebastian a little desperately. "Like that lapdance I gave you was kinda false advertising, you know? I know it always look like strippers are like, sex gods, but it's just an act."

Sebastian nodded. "I understand," he said reassuringly. "Though, it was a very good lap dance," he said with a wink.

"I guess the only thing I can suggest is to be honest and talk to him," Sebastian continued. "Most guys if they're worth their salt will accept that you don't know much, and no one should make you feel inferior because of it. Our friend Marc - the guy who hosted the party. He was married before he realised he was gay, and it took meeting Paul for him to figure it out."

"But I'm not gay!" Sam said hastily. "At least I don't think I am..."

Kurt's smile faltered for a moment, but then he pushed through. He knew Sam's initial reaction to the word was external programming. It was not his fault, and he knew Sam wasn't really homophobic. He understood this was a confusing situation for him.

"I agree with Sebastian. I think Giorgio will understand, and if he's the right one, he'll help you find out what you might be comfortable doing together." Kurt couldn't help but look at Sebastian when he said this.

Sam nodded. Then he frowned, and it was clear he needed a bit more, but wasn't sure how to ask.

Kurt waited.

"So...I get what you're saying, and...I'll do that...But I still kind of want to know what to do. Just so I'm prepared. I mean, I guess I could google it.-"

"Ah, better not!" Kurt cut in, wrinkling his nose. "Trust me. Hold on, I've got something for you."

He got up and went to his bedroom. After briefly rummaging around, he came back with a folded, dog-eared flyer.

"It's a little older but not outdated," he said, handing it to Sam. He quickly added: "Not that you can't ask us! I mean -" He took a deep breath and let it out, "I think it might be a bit weird asking me, but maybe Sebastian....?"

Sebastian smiled at Kurt and nodded.

"First things first, you gotta protect yourself! Always use condoms - And lube...lube is your best friend," Sebastian said looking at Sam.
Sam shifted uncomfortably, and Kurt made his way to the small kitchen to give the two of them privacy. He knew it was a cop-out, but in a way this was more awkward for him than watching Sam strip down to speedos and grind down on his best friend. Kurt could still vaguely hear them, but at least he didn't have to watch Sam's squirming and uncomfortable expressions. It triggered more than a few bad memories inside of Kurt, and it was yet another reminder of what heteronormativity did to guys' minds.

He started to make tea to have something to do and to create another noise barrier between the kitchen and the living room.

Sebastian continued to talk to Sam and tried to answer his questions as best as he could without going into too much detail on the mechanics.

Sam, for his part, listened and found himself intrigued rather than put off by what Sebastian was saying. It was an odd feeling and Sam felt incredibly overwhelmed but he couldn't ignore the small excited spark that ignited in his brain.

"The best thing to do," Sebastian concluded, "is still to speak to him, and give it a go...if you don't like it and realise that maybe it's not for you, then be honest. He'll understand. And if you do enjoy it, then it'll be a lot of fun experimenting and seeing what feels good for you." He winked.

"Thanks, man," Sam mumbled. He looked troubled for a moment. Then, a rush of words fell out of his mouth all at once. "I'm really sorry about stealing the trophy and bad mouthing you and all of that stuff," he said, "You're actually a nice guy, and I am happy for you and Kurt."

"Well, I'm glad we have your endorsement," Kurt said fondly, walking back in from the kitchen with a mug of tea. He sat down on Sebastian's lap.

Sebastian instinctively wrapped his arms around Kurt and held him close, burying his face into Kurt's shoulder and inhaling his familiar scent.

Sam watched them carefully and smiled. He'd never seen Kurt so relaxed. Suddenly, he felt like an intruder.

"Uh," he said a little awkwardly. "I guess I should-"

"There's some soda's in the fridge," Sebastian said cutting Sam off. "Help yourself, and bring me one while you're at it. If you're gonna be gay, you might as well watch some Tyra with us." He winked at Sam.

Sam grinned and nodded, disappearing into the kitchen.

'Poor guy,' Sebastian said quietly in French. 'I'm glad I figured out who I am when I was young.'

'Mm. I can't really imagine what it must be like to- No thanks, Sam, I've got tea!' Kurt switched languages mid-sentence to reply to Sam's question. 'He's right, though. You're actually a nice guy,' he added quietly, kissing Sebastian on the lips.

Sebastian smiled and kissed him back, his grip tightening around Kurt. Not to instigate anything - they had company and he didn't want to make Sam feel any more uncomfortable - but just because he needed Kurt to be close.

'So are you,' he said quietly. 'I still can't believe this is real.'

"It feels pretty real to me," Kurt said, and smirked, shifting around a little in Sebastian's lap, then left
it at that, as Sam came back in with the soda.
A World of Pure Imagination

Chapter Summary

Wonka’s opening night is finally upon them, and Sebastian has a surprise for Kurt.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"If you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it...."

The applause went on an on. Kurt could hardly believe it. This was it. This was his applause. Two weeks of intense rehearsals had led to this point, opening night, and it was all worth it.

He took off his top hat and took another bow. They’d had several curtain calls in groups; the kids, the adults, Charlie on his own, but they kept calling for him. Wonka, Wonka!

As Kurt came back on for his final curtain call Sebastian was the first on his feet and was clapping the hardest, consumed with pride for the man stood centre stage. Just where he belongs, he thought.

The lights in the theatre went on, and Kurt could look into the audience for the first time. Before that, the lights on the stage had blinded him. It was sold out, and everyone was standing in their seats.

Kurt let his eyes glide over the rows until they fixed on what they were looking for: Sebastian, clapping and cheering, a few rows behind the front row. They locked eyes for a moment before Kurt nodded and slipped back into his role, spun his cane, and walked off the stage.

Sebastian was in complete awe of his boyfriend. He had always known Kurt could sing, he had a beautiful voice. But he’d had no idea Kurt could act. He’d not just played Wonka; he’d been Wonka. Intimidating, irrational, charming and frightening.

Sebastian should have known really - his boyfriend could do anything, and seeing Kurt up on stage just proved that.

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Kurt walked into the foyer with a group of co-stars. His hair was damp, his face pink and freshly scrubbed, but he had donned his black and white striped pants and a purple jacket, just in case. Personally, he felt like nothing took away the magic of a good show like seeing its stars walk out of the theatre in sweatpants.

He exchanged air-kisses with the others, and they went their separate ways. Kurt saw Sebastian from across the foyer and smiled. He quickly crossed the distance between them.

Sebastian held his arms out to Kurt as he approached and enveloped him into a hug, picking him up and swinging him round a little.

"That was amazing baby," he said holding Kurt tight. "You were incredible!"

Kurt hugged him back, his whole body flushed with post-performance adrenaline. "Thank you. I missed a few marks, but overall I’m happy," he replied. This was his job now; he had to stay sharp.
"What did you think about the tunnel scene?"

Kurt had been most nervous about that part, because one of the special effects included a live video close-up of his face, saying the tunnel poem, projected on the entire backdrop, interspersed with flashes of horror images.

"If you missed anything it wasn’t noticed by the audience." Sebastian said honestly. "And that scene was incredible! You looked so good up on that screen, everyone single audience member was on that boat ride with you." He pulled back a little to look into Kurt’s eyes, hoping Kurt could see the pride and admiration inside them. "You deserved that standing ovation tonight Kurt!"

Kurt hopped on his heels, looking pleased. He no longer deflected compliments about his work. Kurt knew Sebastian meant it, and so he accepted it. "You know what I like about you?" he said softly, pausing to kiss Sebastian's lips. "I gave you an opening for critique and you didn't take it." He moved his mouth closer to Sebastian's ear. "You must really want to take the leading man home," he whispered, and grinned. "But not yet! I'm too full of adrenaline to go home and sleep. What do you wanna do?"

Sebastian chuckled and kissed Kurt back, lingering for a moment. "Well, actually," he said looking down with a soft smile. "I made a reservation…"

Kurt beamed at him. "Really? Where?"

Sebastian grinned smugly. "It's a surprise." He stepped back and took Kurt’s hand. "Come on."

Kurt squeaked happily and followed him along. All the way down the street, Sebastian was secretive about it, and Kurt loved it. He loved surprises. At some point, he figured they were headed down to the subway, but then they stopped. Kurt looked around. Then his eye caught the familiar façade, and he gasped. "Sardis? For real?" he asked hopefully.

Sebastian grinned and opened the door, stepping back to let Kurt in. "It would be a cruel joke if it wasn’t."

Kurt shrugged. "Not as cruel as a jewelry box without an actual ring in it," he mused, and stepped inside, looking around in wonder. "When did you book this? I remember Finn had real trouble getting a table…"

Sebastian frowned a little at the ring comment but let it go. "When you got cast," he said honestly. "As soon as we knew the date for opening night, I booked it."

He smiled shyly at Kurt and stepped up to the maitre’d. "Hi, table for two booked under Hummel-Smythe please?" he said quietly, blushing a little. The man nodded and indicated for the two of them to follow.

Kurt blinked. That was four months ago, before they'd gotten together. Why would he...? And under Hummel-Smythe? He followed Sebastian in a daze. Were there no limits to his kindness? He knew they'd talked about Sardis once, a very long time ago, but he didn't think Sebastian would have cared enough to remember. But he had, and had booked it, without any agenda but to do something nice for him. Or...was there something else? Had this been planned as a first date and his drunken birthday confession just kind of sped up things?

Kurt didn't want to spoil the moment by asking, so bit his tongue and followed Sebastian and the maitre’d to their table. It was in a secluded corner of the restaurant so they’d have some privacy. Sebastian really had thought of everything. They ordered a bottle of wine to share and picked up the
menus to browse.

"Have whatever you like Kurt, it’s on me, okay?"

Kurt smiled and nodded, bouncing in his seat a little.

They chatted quietly between themselves while they browsed the menu. Sebastian was full of compliments about the show and Kurt filled Sebastian in on some backstage gossip.

"And so everyone was running around like crazy looking for Veruca’s blue wig, and-"

Kurt paused to thank the waiter who put a basket of fresh bread on their table and poured their wine into glasses already set on the table. Kurt took a moment to share a smile with Sebastian and revel in the fact that he had Sebastian’s full attention.

"And then it turned out, someone from the crew had put it on in the first break to take selfies and literally forgot to take it off. So all the time we were searching for it, they just stood there with the thing on their head!"

"I’m sorry, what!?” Sebastian asked, laughing. "How the hell did no one notice that a member of the crew was wandering around wearing a blue wig?"

"I know, right?” Kurt laughed, and took a piece of bread, dipping it into the pot of olive oil set in the middle of the basket. It felt good to share these little things from his day with someone - someone who didn’t pull a sad puppy face whenever Kurt mentioned the part he got.

Kurt talked well into the second course, and Sebastian listened, laughed, and commented. Finally, Kurt said:

"Okay - I think you know just about everything about Wonka now. I formally release you of the obligation of being my audience." Kurt winked. "I know I talk too much once I get going and no one stops me."

Sebastian shook his head and frowned. Kurt often made subtle comments like this, apologising for his behaviour before or as he did something, as if he was scared Sebastian was going to fly off the handle at him. Sebastian knew Blaine was a dick, but he had never really realised how much Kurt’s ex had damaged him.

"I like listening to you talk about your day! You’re so passionate about what you do and I love that I get to experience it," Sebastian said, stroking the back of Kurt’s hand. "You have stories and I want to hear them."

Kurt smiled, visibly touched. "But so do you!” he replied. "I’ve been stuck at rehearsals for two weeks and you took double shifts for the both of us. I’ve hardly seen you! I want to hear about your day now."

Though this was a real job, and something he’d been hoping to get ever since starting at NYADA, Kurt missed the bar and hanging out with his boyfriend and their friends.

Sebastian smiled, softening a little and reached for Kurt’s hand.

"My day wasn’t that eventful," he said truthfully. "We got our end of semester assignments, which I’m pretty happy about. Steph and I have been partnered together for one class, we went to the library after class to do some initial research."
Kurt listened contentedly. He liked hearing Sebastian talk about his studies. He had a way of explaining what he was researching that made it sound fresh and challenging. Kurt remembered how Sebastian would bring his homework to the Lima Bean. It had irritated Kurt back then, especially the French novels, as it had all felt a bit too much like a pose, but now he knew it had just been Bas, using his books to keep himself company in lieu of friends. He wished he had known back then how much they had in common.

His phone vibrated. Kurt didn’t really want to take the call, but figured it was his dad, asking how the play had gone. "Excuse me," he said, "I think my dad's calling."

He picked up.

"Hey, dad. Yes. Yes, it went well." He looked at Sebastian and smiled as he listened to his dad and Carole's congratulations. "I know, but you'll see it on Saturday. It'll probably be better, I'll be less nervous..." He reached for Sebastian's hand and traced one of his fingers in a caress as he listened to the other side of the line.

Sebastian sat patiently while Kurt spoke to his dad. The happiness in Kurt’s voice as he spoke about the play warmed his heart. It was clear from the glow emanating from his boyfriend that Kurt’s parents were proud.

Kurt’s hand suddenly stilled.

"No. I haven't seen Blaine." Kurt's hand dropped away from Sebastian's, and he averted his eyes to concentrate on what his dad was saying. "No," he said again, quieter than before. "I didn't see him in the audience. I - I don't care. Dad, please..." Kurt sighed. This weekend was going to be the moment where he'd break the news about Sebastian to his dad and Carole, but it didn't sound like his father was ready yet. Somehow, he felt like Kurt had to give Blaine another chance.

Sebastian felt Kurt freeze and frowned as he took away his hand. As Kurt’s words sunk in, he sighed and scowled. Clearly his father thought breaking up with Blaine was a bad idea...did no one in Kurt's life see how toxic Blaine was?

Sebastian reached out his hand, offering some comfort. Kurt only tentatively touched it with the tip of his fingers.

"Okay. Thanks, dad. Me too." Kurt closed the call, looking a little subdued.

"I'm sorry," he offered Sebastian. "My dad...I guess he just thinks we'll get together again, like last time."

Sebastian squeezed Kurt’s hand. He could see the conflicting thoughts rolling around in Kurt’s mind. Sebastian swallowed something in the back of his throat.

"If it makes things easier...maybe we don’t tell him about us just yet?" He offered. "You go to dinner with them on Saturday, explain about the break-up, and I’ll meet them another time?"

Kurt pushed down his disappointment and nodded. "Maybe that's a good idea," he agreed softly. He looked down on Sebastian’s hand. "But it's not because I am ashamed of you. I want you to meet him. But maybe I should prepare him for the changes in my life more gradually. Because of his heart."

Most of all, Kurt was afraid that he'd finally have to tell his dad why he and Blaine broke up, and he wasn’t sure his dad’s reaction would something Sebastian would handle well. The last thing he wanted was for the both of them to get into a fight.
Sebastian nodded. "I know…I get it."

And he did get it. He was disappointed, but he understood, though if Kurt’s dad persisted with putting pressure on Kurt to go back to Blaine, Sebastian would certainly have something to say about it.

"Shall we get dessert?" Sebastian asked with a smile, trying to salvage some of the happy bubble they’d been in before Kurt’s phone call. "It’s your big night, it’s only right that we end it in style."

Kurt smiled in relief. "Yes! Thank you, that’s a good idea." He looked at his boyfriend gratefully. Then he hesitated. "Shall we share one? The rehearsals haven’t left me much time for the gym…"

"Sure," Sebastian said smiling.

He had been eyeing up the cheese plate, but it was Kurt's night and if he felt better sharing a cake or something rather than having one each, then Sebastian would support that.

"You pick whatever you want, babe," he offered.

"Don’t say that, I want all of them!" Kurt said, chuckling and rolling his eyes at himself. "I wish I could." He sighed, then eyed Sebastian. "Do you think I obsess over it?" he suddenly asked.

"Whenever I asked him to share, Blaine would say I was manorexic. Which is almost as dumb a word as 'bromance', and anyway I'm sure he just said it because he wanted a big desert for himself -" Kurt stopped himself.

Sebastian had to swallow hard again. He really wanted to hunt Blaine down and kick his ass.

"I don’t think you obsess at all!" Sebastian said a little shortly. "You look after yourself and you look amazing for it. It’s your body babe...you can do what you like."

Kurt pressed his lips together in a smile. He hoped Sebastian hadn’t thought he was fishing for a compliment. Their relationship was just still so new he hadn’t yet figured out which topics to avoid.

"Thanks. Shall we have the cheese, then? I won’t eat much and you can have the disgusting blue one all to yourself!" he said cheerfully, hoping to lighten the mood again. Cheese always helped.

Sebastian smiled. "I’d love to. But if you want a cake we can have a cake...I really don’t mind."

"No, it’s fine," Kurt said, telling himself the cake didn’t even look that good anyway.

Their waiter came swiftly and as they waited, Kurt slowly relaxed again. He started telling Sebastian about the alterations he’d requested for in the Wonka suit, and how he had ended up redesigning half of it with Chase at the Vogue office because he drove the wardrobe people crazy with his special requests.

"I mean, there were only two choices if they wanted me to do that choreography: loose-fitting slacks that would have looked like Mr Wonka was wearing yoga pants, or elastic seams and a weighted hem. And I was not gonna go on in the first!" Kurt added airily. "If it was good enough for Coco Chanel and the Queen, it’s good enough for me."

Sebastian laughed fondly. "Only you, Kurt Hummel, could redesign an entire character’s costume and have wardrobe and directors fall into line." He kissed Kurt’s hand. "You looked amazing babe, everything was perfect!"

Kurt blushed. "Chase did help," he mumbled, but he accepted the compliment anyway. It had cost
him a lot of hard work and a few sleepless nights figuring out how to make it look better. He was glad Isabelle had tolerated him working on it during office hours...and with office materials and staff. All they wanted was tickets to the show, which he had gladly gotten them. He had scheduled them in on Sunday evening, which meant that with Steph and Alex Friday, his dad on Saturday and Alice and Brody on the Sunday matinée, he had some friends in the audience at every performance.

Their cheese arrived, and with it, two different dessert wines so they wouldn’t have to choose just one.

They ate the cheese in companionable silence, occasionally breaking it to salivate over the decadent spread or discuss an anecdote from the show.

Sebastian made sure to reel off his favourite parts from the performance, eager to wash Kurt with praise and boost his confidence.

They finished the tray and wine and it was whisked away by an attentive waiter.

"Can I get you anything else?" the waiter asked. Sebastian looked at Kurt.

"How about it, babe? Anything else you fancy?"

A little flushed from the wine and Sebastian’s compliments, Kurt replied: "Yeah...but not from the menu."

Their waiter got the hint and disappeared to get the check.

Sebastian winked at Kurt flirtatiously and ran his foot up Kurt’s leg under the table.

The waiter arrived with the check and Sebastian paid, leaving a good tip.

As they got up and made their way out of the restaurant Sebastian took hold of Kurt’s hand. "I’m sorry we didn’t see anyone famous," he joked.

"That’s my fault, they only have one special guest per night, and tonight that was Mr Wonka," Kurt quipped, squeezing Sebastian’s hand. He felt warm and happy, and a little emboldened by their flirting.

"Thank you for picking up the check, by the way," he added. "It’s so nice to be dating someone with a job. Blaine was always-"

"It’s fine, Kurt," Sebastian said bluntly, cutting him off. "I was the one who booked it and it was my treat. Of course I was going to pay."

Just like that, the warm, confident feeling was replaced by an ice-cold fist closing around Kurt’s heart. His grip on Sebastian’s hand slackened and he faltered in his step - but just for a moment. Ducking his head, he quickly stepped up again and forced a smile.

"Of course. You’re right. A gentleman would," he offered, hoping it was enough.

"It’s not about being a gentleman Kurt, it’s called being a decent human being..." Sebastian stopped and looked at Kurt. "I’m not him," Sebastian added sharply. "And I’m never going to be, so I wish you’d stop comparing the two of us."

Kurt froze at the tone of Sebastian’s voice.

"I know you’re not him," Kurt insisted. "I do. All I was trying to say was-" He hesitated, trying to
formulate his words so that he wouldn't have to bring up his ex-fiancé again. "...How I appreciate the way you treat me." He shrugged uncomfortably. "It was a positive comparison," he added softly.

"But every time I do or say something nice, you look at me like I am from another planet!" Sebastian let out exasperatedly. "Fuck, you thank me for every time I don't treat you like garbage! It is like you are constantly surprised that I am not like Blaine. And not just surprised - you're suspicious. With every comparison, it's like you're questioning the things I do for you, like you're accusing me of having some kind of hidden agenda." He shook his head. "It's like no matter what I do, I still can't shake the guy."

Guilt washed over Kurt, and he felt his face flush. "But...you said it was okay for me to talk about him," he argued softly.

"Yeah, that was before I knew it was going to open up the floodgates," Sebastian snapped. "I know he was a dick to you, Kurt. I already knew that before you broke up with him. You don't have to keep reminding me."

Kurt covered his mouth with his hand. His fingers were trembling. He didn't want this to be it. He didn't want Sebastian to give up on him.

He quickly crossed the distance between them and tried to salvage what he could.

"I won't do it again," he promised, knowing that he probably couldn't keep it. He ran his hand up Sebastian's chest. "Why don't we go to your place? I don't have a class till 11..."

Sebastian frowned and stepped back from Kurt. "You're doing it again," he stated.

"Doing what?" Kurt asked.

"You're doing this thing, where you..." Sebastian made a frustrated gesture with his hand. "You're offering me what you think I want, to deflect the argument. It's like choosing the cheese plate on purpose. I'm not a child, Kurt. You can't distract me from a scraped knee with a shiny toy! And you can't diffuse the conversation with sex."

Kurt's eyes widened and he lowered his hand. "I'm...I'm not! I am just asking my boyfriend to spend the night with me. Is that so wrong?"

"It is, if it's just to distract me! We can't just sweep stuff under the rug and not deal with it! That's not how this works."

"Well, I don't know how this works!" Kurt replied, feeling humiliated. "I don't know anything, apparently. I don't know what you want, I don't know how to stop talking about my ex, I don't know when my affections are appropriate or not." He paused to breathe. Anger was now overshadowing all other emotions.

"But I do know it's unfair to let me go on and on and not stop me until it's too late. If you'd told me right away you didn't want me to talk about Blaine, I would have tried harder."

Kurt felt tears welling up in his eyes. "I hate that I am so messed up," he added softly, "but you knew that when we started this. This...this is the best I can be right now, and if that's not good enough, then...I don't know..." He broke off and started crying.

As Kurt spoke, Sebastian realised his mistake. Kurt was right. He was being unfair, and he was letting his own frustration and helplessness about Blaine come out against the single person in the world who deserved it least of all. Guilt suckerpunched him in the stomach, and he felt sick. The
fight went out of him instantly.

"Oh Kurt," Sebastian said quietly. "Fuck, I’m sorry, I’m so, so sorry. I’m an asshole!"

Kurt shook his head, hugging his arms. He knew it was his fault. But how could he not mention Blaine, or try to stop thinking about him, when so much reminded Kurt of him? He understood why Sebastian wanted Blaine gone from his mind; his rival, the competition; but even if no single cell inside Kurt would ever consider going back to Blaine, it was like his mind couldn't let go. Of course that would irritate his new boyfriend, even if Sebastian had claimed otherwise before they slept together.

Sebastian stepped towards Kurt with his arms outstretched but didn’t touch him. He knew he had fucked up badly, and he didn’t want to make it worse by touching Kurt if he didn’t want to be touched.

"You’re right, it is unfair of me to not tell you these things. But I figured it was something that would dissipate over time. I guess I just hate that he’s still a part of our lives even though he isn’t actually here." Sebastian said softly.

Kurt let out a shuddering breath. He wanted to cross the distance between them, but at the same time, wasn’t sure if he still could. He used to be able to tell Sebastian everything. How could he have known the rules would change once they got together?

Was this the point where Sebastian broke up with him, because he hadn’t managed to let Blaine go?

"I don’t want him to be a part of my life either," he said quietly. "But I can’t pretend the last three years never happened."

"I know, baby," Sebastian said a little brokenly. He dropped his hands, respecting Kurt’s need for space. "And it was wrong of me to expect you to."

He paused, trying to form words that would fix this.

Kurt shrugged. It wasn’t so wrong to want a whole boyfriend. It was not his fault Kurt was so messed up, and it wasn’t his job to make it better.

"So...this is it, then?" Kurt asked. "Are we breaking up?"

Sebastian felt his heart crack at Kurt’s question. "Wh-No! No, Kurt of course not!"

He moved forward, tentatively placing his hands on Kurt’s shoulders - ready to remove them the instant Kurt indicated that he wanted him to.

"Kurt, I love you! I will always love you. I’m in this for the long haul, I thought you knew that."

Kurt made a small sound of relief in the back of his throat and took the last step into Sebastian’s arms, unable to keep away any longer. For a moment, he had felt his world crash down around him, and now Sebastian had pulled it back together again.

"I think I need more time to believe in words like ‘always and forever’ again," he whispered. "But I believe in you."

Sebastian held Kurt close to his him and buried his face in Kurt’s neck. "I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” He whispered. "I wanted tonight to be perfect. I just...I like doing things for you. I didn’t do it to get one up on him, or to get you to sleep with me. Making you happy makes me happy."
Kurt let out a small huff of breath that was something between a laugh and a sob.

*Making you happy makes me happy.*

He'd heard something like that before. Again, his mind went in circles and ended up with Blaine.

*I want you to be comfortable, so I can be comfortable.*

It was storybook-perfect, movie-adaptable; it was the language in which Kurt daydreamed. But the bitter truth of it was that such words came too easy if you'd seen enough films or read enough books. Kurt had lapped it up, engraved it into his heart as words of true love and self-effacement...only to have Blaine take it all back with his actions within hours.

He didn't *really* believe Sebastian would do that; but all the same such words automatically called up all the pain of earlier betrayal and activated all of his shields, even though he'd blame himself for doing so all the while doing it. He had learned not to take such words at face value.

But how could he say that to Sebastian without accusing him of lying? How could he explain without mentioning Blaine yet *again*? A single tear born of frustration slipped down his cheek, and he hid it against Sebastian's chest.

"I will try to let it go," Kurt promised. "To make it just us." It didn't feel like it was enough. Sebastian deserved a lot more. But it was all he had to offer; he didn't want to promise Sebastian it was all over now only to disappoint him again if he fell back.

Sebastian pulled back and pressed his forehead against Kurt's. He shook his head. "It was wrong of me to put you on the spot like that and expect you to just be over everything that bastard put you through. What he did to you is inexcusable. He didn't just break your heart, it's like he broke your fundamental trust in the people around you. I know it's going to take time to get that back. And if the waiting is hard, that's *my* problem. I shouldn't have made it yours."

He ran his hands down Kurt's back. "You were so amazing up on that stage. As I knew you would be. I didn’t think twice about booking a table because I knew we’d be celebrating your success. I'm so proud of you and I wanted to give you the best of the best...But now all I did was ruin it."

Kurt shook his head. It was true that he'd been having a good time until Sebastian suddenly burst out with his feelings about Blaine, but it was clearly something that had desperately needed to be said. It made him aware of the things he still needed to work on, and hopefully it made Sebastian see he wasn't doing it on purpose. Kurt felt it had lead to a better understanding on both sides.

"I had a good time at Sardis tonight," he said honestly. "You didn't ruin anything." He took Sebastian's hand. "But promise me not to bottle things up anymore. Tell me. I need to know. Things like...trying to stop an argument from happening - I didn't even *notice* I was doing that until you called me out. I wasn't always like that. I don't *want* to be like that, but I can't change it if I am unaware of it. I can't promise I can change it right away, but at least I'll feel like I get a shot at trying."

Sebastian nodded. "I promise." He pressed a kiss to Kurt's forehead. "I need you to talk to me too okay? If you're having a day of it...or if I do or say something that makes you second-guess my intentions. You have to tell me!"

Kurt bit his lip and nodded. He was afraid Sebastian wasn't going to like it if he did, but he was willing to try it.

"Can I still come to your place?" he asked. "I want to. No strings attached."
Sebastian smiled. "Of course, you never have to ask." He stepped away from Kurt a little so he could look into his eyes. "Can I kiss you?"

*Finally, someone who asks first,* Kurt thought, and nodded. "If you don't mind the taste of snozberries," Kurt joked, and he winked at Sebastian.

Sebastian grinned and kissed Kurt full on the mouth. "Babe, you should know by now that I *love* a good snozberry."

Kurt chuckled against his lips. "I don't know if I'm ever gonna get that line out on stage again," he whispered, but his mind was no longer on Wonka anyway.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. IT'S DD'S BIRTHDAY! GIVE HER SOME LOVE! :) ~jwm
Double Check

Chapter Summary

Kurt realises there's one more thing he needs to do before he can leave his past behind.

The rest of Kurt's Wonka stint passed as if in a dream. They were sold out at every show, and the musical theatre critics websites were full of praise and discussion. Of course his version wasn't for everyone, but the general opinion leaned to the positive. Kurt's director already expressed interest in working with him again, and had suggested he'd get representation, recommending a talent management firm they usually worked with. He had also been paid a bonus on top of his agreed salary.

There was only one thing dampening Kurt's euphoria a little. He still hadn't told his dad and Carole about Sebastian, or why he had broken up with Blaine.

He had been more nervous about that than about the show his father had come to see. But as it was over and he looked into his dad's beaming face, he didn't know where to start.

For once, neither his dad or Carole mentioned Blaine over dinner; all they would talk about was how wonderful Wonka had been, and how proud they were of him, and that was such a welcome change that Kurt couldn't do it. He couldn't break their illusions and admit that his fiancé had sought more attractive pastures and that was what made them break up. How proud would they be of him then?

But it meant he also couldn't talk about Sebastian, or it would seem like he had been the one cheating, or at least having an emotional affair. He wanted them to like Sebastian, and not resent him for 'splitting up' him and Blaine.

In the end, Kurt had said nothing, and by the time his dad and Carole left for their hotel, guilt and misery had nearly crushed him. He had stayed up all night, looking at his mobile, wondering if he should call his dad and tell him through the phone. It would have been a little easier not seeing his face, but it had still been too daunting.

He had called Sebastian instead, and confessed everything. A part of him had been expecting his boyfriend to be angry, but Sebastian had remained calm.

"It's okay," he said. "You're allowed to take a day off from your past. You don't always have to carry it around. You can tell them when you're ready."

"I don't like them not knowing about you," Kurt said softly. He sighed. He knew he was only postponing the inevitable.

"I don't like it either," Sebastian admitted. "But I understand your reasons. I know family stuff is hard."

"Are you not angry?" Kurt asked, just to be sure.
"I am really not," Sebastian assured him. "Now tell me about the show, what did they think of it?"

--

A few days after Wonka ended, Kurt and Sebastian did their weekly food shop. Despite living separately they had fallen into the habit of shopping together.

As they left the store, Kurt tried to keep it together, but after they turned the corner to go to the vegetable market, he couldn’t hold back.

"I can’t believe they didn’t ID you. I always get carded! You’ve only been 21 for two months!"

Sebastian laughed lightly and squeezed Kurt’s hand. "Make the most of it, babe! Give it twenty years and you’ll be glad they ID you...then I’ll be the one jealous of you!"

Kurt frowned a little, and then smiled. "You’ll look great with some grey in your hair," he said fondly. He sighed. "I just hope I won’t go bald like my dad...maybe it skips a generation."

Sebastian shook his head. "You won’t go bald babe, your hair's too thick. It’s gorgeous."

Kurt took Sebastian’s arm, feeling pleased. He hoped they could be like Marc and Paul, without the age gap; just two guys in love growing old together. Thinking about them reminded Kurt of something.

"Hey, Marc called me last night, he has an idea for the club. He wondered if, maybe, you and I could sing. A bit like at Spotlight, I think, but less Broadway oriented? And then I thought, maybe that’s too static - but what if we integrated it into our flairs? You know, like Cocktail but with better singing...we could get wireless headsets...rehearse a choreo...?"

Sebastian smiled. It would be nice to perform with Kurt. "Sure! Any excuse to work with you," he said with a wink.

"Really?" Kurt said, hopping on his heels a little in excitement. "I have so many ideas already! We’d need to practise a lot though, I want it to be perfect." He beamed at Sebastian. "It’s going to be great. You’re in charge of flair ideas, I’ll do music - I still have this week off so I could get started... and then you and I can look at it this weekend! Or maybe Thursday, you don’t have classes in the afternoon, right?"

"I don’t, no...but I can’t do Thursday, I have an appointment at the clinic," Sebastian said.

Kurt stopped walking. "...at the...?" He swallowed. "Are you okay?"

The wildest horror scenarios flashed before his eyes.

Sebastian smiled at him and squeezed his hand. "I’m fine babe, it’s just a routine check-up. There’s a walk-in pop up clinic that comes to campus every three months. And I go to make sure all is fine and dandy."

Kurt breathed a little easier. While the idea still made him a little uneasy, they hadn’t been together that long, and before that...

Suddenly, another thought struck him: He needed to get tested as well. Blaine had been his one and only - but his fiancé had been with others. Up until now, Kurt hadn’t even considered that Blaine might have had unsafe sex with anyone...but he might have lied about that too, just like he had lied
about everything else.

Kurt felt sick as he thought about all the times they’d had sex since Blaine’s trip to LA. Without
knowing it, Kurt could have carried something for months - and passed it to Sebastian.

"Bas...do you think I could come, too?" he asked timidly. The idea of putting his sexual history out
there to be questioned and judged by strangers was horrifying, but the thought of not knowing was
worse.

Sebastian felt the change in Kurt’s mood and stopped, looking down at his boyfriend with kind eyes.
"Of course, it’s walk-in, anyone is welcome." He saw the worried look in Kurt’s eyes. "It’s a safe
place babe, there’s no judgement, they just want people to be safe."

Kurt swallowed. "I feel so naive," he admitted. "It should have been the first thing I did after Blaine
told me he cheated. Before I-... before we..." He broke off. "I’m really sorry. I put you at risk."

Sebastian kissed Kurt softly. "Shush," he said quietly. "We always used protection. You haven’t put
me in any more risk than I have been when I was picking up guys at the club." He stroked Kurt’s
cheek. "I don’t think you’re naive at all. Come with me on Thursday, we can both get checked out,
and it’ll put your mind at rest."

Honestly." He returned the kiss. "Maybe doing this will help."

Sebastian nodded and pressed his forehead against Kurt’s. "I know, and over time we will be. I
promise." He smiled. "You know...if we’re both okay...we could consider...not using condoms?"

Kurt paused. He didn’t mind using them, but the message behind Sebastian’s question was clear.
Kurt knew he was opening himself up to a world of risk if Sebastian could not stay monogamous -
but he trusted him, and taking this step felt like letting go of one more scar of his past.

"Let’s talk about that again when we get the results back," he said finally. "I...like that idea, I just
need to get this settled before I can think of anything else."

"I understand," Sebastian said, taking his hand.

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[The next Thursday]

"Sebastian!" A short woman in white scrubs greeted him warmly as he stepped into the room.

"Hello Heidi," he replied returning her warm smile. "How are the boys?"

"They’re very good, thank you for asking. Charlie lost his first tooth last week and was very excited
to get five dollars under his pillow."

"That’s a very generous tooth fairy!"

"Only for the first one, it’s a big moment."

Sebastian grinned at her.

"How are you, dear? I see you’ve brought someone with you today?" Heidi asked.
Sebastian looked back at Kurt who stood in the doorway and smiled at him. "This is Kurt, my boyfriend."

The nurse’s eyes widened, and she beamed a smile at him. "Oh my, a boyfriend, huh? I guess we won’t be seeing you around much anymore then..." She winked at Sebastian, then turned to Kurt.

"It’s lovely to meet you, Kurt. Do you want to get tested today too, or are you just here for moral support?"

"I, uh...I would like to get tested too, please," Kurt replied, a little overwhelmed. The nurse actually knew Sebastian by name? He knew it was a good thing. It meant Sebastian cared about his health. But still, it was very hard to repress his upbringing, and the general brainwashing that STDs were a just punishment for the promiscuous. Just the idea that he might have caught something made him feel incredibly guilty, like he had failed his dad somehow.

"Is it your first time, honey?" Heidi asked kindly.

Kurt nodded, taking Sebastian’s hand.

"It’ll be alright," Heidi said. "Why don’t you both step inside the waiting room right there, and you can go in together when we’re ready for you, okay?"

"Thanks." Kurt felt a little better already.

Sebastian squeezed Kurt's hand and led him down to the waiting area. They sat down on the blue plastic seats and Sebastian smiled at Kurt reassuringly.

"You okay?" he asked softly.

"I am," Kurt said honestly. "I’m just a little afraid." He took a deep breath and offered Sebastian a brave smile. "But you’re here."

"I am," Sebastian reassured him. "We’re in this together, right?"

Kurt laced their fingers together. "We are," he confirmed.

"Kurt!" someone said cheerfully.

Kurt looked up, feeling his face flush. Who’d recognise him here?

His former Spotlight colleague Dani walked in, beaming at the two of them.

"Dani! Hey!!" Kurt sat up a little, feeling relieved. If anything, he knew she wouldn't be homophobic about it.

"I’ve seen you before too," Dani said pensively, looking at Sebastian. Her eyes lit up. "You were there when Rachel lost her shit about singing Kurt’s song!"

Sebastian grinned at her and held out his hand. "Sebastian," he said. "And yes, that’s right. That was fun."

"It was!" Dani replied, shaking his hand. "I have to say, as annoying as she is, I do miss working with her. She was always fun to rile up."
Kurt frowned. "You don’t work at Spotlight anymore?" he asked, a little surprised.

"Oh, I do. But Rachel quit! Or, rather..." Dani started, shifting her weight to one side and putting a hand on her hip, getting ready to share a bit of gossip. "She took a weekend off to go to Ohio, and then never came back! I heard through the grapevine, and by that I mean Santana," she winked at Kurt, "that Rachel went back to her old school to help out the Glee club, then got bored, and went on a **cruise** with her dads."

She shrugged. "Gunther fired her after a week. I would have kicked her out sooner."

Kurt stared at her. It sounded ridiculous...but at the same time it sounded **very** Rachel.

"Can you believe it? She’d better take care NYADA won’t kick her out too..." Kurt mused.

"Well, according to Santana, Rachel isn’t even sure she wants to come back to school...not getting the part in that show ‘affected her confidence’," Dani said rolling her eyes.

"What planet is that girl even from?" Sebastian asked, shaking his head. He’d never met anyone as vapid as Rachel.

"At least, with her gone the rest of us actually get a chance to sing." Dani looked at Kurt. "Oh, and by the way, Mr Hummel, I have a bone to pick with you! Why didn’t you tell me that you were in a play? I had to read about it in the **paper**! I would have liked to come to see you!!"

Kurt looked a little guilty. "I’m sorry. I guess I just..." didn’t expect anyone to want to come, "...didn’t really advertise it," he finished lamely.

"Hmmm. Well, I knew you’d get a break some day. You were always too good for Spotlight."

Dani grinned at Sebastian. "So...are you two getting hitched? Getting your pre-nup check-ups?"

Kurt bit his lip. She was a bit like Santana, but **nicer**. To the people she liked, anyway. “Not quite yet,” he said softly. “But um, who knows... “

Sebastian smiled at him, and couldn’t help but remember his dream.

“I come here every three months,” Sebastian explained. “And...as we’re together now, we thought we should both get checked out.” Sebastian looked at Kurt for confirmation.

Kurt nodded.


"Definitely a good trade-in, by the way," she said from the corner of her mouth. "I was sorry to see you go at Spotlight, but I don’t miss your whiny ex at all."

"Me neither," Kurt agreed.

"Do you go to NYU?" Sebastian asked her. "What’s your major?"

"Chemistry," she said smiling at him. "I wanna get into forensics."

"Wow!" Sebastian said impressed. "That’s-"
Dani’s phone chiming cut him off. "Sorry, hold that thought." She slid her finger across the screen to answer it and held it up to her ear. "Where the hell are you, Ell!?"

Kurt took the moment to kiss Sebastian’s cheek.

Dani groaned. "Yes, Elliott. That was today. Urgh, I can’t believe you. It’s your health." She looked at Kurt and Sebastian and rolled her eyes. "So what were you-" She broke off and her expression changed. “Oh, right, your audition! How did it go?”

Kurt’s ears perked up a little.

Dani listened for a while, occasionally humming and uh-huh-ing. Finally, she sighed.

"Don’t worry about it, babe. You are awesome, and if they couldn’t handle that, it’s their loss, not yours. You’ll find yourself a band...you’re too talented not to."

Kurt looked at Sebastian, silently raising his eyebrows. He wondered what kind of band Dani’s friend was looking for.

Dani finished her conversation and hung up the phone. "Sorry about that, my friend Elliott. He’s desperatley trying to find a band that needs a frontman...but he’s uh...a unique act. And so far no one is interested."

"When you say unique..." Sebastian prompted.

Dani smiled. "Well, he has his own style, that’s for sure. He makes his own clothes, it's kind of...hybrid steampunk gothic glam rock thing. Glitter. I can't stress that enough. He calls himself Starchild. And he has this amazing voice but he does tend to be a little...extroverted. You know, like...if Queen were ever to be looking for a new front man, he could apply."

Kurt swallowed. Elliott sounded...amazing, but intimidating. "I tried to start a band last year," he said carefully, "but no one was interested. Maybe...we should meet."

"Kurt. Sebastian. We're ready for you now," Heidi called out from the other room.

Kurt looked at Dani as he got up. "Ask him if he likes Madonna," he decided in the spur of the moment.

"Oh, he loves her, I already know that," Dani said, grinning. "I'll tell him to contact you."

Kurt smiled. It'd give him something to think about while they were getting tested. "Okay. Let's do this, then."
Let's Talk About Sex Baby

Chapter Summary

Kurt and Sebastian start rehearsing for their Satire performance, but keep getting distracted...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Mellencamp babe? Really?" It was Sunday afternoon and Sebastian and Kurt were lounging around Kurt’s apartment, scrolling through each other’s music selection. They were trying to find a song for their debut performance at Satire.

After discussing it, first between themselves and then with Marc and Joe, they had agreed to do a trial performance after Kurt’s Wonka holiday was over, to celebrate his return.

Sebastian was quite excited to perform again. Apart from their karaoke nights, he’d not sung much since leaving Dalton, and being able to do it with Kurt had added appeal.

Now came the hardest part, as far as Sebastian was concerned: finding a song that suited both of their tastes and voices. While they generally had a lot in common, and also liked a lot of the same music, there were still some surprises in their playlists.

"I never pegged you as a flannel fan," Sebastian said, smirking.

Kurt snorted. "It was a phase," he explained. "It's my dad’s music, really. I once did a song in Glee club to prove something to myself...or maybe to prove everyone else wrong, I don’t know."

He put on a low voice and sang a few lines from Pink Houses, rolling his eyes a little at the raw sound and the pressure he needed to build up in his chest to produce it.

Sebastian felt a tug in his belly at the low rough growl to Kurt’s voice.

"Damn babe, that’s hot.”

Kurt chuckled. "Is it?" he asked, using the same low voice. He enjoyed it when Sebastian let him know when something turned him on. Sebastian wasn’t shy about it, and it did a lot for Kurt’s confidence.

"Mmm.” Sebastian hummed, staring at Kurt. "Super hot.”

"I'll keep that in mind..." Kurt said, pushing himself up from his comfortable position on the couch to move towards Sebastian. He leaned forward and kissed him. He was beginning to collect a large spectrum of things that turned his boyfriend on.

"But I draw the line at wearing flannel again," he joked.

Sebastian chuckled and drew Kurt in for another kiss, his hand curling around the back of a Kurt’s neck.
"I dunno babe, you look good in anything, I bet you’d look incredibly hot, all rugged and rough,” he said against Kurt’s lips.

Kurt smirked. "Flanel doesn’t make me look rugged. It makes me look like a lesbian, at best." He rolled his eyes. "Though it does explain why Brittany was suddenly attracted to me."

Sebastian shook his head, "I think I will have to reserve judgement until I see it, but I highly doubt you’d look anything other than strikingly sexy."

Kurt didn’t want to argue his point anymore. He was grateful that Sebastian was so convinced. "You should see me without it though," he whispered in Sebastian’s ear, before pulling away. "But we’ve got work to do, remember? What have you got? Anything that’s not Bieber?"

Sebastian shivered with anticipation and grinned as Kurt pulled away. "You play dirty, babe, but fine...I’ll just have to get you back later.” He winked. "I have lots of other music."

"Mm, yes," Kurt said, picking up Sebastian's phone again to scroll through the playlists. "Aqua - Barbie Girl. Yeah, that's not embarrassing at all."

He grinned. He actually thought the song was kind of catchy, but he wasn't about to admit that.

"Oh...Pink. I like her. But I think we need something a little sexier and a little less aggressive for the bar..."

Sebastian grinned, he knew some of his music tastes were classic pop and he had no shame. He was a nineties child after all. He scrolled through Kurt’s music library and found an entire playlist devoted to power house divas. "Oh, Diana Ross? Did you sing this when you came out to your dad? Sparkled sequins, feather boas and all?"

Kurt chuckled. "No, my dad probably wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between that and any other day at the Hummel household," he replied dryly.

Then he shook his head. "Did you ever sing it, though, like at the top of your lungs? I mean, not as a statement, but just because you could? In the shower, in the car? It feels a-mazing. I love Diana Ross. And Gloria Gaynor, and Bonnie Tyler. There’s a reason I Will Survive is in every single karaoke machine!"

"I think everyone has!” Sebastian grinned. "At first I was afraid, I was petrified, kept thinking I could never live without you by my side!” He sang loudly.

"But then I spent so many nights thinking how you did me wrong, and I grew strong...and I learned how to get alooooonng...” Kurt added, laughing, rising up to jump on the couch. He extended a hand to Sebastian, pulling him up as well.

"And so you're back! From outer space!” they yelled together, jumping and shouting through the lyrics and making dramatic arm movements and facial expressions until Kurt couldn't stop himself from laughing anymore and let himself fall back on the couch.

Sebastian fell down too, laughing hard. He slumped down next to Kurt, his head rested against Kurt’s shoulder.

"We are so singing that at the next karaoke night,” Sebastian said as he calmed down, a grin still stretched across his face.

Kurt chuckled. "Yeah, totally. But not at the bar, or they'll all take over and leave none of the
spotlight for us," he joked. "Nobody can resist that song."

"True. Something else, then," Sebastian said, picking up Kurt’s phone again and unlocking it to return to his music library. He sat back and began scrolling again, still humming Diana Ross.

Kurt sat back too and watched Sebastian from his place on the couch for a while. He was so gorgeous, lounging casually, long legs splayed, one foot wedged between the seat, the other resting on the floor. His head was propped up against the pillow and he held Kurt’s slim phone delicately in his hand, occasionally tapping or swiping the screen with a long finger.

Kurt was definitely jealous of his own phone.

He bit his lip. Their kisses had made him hungry for more. But he had just told Sebastian off for not concentrating, so he couldn’t just come out with it now, or his boyfriend would surely tease him. Maybe there was a way to make it seem like his idea...

Kurt smiled deviously and tapped into Sebastian’s music streaming service.

"How’s this?" he asked innocently, and played Kiss Me by Sixpence None The Richer.

Sebastian looked at Kurt and pulled a face. “I dunno babe...not really the vibe we’re going for is it? We want something sexy.”

Kurt shrugged and tried again. "What do you think of Don’t Talk, Just Kiss?"

Sebastian laughed out loud. “Again...is a bit too cheesy, even for Satire.”

Kurt sighed. Maybe this was going to be harder than he thought.

"Feel Like Making Love To You?" he suggested. Again, Sebastian objected that it was too old. "It’s a classic," Kurt mumbled, but he was already scrolling further. "All I Wanna Do Is Make Love To You?...Let’s Get It On?"

Sebastian bit his lip. He knew what Kurt was trying to do, but it was too much fun to keep stringing him along. “I don’t think any of those are really suitable babe,” he said fighting a laugh.

Kurt sighed. It just wasn’t working. But he wasn’t ready to give up. "Let’s Talk About Sex," he stated, challenging Sebastian. "I Want It That Way?"

Kurt’s suggestions were getting more desperate and it was taking all of Sebastian’s willpower to not burst out laughing. “We want something we can dance to, though…”

Kurt groaned, letting himself drop back into the couch. "I Need You Tonight..." he drawled. "Do Me." He was starting to think Sebastian was doing it on purpose.

He decided to give it one last try. "Okay, George Michael then. I Want Your Sex."

Sebastian did laugh this time and looked at Kurt with fake incredulity. “Are you okay babe?” he asked. “Do you wanna take a short break?”

Kurt rolled his eyes so hard they nearly fell out. "No, I don’t want a short break! I want a long, hard break," he said frustratedly, "as I’ve been trying to tell you for the last fifteen minutes! Bas, I just really, really want to fuck."

Kurt blinked a few times, a little surprised of himself. "I...I mean," he stuttered, "the way you are sitting there, it’s so...It got me...you’re so hot...and I literally just want to pounce on you. Like, all the
time. Can we leave the songs for now and just have sex?” His voice rose a little in pitch at the end and he felt his cheeks redden.

Kurt sounded so desperate that Sebastian took pity on him and crawled across the couch towards his boyfriend. “All the time, huh?” he said with a raised eyebrow.

“You have no idea how distracting you are,” Kurt said, sliding his hand up to cup Sebastian’s cheek.

“Oh I do,” Sebastian said, leaning into the touch and climbing into Kurt’s lap. “The feeling is mutual.” He kissed Kurt, shifting his hips and grinding down against him a little. "I want you all the time too, it’s very distracting.”

"Yes," Kurt mumbled against his lips. "We cleared our schedules to rehearse for work and all my body seems to want to rehearse is other things." He reached down to cup Sebastian's ass over his jeans. "It's very...unproductive."

Sebastian grinned and pressed back into Kurt’s hand, his own hand sliding up to cup the back of Kurt’s head to tilt it backwards. "Well we have been working very hard...we could grant ourselves a short break.” He lent in to press a kiss against Kurt’s scar on his neck. "Or a long, hard one…"

He teased the skin lightly with his teeth.

Kurt shivered and closed his eyes, urging him on by squeezing his hands tightly, pressing Sebastian's hips against his.

"Hmm,” Sebastian hummed, reading Kurt’s body language, and moved to capture his boyfriend’s lips with his own in a piercing kiss. He rolled his hips down.

Kurt made a soft noise into Sebastian's mouth, licking into it to chase his tongue. If there was anything he had discovered since their relationship had started, it was that this kind of make-out session always won over scheduled dates. He honestly couldn't say what he and Blaine had been thinking back in school. He had certainly missed a lot of very clear hints that they were not a match.

"God Kurt,” Sebastian moaned against Kurt’s skin. "I love how vocal you are. You’re so hot."

"Lucky me," Kurt let out, "because you make me feel so good I couldn't be quiet if I wanted to." Making out with Sebastian was as much a discovery of his own body as it was of his boyfriend’s, and he could not repress the occasional gasps of surprise.

It was about the hottest thing in the world not to have to hide when he was feeling like this - so far, Sebastian had always immediately admitted to feeling the same way and they had simply given in to it, whether it was evening, night, or mid-day. Kurt didn't know if it was always going to be like this or if it was the excitement of a new relationship, but for now, he decided to just enjoy the ride.

And they had one more reason to be relaxed. Their STD tests had all come in negative. Sebastian and Kurt were both clean and healthy, and after a long and intimate talk, they'd agreed to make their use of condoms optional.

"Maybe we should close the blinds," Kurt suggested. "I don’t always need an audience."

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"Damn, babe.” Sebastian panted about half hour later. "That was amazing."

"Yes...” Kurt replied breathlessly. "That was the hottest thing ever."
He noticed that Sebastian's music was still playing. He hadn't heard any of the previous songs. So much for multitasking. He chuckled. "Maybe we should tell Marc and Joe we need a few more weeks to, ah... practise our act," he said, grinning.

Sebastian laughed and tucked his face into the crook of Kurt’s neck, his arms winding around Kurt’s back. "We might have to...we can’t perform that at the club."

Kurt snorted. "I'm sure some of the guys would be into it," he replied. "Remember that guy who wanted to take us both home?" He shook his head. Satire was not one of those clubs, and he while his confidence was growing every day he was with Sebastian, he didn't think he’d ever become as extroverted as to have sex in front of an audience.

Sebastian smiled at Kurt. He did remember. "I’m glad you didn’t go home with him,” he said quietly, thinking back to how Kurt had taken the guy’s number for himself.

Kurt wrinkled his nose. "Oh god, never! I took his number because I wanted to win our bet!" He nudged Sebastian’s nose with his his own. "Couldn’t beat you though..."

Sebastian smiled and kissed him. "I couldn’t beat you either,” he said.

Kurt hummed and moved a little. He winced at the sound of their skin unsticking. "I think we could use a shower."

Sebastian grimaced a little and nodded, moving carefully off Kurt’s lap to a standing position. He offered Kurt his hand. A shower sounded perfect, and maybe after, they might actually pick a song.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cut! We felt adding another steamy bit might be repetitive and not add anything to the plot.

We did do a first draft for it, and will include it in the “Extras & Outtakes” series we are planning to put online after GUC, to tide you all over during the hiatus while we write the sequel.
Ex's and Oh's

Chapter Summary

To celebrate Kurt's return, he and Sebastian have a surprise for Satire. Unfortunately, there is a surprise waiting for them too...

Chapter Notes

The song used in this chapter is Ex's and Oh's by Elle King, listen to it here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uLI6BnVh6w

It was Friday night and Satire was packed. Word had gotten around via social media that it was Kurt’s first night back after taking a month off to rehearse and perform Wonka, and that the staff were planning something special to welcome him home.

Due to the large number of people, the bar was fully staffed. Marc, Sebastian, Danny and Kurt were all working and Joe was on hand in case things got manic.

Sebastian liked it when it was busy like this. The evenings went quickly and they were always sure to rake in the tips. He set down the tray of Jäger Bombs he’d just made and smiled at his customer.

"You sure I can’t tempt you to join us, gorgeous?" the man said with a wink. "We don’t mind sharing."

Sebastian smirked. "Can’t drink on the job, boys. Sorry! Save me one for later though." He winked. That wasn’t strictly true; Joe didn’t mind them having the odd drink whilst they were working, as long as they kept their heads. But as a rule Sebastian didn’t accept drinks from the customers. If he did, he’d be wasted by the end of the shift, and he’d much rather keep the tip.

The guy leered back at him and handed him the money. "You can count on it, keep the change."

Sebastian backed away from the bar and punched the numbers into the register, depositing the change into the jar next to it.

Kurt watched his boyfriend from the side. He knew that later drink was never going to happen, but Sebastian had made the guy feel good and cashed his tip. It didn’t bother Kurt. He trusted him.

"What can I get you?" he asked, leaning over the bar at a flamboyantly dressed man with a pompadour hairstyle. He was wearing large golden rings on each finger.


Sebastian grinned at the request and grabbed the bottle of orange liquor that stood in front of him. He rolled it over his arm and threw it to Kurt, who caught it without looking.
"Do you believe me now when I told you you were missed?" Sebastian asked Kurt, as a couple of guys hollered at Kurt flirtatiously.

"I think I caught the hint after the sixth guy who ordered a Triple Orgasm," Kurt replied, winking at Sebastian before blowing the guys a kiss.

Sebastian smirked and pressed up against Kurt under the ruse of reaching for a glass. "Too bad for them, all they get is the drink, though. I get the orgasm..."

Kurt chuckled. "Just one?" he teased.

They might have missed Kurt - but not as much as Kurt had missed being there. The bar, the atmosphere, the attention...and working with Sebastian. During their many training evenings before Wonka, they had worked out cues between them that gave them just that little extra flair in their bartending tricks, without needing to raise their voice over the music. It had taken them many slow Tuesday nights to polish, but now it worked amazingly. Kurt saw what Sebastian was setting up for his order and passed him a bottle of vodka. Sebastian handed over a bottle of syrup, neither one needing to ask or acknowledge the request. They worked so well together that each one knew what the other needed without any form of communication at all.

And for tonight, Kurt's glorious return, they had something special for their guests (and their tips). It was coming up later. Kurt was a little nervous, but he was a theatre professional now - stage fright was all part of the deal. It fuelled him to excel. The choreography was Kurt's idea originally, but they had worked on the final act together, combining ND and Warbler experience with whatever they felt they could get away with stealing from films. If it worked, it would be spectacular - and spectacularly hot.

He glanced at Sebastian. Not that his boyfriend needed any help with that. It had been two months and Kurt still couldn't quite believe Sebastian was his now. He definitely planned to deliver on that triple orgasm later.

They had decided to keep their relationship private at work for now - their colleagues knew, but as they worked on their act, Kurt and Sebastian had both agreed it would be more exciting if they kept the whole "will they or won't they" vibe up for the patrons.

"You two are so hot!" one guy moaned as they came out of another mixing routine. "What does a guy have to do to get you both in his bed?"

Kurt smirked, and looked at their customer. He was very young and eager-looking, and had a purple wristband wrapped around his wrist. Kurt couldn't help but wonder if this might be his first time in this bar - or any bar at all. "I know just the thing," he said, taking a champagne coup from the shelf. 'La priere d'une vierge...' He winked at Sebastian, who handed him a small bottle of orange concentrate.

They mixed it together, giving off a little show just for him - to take the edge off the rejection they were about to serve him on crackling ice.


The guy visibly deflated a little bit shrugged and smiled at them. "Guess I'll be praying then." He paid, left a tip and disappeared into the crowd.

"Poor kid," Sebastian said, shaking his head. "Can’t blame him for trying though, we are hot."

"We are," Kurt agreed, his old confidence from back in school rekindled by months of compliments
and the absence of constant negativity. He smiled.

"Someone wants your attention badly," he said fondly, nodding at one of Sebastian's regulars. Kurt wasn't worried. He knew all of them by now. They were nice guys, mostly, and knew their boundaries.

"Can I see some I.D.?' Terry asked, trying to keep a straight face at the sight of the young man in the garish colours. Terry always felt everyone should wear what they were most comfortable in, and the man wasn't technically violating Satire's dress code, so he wasn’t about to give him a hard time about that. He looked awfully young, though.

The man flashed a card at him.

Terry shook his head. "Did mommy and daddy buy you a real one, too?" he asked, now a little annoyed. He'd tried being nice, but he was not a fool.

Grudgingly, the man reached into his wallet and took out another card.

As Terry expected, Anderson, Blaine D. from Ohio was not yet 21. He sighed and took a purple wristband from the stack, nodding at him to hold out his hand. Purples (or 'puppies', as the staff sometimes teasingly called them) did not get served alcohol at the bar. Patrons over 21 got black wrist bands to show they had paid the cover charge. People without wrist bands did not get served, period, so most patrons were smart enough not to try and tamper with them. "Have a good time," Terry said without much enthusiasm, his eyes already checking out the next in line.

Feeling humiliated, Blaine was already in a bad mood as he got inside. Why did Kurt pick such a snooty place to work, anyway? Did he think he was something better now, with the Showcase and the travelling circus show he had joined for a week? Blaine scoffed. It had been all over NYADA, and no one so much as noticed the impromptu performance he'd done in the cafeteria.

He knew listening to Tina and giving Kurt some space had been a bad idea. After being refused entry to the Showcase, Blaine had gone to stay with his brother in LA to give Kurt the time to miss him. That had clearly been a mistake.

LA had been a total drag, and to make things even worse, Kurt didn’t seem to have missed him at all.

Cooper had to work most of the time, and when he wasn’t working, he would be at the gym or jogging in the hills. His brother had also started a new health regime that rivaled Kurt’s; he insisted on only eating raw, organic food. Blaine had had to get take-out pizza every night to keep from starving.

And they’d only been to two parties while he was there. Neither of them had been much fun without Sam by his side - no one would even look at him, much less talk to him. The only guy who had noticed him was the guy he’d hooked up with last time, and even he had only asked about Sam. (Granted, Blaine did sort of promise they’d have a threesome next time, but that was only so the guy would stop complaining).

After coming back from LA, he’d gone back to Ohio to see the Warblers, but even hanging out with them didn’t cheer him up as it used to. The new Warblers were all about jumps, backflips and other acrobatics, and had been very unimpressed with his suggestion to rehash Teenage Dream (even though it was a classic). Blaine missed being their front man.
He looked around the club, judgement seeping out of every pore. He had liked it better when Kurt had worked at Spotlight. At least there, he could come by and sing every once in a while and practise some songs. It didn't look like this place even had a stage. Blaine made his mind up. Kurt was just going to have to find a new job once they got back together.

"Kurt said if you’re late for class on Monday because you’re still hungover, you have to be defender," Sam said to Georgio as he sipped his third Long Island Iced Tea. Kurt was filling in for Mr Hura’s TA who was home with a broken ankle, and he took his job seriously; even with his friends.

Georgio laughed and licked his lips. "When am I ever not the defender?" He winked, and Sam chuckled.

Georgio smiled at him and slid his free hand down Sam’s back, hooking his thumb into the top of his jeans. Sam leaned into the touch. He never thought he could feel like this with a guy. He still didn’t fully know what he identified as. All he knew that this thing with Georgio felt good...it felt right. Talking to Kurt and Sebastian had helped a lot.

"Sam?"

Sam froze. The sound of that voice went down his spine like a bucket of ice water.

Georgio stilled his hand, but did not remove it. He remembered Blaine from NYADA. He’d never forget the commanding tone Blaine had used in his voice when he spoke to Kurt, and Sam had told him plenty of what had happened between them. Just seeing Blaine sent him straight into protection mode.

Sam looked at his ex-bff, feeling a little queasy inside.

"Blaine," he greeted tersely. "Uh, this is Georgio." He exchanged a glance with his lover. "My boyfriend," Sam added.

Blaine’s eyes went wide. Then he frowned. "That's not funny," he said irritately. "You're not gay!"

Sam swallowed nervously but stood his ground. Georgio’s presence next to him gave him strength. The knowledge that his boyfriend was twice the size of Blaine helped too

"No. I’m not," he confirmed. "But I’m not straight either."

Blaine shook his head as if he was trying to escape an angry bee buzzing around his head. "That makes no sense!" he let out. "You were all over all those girls in school, even Tina for God’s sake!" He made a disgusted face. "And you never came on to me."

Georgio couldn’t help it. He laughed out loud. "And why would he?" he asked. “Honestly, have you seen Sam? He could have anyone he wanted, guy or girl...why would he ever choose you?"

"Because!" Blaine stammered. "Be- ..." He turned back to Sam. "How long has this been going on?"

Sam shrugged. "I had a gig...somewhere, and we hit it off." He had promised Kurt not to tell Blaine anything about him, so he figured that included Sebastian’s birthday party.

"Oh, I see," Blaine said, giving Georgio a nasty look. "It's like that."
Georgio shook his head. “No. It’s not like that.” He knew full well what Blaine was trying to imply. “And I think deep down, you know that, or you would have tried to buy your way into his pants with your daddy’s money.”

Blaine, humiliated, opened his mouth to respond but his voice caught in his throat. "Y-You better watch it!” Blaine said pointing his finger at Georgio. "Or I-I’ll..."

"What? Stutter at me?" Georgio laughed.

"Gio," Sam said quietly, feeling embarrassed by Blaine’s implication as well as Georgio’s twisted compliment. He hadn’t asked for either - he just wanted to enjoy a night out and put his mistakes behind him.

"I don’t want anyone to fight," he said. "Just leave us alone, Blaine, okay?" Then something occurred to him. "Why are you here?"

"None of your business," Blaine snapped.

Sam narrowed his eyes. Technically, it was a free country and Blaine had every right to be here. But knowing by now how Blaine’s mind worked, Sam couldn’t help but feel cautious. Did he find out that Kurt worked here?

"Don’t cause any trouble alright? This is a safe place."

"Don’t tell me what to do, Sam," Blaine spat.

"Come on," Georgio said stroking Sam’s back. "Let’s go find somewhere to dance, we don’t wanna miss the show."

Sam threw Blaine a cautious look but then nodded and allowed himself to be steered through the crowd.

Blaine watched after them, feeling furious. He wanted to charge after Sam and demand an apology. He thought about speaking to the DJ and singing...singing always worked. If people would just give him the chance to try. He was sick and tired of people standing in his way when it came to things that were his.

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Kurt cashed in another tip and glanced at his watch. It would be time soon. He took out a set of shot glasses and started setting them up. He checked the battery of his headset and pushed the wireless transmitter into his back pocket. Satire wouldn’t know what hit it.

He glanced at Sebastian. Their eyes met and he smiled softly. Distracted by Kurt, Sebastian didn’t see how one of his customers, talking enthusiastically with someone at the bar and gesticulating wildly, knocked over a freshly mixed Piña Colada that he had just served.

Kurt saw the glass tumble and fall, hitting the counter before crashing to the floor in a splash of coconut milk and cream. The entire front of Sebastian’s black jeans was splattered with white flecks. There was glass everywhere.

Sebastian sucked in a deep breath and stepped away from the bar in shock. Was this what being hit with a slushy felt like?

Kurt sprang into action. He reached for the intercom. "Danny, could you come up to bar 1? Bas
"Needs a break." As Danny confirmed, Kurt grabbed a dustpan from under the counter.

"Go ahead and change, I'll take care of the glass," he offered. "Danny is coming over."

Sebastian vaguely heard Kurt talk to Danny and then saw his boyfriend in front of him. He nodded at Kurt’s words and walked uncomfortably to the bar hatch, pushing his way through the crowd in the direction of the staff room.

He locked the door and grabbed his backpack, thankful that he was staying at Kurt’s that night and had brought a change of clothes.

Ten minutes later, he was dressed in a new outfit and had thrown his ruined jeans straight into the washing machine they used for the dish towels and aprons. Joe wouldn’t mind.

He was making his way back towards the bar when he heard someone say his name. The sound of the man’s voice made the hairs on the back of Sebastian’s neck stand on end.

He turned slowly and took in the sight of the man who had almost broken Kurt.

"Blaine."

Blaine was staring at him with his eyes and mouth wide open. First Sam, now Sebastian? Who else was going to turn up here, Eli? "Why are you - I mean, hey," Blaine let out, doubling back on his words in hopes of a better, smoother start. "Do you come here often?"

Sebastian felt his stomach roll over at Blaine’s words and was sure the colour had drained from his face. Thank God it was dark.

The sight of Blaine in his garish clothes, (honestly who wore bright purple capri pants to a club?) was almost comical. He knew he couldn’t laugh. His only goal now was to get back to Kurt. They had a show to do. Swallowing the bile in his throat, Sebastian relaxed and smiled at Blaine.

"Err, no I don’t. It's actually my first time," he lied. "What about you?"

"Oh yeah, I come here all the time," Blaine replied. "The guys at the bar all know me."

Yeah, they know you alright, Sebastian thought bitterly. They know you’re the asshole who abused Kurt. He forced an impressed-looking expression onto his face.

Blaine gave Sebastian an obvious once-over. "So how come you're not tagged?" he asked, holding up his own wrist with the purple band. He struggled to remember. When was Sebastian’s birthday again? Maybe he was already twenty-one and could get them some drinks...Maybe he wasn’t, and he had just taken it off, breaking all the rules again. Blaine had secretly admired that about Sebastian ever since they met. It was hot.

"Oh, I have my secrets," Sebastian said with a smirk that didn’t quite meet his eyes. Despite having changed his clothes, he felt dirty. It was taking every ounce of strength that he possessed to not punch Blaine in the face. Unfortunately, neither he or the bar could afford the lawsuit that would come from an unprovoked attack, and he wasn’t quite sure what Kurt would think of it either.
Blaine swallowed. He knew it. Damn, he should have hit him up sooner. Better late than never, he told himself.

"So, um...that offer of yours, does that still stand?" he asked, trying to sound casual.

Sebastian fought the shiver that ran through this body at the question but plowed on.

"Oh, what offer is that?" he said, feigning ignorance.

"Uh...you know. Back in school... We - we...you...you wanted to get with me." Blaine cursed himself for not getting it out without a stutter. He cleared his throat. "I was with Kurt then, and...well, we, uh, never did talk specifics...but...." He straightened his back to stand a little taller. "I'm ready to be specific now."

Sebastian leered at Blaine but stepped back subtly. "Ah, would if I could, killer. But now I have a boyfriend."

Blaine blinked. Was Sebastian actually playing hard to get? Rising to the bait, Blaine followed Sebastian and stepped back into his personal space. He tugged at Sebastian's collar until he was low enough to speak directly into his ear, and whispered: "That doesn't bother me if it doesn't bother you..." To accentuate his intentions, he licked Sebastian below his ear.

Sebastian closed his eyes and shivered. Hopefully, he could pass it off as desire. He pulled back from Blaine and winked at him.

"Easy there," Sebastian said smoothly. "He’s here tonight, you don’t want me to get caught, do you?"

Blaine relaxed and smirked. "No, of course not."

"Tell you what, you hang around here out of sight and I’ll see if I can slip away later?"

Score. Blaine knew it. He still had it. "Don't make me wait too long," he said smugly. "I've been around the block a few times since we last met and you're not the only hot guy in here." He winked. "And bring us some drinks when you come."

Sebastian winked and nodded, backing away from Blaine slowly and disappearing into the crowd.

As soon as he was out of Blaine’s sight, he pushed through the crowd back to the bar. He was met with cheers from the patrons, but he ignored them for a moment to grab a bottle of whiskey and a tumbler. He poured himself out a drink and downed it in one, trying to get rid of the nasty taste in his mouth. He gagged a little at the burn in his throat, but kept it down.

Kurt saw Sebastian come back to the bar and felt his heart start to pound. They said they’d do the number after Sebastian's break. He was about to go to him when he saw Sebastian down a drink. They'd agreed to be sober before their bit, so it surprised him...even more when he saw what Sebastian was drinking. He walked over and lightly touched Sebastian’s back with the tips of his fingers to get his attention.

"Are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Sebastian shook his head at the taste of the whiskey and turned to look at Kurt, guilt welling up inside him. He took Kurt’s hand and squeezed it.

"I’m fine," he said reassuringly. "Nothing I can’t handle anyway...you ready for this?" He asked
with a grin.

*He keeps things bottled up too much,* Kurt thought. *Like me.* But he smiled and nodded. He’d ask again later, and if it was something serious, Sebastian would tell him in his own time.

"Let’s do this."

He reached under the bar and handed Sebastian the headsets they’d stashed there, and he switched his on. The DJ would see its light go on on the dashboard and he’d know it was show time. Kurt clipped the headset onto his ear and got to his side of the bar. He shot a look at Sebastian, who was also getting in position. They exchanged a private smile. This was going to be good and they knew it.

The current song started fading out, and the lights on the dance area dimmed slowly. Lights on the bar grew - and then the beat started. *Showtime,* Kurt thought, and he reached for two large mixing cups, knowing Sebastian was setting his up as well, and grabbed a bottle by the neck, spinning it high up in the air to get people's attention. Beside him, Sebastian's bottle spun in sync. Then, with a clear voice, Kurt started to sing.

"Well, I had me a boy, turned him into a man - I showed him all the things that he didn't understand...Whoa..."

The second Kurt started singing, it was like the club had caught fire. Everyone was clambering to the bar to get a look at the two of them, which was exactly what they wanted. They planned to deliver.

Kurt scooped one of the mixing cups full of ice and then casually tossed it over his shoulder, knowing Sebastian was there to catch it in his cup. "And then I let him go... " The cheers of the crowd told him the ice had found its target.

They moved seamlessly through their routine. Sebastian picked up two bottles and spun them around his hands expertly before upending them into the silver shaker Kurt was holding out to him.

"Now, there's one in California who's been cursing my name - " Kurt sang nonchalantly as he screwed the shaker closed, and continued cheekily, "’Cause I found me a better lover in the UK, hey hey- " He twirled the shaker around his hand, paused for dramatic effect, and added: "...until I made my getaway."

The whistling and cheering was almost deafening. The DJ upped the volume expertly.

Kurt quickly set the shaker down and took the three empty shot glasses that had been set up behind the bar. In the corner of his eye he could see Sebastian do the same. Together, they slammed one shot glass after the other upside down on the bar, and sang:

"One, two, three, they’re gonna run back to me - ’Cause I'm the best baby that they never gotta keep..."

Their audience nearly broke the bar down. A lot of them had whipped out their phones and were taking videos, others were pushing in to get closer.

"One, two, three, they’re gonna run back to me," Kurt and Sebastian turned the shot glasses the right way up to the count in the song, picked up a bottle, and poured liberally over the shot glasses in a suggestive shake of the hand as they sang, " They always wanna come, but they never wanna leave... "

"Ex’s and Oh Oh Oh’s they haunt me..." They sang together, simultaneously throwing a bottle at
each other and catching the one sailing their way. "Like Gho-o-o-o-osts, they want me to make 'em, oh oh oh, they won’t let go. Ex's and Oh’s..."

To the audience’s approval, Sebastian jumped up onto the bar as the music played before the next verse. He caught the bottle of tequila that Kurt tossed him upended in the air, catching the stream of liquid in his mouth.

"I had a summer lover down in New Orleans," Sebastian sung as he threw the bottle back at Kurt, who caught it and spun it around his hand. "Kept him warm in the winter, left him frozen in the spring. My my. How the seasons go by..."

He offered his hand to Kurt and pulled him up to join him on the bar top as he sang. "I get high." As Kurt stood up straight, Sebastian sank to his knees, still holding Kurt’s hand, "And I love to get low." Sebastian turned to look at the audience and winked, the crowd whistled madly.

Kurt was having the time of his life. Sofar, every single move had been rock solid and the audience had reacted exactly the way they wanted. Kurt even felt secure enough to throw in a few extras. He rested his hand on the top of Sebastian's head as his boyfriend went down on his knees to make the visuals even more obvious and added in plenty of hip circles up on the bar. It felt right, like he had been doing this all of his life.

Sebastian stood back up. Kurt’s improvisation had only made him more eager for the next part. "So their hearts keep breaking and their heads just roll, you know...that’s how the story goes."

Sebastian picked up a tray they’d set up earlier. It had three shots on it. On the beat of the song, Sebastian pointed at Kurt, then at the shots, and mimed downing one of them.

He lowered the tray and held it out to Kurt in a mock challenge. Kurt stepped up and downed not one, but all three to the beat.

Sebastian laughed and gyrated his hips, leering at Kurt. "They always wanna come, but they never want to leave."

The reaction of the audience was amazing, and Kurt laughed. The shots on the tray had been fake, and now it was time for a real one. As they went into the chorus, they both walked to their respective sides of the bar to look for participants in the audience.

Kurt saw a man with an untouched shot in front of him and remembered him from earlier. He gave him a seductive smile, knelt down in front of him, and in the beat, grabbed the shot and drank it, slamming the glass back down on the counter. To make up for it, he reached behind the bar, took hold of a bottle, and with his free hand, guided the man's head to the bar. He mimed opening his mouth. When the man obliged, he rose to his feet and poured a long shot down from hip level, aiming at the man's mouth.

The man was laughing and most of it got sloshed into his face, but it only added to the effect. On the last beat of the chorus, Kurt flicked him a paper napkin, shot him a wink, and strolled back to Sebastian. He was ready.

They met in the middle, and for a moment, just danced, grinding their hips without ever really touching, giving the late and great Patrick Swayze a run for his money. The ledge was narrow and their footwork had to be precise not to slip off, but Kurt hadn't trained with Cassandra July for nothing.

Fully aware of who was watching in the audience, Sebastian grabbed hold of Kurt’s hips and pulled
him closer. He ran one hand up Kurt’s spine and splayed the other across the small of his back for security, and then dipped Kurt low to the bar, bearing his weight completely. Then, he pulled Kurt up and spun him round.

Nodding at each other, they jumped back down behind the bar, walking to their own sides and starting setting up line of shot glasses across the bar, meeting in the middle. They ran the line with a bottle of spirit each and filled up each glass, indicating for the people at the front of the queue to drink up. Their patrons hollered in delight at the song and the free drinks.

As the song built up for its climax, Kurt and Sebastian both grabbed the shakers from earlier and began spinning them round in earnest, throwing them between each other. As the song’s final bars rang out, they emptied the contents of the cocktails into a glass each and slid them across the bar to two guys, topping the drinks off with a cherry as the final note rang around the club.

There was a moment silence as the song ended before the whole place exploded.

The applause was unbelievable. From all sides, people were clamoring for them, holding out dollar bills and napkins with phone numbers. Kurt felt like a rockstar and a stripper at once. Sebastian’s improvised dip had been perfect, and Kurt couldn’t help but notice how they had fit together like puzzle pieces. Well, puzzle pieces that were very excited to see each other, that was. Kurt smirked at the thought. He wasted no time feeling embarrassed about that - he couldn’t have hidden it in those jeans even if he had wanted to, and clearly they both had a little kink for performing.

He turned his attention to his customers, accepting several drink orders at once, his hands flying over the glasses. Every time he served one drink, ten new orders seemed to be coming at him.

Suddenly, among all of the laughing, partying patrons, he saw one man who was not smiling at all. In fact, he looked livid, and he was heading Kurt’s way. It was Blaine. He was yelling something. Kurt had no chance at all of hearing him over the noise of the crowd, but he could tell from the scandalized looks of the people around Blaine that it wasn’t anything good.

Blaine had seen their routine, and now he was angry. Of course. Angry about the attention Kurt was getting, about the way he was presenting himself...He was probably even jealous that Sebastian had danced with Kurt, when he’d always shown more interest in Blaine.

Kurt’s stomach dropped. Within the blink of an eye, his happy buzz was doused. The Showcase, Wonka...everything faded, and he suddenly felt out of place. An imposter. He flushed with embarrassment and old shame. He could feel himself shrink, closing every single window he had opened up inside until he was locked down into a hard shell of himself.

Instinctively, Kurt went into damage-control mode.

Sebastian.

Kurt knew he had to keep the two of them away from each other. He couldn’t count the number of times Sebastian had sworn to hurt Blaine for what he had done, and he couldn’t let that happen. Sebastian might be arrested, and fired from Satire for sure - or worse.

Blaine wrestled his way to the front. Meanwhile, someone had alerted one of the bouncers, and Kurt saw him heading their way. He caught the man’s eye and shook his head. If he avoided this storm by letting Blaine be thrown out, it’d only turn into a hurricane. Blaine would not give up until he had had a chance to tell Kurt all of the things that were wrong with him.

Kurt sighed. He still had two orders unfinished, but it couldn’t be helped. Blaine had reached the bar.
Before he could start shouting at him, Kurt gestured at his ears, and pointed across the room to the staff room. Blaine looked even angrier, probably thinking Kurt was dismissing him.

"Not here. We have a staff room," Kurt shouted. Then he gave up and climbed over the bar to pull Blaine along by the hand. Ignoring the shouts directed at him, Kurt wove through the crowd, dragging Blaine along.

The staff room was sound-proofed to give its employees as much quiet as was possible during their breaks. As soon as the door closed, the music was only a dull beat in the background. Kurt let go of Blaine's hand and braced himself.

"So…this is where you’ve been hiding?" Blaine said icily, folding his arms over his chest. "You kick me out of my home and then hold up in some hovel of sin dancing and flirting your way through the beds and club bathrooms of New York?"

Kurt didn't care what Blaine implied about him - he had been flirting. But he didn't want him to insult his workplace, where he felt safe and at home.

"Satire is a perfectly respectable club,” he said, copying Blaine's stance. "And I'm not hiding, I'm working."

"Oh, that ‘s what you call that? You were on top of the bar, Kurt. I’ve never seen anything as cheap in my life! I couldn’t believe my own eyes. You were basically stage-fucking another guy in front of hundreds of people. And for money? You really sold out Kurt, it’s pathetic. You're a NYADA student! Do you have any idea what that means? You're representing all of us - and this is how you show off what you’ve learned? What would Madame Tibideaux say about that? By god, Kurt, what would your father say if he saw you like this?"

It was a familiar tune, and Kurt let it wash over him. Blaine didn't say anything Kurt hadn't heard before - hadn't thought about himself in the past months, as echoes of Blaine's abuse still lingered in his head. The NYADA staff would probably not approve. His dad would definitely not approve - but just because he didn't understand. Kurt wasn't doing anything wrong.

He knew this, and yet no words came out. Kurt gave a frustrated sigh.

Blaine scoffed, his anger not yet satisfied. "You know they were all laughing at you, right? You had no business being up there, what the hell were you thinking? And with Sebastian of all people!"

Kurt’s eyes flashed. "What about him?" he asked, his voice level. He would not accept Blaine saying anything about Sebastian. The choreography, most of the ideas, had been his, not his boyfriend's. Sebastian had only done what he had asked him to.

"What do you mean what about him? It's Sebastian Smythe. He’s like an STD on legs, Kurt..." Another thought came to him and his anger rose even higher. "Is he fucking you?" Blaine suddenly concluded, like an epiphany. "Is that what this is? Why else would you let him dance with you like that? Are you cheating on me?"

And there it was. Blaine still considered them to be together; Kurt was his, and anything he did with anyone else was a betrayal. The way it was phrased cut straight through Kurt's heart. He was passive, forever only a recipient of someone else's lust, an object without agency; in Blaine’s mind, Kurt let Sebastian touch him, let himself be fucked. For lack of a better word, Blaine considered Sebastian to be trespassing, and blamed Kurt for it.

Kurt thought of that morning. He had made love to Sebastian the way he enjoyed it most; and there
had been absolutely nothing passive about it. Anger rose inside of him. With Blaine's judgement of him, of his part in their sexual relationship, he also judged Sebastian's preference - and Kurt would be damned if he let Blaine say anything else about him.

"You and I are not a couple anymore, Blaine," he spat out, uncrossing his arms to point at his ex-fiance's face. "And it is none of your damn business what I do with whom - or how! Sebastian is ten times the man you are! And I can dance - and have sex with him - any way I want!"

Blaine ignored Kurt’s speech. He hadn’t missed Kurt’s high-pitched, shrill voice. Instead, he focused on the last part and spat back. "So you admit it! You are having sex with him? How could you do this to me? You were always lording my moment of weakness over me, and yet you stand there and do the same thing? You're such a hypocrite! At least I apologised!"

"But you never did," Kurt reminded him. "You didn't apologise. You blamed me." He shook his head. "And I won't apologise to you anymore," Kurt said, unintentionally echoing the lyrics he won the Showcase with. "I did nothing wrong. Sebastian and I did not get together until you and I had been broken up for months. He became my best friend in the time I needed one."

"What does that even mean? When were you ever friends? Sebastian doesn't have friends. You know what he's like. He just uses people. Don't you remember that he tried to seduce me, on the day of our engagement?" Blaine protested.

"That never happened!!" Kurt yelled angrily. "It's just another of your lies. Sebastian said--"

Blaine made a face. "Of course he did, Kurt. He'd say anything to get you in bed. I can't believe this! Are you seriously taking his word over mine?!" he let out.

Already having put two and two together long ago, Kurt didn't have to think about it. He raised his chin, looked Blaine in the eye, and said: "Yes."

He decided to make it clear once and for all. "I know you lied to me, Blaine. Not just about this. You lied again and again, you undermined me, belittled me, and held me down. And you lied to everyone else too. To Sam, telling him I didn't mind that you spent all your time together...god knows what you told the others about me to keep them on your side." He took a deep breath.

"I love Sebastian, and he loves me. He didn't need to say anything to 'get me in bed'. I wanted to be with him, and that was my choice. It had nothing to do with you and everything to do with the man that he is."

Sebastian opened the door to the staff room just in time to hear Kurt declare their love for each other. He stopped in his tracks. Kurt had never said it outloud before.

When Sebastian had seen Blaine appear at the front of the crowd, mouthing off at Kurt, he’d seen red. He wanted to dive in front of Kurt and protect him, but the bar had been swarmed by customers and Joe had refused to let him leave. His manager had come out of his office during the performance to watch and then stepped behind the bar to help with the crowd.

"But Kurt needs me!" Sebastian had shouted back as Kurt disappeared into the crowd with his ex. "You don’t know what Blaine is capable of!"

"Kurt can handle himself and he knows the bouncers are on hand if things escalate," Joe had said. "You can take your break once the crowd calms down. This is your moment. You got 'em foaming at the mouth kid, you can’t run off now."

Sebastian scowled at his boss and turned pleading eyes towards Marc, who looked just as worried as
"Kurt will be okay, Seb," Marc said quietly. "Joe’s right. One of you has to deal with your patrons now. You can’t leave them hanging after that number."

Sebastian had deflated, realising he wasn’t going to be allowed to move. He had spent the next fifteen minutes on tenterhooks.

As he walked into the staff room however, he realised that Kurt was perfectly fine on his own. It gave Sebastian a rush of love and pride.

Just to make sure, Sebastian crossed the room, brushing past Blaine until he was standing in front of Kurt.

‘Are you okay?’ he asked in French, running his finger down Kurt’s cheek, his eyes darting over his boyfriend’s face for signs of damage. ‘Did he hurt you?’

‘He didn’t touch me,’ Kurt said evasively. He was hurt - everything hurt from Blaine’s words - but he didn’t want Sebastian to do something he would regret later. He switched back to English. He turned his face a little into the comfort of Sebastian’s hand and looked up into his boyfriend’s eyes. "Please, just...let me handle this?"

"Yeah. We’ll handle this," Blaine echoed. "You can go find someone else to dry hump on the bar, I’m sure there are plenty of candidates."

Sebastian felt anger flash up inside him and he turned to face Blaine, positioning himself so that he stood slightly in front of Kurt, acting as his own personal shield.

"That’s funny Anderson, from what I recall, you were offering to be such a candidate not even an hour ago...and if I’m not mistaken you wanted to do a lot more than dry hump."

Blaine stood with his mouth open and snapped it shut, glaring at Sebastian.

"Well, then you’ll also remember that you told me to wait for you until you could slip away." Blaine felt humiliated and completely cornered. But if he was going down, he’d take Sebastian down with him.

Kurt looked from Blaine to Sebastian. ‘You knew he was here?’ he asked privately. Then Kurt remembered the whiskey shot and suddenly, things clicked into place.

You look like you’ve seen a ghost.

I’m fine.

Kurt paled. For a split second, he almost believed Blaine. His old insecurities came rushing back into his head at the speed of light. Had Sebastian really agreed to go off with him? But one look at Sebastian told him enough. Whatever had happened between them, he knew Sebastian had had his reasons not to tell him right away. Kurt trusted him. He looked back at Blaine.

"I don’t care what he told you. We have to get back to work. I want you to leave."

Blaine was livid. "I am not going anywhere!" he spat. "I will not let you do this to me!" He stepped forward, balling his fists, and tried to push past Sebastian.

Sebastian pushed Blaine away from them as he approached. Blaine stumbled backwards and let out a
frustrated yell, barrelling towards them with his fist raised.

Sebastian pushed Blaine away again, refusing to throw a punch unless he had to. His whole body was vibrating with adrenaline.

Blaine raised his fists and hopped on the balls of his feet, getting ready for a fight.

"Come on then," he growled. "I’m not afraid of you."

Kurt watched with growing horror. This was exactly what he had been trying to avoid.

"Blaine," he pleaded.

"Stay out of it, Kurt," Blaine hissed, and swung at Sebastian’s head.

Blaine’s fist collided with the side of Sebastian’s jaw - he’d tried to move out of the way but hadn’t quite timed it right. He felt his jaw lock and stumbled backwards.

Blaine grinned triumphantly and stepped forward, looking eager to throw another punch.

"No!" Kurt yelled loudly, pushing Blaine out of the way. He had never been in an actual fist fight - not one in which he wasn’t hopelessly outnumbered anyway - but he would not let anyone hurt his boyfriend.

Blaine’s eyes went wide. Kurt had never pushed him away, ever. Well, apart from that night at Scandals maybe, but that didn’t count. What had happened to him that had changed him so much? Sebastian, obviously. Anger boiled up inside of him. He’d show Kurt he’d picked the losing side. He lunged towards Kurt with his fists raised.

Sebastian, who had recovered from the blow, saw Blaine go for Kurt.

“Stay the fuck away from my boyfriend!” he yelled, diving forwards and rugby-tackling Blaine out of the way. They both hit the ground hard. “Don’t you dare touch him!” Sebastian said, pulling back and punching Blaine in the face. He felt the satisfying crack of Blaine’s nose and he pulled back, his hand covered in blood.

He stood up and crowded over Blaine, using his height to his advantage.

Kurt stared at them in shock. It was like everything had happened in slow-motion. Blaine had come for him, fists raised, and Kurt had brought up his hands into a defensive stance, raising his arms, only to stand there empty-handed as Blaine was tackled by Sebastian. Suddenly, everything sped up and happened at once; and then Blaine was on the floor, howling in pain, and Sebastian stood over him, like a boxer waiting for round three.

Blaine was curled up in a ball, cupping his nose with his hands and feebly trying to stop the blood flow. It dripped on the ground from between his fingers. Kurt watched the pattern for a moment, unable to believe this was happening. He was trembling.

It wasn’t the first time he had seen that look in Blaine’s eyes, but it still came as a shock that Blaine had been ready to actually punch him.

Still shaking with adrenaline, Kurt went into his survival mode, shutting down his emotions to deal with the situation.

"I’ll alert a bouncer," he said, and after assuring himself Blaine wasn’t going to get up, he opened the
door of the staff room and hit one of the bar's wall-mounted alarm buttons. It didn't take long for Terry to get there. Kurt let him in.

"He followed us here and tried to attack me," Kurt said unemotionally. "Bas broke his nose."

"Serves him right," Terry grunted, a little angry with himself that he had let the kid into the club in the first place. "I'll get him. Shall I call the police?"

Kurt paused. "No," he said after a moment. "Just blacklist him. I don't want to see him in our home ever again."

Terry lifted Blaine up by the scruff of his neck and dragged him from the room, shutting the door behind him.

Sebastian stood staring after Blaine and Terry for a minute; he was breathing heavily and could feel his heartbeat in his ears.

As his body calmed down, his mind sped up.

Kurt.

He turned to face his boyfriend. He looked just as spooked as Sebastian felt. He stepped towards Kurt and raised his good hand slowly to stroke Kurt's face.

"Are you ok?" he asked quietly.

"I'm not sure yet," Kurt whispered, reluctantly letting go of the hold he had on his shields to let Sebastian in. It was over. He didn't need to be strong anymore. But before he let go completely, he needed to make sure Sebastian was okay. He had never seen him this angry before.

"Are you?" He took Sebastian's face in his hands gently, and looked up at Sebastian's jaw.

Sebastian opened his mouth and moved his jaw. It clicked painfully once, then felt fairly normal. He stretched his hand out and moved his fingers. They were sore and still covered in Blaine’s blood but seemed okay. "Just bumps and bruises," Sebastian replied. He ran his hands down Kurt’s sides and wrapped them around his waist, pulling Kurt close.

"I'm sorry it took me so long to get here, Joe wouldn’t let me leave. And I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you Blaine was here. I was going to tell you after the song." He pressed his forehead against Kurt’s and closed his eyes, letting the contact reassure him. He’s gone, it’s okay. We’re safe.

"I'm glad you didn't tell me before," Kurt admitted. "I wouldn't have been able to do the routine otherwise."

He held on to his boyfriend, hands sliding down to clutch behind Sebastian’s neck. He finally allowed himself to feel all of the things he had been keeping at bay until now. Before he knew it, he was crying.

Sebastian buried his face in Kurt’s neck and held him close, tears falling from his own eyes.

"Shh," he whispered through his own tears. "It’s okay, you’re okay, I won’t let him hurt us."

Kurt nodded wordlessly. He needed several shaky breaths before he was able to explain.

"I'm just-" he sniffed, "so disappointed in myself. I thought I was fine, that it was all over, that I was on my way to be...a normal person in a normal relationship. But it took only two seconds- seconds! -
of Blaine looking at me like he did to make me feel..."

Kurt broke off, shaking his head. "I hate that he can still make me feel like nothing I ever do will be good enough."

"He’s wrong baby, he’s so wrong," Sebastian whispered, kissing Kurt’s shoulder and starting a trail of light kisses on Kurt’s skin, offering comfort and reassurance with his actions as well as his words. He ended his trail at his boyfriend’s lips, kissing him firmly and holding the contact for a moment before continuing to talk. “You are amazing, you’re everything and he’s jealous. He’s jealous of you, he’s jealous of us and he knows he’ll never match up."

He pulled back and looked at Kurt’s tear-stained face, leaning forward to press tiny kisses under each eye. "I love you so much, and if you let me, I will spend every minute of every day showing you just how much."

Kurt pressed his lips together and nodded, leaning in to rest his cheek against the side of Sebastian’s face. "I just thought I was stronger already," he whispered.

"You are strong, Kurt," Sebastian whispered. "You’re the strongest person I know."

Kurt smiled weakly, letting his eyes fall shut as he let Sebastian’s love and comfort wash over him, slowly cleaning up the trail of destruction that Blaine had left in his wake.

After a while, to diffuse some of the awkwardness he felt, he added: "You know what I could really use right now?...A Smythe Special."

Sebastian smiled, giving Kurt the out. "I’m sure I can fix you something. C’mon."

As they opened the door of the staff room, they were met by a wall of sound and partying guests. It was bewildering to realise the party had gone on without them, that no one knew what had just happened. Kurt took Sebastian’s hand and squeezed it tightly as they made their way to the bar. Kurt put on his show-smile, but he could tell it was no good by the way the crowd parted for them, the club’s patrons stepping aside and looking at them in shock. Kurt glanced at Sebastian. A bruise was blooming on the side of his face and his eyes were red. Kurt knew his would be the same.

They reached the edge of the dance floor. Marc and Danny were tending bar 1. They caught sight of them at almost the same time.

"Jesus Christ, what happened?" Marc let out, dropping everything to let them in behind the bar. "Are you okay?"

"Who did this?" Danny asked, zeroing in on Sebastian after seeing no visible injuries on Kurt. "Is that your blood?"

Sebastian shook his head. "No, it’s Blaine’s...he went for Kurt and I stopped him."

Marc scowled and stepped forwards, taking Sebastian’s face in his hands gently. "Does it hurt?" he asked quietly.

"A little, but I don’t think anything’s broken."

Marc nodded. "Okay, ice, we need ice," he mumbled, pulling a bar towel from under the counter and thrusting a hand directly into the ice bucket to grab ice cubes for a makeshift cold compress.

"Are you okay Kurt?" Danny asked, his eyes sweeping over Kurt’s tear-stained face.
"Yeah," Kurt said. "I'm just a little shaken."

"Can I get you something? A drink?" Danny asked.

Kurt shrugged. "A new apron, maybe," he suggested. Maybe distraction was better than sympathy. He nodded at the patrons on the other side of the bar, who were staring at them.

Danny got the hint and nodded, heading out to the back to return shortly after with two fresh aprons. He handed one to Kurt, and eyed Sebastian hesitantly. They hadn't talked much since Seb and Kurt had become a couple. Danny didn't know if Sebastian had told Kurt about them, and now he was unsure how much attention he was allowed to give him.

Sebastian was holding the compress to his face. Marc was filling orders again but never moved far from his side, keeping an eye on him.

"Is there anything I can do?" Danny finally asked Sebastian, putting the new apron down on the counter for him.

Sebastian smiled at his friend. "I'm good, thanks Dan."

Danny nodded and squeezed Sebastian's shoulder. He turned around and went back to the bar to help Kurt, who had started taking orders.

"How are you really?" Marc asked quietly, concern lacing every syllable.

"I'm okay..." Sebastian said, glancing at Kurt. "I just wanted to protect him Marc, he's been through so much...I swear I could have killed that guy."

Marc clenched his jaw, following Sebastian's eyes to Kurt. The thought of anyone hurting either of them made him see red.

"I'm sorry we stopped you from going after him sooner. Joe... I," Marc corrected, feeling the need to take responsibility, "I underestimated the situation."

Sebastian shook his head. "You were right. The bar was too crowded to leave. And Kurt needed the chance to show Blaine and himself that he is strong enough to stand up for himself. And he did, he was amazing, Marc! If I'd gone in after him, he wouldn't have done that. If he hadn't de-escalated the situation, I actually may have killed Blaine."

Marc gave Sebastian a hard, scrutinising look. He hadn't seen this violent side of Sebastian before. A shadow of it, maybe, back when he had just started at Satire, but never in defence of anyone else. It was almost a dangerous kind of passion. Yet, Marc understood where it was coming from.

"I'm glad you didn't. We need you here. Kurt needs you. You're no help to anyone in jail." He winked. "Your delicate French stomach would never survive the food."

Sebastian grinned and let out a laugh, then winced as his face moved painfully. "Oh it definitely wouldn't, besides, orange isn't really my colour."

Marc laughed. "Alright, let's get back to work. Take it easy with that hand! No fancy stuff."

Sebastian smiled and nodded. "Thanks, Marc."

He grabbed his apron and put it on. He washed his hand carefully in the sink under the bar and then started taking requests from his customers.
Marc hung back and watched Sebastian, unsure whether he should be worried, angry or proud. He had never had any interest in having children of his own. He and Paul had agreed early on in their relationship that they were happy with it just being the two of them and the dogs. Yet both of them had come to care about Sebastian as if he was their son. They felt that kind of fierce pride and love that only a parent could feel and it was most prominent in times like this.

As one of his regulars called out to him, Marc snapped out of his daze and walked over to his section, placing a hand on each of the boy’s shoulders as he passed them.

It had been one hell of a night.

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Distraction helped, though Kurt couldn't help the flash of guilt that hit him every time he saw the bruise on Sebastian's face. He didn't want to think about all the things that could have happened. He knew how Blaine worked out; he had no martial arts training and made up for it with sheer force. He had often skinned his knuckles because he went at his punching bag without gloves. Once, he had sprained his wrist with a badly executed hook. Of course it had never been his fault; Blaine had bought a new punching bag after that incident, claiming the sand had become humid and clumped together because Kurt aired out the apartment too much.

Kurt sighed. The new punching bag, bought from his salary, had been donated to a local youth sports center and hopefully, the kids there were getting proper training with how to use it.

Kurt looked at Sebastian again. At least it didn't look like there'd be permanent damage. He wasn't sure he could say the same for Blaine's nose. But it was his own fault. Blaine had wanted this fight - Sebastian had held him off as long as possible. Any guilt Kurt may have felt about what happened to Blaine was negated by the things he had said about Sebastian. As far as Kurt was concerned, he had gotten what he deserved.

As the club emptied and they started cleaning up, their manager came to the bar. He took in the sight of Sebastian with a frown.

"I'm sorry your instincts proved right. Terry said the guy you'd been trying to stop got violent after all. The both of you should have called in security sooner." He sighed. "Are you boys alright?"

Sebastian ran his fingers down the side of his jaw, wincing slightly at the pain. He took Kurt's hand in his other one and squeezed.

"We're fine...the other guy got off worse," he said. "I uh, may have broken his nose."

"It was self-defence," Kurt hurried added.

"Alright," Joe said, nodding. "We'll deal with that. We have insurance. Did you know him? Was a regular?"

Kurt bit his lip. "My ex-fiancé. He must have found out I work here now. He...didn't exactly approve of this-" he nodded at the bar, "-or of us." He glanced at Sebastian, feeling another pang of guilt at the bruise on his face.

"Well, he's not getting in here again," Joe said resolutely. "Terry added him to the mugshot gallery." He gave Kurt a sympathetic look. "Some Ex's and Oh's, right?"

That brought a smile to Kurt's lips. "Right."
Joe's eyes shone. "Say, about that. You boys were amazing. Amazing! I haven't checked the jars yet but I think you brought in at least 800 dollars in tips!"

Kurt exchanged a look with Sebastian. Not bad for a few nights of practise.

"I have to admit, when Marc told me about the idea you three had cooked up, I thought it was gonna be some kind of Coyote Ugly rip-off, but this! I should have known though, with such a talented flairtender and a theatre professional on my crew...!" Joe beamed.

"So I was thinking," he continued eagerly, "I don't know how long you boys need to learn a new number, but if we could do this like, once a month, or - even once a week! And we spread the word through social media... I know there's probably already videos out there right now, but I mean official ones that show the bar as well, where to find us... " He paused. "I'll give you both a raise as well. Come on, say you'll think about it."

Kurt, who had stood listening to him with his mouth hanging open, looked at Sebastian.

Sebastian, shocked himself, looked back at his boyfriend. He’s almost forgotten about their performance - with everything that happened after.

"Can we...have some time to think about it?" he asked.

"Of course! Take your time guys, talk it over and see what you think. I know you're both busy with school."

Kurt nodded. Doing Wonka on top of NYADA had been hard work, but if they only did one once a month, for extra money…? Though the run-in with Blaine had dampened their first euphoria a little, their act had been a big success.

For now, though, he just wanted to go home. Kurt longed to be alone with Sebastian, just them, and reassure each other that they were still okay. Talk could come later.
Rachel has (Blaine's) half of the story, and Kurt sets her facts straight.

Rachel hovered outside Miss July’s advanced dance class, slightly out of view. She had not forgiven the dance teacher for not allowing her to move out of intermediate up to advance at the beginning of the semester. Apparently she "lacked the vocation and drive required to keep up." Ridiculous! She already had more drive than her peers when she was five years old.

*Kurt had been allowed to advance, and he had done a whole semester less than her.*

Blaine was right. Kurt did get special treatment over other students. It wasn’t fair at all.

She still couldn’t believe Kurt had been cast for the lead role in a production off broadway. She had read the reviews and they were full of praise.


A part of her felt proud...they had been best friends once after all. For the most part, however, she was just jealous that he’d gotten his break before her.

But she *did* miss him, and she was worried about him. Blaine had told her Kurt was now working at a strip club with Sam (who, according to Blaine, was now 'gay for pay'). Blaine had also mentioned that Kurt was "sleeping" with Sebastian Smythe. She had seen Blaine’s nose after his run in with them. Apparently, Sebastian had attacked him after Blaine had tried to convince Kurt to come home with him. She couldn’t believe Kurt had got himself into such a mess. *Time for an intervention.*

The class was starting to filter out now. A couple of people smiled at her as they passed. Then she saw him, dressed in black yoga pants over his leotard and a grey hoodie she didn’t recognise. She tightened her hold on her bag and stepped forwards into his path.

"Hi Kurt," she said determinedly.

Kurt froze in his steps. "Hey, Rach," he said carefully, looking around to see if her 'best gay' was lurking nearby.

He hadn't seen Blaine since the night in the club. It had taken Kurt all night and a large part of the next morning to work through things in his head. The hardest thing to come to terms with, was that Blaine had been ready to beat him into submission. Kurt didn’t know how to reconcile that with the boy he fell in love with. The change had come so gradually that Kurt hadn’t noticed, and now it was like Blaine was a complete stranger; and a dangerous one. It made Kurt wonder how much *he* had changed himself.

Sebastian had been supportive all the way through, needing the reassurance just as much as Kurt had that they were okay.
It hadn't hit Kurt until later that night, when Sebastian had wrapped his hand with a bandage and Kurt had applied arnica to the purpling bruise on his boyfriend's jaw, that it hadn't just happened to Kurt. It had happened to both of them. Kurt believed him when Sebastian said he had panicked back at the bar, not being allowed to go and see if Kurt was okay. Sebastian had been provoked and attacked, pushed to a point where he felt he had no other choice but to defend himself (and Kurt). He had broken Blaine's nose, and now he didn't only have to deal with a busted hand and face, but also with the emotional backlash of his actions.

Still, it had proved once and for all Kurt had someone on his side now; it meant that even if Kurt felt like his strength had wavered in the confrontation with his ex, he no longer had to face his bullies alone. And moreover; without a doubt, Kurt knew he would have done the same thing for Sebastian if the roles had been reversed. They were a team now - not just at the bar, but for life.

Of course, that didn't mean his friends from Ohio would see it that way. Feeling like he needed more layers to face her, Kurt zipped up Sebastian's hoodie over his chest. "How've you been?"

She shrugged. "I just got back from Ohio, my dads are selling the house..." She paused as heartache settled in her chest. "And I've been there packing up my old room...it's so odd."

"Wow, they're moving out?" Kurt asked.

"They're getting a divorce," Rachel replied, and Kurt could tell how shaken up she was about it. In a way, he understood. Ohio was her home, the place she could always come back to - and now it was all going to change.

"I'm sorry," he offered. "That must be hard."

She swallowed and nodded. "It has been."

And it had, knowing one of her dads had cheated, tarnished the perfect image she had of them. They should have never gone on that stupid cruise. Then her dad wouldn't have met that creepy Argentinian guy, and they'd all still have their happily ever after.

Still, Rachel knew she had to put her own heartache aside for now. She was here to help Kurt. And as soon as he saw reason, maybe he could help her out, too.

"How have you been?" she asked. "It feels like ages since I saw you, Kurt."

"I've been right here," he reminded her. She had been the one skipping classes, going to big auditions and networking parties that she felt were more important than NYADA.

Not wanting to kick her when she was clearly already down, Kurt decided not to ask how that had been working out for her. He knew that if it had been successful, she would have told him already. The fact that she left for Ohio without so much as a word spoke volumes.

"I'm okay," he replied instead. "You know, pretty busy, but..."

"I heard," she said, offering him her best stage smile. "Willy Wonka! That's amazing Kurt, I read the reviews...congratulations."

"Thanks," Kurt replied, mirroring her smile. "I um, sent you an invitation to opening night, but I guess...well, I know you're busy too."
"I was in Ohio!" she said honestly. "I would have come if I’d been here! I’m sorry Kurt, it must have sucked not having anyone there to watch."

She knew Blaine had refused to go point-blank...and she doubted that Kurt's new friend had dragged himself away from his bed partners to watch.

As jealous as she was, she did feel a little sorry for Kurt.

"Oh, it was fine," Kurt said as if he had read her mind. "My boyfriend was there. We went to Sardis afterwards. I didn’t see Patti though." He smiled at the memory. Despite their fight, it had been a good night.

Rachel looked at him in shock. She didn’t know he had a boyfriend! Blaine hadn’t said anything about that. That made Blaine’s instructions a lot harder to carry out. How was she supposed to convince him to give Blaine another chance now? She sighed. It couldn’t be helped. Kurt’s interests (and her own) came before Blaine’s.

"Oh...that’s...that’s good," she said a little flustered. "I didn’t know you had a boyfriend, sorry."

Kurt smiled more genuinely now. "It's...rather new." He was surprised Blaine hadn’t told her, but if she had been in Ohio, maybe she had missed the drama.

He caressed his sleeve, a little lost in thought.

Rachel saw the change in his demeanour. Kurt’s smile softened and she noticed him caress the sleeve of the hoodie. It must belong to mystery boy.

"Oh," she said quietly. "I’m...happy for you! And quite honestly, I’m relieved. Blaine said that you been off gallivanting with Sebastian Smythe. Which...really, Kurt? Talk about life choices! I mean, I understand why you’d be attracted to him, I do , and I suppose someone like him wouldn't mind just hooking up for sex, but it’s better to have a real boyfriend, right? So what happened...I guess you ended things with him after he beat Blaine to a pulp?" She spoke very fast, not giving Kurt the opportunity to interrupt.

He narrowed his eyes. "Yeaaaah...no," he said, drawing his words out. "I am dating Sebastian Smythe. He’s my real boyfriend. We’re not gallivanting. We're in love. And he didn't beat Blaine to a pulp. Blaine punched him first and he defended himself."

He raised his chin to take whatever criticism she would have for him.

Rachel gaped at him, frozen for a moment. "Kurt, are you crazy?" she screeched, causing a few passers by to look their way. "After everything he did to us in school? After what he did to Blaine? Twice? And Finn?"

Her voice cracked but she swallowed and took a breath, looking up at Kurt with sympathy. "Is he blackmailing you? What is it that he has on you? I’m sure we can get you out of this!! Or is it to make Blaine jealous? Because if that’s the case-"

Kurt briefly closed his eyes. For the sake of their old friendship, he swallowed down his disappointment and tried to see it from her point of view.

"I understand why you'd think that, Rachel. And if he was the same guy he was back then...But he's not. Sebastian has changed since high school. He knows what he did to Finn and Blaine was wrong. He's not blackmailing me. And it has nothing to do with Blaine!"
"He tried to get with Blaine at your proposal!" Rachel let out, scandalised.

Kurt shook his head. "Blaine made that up," he said, but Rachel wouldn't hear it.

"It's Stockholm Syndrome," she concluded. "He bullied you and you think it's because he likes you. Kurt, that trope about boys pulling girls' pigtails is wrong on so many le-

"Please don't," Kurt warned her, his eyes narrowing. "I am not a girl."

Rachel rolled her eyes. "That's not what I meant."

"Isn't it?" Kurt asked, crossing his arms over his chest and raising an eyebrow.

"Of course it isn't!" Rachel snapped. "But the saying still goes! If a boy picks on you and treats you badly, you stay away from him."

"Ah," Kurt replied. "Like Jesse?"

Rachel gasped. "That's...He apologised!"

"So did Sebastian."

Rachel and Kurt glared at each other for a moment, at an impasse. Kurt wondered if Rachel had changed, or if - like with Blaine - he had just never seen what she was really like.

"It's not the same," Rachel finally said.

"Why not?"

"Well, because...Sebastian’s so..." Rachel broke off, looking frustrated. "Kurt, what if you...catch something?" she whispered, looking around her.

Kurt made a disgusted sound in the back of his throat. "Not that it’s any of your business, but he gets a check-up every few months. And so do I." He squared his jaw, giving her a hard look. "And anyway...if I would have caught anything from anyone, it would have been Blaine...how many guys did he sleep with in LA last summer? You’re his ‘best het-girl’, maybe he told you?"

Rachel shook her head. The thought that Blaine would tell her such things was preposterous (and a little gross). Why couldn’t Kurt just let that go? She had had a hard enough time having to hear about her dad cheating (over and over, while her dads yelled at each other from different rooms in the house). Suddenly, she had an epiphany.

She looked at him in disbelief. "Wait...you defended Sebastian at New Years! This is why, wasn’t it? You were sleeping with him back then? You were the one cheating!!"

Kurt shook his head. "There are other reasons to defend someone, Rachel. Friendship. Common decency." He sighed, starting to feel weary. "I have to go and get ready for work."

Rachel realised her mistake and back-peddled. "I’m sorry, Kurt," she said, trying to soften her voice. "I just care about you and don’t want to see you get hurt. I missed you."

_I miss pre-Blaine you, Kurt_ thought grimly. _When it was just us against the world - not the Rachel-
"Sebastian would need nine lives to hurt me as much as Blaine did," he said, not wanting to hide the way he felt about his ex anymore.

Rachel sighed. It was like every time he mentioned how hurt he was, it was a silent accusation of her failing as a friend. She wished he'd just let it go.

"I'm sorry he hurt you Kurt, but you didn’t have to punish the rest of us as well. You didn’t even tell me about Wonka! I heard it from a first year." The fact that he’d sent her an invitation didn’t count - she hadn’t seen that until she came back to the city, long after the show had ended.

Kurt shrugged. Rachel's track record for rejoicing in the success of others wasn't great.

"It's NYADA, word of mouth travels at the speed of light. I barely had time to process it myself before everyone knew." In truth, he had been dragging it out a little, avoiding her, because he knew she'd either try and talk him out of doing it, or try to get in as an understudy or something.

Apart from that, Rachel had made her alliances quite clear by continuing to meet with Blaine (he could tell from their selfies on Facebook) and never once reaching out to him to ask how he was doing.

Rachel bit her lip and sighed. It was true what he said about NYADA. Word about her losing Midnight Madness had been everywhere within seconds.

"So...how was it? Being up on stage? Was it everything we ever dreamed it would be?" she asked, hoping to make up for her failings as a friend a little by showing interest now.

"It was...hard work. But very rewarding," Kurt said. "I got the call a week after the Showcase...they said they'd call but I thought they were just being polite."

He smiled. That week had been pretty good. Wonka, Satire...and Isabelle had been true to her word and had talked to HR, who had finally put Kurt on the payroll. He was officially Isabelle’s PA now, an unpaid intern no more. The first thing he had done with his money was to take the week after Wonka off to recuperate. He hadn’t had a real holiday in years.

"That’s right, you won the Winter Showcase too..." She looked him over. "You really made it."

Jealousy rose inside her, she was surprised that her skin hadn’t turned green.

"Weren’t they the same directors that were going to do Fanny?" she asked, trying to get an in to her real purpose: Kurt’s contacts.

"Yeah, yeah they were, weren’t they?" Kurt replied, and as a revenge for the things she had said about Sebastian, added: "They said the casting process didn’t yield anyone suitable for the part...Maybe you should have auditioned after all, huh?"

Rachel felt as if he’d slapped her. She looked up at him, hurt in her eyes.

"I-I did...I sang Don’t Stop Believing..."

"Oh, really?" Kurt said sweetly. "Wow, I didn’t know." He shrugged. "Maybe they weren’t Journey fans."
He looked over Rachel's shoulder. Brody and Alice were walking up the corridor, hand in hand. He waved at them. They were meeting for lunch; saying he had work had just been an excuse to keep Rachel from seeing Alice. Kurt found he didn’t really care anymore. Maybe it was time she found out about Brody.

Rachel flushed. She had been planning to suggest Kurt asked the directors to give her another chance, but she saw his attention move away from her and realised that her battle was already lost.

She followed his eyes and noticed Brody and a very pretty girl walking towards them. The girl was beaming at Kurt and greeted him with a hug.

Brody hung back a little awkwardly, looking between the two girls.

"Brody," Rachel said frostily.

"Hey Rachel," Brody said, giving her a short nod.

Alice glanced at her before exchanging a look with Kurt. She remembered Rachel well. The way she had bad mouthed Kurt against Blaine and then pretended to be his friend...It was awful. Alice didn’t understand how Brody could have fallen for such a snake. But two could play that game.

She put on a beaming smile. "Oh my god, you’re Rachel? The Rachel? Brody told me so much about you!" She held out her hand. "I’m Alice. It’s super nice to meet you!"

Kurt bit the corners of his mouth. She sounded almost genuine, except for everyone who knew her.

Rachel stared at Alice, a little taken aback. She shook Alice’s hand and returned her smile, though it didn’t reach her eyes.

She eyed Alice up and down, taking in her appearance. She was very pretty, Rachel supposed, if you liked blondes with tiny noses. Her hair was long and her curls looked natural. Much to Rachel’s annoyance, Alice dressed well too; she was wearing light denim cut off jeans, a black and white striped off-the-shoulder top and a black hat. Rachel wondered if Alice would look good in the kind of thigh-highs that Brody had liked so much on her. She decided Alice’s legs were probably awful underneath her jeans. It made her feel marginally better.

"Hello Alice," she said. "It’s...nice to meet you too."

She directed her eyes to Brody. "How nice that you're dating again," she said, unable to keep the patronising tone out of her voice. She knew a guy like him wouldn’t be single forever, but still she felt he could have pined after her a bit more.

"Isn’t it?" Alice agreed, possessively wrapping her arm around his back. Brody mirrored his girlfriend and hugged her close to his side. "We’re moving in together this month. I mean, after almost a year, it’s really about time, isn’t it?"

Brody confirmed it with a small nod.

A year? That was even worse. How come Kurt had never told her about this?

Rachel narrowed her eyes. "Well, the best of luck to you. We lived together for a while too. You really get to know each other well when you do. You know, learn each other's secrets."
"Rachel," Kurt said sharply, giving her a clear warning.

Alice glared at her and tightened her grip on Brody. He responded by rubbing his hand down her back.

"Alice knows, Rachel," Brody said calmly. "We don’t keep secrets from each other."

"See, where I come from, we support and accept everyone for who they are, regardless of their pasts...but then, you probably wouldn’t understand that, not with your group of ‘friends’," Alice snapped.

Rachel stared at them gobsmacked.

"And I’d say ‘you don’t know what you’re missing’, but...you do, don’t you?" Alice added smugly. "And that’s all mine, now."

Rachel gasped, and looked at Kurt for support, but before he could say anything, someone else did.

"Miss Berry. So nice to see you could join us today. My office, if you please."

Kurt looked around to see Madame Tibideaux standing in the hallway. Behind her, just visible through the doors of the dance hall, stood Miss July, leaning against the door frame with a satisfied smile on her face. Suddenly Kurt knew this wasn't a coincidence.

Looking like a deer caught in headlights, Rachel followed the Dean's swishing robes. She glanced behind her at Kurt one more time. He gave her a little shrug.

As she left, Miss July ironically saluted her from the doorway, then looked back at the others.

"How are you, Brody?" she asked kindly.

"I'm fine, Cassie," he said, leaning his cheek against Alice's head. "Thanks."

She nodded and turned around, walking back into her room. The music started playing loudly, and Kurt knew she was back in her own world.

"She got me my job as a vocal coach, you know," Brody said, looking at the empty doorway. "She had to fire me as her TA when everything came out, but it was just pressure from above."

Kurt smiled. "She likes to pretend she's tough, but she's kind of amazing."

"She is," Brody agreed. "She really helped me out."

"She also seems to despise Rachel," Alice chimed in, remembering the look of triumph on Cassie’s face. "So that puts her high in my good books already."

"She gave me her airmiles when I didn’t have the funds to go home in my first year," Kurt added. "Granted, I used them to go see Blaine, but still..." He looked over his shoulder at the dance hall. "She has rock-hard abs and a soft heart."

He looked back at his friends. "I’d like to get out of here before Rachel gets back. Something tells me she won’t be in a very good mood...and I’m done picking up the pieces for her, after what she had to say about Sebastian."
Alice narrowed her eyes angrily, but Brody put a hand on her arm.

"Seb can take her, Angel," he said gently.

"I know, but still...people need to stop judging him because of mistakes he made when he was a kid...particularly those that have no moral high ground themselves!"

Brody shared a look with Kurt.

Kurt smiled softly at Alice. She was very defensive of her best friend, even in situations that didn’t necessarily called for it. He loved her for it.

"I think, after this, Rachel will be too busy regretting her own mistakes to be judging anyone else for a while," he said. He held out his arm and Alice took it. He started leading her and Brody towards the door.

"I need avocado toast and a bionade," Alice announced, hugging Kurt and Brody’s arms against her sides. "Talking to her in person gave me a bad taste in my mouth."

"Bionade is not going to change that," Brody joked, and Alice bumped his shoulder in protest.
"Oh god, Kurt don't stop..."

Kurt was straddling Sebastian. He was breathing hard, his mouth open, frowning in concentration. He was driving his hips down in a fast pace, riding his boyfriend into the mattress. He had already come, and now he wanted Sebastian to get there. He had no intention of stopping before he did.

Sebastian was gripping Kurt’s hips so tightly his knuckles were turning white. He drove his hips up hard, meeting Kurt thrust for thrust, chasing his orgasm. "Oh fu-uck," he moaned, his voice rising an octave on the last syllable.

Kurt clenched around him as he rose up and it sent Sebastian over the edge. His vision blacked out, his mouth hanging open in a silent moan as wave after wave of pleasure crashed over him. He continued to thrust shallowly, riding out the orgasm until he stilled and slumped back into the bed with a shaky breath.

Kurt fell forward against his chest and Sebastian wrapped his arms around his boyfriend, kissing his shoulder. "I think we get better and better at that, babe."

"Practise makes perfect," Kurt mumbled, still a little out of breath. He kissed Sebastian’s lips and shifted his hips, lifting himself up a little to move off Sebastian’s lap. He’d probably be feeling that for a bit, but he didn’t have dance class that day so it didn't matter. (He shuddered to think what Ms July would have to say about it in front of the whole class if she noticed he was saddlesore.)

As Bas got up to shower first, Kurt looked up at the ceiling, quietly going through all the things he needed to do that day in his head. Then he picked up his phone to check his messages.

His heart stopped for a moment. Then, it started racing to make up for lost time. He had 3 missed calls from the night before, and one text message. All from his dad.

They'd had a shift at Satire, and it had got so late that Kurt hadn’t checked his phone before going to bed. He and Sebastian had been busy with their private little after-party...

When Sebastian walked back into the bedroom, scrubbing his hair dry with a towel, Kurt was still staring at his phone.

"You okay babe?" Sebastian asked, pausing his hand. The look on Kurt’s face was one of pure shock. A feeling of dread settled in Sebastian’s stomach.

He crossed the room and sat on the side of the bed, looking at his boyfriend. "What is it?"

"I think something’s wrong with my dad," Kurt said, his voice sounding small. "He tried to call last night, and then sent me this."
He held out his phone for Sebastian to read.

From: Dad (cell) 00:32

I want you to come home this weekend. We need to talk.

Kurt pulled up his legs and hugged his knees.

Sebastian scooted over the bed and wrapped his arm around Kurt. That text didn’t sound good at all.

"Are there any other messages?" Sebastian asked.

Kurt shook his head and sighed.

"I don't know how to deal with this," he whispered. "He was doing well! He’s supposed to be in remission!" He let out a frustrated sigh. "Maybe it’s his heart?"

Sebastian made a soft shhing sound and rubbed his hand up and down Kurt’s arm softly. "It might be nothing," he said quietly.

He couldn’t think why Kurt's dad would send such a text that time of the night, particularly with no follow up, but he didn’t want to add to Kurt’s distress by pointing that out.

"Why don’t you call him and see what he says, and we can drive down this weekend and see him. He might just miss you?"

Kurt nodded. He knew that was what he had to do, but he wasn't sure if he was ready to hear what his dad had to say.

"I'll just shower first," he decided.

-  

A while later, after he had plotted out all possible scenarios and his reactions, Kurt sat down on Sebastian's couch and called his old home number. It rang for a long time. Finally, Carole answered.

"How bad is it?" Kurt blurted out, despite having rehearsed a lot of different opening sentences.

"Kurt? Is that you?"

"Yes, Carole, I’m sorry. It’s Kurt. Is my dad ok? He called me last night and then left a text telling me to come home..."

He could hear his stepmom sigh at the other end.

"I told him not to bother you that late," she said, more to herself than to him. "He's just worried about you, Kurt."

"About me? But...he's not sick?" Kurt looked at Sebastian hopefully.

"No, honey. He's fine. It'd be great if you could come and talk to him. I'm sure you two can work it out."

Kurt slumped against the couch in relief. Whatever else was on his dad’s mind, he could handle. Kurt hesitated. Another look at Sebastian helped him make up his mind.
"Carole...can I bring my boyfriend?" he asked.

"Your...? Oh. Yes, of course! I'd love to meet him!"

Kurt heard the surprise in her voice, but knew her words were genuine.

"Okay. Then...I'll see you Friday, I guess."

"I look forward to it, Kurt. Just text your dad when you leave so we'll know when to expect you."

Kurt promised he would, and hung up. He sighed.

"My dad's ok," he told Sebastian. "Apparently, he's worried about me. I guess I haven't been in touch that much, but it feels like I only just saw him at Wonka!" He shrugged. "Still...It'll be an opportunity for me to introduce you, I guess?" He smiled at his boyfriend. "I'm sure they'll love you."

Sebastian let out a sigh of relief for Kurt at the news that his dad wasn’t ill again. However, nerves erupted inside of him at the notion that in a matter of days he would be meeting the infamous Burt Hummel.

"I'm sure they'll hate me!" Sebastian said, sinking into the sofa next to Kurt. "After all the crap I pulled in high school, what parent in their right mind would want their son dating me?"

Kurt pulled up a corner of his mouth. "I wouldn't worry about that." He held up a single finger. "One: that was all a very long time ago." He added a second, "two: you changed your ways..." He added a third, "and three: My dad doesn't know who you are. I never told him."

Kurt paused and offered Sebastian a soft smile. "No offence," he said, "but that was around the time communication with my dad became...difficult."

Sebastian frowned. "I thought you guys were super close?"

"We were. We are," Kurt corrected himself. "But after Blaine and I got together, it was hard on him. He had accepted me being gay when it was...abstract. Theoretical. Somewhere in the distant future. Me having an actual boyfriend... He really tried, but I could tell he was struggling. I decided to keep that part of my life, anything to do with boys and love...private." Kurt paused.

"I figured he'd worry less about me if we kept the pda's down around him. If it looked like Blaine was just a good friend, who tolerated my strange hobbies and took the burden of listening to me talk about clothes off him. It helped that he took to Blaine easily; they watched sports together, talked about cars..."

Kurt took Sebastian's hand and squeezed it, hoping to convey that he bore his boyfriend no ill will over the past. "By the time you came around, I was just used to dealing with things on my own. It didn't even cross my mind to tell my dad someone was trying to seduce my boyfriend. It would have only caused him unnecessary discomfort."

Sebastian winced at Kurt's words. He remembered what it was like to have no one to talk to at that age. He returned the squeeze of Kurt's hand and focused on the present again.

"So...if he doesn't know about me at all...I have a chance, right? I mean..." he swallowed. To say he was nervous at the prospect of meeting Kurt's parents would be an understatement.

Kurt offered him an encouraging smile. "Of course you have a chance. My dad's not so bad once
you get to know him. Be sure to mention you graduated at Dalton. He'll like that."

Kurt kissed him, brushing his face with his hand. "And I will tell him about how you got me a better job, and introduced me to your friends, and how happy you make me. We'll woo him together."

He paused and looked at Sebastian. "In all honesty, though...He is my dad, and he's important to me. But if he doesn't approve of us, it won't change how I feel about you. He'll just have to suck it up and sit through our family dinners like so many other parents deal with their sons-in-law."

Sebastian couldn’t help the smile that formed at Kurt’s words. Son in law. Visions of his dream from that first morning filled his brain. He truly believed that they would have that one day. The thought didn’t scare him as it once might have.

"I love you," he said quietly. "No matter what, we’re in this together."

"Yes, we are," Kurt agreed, feeling lighter than he had after the call. "I'll start a packing list."

As his boyfriend went to make coffee, Kurt went over Sebastian's wardrobe in his head. He didn't want them to clash, but Bas should also look like himself, not like someone Kurt had dressed up for the part of his boyfriend.

His dad would probably be uncomfortable if Sebastian looked too preppy, but Kurt was also going to be packing a few things from the Vogue vault and they didn't need to look shabby either. They were grown-ups, living in a big city and making a good paycheck. They could afford to look like New Yorkers.

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Before they knew it, it was Friday. As final exams were almost upon them, they had no classes, and their shifts at Satire were switched to accommodate a weekend off. Joe had only reluctantly let both of them go over the weekend, but as a dad, he could understand Kurt's folks wanting to meet his new partner.

Now, they were on the road in Sebastian’s brand new Mercedes Roadster. It was about a ten hour drive with rest stops and they’d decided that Kurt would drive the highways and Sebastian would take the quieter roads. He’d only gotten his license recently, having taken lessons while Kurt was rehearsing for Wonka, and while he enjoyed driving, he lacked the experience to give him confidence on the busier roads.

Sebastian’s car was surprisingly spacious for a sports car. Kurt had enough room to adjust the driver's seat to a comfortable position and the smooth drive made him miss his old Navigator. For the first fifteen minutes, it was all Kurt could talk about, despite his growing suspicion that he was boring Sebastian to death.

"...and so then we sold it and I used my money for a flight to New York and a few months' rent."

Sebastian listened to Kurt from the passenger seat. He sat scrolling through his phone, trying to find the playlist he’d created for their journey.

"Babe, one of the things I love about you is your constant ability to surprise me. The fact that you break the stereotype and love cars and engines makes me think about you in oil-stained overalls, which is super sexy," he said, still staring at his phone. "But while I love listening to you talk about your interests and hobbies...can we please talk about something other than cars now, please?"

"Of course. Sorry..." Kurt said, glancing to the passenger seat. He was happy for Sebastian's
honesty, even if it sometimes stung a little. But he had really talked about cars enough.

"What are you doing on your phone?"

It had taken a while for Kurt to stop feeling suspicious whenever Sebastian was reading messages, given his past with Blaine, but now he just asked to make conversation.

Sebastian grinned and pressed the shuffle button on his playlist.

"Road tunes!" he said, popping his phone on the ledge of the dashboard. "Can’t spend all day in the car without proper tunage."

Kurt smiled. He liked listening to the songs Sebastian had picked, even if some of them were horrible, because it was worth seeing him enjoy himself. They sat in silence for a bit, listening to the music and watching the city disappear around them.

Sebastian grinned at Kurt as a familiar song started up. He sat up in his chair and cleared his throat as he sung the opening lines.

"Well you done done me and you bet I felt it,
I tried to be chill but you’re so hot that I melted,
I fell right through the cracks, now I’m trying to get back..."

He raised his eyebrows at Kurt and his grin widened.

Kurt’s musical theatre heart swelled, and he sang the next lines. They switched back and forth, Kurt singing as he kept his eyes on the road. When they reached the chorus, Kurt couldn't stop himself from looking at Sebastian.

"But I won't hesitate no more, no more...It cannot wait, I'm yours"

He reached for Sebastian's knee with his right hand and and squeezed his thigh. He was going home and Sebastian was with him. This was going to be perfect.

Sebastian entwined his fingers with Kurt’s and raised their hands so he could kiss Kurt's knuckles.

When the song ended, they fell into a companionable silence, broken occasionally by singing along to the music or talking.

Somewhere east of Mansfield, they stopped off for the final time in a rest stop and Sebastian took the wheel for the final leg of the journey.

As he pulled back out onto US-30, he looked at Kurt.

"So is there anything else I need to know about meeting your dad?" he asked casually, trying to mask how nervous he felt.

Kurt, who had just finished a text to Carole to let her know where they were, looked at Sebastian from the side. "I think you'll be good as long as you don't call me 'princess' within his earshot," he joked lightly. Sebastian hadn't called him that in over a year.

But he knew that was not what Sebastian meant, and gave it some more thought.

"He's not one of those guys who likes to hear himself speak. If he's short with you, don't take it
personally. He's just...to the point. Okay?"

He hoped Sebastian didn't feel too pressured. Although he was sorry for the way Sebastian's family had fallen apart, it was a secret relief that they weren't driving up to meet the Smythes. He’d be just as nervous, or more.

Sebastian bit his lip and nodded, twisting his hands around the steering wheel. Surely it was stupid for him to feel this nervous? So what if they didn’t like him. When had he ever cared about other people’s opinions?

He wished he was better at lying to himself.

"What’s your stepmom like?" Sebastian asked to distract himself. He’d already heard a lot about her but needed the small talk to settle his nerves.

At the thought of Carole, Kurt smiled. "She's wonderful. She's...caring and thoughtful and understanding...She’s not the best cook in the world and she wears mom jeans, but." He sighed. "She's everything a child could wish for in a mom, I guess."

Except for arriving too late, when the child was already in his teens.

Kurt’s smile wavered a little, but he quickly pushed on.

"I introduced them, did I ever tell you that? Okay, I kinda did it to get close to Finn, but I could also see they were right for each other."

Sebastian smiled.

"You didn’t tell me, no." He glanced at Kurt. "You had a crush on your brother? That’s a bit weird, babe."

He knew Finn wasn’t really Kurt’s brother, but he enjoyed the gentle teasing. It helped calm his nerves.

Kurt swatted his arm. "He wasn't my brother then!" Sebastian's chuckle irritated him, but it also made him smile. In retrospect, it had been a little weird.

The rest of the drive passed by rather uneventfully. Sebastian’s nerves rose the closer they got. As they passed the ‘Welcome to Lima’ sign he took a shaky breath and let it out slowly.

Kurt placed a hand on his knee and gave him directions to his house. The first thing Kurt noticed was that his dad’s car was missing in the driveway. He frowned.

"Could you park at the side of the road?" he asked, knowing how his dad hated having someone else park in his spot.

Sebastian bit his lip, looking around. Parking was not one of his stronger points yet.

Kurt pointed out two gaps, but Sebastian was too nervous to make it work.

"You do it," he said, frustratedly. "I suck at this."

"It’s okay," Kurt said. "Take your time, we’re not in a hurry." If he was completely honest, he kind of was, because he needed to use the bathroom, but he didn’t want to rush Sebastian.

Sebastian sighed and tried again. And again.
"Maybe we should park on the driveway after all," Kurt suggested, shifting in his seat. "Just move it right up the front so my dad can still fit in behind you."

Sebastian nodded, looking a little grim. Driving up very slowly, he parked his car as close to the house as he could, and killed the engine.

"Show time," he said quietly.

"Yes," Kurt said, leaning over to kiss him. "I love you," he reminded Sebastian. "Okay?"

Sebastian smiled against Kurt’s lips and kissed him back, feeling himself relax.

"I love you too." Sebastian looked out his window and saw the front door open.

Kurt’s stepmom emerged from the doorway and Sebastian recognised her from the pictures in Kurt’s apartment.

Kurt unbuckled his seat belt, but before he could get out of the car, Sebastian was already there, opening his door. Kurt had to repress a grin. He was really trying hard. Kurt kissed his cheek and made his way to Carole.

Carole came to greet him half-way. She looked genuinely glad to see Kurt and greeted him with a hug, holding him tightly for a moment. As she let go, Kurt looked over his shoulder at Sebastian. He was taking their luggage out of the car. If he tried any harder, he'd need a white horse soon.

Kurt hopped nervously of the balls of his feet, looking proud and a little nervous at the same time. Carole gave him an unsubtle "wow" face and Kurt nodded. Yes, he was aware that his boyfriend was extremely handsome, chivalrous and well-dressed. He raised his chin a little, feeling pleased and giddy.

As soon as Sebastian reached them, Kurt took one of the bags off him so he'd have a hand free. Carole offered him her hand.

"Hi, I'm Carole."

Sebastian smiled and shook Carole’s hand, greeting her politely. She oozed warmth and hospitality and he felt himself relax a bit.

As they introduced themselves, Kurt looked over out over the street.

"Where’s my dad?" he asked quietly.

Carole's smile faltered a little, and although she recovered quickly, it was enough to send Kurt's mind in overdrive.

He reached for Sebastian's hand.

"He’s at the shop," Carole assured him quickly. "I already called him to say you were on the way. He’ll be here any minute. Let's just go inside and the two of you can bring your luggage up."

Carole lead the way in, and Kurt dashed into the bathroom. Carole showed Sebastian into the living room. As they walked through the double doors, Sebastian took a look around. He spotted pictures of Kurt and Finn on the walls at different stages of their childhoods.

One picture stood out from the others and Sebastian drew closer to it. It was Kurt at maybe four or five, wearing a dinosaur towel with a hood. He was wrapped up in a woman’s arms and had a big
smile on his face.

"He was cute huh?" Carole said, looking at the picture too. When she’d come to live with Burt, she had expected to feel more conflicted about the pictures of his past, but as it turned out, she felt absolutely no resentment towards Burt’s first wife. It was obvious that Burt and Kurt had both adored her, and yet Burt never made Carole feel like she was somehow less, or a replacement. By now, when she saw the pictures, it almost felt like she had been there with them.

Sebastian looked around at her and blushed a little. "Yes," he said. "You have a very lovely home."

Carole smiled. "Thank you. The garden gets a bit more attention than the house. With Burt away for his Congress duties, I spend more time at the hospital than I used to."

"That’s right, Kurt said you were a nurse, he talks about you a lot."

Carole averted her eyes, feeling privately pleased. It seemed like such a throwaway comment, but she somehow didn’t feel like he was just saying it to be polite.

Sebastian walked over to the window that looked out into the front garden. In the evening sun, the plethora of colours seemed to dance. It reminded him of his grandparents’ garden back in Paris.

Kurt came into the room just in time to hear Sebastian compliment Carole on her flowers, and he smiled. He could tell Carole was pleased. She was just about to offer them something to drink when they heard the front door open, and slam closed.

Carole closed her eyes and let out a soft sigh. She gave them an apologetic look and told them to stay put while she went to greet her husband. She was probably hoping to keep his words from their ears, but it was no use. Burt’s loud voice was perfectly audible through the door.

"No, Carole! I will not calm down!"

Sebastian felt his blood turn cold and looked at Kurt nervously. The hurt and confusion that had appeared in Kurt’s eyes caused Sebastian’s protective side to surface and he reached out his free hand to stroke Kurt’s face softly.

"It’ll be okay," he whispered. "I don’t scare off that easily." He kissed Kurt softly.

"Just because he owns a Mercedes does not give him the right to almost drive it into my house!"

Sebastian’s eyes widened and he looked at Kurt with guilt. He knew he had only just said he’d brave this for Kurt, but he was beginning to doubt if he’d live through it. Kurt took his boyfriend’s hand and squeezed it reassuringly. The door opened and they braced themselves.

Burt walked in, wearing his coveralls, a baseball cap and a frown. He sized the both of them up with a menacing look.

"So that’s your car, huh?" he asked, looking at Sebastian.

"Uh, y-yes. I’m sorry, I tried to park on the road but I’m not that great at parking yet, I only just got it..." Sebastian rambled.

Burt glared at him. There was a contemptuous glint to his eyes as he sized Sebastian up, like everything Sebastian was saying only confirmed what Burt thought about him.

"I told him he could park there," Kurt quickly intervened, hoping to mollify his dad. He offered him
a small smile. "Dad, this is Sebastian Smythe."

Sebastian took a deep breath, stood up straight and held his hand out to Burt.

"It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir," he said as confidently as he could. So far his first impression wasn’t great.

Burt glanced from Kurt to Sebastian. Carole came up to them, and her presence seemed to remind him of his manners. He took Sebastian’s hand and shook it with a firm grip.

"Sebastian also went to Dalton, dad," Kurt said eagerly. "He graduated in the top 5%. And now he's at NYU, he’s doing a double major in English and Hist--"

"That’s enough, Kurt," Burt said gruffly, cutting him off. He nodded at Sebastian. "What happened to your face?"

"Uh-" Sebastian started, running a finger along his jaw and looking at Kurt. He wasn’t sure how much he was allowed to say about his ex. The side of his face still showed a faint bruise from Blaine’s fist.

Kurt looked back at Sebastian. He wasn’t sure what was going on. His dad was acting like he had been caught drinking or breaking curfew. What had he done? Was it just showing up with a new boyfriend?

"Why don’t we sit down?" Carole suggested, taking Burt’s arm and leading him further into the living room. "They only just got here. They’ve been driving all day. I’ll go get us some drinks."

Burt grudgingly sat down in his tv chair.

Kurt and Sebastian took a seat on the couch opposite of him. When it didn’t look like his dad was going to say anything, Kurt broke the uncomfortable silence.

"What's going on, dad? Are you mad at me? What did I do?"

Kurt hated how insecure he sounded, but he had to know. He had been expecting a warmer welcome than this.

"I would like to talk to my son alone," Burt announced.


Sebastian placed a hand on Kurt’s knee reassuringly. He didn’t like the way Burt was speaking to his boyfriend and he wasn’t about to abandon him.

Burt narrowed his eyes. "Alright," he said. He paused for a moment, then started to speak.

"A couple of days ago, Blaine came to talk to me. His nose was all busted up." He made a gesture at his face and looked at Sebastian as he did so. "And he told me some things no father ever hopes to hear about their child."

Kurt swallowed thickly. "Like what?" he asked.

Burt clenched his jaw for a moment. "Like the fact that you have started working at some club. An adult club. Where you dance on top of the bar, and-" He broke off and shook his head.
"I can’t believe he came to you…” Kurt whispered. He placed his hand over Sebastian’s hand, needing the comfort. Sebastian squeezed it gently and looked back at Burt, his face hardening.

"He loves you, Kurt, he only has your best interests at heart!” Burt protested.

"No, he doesn’t," Kurt replied softly. "In retrospect, I don’t think he ever did."

It hurt to say that, but time had given him a lot to think about...especially now that Sebastian had shown him there was another way things could be.

"What are you talking about?" Burt replied. "You were going to get married!"

"Yes, we were. But it’s over between us now."

"Because he wouldn't let you throw yourself away, selling your body!" Burt said loudly.

"That’s what he said I do?" Kurt asked sharply, his eyes widening.

Sebastian shifted uncomfortably next to Kurt, trying to dispel the anger that was igniting inside him. It wouldn’t do to explode on Kurt’s dad the first time they met - but it was becoming increasingly more difficult.

"He implied it," Burt said. "He said those guys were all over you, and he saw you take money and telephone numbers, and that when he went to talk to you about it, some guy called Sebastian," he glared at Kurt’s boyfriend, "acted like he owned you, and broke his nose." He paused.

"I know what Sam did before he moved in with us, Kurt. Finn told me about that. I never thought you’d go the same way. I just wished...god, Kurt, if you needed the money so badly, why didn’t you come to me?"

"Burt!" Carole said, walking in with a tray of glasses. She looked scandalised. "What happened to 'let’s give Kurt a chance to explain'?"

Burt huffed. "Fine...Kurt...What do you have to say for yourself?"

Sebastian felt himself shaking with rage and glared at Burt. He was holding on to Kurt’s hand with more force now, using it as an anchor to hold him back from lashing out.

"Well, to start with," Kurt said, his voice trembling a little, "Sam was a stripper, not a prostitute. And I am neither of those things. I am a bartender."

"At a sex club," Burt supplied.

"Actually," Sebastian snapped, unable to keep quiet any longer. "It’s a cocktail bar, I can show you the website if you’d like."

It felt like he wasn’t just facing Burt anymore, but also his grandparents and his father all over again, and everyone else who’d ever projected their own sick fantasies onto his life.

"Do not take that tone with me!" Burt threatened.

"Burt…” Carole started, but Burt shut her down.

"No, Carole, I will not be talked to like that in my own home," Burt said angrily. He turned to face her and pointed at Sebastian. "This is the guy who broke Blaine's nose, for god's sake! He’s the one who got my son into all of this-"
Kurt stared at his dad in a stunned silence, unable to comprehend that the man sitting in front of him was his father. He should say something, come to their defence, at least protect Sebastian. But he couldn’t; it was like his brain had switched off.

Sebastian glanced at Kurt and squeezed his hand, silently asking for permission to tell their story. He felt Kurt’s responding squeeze. It was enough. He turned back to Burt, sitting up straight and hardening his gaze.

"Actually, Mr Hummel," he said in a low voice. "I think you’ll find that I’m the one that got Kurt out of the bad situation he was in."

He saw the confusion pass over Burt’s face but he didn’t interrupt, so Sebastian ploughed on.

"I have heard Kurt talk about you a lot over the last year, the way he admires your unwavering faith in him. How you’ve always supported him and been there for him through thick and thin."

He swallowed in an attempt to keep himself calm.

"But I have to admit I am disappointed. We have been in your house for less than half an hour and you’ve already broken every illusion of you that Kurt has drawn up in my mind. Maybe you can’t tell, but your insinuations are hurting Kurt, and I cannot let that continue."

"Now you listen to me-" Burt started angrily.

"No. You listen to him, Burt," Carole said, with a silent fury. The drinks sat forgotten in light of the scene that was unfolding in front of her. As much as she loved her husband, she would not let him treat the children like that - even if they weren’t really children anymore. They had a voice, and their side needed to be heard.

Sebastian gave her a brief nod of thanks and breathed in deeply.

"It is now my turn to break some of the illusions you have, forgive me." He shot a brief glance at Kurt and saw the subtle nod of his head.

"Blaine Anderson is a manipulative asshole who has been emotionally abusing your son for years."

Kurt closed his eyes and could feel himself falling. It had started. He could not stop it anymore now. In a way, he was glad. He pulled his hand from Sebastian’s and faced his father.

Sebastian made no move to take Kurt’s hand again. He knew that Kurt needed his own space without contact right now.

"He's right, dad," Kurt said calmly. He looked pale, and a complete stillness had replaced his trembling. When he continued, Kurt's voice sounded flat.

"Blaine cheated on me. At least twice, maybe more. The first time, that I know of, was when I had just moved to New York. When I asked him why, he blamed me for it. For a long time, I believed him."

"Oh honey," Carole whispered, her face falling.

"He was controlling, paranoid and aggressive. Especially when he'd had something to drink. I didn't want to see it. We had fights, break-ups, and near-breakups…I took him back, again and again, because I thought - because everyone kept telling me - it was love."
Carole clasped her hand over her mouth and tears started to well up in her eyes.

"That's not-" Burt started, breaking off. "When you had just moved to New York...?"

He paused.

"That was why you were broken up over Christmas?"

"Yes. And you brought him to New York without asking me, and made me feel like I was being unreasonable by not taking him back." Kurt didn’t say it to accuse his dad, but he could tell that was how his father took it.

"I didn’t know!" Burt protested. "Blaine said you had just grown apart because you were in New York and he was in Ohio! He told me-"

"Whatever he told you, it was a lie," Kurt said flatly. "He’s been lying to everyone."

Burt shook his head. He was trying to make sense of it, but he was struggling. Unable to come up with a defence, he decided to focus on something else Kurt had said.

"What do you mean, he was aggressive?"

Kurt winced and Carole wanted to hug him. She thought back to the past Christmas and the things she had suspected. Kurt had seemed withdrawn and distant. It had been like he was present but not really there. She remembered how at one point he had started to open up to her, but then Blaine had come into the room and Kurt had withdrawn back into himself and rebuilt his walls, giving Blaine what he wanted without any argument. She had always wondered what Kurt had been about to tell her. Maybe they were going to find out. Suddenly, she wasn’t really sure if she wanted to know, but she knew she had to.

Kurt opened his mouth to speak, but suddenly visions of the past three years flashed before him - the accusations, the fights...It was too much. He didn’t want to relive that in front of his dad. He couldn’t. He glanced at Sebastian for help.

Sebastian took the hint and swallowed the bad taste that had formed in his mouth - even with all his nerves about meeting Kurt’s parents, he had never expected it to go like this.

He looked back to Burt and Carole and started to speak.

"The night that I got this," Sebastian said, pointing to the bruise on his face. "Was Kurt’s first night back at Satire after his performance as Wonka."

"Satire is-" Burt interrupted.

"The bar that we work in," Sebastian replied. "It’s one of many LGBTQ friendly bars in the area and is mainly catered towards men."

Burt nodded and looked like he wanted to interrupt more, but a stern look from his wife made him sit back and wait.

"Our manager had been trying to think of a way to bring in more customers and between us, we came up with the idea of combining the fact that we can both sing and add that to the flairtending that we already did."

"What is that flairtending when it’s at home?" Burt asked gruffly.
"We do tricks with the bottles and cocktail shakers," Kurt added in. He was glad his dad seemed to be giving them the chance to talk, but he wished he’d stop interrupting.

"What, like in that Tom Cruise movie?"

Kurt nodded. "Only for the new show, we did it to the beat of a song and sang live."

Burt was visibly impressed.

"Oh my god, I love that movie," Carole whispered admiringly, for a moment forgetting the situation they were in.

"That performance was the first one we’ve done, and it was a hit," Sebastian continued. "Joe, our manager, said that it was the most successful night the bar has had in over a year, and we made around $900 in tips." Sebastian smiled at Kurt. "It was all Kurt’s choreography. Your son is very talented, Mr Hummel."

Carole smiled at him and Burt coughed.

"Blaine was in the audience that night, and he saw the performance." Sebastian paused before speaking again, visions of that night flashing behind his eyes. Kurt wrapped an arm around his boyfriend and shuffled closer.

"He was furious about it." Sebastian said, "acting like what we’d been doing was a personal insult to him, despite having been broken up with Kurt for over six months…” He couldn’t keep the frustration and anger off his face as he thought back to it.

"He practically dragged Kurt from behind the bar and into the staff room. I tried to follow but Marc and Joe wouldn’t let me…” He leant into Kurt’s embrace, the contact helping to calm his emotions. "But I got there in time to see Kurt shut Blaine down. He was so brave and amazing..."

"So Kurt broke Blaine’s nose?

"Dad, please, just let us tell it at our pace," Kurt said exasperatedly. "And stop jumping to conclusions."

Burt huffed in annoyance but slumped back in his chair and allowed Sebastian to continue.

"Kurt told him they were over, and he needed to calm down. Blaine wouldn’t listen and he went for Kurt. I pushed him back, I swear that’s all I did...I’m not a violent person, but I wouldn’t let him hurt Kurt."

Before his dad could interrupt again, Kurt added: "Blaine threw the first punch. He got one swing at Bas, and would have done more if I hadn’t stepped in between them. And that-” he paused, trying to squash the nausea that arose when he thought about it, "just made him angrier. He came for me instead."

Carole stared at him, like she was trying to use xray vision to scan his body for bruises under his clothes.

"Sebastian stopped him and broke his nose in the process. Then we called security and they threw him out," Kurt finished, trying to feel nothing.

Burt was still looking incredulous. "I don't understand," he said. "The things he told me about you...Blaine said he had stopped Sebastian from hurting you. And now you say-"
"I am telling the truth, dad. If Bas hadn't stepped in, Blaine might have broken my nose. Or worse."
Kurt's voice was neutral. "Either you believe Blaine, or us."

Burt took off his cap and rubbed his head. "So maybe he misinterpreted your...performance, and got upset, jealous. I'm not saying it's right, Kurt." Burt hurried to say, "but...all of this...Cheating, hitting you, telling us lies...You've been together since high school! I don't understand where this is coming from. He was always so charming and polite. I just have a hard time believing how he would have changed so much in New York. I mean, did he ever do something like that here?"

Kurt breathed in sharply. In the silence that followed, his lack of denial was perfectly audible.

A tear rolled down Carole's cheek, and she pressed down a sob with her hand. With her other, she sought out Burt's. Burt was about to say something, when Kurt started to speak.

"There were...signs. He always had a temper. When he had just transferred to McKinley, he picked a fight with Finn, and later with Sam. I...figured he just needed time to get settled in."

Kurt withdrew his arm from around Sebastian and rested both hands in his lap, looked down on them as he continued. It was time to tell the whole story - and not just to Burt and Carole.

"Around the time we did Westside Story, Blaine had met...someone. A boy. He got us fake IDs to get into a gay bar. I knew Blaine liked him, so I didn't want them to go alone. They both got pretty drunk. I was gonna drive home."

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly, deliberately avoiding looking at Sebastian. He wasn't sure if he could go on if he looked into his eyes now. But he needed his dad to know, to confront him with the truth and make him see.

"Blaine pulled me into the back seat of his car. He wanted us to have sex."
Burt started, but Kurt pushed on, knowing that if he stopped now he would never have the courage to try again.

"I told him I did not want to lose my virginity in a car on a parking lot. Blaine...didn't care, and started to undress me. His hands were so cold." Kurt's breath caught for a moment. "I told him no. Several times. I yelled at him to let go of me."

Carole was hiding her face in her hands now, turning towards Burt's shoulder. He sat stone faced, listening to the story unfold in horror.

"I managed to open the door and I got out. Blaine was angry, he said...a lot of things. Then he left me there in the parking lot by myself."
Kurt took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Then he continued, his voice soft in the quiet living room.

"I didn't want him to break up with me, so the next day I apologised for not..." He swallowed. "...being spontaneous."

Kurt shook his head softly. If he had known what he did now, he would have never done any of that. He pushed on. "Blaine accepted my apology and promised he'd wait until I was ready. But I'd seen him text...this boy...all week and I knew that if we didn't - If I didn't give him what he wanted," he corrected himself, "I was afraid he'd leave me. So I slept with him."

He finally looked up at Sebastian.
Sebastian stared at Kurt and felt the colour drain from his face. He appreciated the fact that Kurt omitted his name from the story; Burt didn’t need any more ammo against him. But Kurt’s words made his blood run cold.

Kurt must have felt so helpless in that moment. Sebastian hated that someone had touched Kurt against his will...and that afterwards, Kurt had felt forced to give Blaine what he wanted anyway...because of him.

He opened his mouth to say something but Burt cut him off.

"Kurt, I don't understand. We talked about this..."

"I know," Kurt whispered in defeat, lowering his head. "I know, but I - I did love him," he confessed. "I knew it would happen sooner or later and it was...okay. I wanted to do it. He didn't hurt me." He glanced at Sebastian from under his eyelashes, hoping that what he had told him about his first time would stay between them.

Sebastian wrapped his arm around his boyfriend’s waist. Kurt leaned into the touch and closed his eyes.

Burt noticed the gesture but didn’t comment. He wished he could hug his son too, but after all the things that had passed between them, he wasn’t sure he’d ever be allowed to do that again.

"So...what happened after that? I mean...was there anything else? If it's as bad as he..." Burt nodded towards Sebastian, "says it is..."

Kurt opened his eyes and shrugged uncomfortably, forcing himself to de-compartmentalize and re-examine the things he had buried deep in order to survive. How much more proof did his father need to be on his side? Kurt knew what Blaine did was bad, but suddenly he was wondering if it was bad enough to warrant the labels they were putting on it.

"I think your dad just wants to make sure he understands the scope of it, Kurt," Carole said softly, her voice a little hoarse. "We believe you."

Burt looked at her, then back at his son. He believed Kurt. He was still undecided about the new guy. What did he get out of all this, and who exactly had given him that expensive car? To confirm Carole's words, he nodded.

Kurt bit his lip.

"A couple of months later, he broke up with me for texting another boy. It was nothing, but he wouldn't take me back until I had apologized publicly. I did, because it felt like...I had nothing, if I didn't have him." He smiled a brief, mirthless smile at the memory of the song he had sung. It faded as soon as he continued. "The threat of us breaking up was always there, looming over me. Blaine knew how terrified I was of losing him, and used it to his advantage, in every way he could think of."

Kurt tried to think of examples that his father would understand. He doubted it would illustrate his case to say how he had run their household by himself, as he had done that at home too.

“Blaine said he needed space to do... guy stuff. Without me. So once a week, I’d leave for the night and Blaine would spend time with Sam, playing games and watching films. I didn’t like it, but Sam thought I was okay with that, because Blaine had lied to him too. After a while, it became twice a week...and then, just whenever they felt like it. In summer, they went to LA together. I found out
later that it was there that Blaine cheated on me again.”

“With Sam?” Burt asked, looking confused. “I thought that he wasn’t gay.”

Kurt shook his head. “No, with a friend of Cooper’s, apparently. Sam was the one who told me about it...eventually. Initially, Blaine had told Sam I had given him permission to see other people.”

He left Sam’s newly redefined sexuality out of it for now, as that was Sam’s business.

Burt sighed.

"Kurt..." he started. "Why...why did you never say anything? If things were that bad, why did you keep quiet?” He shook his head. "Why the hell did you agree to marry him?"

Suddenly, Kurt couldn't take it anymore. He rose from his seat, his eyes blazing with anger. He would not sit there and be made responsible for this. Not again - and not by his dad.

"Would you have believed me if I had? You didn't even believe me just now! You hardly let Sebastian explain - the man I love and I choose to be with - because my ex fiancé told you your own son is a prostitute. And you believed him."

He threw up his hands. "Why did I agree to marry Blaine? You tell me, dad. You drove me there. Talking about mom. Making me feel like this was my last chance.”

Kurt pressed his lips to a thin line as he looked down on his dad. He folded his arms across his chest. "For as long as I can remember, I have been told, implicitly or explicitly, that the chances for someone like me to ever find anyone were slim. I had to watch everyone around me hook up while I sat alone! I wasn’t allowed to show my interest in anyone for fear of being predatory. I had to sit and wait, until someone finally showed interest in me, and then I had to work to keep him interested.

You, and everyone else pushed me into accepting him," he said bitterly. "And no one bothered to ask me why we were broken up in the first place."

Making one final grasp for his father’s understanding, he quietly added: "If you really felt I looked like you were 'driving me to my execution’...how come you didn’t ask me why?"

Sebastian stood up and took Kurt’s hand, glaring at Burt. If he didn’t understand now...Sebastian didn’t know what else would make him.

Kurt’s words cut through Burt’s heart.

"Kurt I..." he stammered. "I...I’m sorry son. I’m so...so sorry." His face crumpled.

"You...you gotta understand kid. From the minute you were born, all I ever wanted was for you to be happy. And when you...well, I knew you were different and that terrified me because, Lima, you know, it’s not a very open place and god, I never wanted you to be alone. And with all the crap you went through in school...it almost killed me."

He paused.

Kurt breathed shallowly, afraid he might throw up if he filled his lungs. He knew he had given his dad a heart attack; he didn’t need reminding.

"And then this kid comes along who’s charming and handsome and can sing and...it was like someone had answered my prayers. And I was so happy that you had found someone that it eased
"my fears," Burt continued. He shook his head.

"So when you guys were on the rocks I thought, 'Kurt can’t be alone again’. I’d just gotten my tests back, and I knew it was gonna be alright, but it was cancer and you know how unpredictable that is-" He broke off for a moment and glanced at Carole. She was blinking back tears.

"I just wanted you to have someone in case I…in case my time to care for you was cut short," Burt said apologetically. "And then Blaine came around and he said it was nothing. That New York had been so overwhelming that you’d just neglected him a little and you’d had a spat about it. I wanted to help you fix it. That’s why I took him with me. He’d made you happy once, so I thought he’d do it again. But son…if I’d have known…I’d have murdered that kid where he stood. I swear to god, if I’d known, I’d have never let him near you again."

Kurt acknowledged his father’s words with a small nod. He was trembling. He let go of Sebastian’s hand to hug his own arms. Sebastian wrapped his arm around Kurt and Kurt placed one hand over his, leaning into his boyfriend’s warmth.

Burt stood up and walked towards Kurt.

"You gotta believe me, Kurt. I’m so sorry."

Kurt clenched his jaws, feeling powered out and yet pumped full of adrenaline still - and awful at seeing how much he had hurt his dad. Tears started running down his cheeks without him acknowledging it.

"I'm sorry too, dad," he whispered, holding on to Sebastian's hand like a lifeline. "It took me a long time to see what he was like, too. And then even longer to admit it to myself. I didn't want to be like that-" He wiped at his cheeks. "But Sebastian helped me realise that I didn't have to accept it."

"Without any hidden agenda," Kurt continued, his voice growing stronger now, "he made me see I was settling for less than I deserved. He gave me the strength I needed to break it off for good."

"No, son," Burt said, a little choked up. "No offense," he added towards Sebastian, "but you've always had that strength right here." He tapped at Kurt's chest.

"And I am proud of you for doing what you did." He included Sebastian in his gaze. "But I'm still glad there was someone around who saw what was going on when we all couldn't, and who looked out for you. Thank you for looking after my son."

"He looks after me too," Sebastian corrected him gently. He knew what Burt was going for, but Kurt deserved more than to have his custody be transferred from father to lover. "We take care of each other."

"We do," Kurt agreed. "And I hope you will give him a chance, dad. Because," he wrapped his arm around Sebastian so they were holding each other, "we're pretty much a package deal now."

Sebastian squeezed Kurt’s side at his words and pressed his forehead into his boyfriend’s shoulder. He suddenly felt exhausted.

Burt looked at the young man standing next to his son and felt his heart soften.

He held his hand out to Sebastian. "I'm sorry I haven’t been very welcoming," he said.

Sebastian lifted his head from Kurt’s shoulder and shook Burt’s hand firmly.
"Thank you sir," he said quietly.
"Cut the sir crap, kid...it’s Burt."

Sebastian smiled at him and nodded.

Carole stood up as well and took Burt’s hand.

"Are either of you hungry? There’s some left-over meatloaf in the fridge."

Sebastian looked at Kurt, who shook his head. He just wanted to retreat to his room, away from his dad’s eyes, and go over the evening without having to guard his facial expressions. Sebastian gave him a reassuring nod.

"No thanks Mrs H...Carole," he said with a smile. "We stopped on the way down. But we might call it a night if that’s okay...it’s been a long day."

"Of course, sweetheart." She pressed her free hand to Sebastian’s cheek and then to Kurt’s.

After a round of good nights, Kurt and Sebastian walked back into the hallway, grabbed their bags and headed upstairs to Kurt’s old room.

Sebastian shut the door behind them and closed his eyes, his hand still resting against the painted wood. He let out a shaky breath and set his suitcase down before turning to face Kurt.

"Are you okay?" he asked quietly. Stupid question, Smythe, he thought to himself. Of course he’s not okay, neither of you are.

Kurt shrugged and pressed his lips together in a thin smile. "It was not how I’d envisioned telling them…but maybe it was the only way to get them to understand."

He paused. "I'm sorry you had to find out like this."

Sebastian bit his lip and nodded. The realisation that it really all had been his fault, swept over him like a bucket of ice. "I’m sorry too Kurt," he whispered. He let out a shaky breath and looked at Kurt. All the emotions that had built over the last hour finally took hold and he felt tears prickle in his eyes.

"You should h-hate me," he choked out through a sob.

Kurt felt his heart break. "Oh no, Sebastian, no, no, no," he let out, pulling his boyfriend into his arms and holding him tightly. He planted kisses in his hair, repeating his words over and over. He rocked him softly. His own tears started flowing again too.

The bitter truth was that he had hated Sebastian. Had blamed him for all of it, for years. But it had been so very misplaced.

Sebastian closed his eyes and melted into Kurt’s embrace, wrapping his arms around Kurt and clutching him like a lifeline. He hated himself for breaking, for seeking out the comfort of his boyfriend when it should be him comforting Kurt. Kurt had just laid is soul bare for the world to see, shared his deepest secrets with his parents - and here Sebastian was like a crumbling fool.

"Listen to me," Kurt said, letting go a little so he could look Sebastian in the eyes. "It wasn't your fault." He needed Sebastian to believe him, despite his own guilt. "Blaine would have done what he did anyway. I know that now. If it hadn't been you, it would have been someone else."
Sebastian bit his lip and looked back at Kurt. Tears still ran down his cheeks but he nodded a little, deep down he knew Kurt was right - even if it didn’t feel like it.

Kurt swallowed thickly. "I should have seen what he was like back then and broken it off. But it was easier to think it was you, and the opportunities you offered that tempted him-" Kurt looked at Sebastian sadly. "I blamed you, and then I blamed myself, and all that time the guilt lay with him. If he had really loved me, no amount of flirting or promises should have made him treat me like that."

Sebastian nodded and pressed his forehead against Kurt’s. He closed his eyes. He needed to take them back to the present and away from old pain. "Blaine never knew how good he had it, but I do...You are the one, Kurt," he said passionately, holding him close. "Other opportunities can go to hell. I'll never want anyone else, no matter what they'll offer."

"Me neither," Kurt said softly. "You showed me what love can be like." To offer the both of them a way out of their emotions, he added jokingly: "you’ve ruined me for anyone else now." He grinned. It was true. There was no one like Sebastian. Anyone else would be a downgrade.

Sebastian grinned through his tears and kissed him. "Good," he whispered. "Because you’re mine Kurt Hummel, all mine."
Sebastian awoke first on Saturday morning. The white blinds pulled down over the windows dimmed the sunlight streaming through so the room was bathed in a soft pale glow. He rolled over onto his side and took in the beautiful body lying next to him. Kurt was sprawled out on his front, arms stretched up above his head hugging the pillow. He was still blissfully asleep.

Sebastian raised a hand and gently swept the hair away from Kurt’s face. He thought about waking Kurt up in what had become their usual way, but then his thoughts drifted to the night before and he decided against it. Despite knowing Kurt liked having sex with him, after hearing how he was almost raped, Sebastian did not want to initiate anything while Kurt was unconscious. So instead, he leant forward, kissed Kurt’s shoulder and silently climbed out of bed.

Kurt felt the mattress dip and Sebastian get up. He moaned softly, burrowing his head further into the pillow. It felt like they had only gone to sleep five minutes ago. He felt exhausted. He’d just let Sebastian shower first, and would get up soon. It was still early. Kurt didn’t want to deal with being in Ohio yet. Although they’d ended their talk of the night before in a good place, with apologies all around, forcibly dragging everything up and laying his hurts bare for all to see had cost a lot of energy, and he needed more time. Just a little longer…Kurt turned around and drifted back in to sleep.

Still in his pyjamas - which consisted of a pair of boxers and a white t-shirt - Sebastian quietly left the room, stopping only to pick up his phone and headphones on the way.

He padded softly through the empty house and made his way downstairs into the kitchen. It took him a minute or two to look around and find the items that he needed and then, being mindful to not wake up the rest of the house, he plugged in his headphones and pressed play on his cooking playlist. An upbeat song started playing and he grinned, closing his eyes for a moment as his body started to move and he set to work on making the batter for crêpes.

Twenty minutes later, Kurt slowly woke up. "Mmmm...Bas?” he mumbled, splaying his arms out on either side in hopes of finding the warm body of his lover to cuddle up against. Not finding anyone, he slowly began to remember Sebastian getting up earlier. He rubbed his hands over his face. Ugh, getting up.
Kurt glanced at the clock and sighed. He didn’t know what time his dad usually woke up now, but he wanted to be there when he did, just in case he had more to say to Sebastian.

Kurt made himself sit up and stretched, rolling his shoulders. He saw that Sebastian’s clothes were still draped over the chair by the dresser. Maybe he had gone downstairs to make a coffee first; they often did that at weekends. Suddenly thirsty for a morning brew and a kiss, he swung his legs out of bed and went to get his bathrobe.

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Sebastian was on a roll. He’d made the batter and left it to sit while he sliced fruit and whipped up some cream. He had also made a pot of coffee and had just finished setting the table when one of his favourite songs came on.

He grinned and straightened up, pretending to air guitar for a moment.

"Let’s go girls..." he sang out loud, twirling back to the kitchen counter where he grabbed a frying pan and poured some oil into it before turning up the heat underneath.

He grabbed a ladle and held it up to his mouth as the first verse started.

"I'm going out tonight, I'm feeling alright, I'm gonna let it all hang out."

He sang into his ladle, swirling his hips and legs in a ‘twist’.

"Gonna make some noise, really raise my voice, yeah I wanna scream and shout!"

He scooped up a ladle full of batter and poured it into the now bubbling oil. He picked up the pan and twisted it around covering the base in a thin layer of batter. It would have been easier with a spreader ladle, but beggars couldn’t be choosers.

He thrust his hips forward to the beat and threw his head back.

"Uh...No inhibitions, make no conditions, get a little outta line. I ain’t gonna act politically correct, I only wanna have a good time."

He shuffled the pan a little to keep the crêpe from sticking, making a mental note to buy a few decent crêpe-making tools for Carole.

"The best thing about being a woman, is her prerogative to have a little fun!"

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Burt woke up from a noise downstairs. Was someone singing? He breathed in deeply and grinned. Singing and cooking. It reminded him of the times Kurt still lived at home.

Beside him, Carole pushed her eye mask up to her forehead.

"...is that Kurt?" she asked, groggy with sleep.

Burt concentrated on the sound. "No, I think it's Sebastian," he mumbled.

Carole listened for a moment longer and then smiled. "I like them together," she said softly. "I think Sebastian’s good for him."

"Hmmm," Burt let out. He knew that technically, he knew nothing about the boy - everything Blaine
had told him had clearly been a lie - but he had to admit that they did look to be very in tune with each other. Sebastian seemed less impulsive, less dominant than Blaine - which after Kurt’s admissions from last night was definitely a good thing. Maybe, Burt mused, it would be good for Kurt to have a relationship where he called the shots.


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Sebastian flicked his wrist and the thin pancake few into the air, flipping over. He spun around while he sang and caught it expertly in the pan, returning it to the heat.

"Oh oh oh, go totally crazy, forget I’m a lady!" He sang into his ladle as he added the crêpe to a small stack of them on a plate next to him.

"Man’s shirt, short skirt." He added more batter, swaying his hips from side to side and tapping his feet to the beat of the song.

"Oh oh oh, really go wild yeah, do it in style yeah." He pulled out his t-shirt and shrugged his shoulder.

"Oh oh oh, get in the action, feel the attraction, colour my hair, do what I dare." He flipped the crêpe up and caught it again.

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Burt and Carole put on dressing gowns and got ready to go downstairs, meeting Kurt in the hallway upstairs.

"Good morning," Kurt said, offering them a sleepy smile. "I think I smell crêpes."

"Morning Kurt," Burt replied, secretly a little relieved that Kurt didn’t seem to be angry at him anymore. "I already figured." He tapped his nose. "Let’s go down and see if they are any good."

"Oh, they are," Kurt assured him. "But feel free not to like them so there’ll be more for me."

"Ha! You wish!"

Carole ignored both her Hummels doing their thing, because she had recognised the song Sebastian was singing. She grinned. She had never met a man who would sing "I feel like a woman" with such enthusiasm.

Burt, Carole and Kurt arrived downstairs as Sebastian’s back was turned, and it was clear from his singing that he had no idea he was being watched.

His audience of three stared; Carole at the unexpected view of Sebastian’s state of undress in her kitchen, Kurt at the way he was swinging his hips, and Burt...he was mostly just confused about what Sebastian was singing.

"I wanna be free, yeah, feel the way I feel!" Sebastian sang loudly, a few specks of batter flying from the ladle. "Man!" He crossed his ankles for a turn on the beat.

"I feel like a..."

As Sebastian turned he opened his eyes and saw all three Hummels standing in the doorway.
The song continued to blare out into his ears but he pressed the pause button on the cable and pulled the buds from his ears.

"Umm...morning," he said, grinning shyly, his cheeks ringing red from embarrassment. "I thought I’d make you breakfast..."

"Good morning!" Carole said happily. "That was very nice of you. It smells delicious!"

"It looks delicious, too," Kurt added, biting his lower lip and giving Sebastian a slow once-over. If he had walked in on Sebastian cooking like that in New York, the breakfast would have been hopelessly burned by the time Kurt’d be done with him.

He heard his father inhale sharply next to him, but to Burt’s credit, he said nothing. For the sake of peace, Kurt banished all thoughts of bending Sebastian over the kitchen counter to the back of his mind for later and pretended not to have noticed his dad’s discomfort.

"I’ll go set the table, then," Burt offered. He was still a little confused about the song, but the crêpes were getting cold and he was hungry. Carole went to help him.

Kurt stepped up to his boyfriend, and noticed several tiny white specks on his face among his usual birthmarks. There were some on his glasses as well.

"You have some..." Kurt gestured at his own face. "Here, I’ll help you-" He wet his finger and reached for Sebastian’s face.

Sebastian closed his eyes and let Kurt wipe his face. From the other room they heard Burt mumble; "Of course he’s already set the table..." The rest of Burt’s sentence cut off and Sebastian opened his eyes to smile at Kurt.

"Good morning," he said dipping his head to kiss Kurt gently. "How are you this morning?"

"I’m okay, I guess," Kurt replied. "I slept well. I’m glad it’s all out in the open now." He looked around the kitchen. "This is a nice surprise. And a smart move, too. My dad can’t resist good food." He offered Sebastian a grin.

He waited until Sebastian had taken out the last crêpe and then took up the bowls of fruit and cream to carry them to the table.

"Behold the best crêpes you’ve ever had!" he announced theatrically, entering the dining room.

"I never got why something that smells so good is pronounced crap," Burt mused.

"Thank you, Finn 2.0," Kurt said, "but that’s probably because it’s not. It’s pronounced crêpes."

Sebastian smirked and set the plate down on the table.

"Don’t worry Burt, they taste good no matter how you pronounce it."

He allowed everyone else to take one of the light pancakes for themselves before helping himself.

"So what’s the best combination?" Burt asked looking at the multitude of options on the table.

"It really doesn’t matter." Sebastian said honestly. "But personally I take some banana." He did just that and laid them down the centre of his crepe. "Then take some whipped cream." He placed that down the middle. "And then chocolate sauce." He drizzled the fruit and cream mix with the
chocolate syrup. "Then fold it all up, add more cream to side and cover it in more chocolate."

Kurt closed his eyes briefly and held himself back. His dad should not be eating stuff like that, not with his heart. And neither should Sebastian, or any of them, really. But it was such a nice change from the night before, to be sitting in a relaxed environment, and Sebastian had gone through such trouble making them...Kurt knew he couldn't spoil it now.

"They are also very good with cinnamon and plain applesauce," he tried as a hint, but left it at that. He no longer lived at home, and his dad was married. He couldn't police his dad's food intake anymore.

He took a bite off his, with strawberries and powdered sugar, and sighed blissfully. He had never been in France, but somehow it was like a little taste of it.

"They are delicious, Bas," he said. Carole nodded with her mouth full.

"Yeah, I have to say, they are very good," Burt said, helping himself to another one. "You may keep this boyfriend and bring him home often."

"Gee, thanks, dad," Kurt replied drily, squeezing Sebastian's knee under the table. "Maybe you can come up and visit us too though."

"We’d love that, Kurt," Carole said, smiling.

"So, Kurt mentioned you’re at NYU?" Burt asked, looking at Sebastian.

Sebastian looked up from his breakfast at Burt and nodded.

"Yes, sir." He said slightly nervous. "I’m double majoring in English Literature and History."

Burt nodded, impressed. "Wow. So what do you wanna do with that?"

Kurt smiled into his coffee mug. "This is the part where he asks for your plans of the future to see if you can afford me," he teased.

"Hey," Burt said, frowning. "That’s not what I-"

"Just joking, dad," Kurt replied. "Everyone knows I’ll be supporting this entire family once my first Tony is in." He winked at Sebastian.

Sebastian smirked at Kurt. "Does that make me your trophy wife?"

Kurt blew him a kiss over the table.

Carole chuckled, looking at them with little hearts in her eyes.

Burt cleared his throat, reminding Sebastian that he’d asked a question.

"Um..." Sebastian said coughing. "I’m actually not too sure yet, having a degree in each of those subjects opens a lot of doors. I’d like to travel and visit some of the places I have only read about so far. I quite like the ancient worlds so it’d be great to experience them a bit and write as I go. But I know writing and traveling aren’t very financially stable career paths unless I get lucky!" he added hastily. "So I’ll probably do a masters as well and teach...if I could get a job at a college teaching either English or History, that’d be good. I don’t think I could teach high school...or the little ones. But people who want to learn...for sure."
He blushed a little, realising he’d been rambling. "But um yeah...I’ve got a lot of options."

Carole was smiling at him fondly and looked as if her heart was about to burst out of her chest. It made Sebastian blush even more. He hurried to eat some of his crêpe.

Burt surveyed the young man sat at his breakfast table. He was intelligent, polite and well-spoken. And he clearly loved Kurt.

But Burt couldn’t help but feel a bit wary. He’d liked Blaine too, and look how all that turned out.

"Well you seem to have a sensible head on your shoulders...and it’s good to keep your options open. Not everyone knows what they wanna do with their life right away and that’s okay."

Sebastian smiled at him. He already had one definite plan for the future, but now might not be the time to talk about that.

"And what about you, Kurt...how’s life at NYADA?" Carole asked.

Kurt, who’d been listening to Sebastian with a dreamy look on his face, looked a little startled as his stepmom suddenly addressed him. He took a sip of his coffee and straightened in his seat.

"Well, the summer showcases are coming up," Kurt replied. "I have choreographies and songs to rehearse, alone and in groups. I have some theoretical exams as well, musical theory and screenwriting - but when I’m not working, I’m mostly just at the NYADA sports center training at the moment." He looked at his dad. "In the week between exams ending and summer break starting, the showcases are performed to audiences, teachers, critics. It’s a networking opportunity as well."

He sighed. "I can’t wait for it to all be over so I can eat again and get fat." He winked at Sebastian.

"Honestly, Kurt, you’re not-!" Carole started to protest, but Kurt cut her off.

“Just kidding, Carole. I can’t afford to get fat. I work at Vogue, you know,” he added, winking at her.

She shook her head. She knew he was only joking, but there was usually a sliver of truth in every jest. He was the only one of them who’d only had one crêpe. To get herself out of mom-worry-mode, she asked: “Is that still going well, too?"

"Oh yes,” Kurt replied eagerly. “I’m finally getting paid for my work at Vogue now! Isabelle had a fit when she thought I was leaving for the ‘big stage’ so she and Chase bullied legal into giving me a contract. I am now officially her assistant - but only part time. I love working at the bar too much to give it up. The money is better too."

"Yeah," Burt cut in. "900 dollars in one night huh? That seems...a lot."

"Well, we’re just that good,” Kurt said, smiling at Sebastian. "Sebastian taught me everything. We trained after hours. I had to learn a lot of recipes too...Maybe we can show you a few tricks later."

"I’m sure we can arrange something." Sebastian replied with a smile.
Burt nodded thoughtfully. "While I’m pleased you earn a lot at the bar...You boys make sure you log it all on your tax forms, you hear me? The last thing you need at the end of the year is a massive tax bill because you’ve not declared."

"We do, sir." Sebastian assured him. "Though we don’t earn that much every night. It’s only been one performance so far and is likely to only be a monthly thing. Plus, any tips we make get shared out between all the staff."

"Burt," Carole said placing a hand on his arm. "I think the boys can handle themselves."

"I’m not saying they can’t." Burt replied. "Just doing my parental duty...I’m sure Sebastian’s parents do the same."

Sebastian froze and glanced at Kurt.

Kurt took Sebastian’s hand and squeezed it. He wasn’t sure how much Sebastian was willing to share, so he simply said: "Sebastian and his parents are...not very close. He’s lived on his own for a while now."

He looked at Sebastian, hoping it was okay.

"Oh honey, I’m sorry," Carole offered immediately.

"Me too," Burt added gruffly. "Sometimes families have a hard time getting along." He carefully avoided Kurt’s eyes, clearly thinking about the previous night.

"Maybe you’ll work it out. I’m sure they’d be proud of you if they saw you now," Carole said.

Sebastian chuckled darkly. "I doubt it...My mom died when I was two and my dad decided he’d rather become a big shot attorney than take care of his son, so I was raised by my grandparents...who kicked me out when they found out I was gay."

He shrugged, not wanting to make a big deal out of it.

"I don’t need them," he added bluntly. He looked at Kurt and softened his gaze. "I have a new family; Kurt, my friends from NYU and Marc and Paul...they accept me for who I am."

"Who are Marc and Paul?" Burt asked.

"Marc works at the club with us. He took me under his wing when I was starting out; taught me how to tend bar and do flairs. Paul is his husband. They have this amazing apartment in Manhattan, with an indoor pool and two dogs." As he started talking about them, his smile grew. "I didn’t know anyone in the city when I moved here, and when they found out I had no one, they kinda unofficially adopted me," Sebastian said, grinning at the thought.

"They’re the ones who bought him the car, dad," Kurt added. "It was for his twenty-first."

Burt raised his eyebrows. "That’s a very generous gift..."

"Paul is a surgeon," Sebastian explained at the look on Burt’s face. "I think he had the idea to buy a more sensible car, but Marc talked him round...I told them not to spend that much money on me, I mean......I’m not worth it." He switched to French for the last few words.

‘Hey now,’ Kurt replied. ‘We’ve talked about this. You are worth it.’

‘I meant the money...but-’
"You speak French?" Carole asked, looking impressed.

"Um, yes," Sebastian said shyly, switching back to English as he realised what he’d just done. It had become so natural to talk to Kurt in French he didn’t always notice he was doing it. "I lived there for the best part of fourteen years. I kinda picked it up."

"Fourteen years, huh?" Burt said thoughtfully, and Kurt could tell he was trying to figure out the maths in his head.

"Technically I am American," Sebastian added. "I have an American passport. But I moved to Paris with my grandparents when I was two and a half."

Kurt saw the moment it hit his dad.

"You were sixteenth when-" Burt cut himself off, looking shocked. He glanced at Kurt with wide eyes. Kurt nodded almost imperceptibly, and Burt ducked his head.

Carole sighed softly. Kurt could tell she was just about ready to also adopt his boyfriend. His dad was looking a mixture of anger, sadness and guilt - but Kurt knew it was for Sebastian, not directed at him.

"Wow. So, I guess your French is really good then," Burt said, breaking the silence and offering everyone a way out of their gloomy thoughts. "Well, I can see why that’s right up Kurt’s street. He started watching the French channels when he was ten. Said their films had more depth. Huh."

Kurt smiled softly and looked down on his plate, feeling a little second-hand embarrassment for his snooty younger self.

"And then, in high school, whenever we’d get into a fight-"

Kurt’s head snapped up. "Dad, please!" He tried to save face, but to no avail.

"No, Kurt, I’m your father, it is my job to embarrass you in front of your boyfriend," Burt said relentlessly. "When we got into fights, he’d start talking to me in French, which didn’t bother me because I couldn’t understand a single word anyway-"

"Oh, it bothered you!" Kurt protested, "that’s why I did it."

"I only pretended it bothered me-"

Carole looked at the both of them like they were the most adorable puppies she’d ever seen.

"You may see where Kurt gets his stubborn streak," she told Sebastian confidently.

"Without a doubt!" Sebastian agreed. On the surface, they looked nothing like each other, but once you got them talking, the resemblance was uncanny. He chuckled. It was very easy to imagine Kurt as a teenager, pulling one of his epic bitch faces Sebastian remembered only too well, and firing away at his dad in French. Sebastian loved him for it.

"Well," Carole said softly. "It sounds like you boys have a pretty good life in New York now…"

"We do," Kurt said, looking at Sebastian. "It’s a great group, we all look after each other."

"It’s how this works." Sebastian said softly. He smiled and took Kurt's hand, curling their fingers together.
Carole and Burt looked at each other and smiled. Now that they had had time to observe their son and his new boyfriend together, it was clear that everything the boys had told them the previous night was true.

It pained Carole to know that neither of them had had it easy. They had both suffered and had the scars to prove it. But it eased her mind to know that they had found happiness in amongst that.

Looking at the two of them now, she knew in her heart that she would do everything in her power to protect that happiness.

"Sebastian," she said kindly. "Kurt mentioned that you went to Dalton...did you know each other back then?"

Sebastian raised his eyebrows at Kurt and half smiled.

"Our paths crossed a few times, but we didn’t really get to know each other until we met in New York."

"He transferred after Blaine had come to McKinley," Kurt added, knowing that the mention of his ex was probably enough to stop further enquiry about that period. "He was a Warbler too, though. Captain, and a good one. New Directions had a hard time competing against them."

He considered how to continue. "It was by coincidence that we met again. I went for a drink and he was working. We got to talking...Bas was showing off a lot -" Kurt teased, "I was very impressed, of course."

Sebastian nodded. "Couldn’t get rid of him after that," he said with a grin and a wink at Kurt.

"That’s true. He was irrististible," Kurt joked, but he let his smile fall a little after that. "Though for a long time we were just friends because I was still with Blaine..." He pressed his lips together. "Sebastian had to listen to me complain about Blaine a lot. He and his friends - our friends - kept telling me I deserved better, but it took me a while to believe that too."

"Well," Burt said gruffly, uncomfortable with showing too much emotion. "I gotta say thank you, Sebastian...you came into Kurt's life at the right time."

Sebastian smiled shyly. "Thanks. I’m just glad he decided to come to Satire and give me a chance, despite me having been..." he hesitated. "On a different school choir," he finished.

Kurt smiled softly and squeezed his hand. "We put that behind us."

Sebastian nodded.

Burt looked at them, not sure why that would have been such a big thing for them. Maybe it was a bit like being on different football teams. He would understand not wanting to date a cheerleader from the other team.

"I gotta head off to the garage for a bit," he said to Carole. "Gotta check in and make sure it’s all running okay."

"Alright sweetheart, I’m meeting Lisa for lunch. What would you like for dinner tonight?"

"Actually," Sebastian said, cutting in awkwardly. "If it’s okay with you, we’d like to cook for you tonight." He looked at Kurt for confirmation.
Kurt looked up at Sebastian in surprise. "Yeah!" he quickly agreed. "Oh! We could do that...oriental pumpkin thing we tried the other night?" He turned to Carole. "It's delicious, and very lean." He subtly pointed at his dad with his eyes.

"I saw that," his father said, rolling his eyes a little at Sebastian. "You boys know how to cook steak, as well? I'm not much for that...lean stuff."

Sebastian chuckled.

"I'm sure we can rummage up a steak," he said, grinning at Burt. "...With lots of vegetables," he added to appease Kurt.

"I can live with that," Burt agreed.

Sebastian bounced in his chair a little, excited. "We can head to the store and get the stuff after we get dressed...Is there still a butchers in town?" he asked.

"A really good one, not far from the park," Carole chipped in. "Next to the thrift store."

"I know where that is," Kurt said happily. "I got my first Lagerfeld there. Almost for free! They had no idea."

Burt frowned as if he was thinking very hard. "Was that the shirt with those...suspender things at the collar?" He gestured at his chest.

Kurt's entire face brightened. "You remember that?" he asked, sounding awed.

Burt shrugged, a little embarrassed. "Well, it was all you could talk about for a week. I never understood why you were so crazy about it and then only wore it like, twice."

Kurt grinned. "I wore it for the school pictures, then sold it on ebay for fifty dollars. It went into my Doc Martens fund."

Burt shook his head, giving up. There were a few things about Kurt he would never understand.

Kurt and Sebastian spent the afternoon walking around Lima. It was strange how small it all seemed now. They got a few looks as they walked hand in hand, but in all, Kurt got the feeling most people just ignored them. Since Kurt had no intentions of renewing any old acquaintanceships, that suited him well.

They bought the ingredients for their meal, and after a short stop at the thrift store (which wasn't as exciting as Kurt remembered now that he had access to the New York vintage flea markets) they were back at Kurt's old home, putting everything away.

Carole came home shortly after them.

"Hey, did you boys have a good time?" she asked kindly. "Oh, that looks good," she added, looking at the vegetables in Kurt's hands.

Sebastian looked at the bunch of spring greens that Kurt was holding and smiled.

"It will be when we're done." He was setting up the herbs and spices on the counter to prepare the marinade. "Babe, do you have a-" He turned to ask Kurt and saw him already holding up the pestle and mortar.
He smiled and took it from him. "Thanks."

"God, you guys are adorable." Carole said with a smile. "I'll leave you to it." She left the room smiling.

Sebastian ground up the powered onion, garlic, oregano, black pepper, brown sugar and cumin in the pestle whilst Kurt laid out the steaks onto a couple of large plates.

Once the seasoning was ready Kurt covered all the steaks with it and sat them to rest covered on the side. They moved around the kitchen seamlessly together handing off needed items between them without the other having to ask.

Carole and Burt, who had gotten home shortly after his wife, watched the two of them work silently from the doorway.

The radio was on in the background and the two boys danced and sang together while they cooked.

"Boy when I'm wrong about something, I really am wrong," Burt mumbled to his wife.

He remembered seeing Blaine with Kurt in the kitchen a few times. It had generally resulted in Blaine getting bored, or annoying Kurt by eating as they cooked. Blaine also liked sitting on counter tops which had always irked him.

How had he ever thought that that kid was right for his son?

A familiar tune came on. Kurt smiled. This was one they'd used to time their pair throws, back at the bar when Kurt was still learning.

He picked up a bottle of olive oil, checked the cap, and tapped it twice on the counter to the rhythm of the song - their cue for 'incoming'.

He felt rather than saw Sebastian behind him, and knew it was going to work. He flipped it up, the bottle spinning perfectly in the air, and paid it no further heed. Sebastian would catch it. He heard Sebastian chuckle and unscrew the cap to pour some in the frying pan. He'd caught it alright.

Anticipating what he might need next, Kurt picked up a pepper mill and spun it around his wrist, waiting for Sebastian's cue. It came, and he passed it round his back, his fingertips briefly brushing Sebastian's in the exchange. Their eyes met. Kurt wished he could frame the look on Sebastian's face and keep it forever - he looked genuinely happy and in love, like there was no place he'd rather be than right there in a small kitchen in Ohio, cooking and singing.

Kurt nearly missed his next cue because of it, and he laughed as Sebastian passed the bottle of oil back underhand and it almost slipped from his fingers. He caught it in the last moment and held it up like a trophy.

Carole clapped, and Kurt dropped the bottle from his hand, shocked at finding out they'd had an audience.

Still focused on Kurt rather than their surprise audience, Sebastian saw the bottle fall and bent with an outstretched hand just in time to stop the bottle smashing on the floor.

"Well I say," Burt said impressed. "You got some quick hands there, Smythe."

Sebastian grinned at him. "Lots of practice."
"You play sport?"

"I used to play Lacrosse at school but not much anymore. But working five nights a week throwing and catching bottles keeps me in my game."

Burt nodded.

"How do you guys take your steak?" Sebastian asked, placing the steaks into frying pans.

They told him their preference and Carole took the cutlery from the drawer to lay the table.

Sebastian grabbed a bottle of red wine and poured a healthy measure into the sauce that was bubbling away in a pan.

As Burt and Carole moved into the dining room to set the table, Sebastian turned to Kurt and kissed him softly.

"Good catch," Kurt whispered against his lips. "But then I already knew that."

The sound of drops hissing on a hot surface made them break away and Kurt quickly removed a pan from the stove that had been boiling over. "A distraction as well, though," he added teasingly. "Maybe a little less flair and a bit more concentration for now, lest we burn the steaks."

They managed to finish the rest of the preparations without incidents, and finally, the four of them were seated at the table, a delicious smelling warm meal in front of them. Burt was eyeing the steaks hungrily, and Carole just looked overall pleased she hadn't had to cook.

"Bon appetit," Kurt said.

The meal went smoothly. Both Burt and Carole were impressed with the food and conversation flowed between them naturally.

It was as if the night before had never happened.

After dinner, they retired to the living room to watch a film. After listening to the boys talk about their job and watching them work together, Carole had been in the mood to see Cocktail. She happened to have a wide range of Tom Cruise films on dvd, and Cocktail was one of them.

Kurt sunk into the love seat, his legs stretched out. Sebastian smiled at him, and without thinking about it, settled himself down in Kurt’s lap.

Kurt wrapped his arms around Sebastian and they shuffled together to find a more comfortable position.

‘Okay?’ Sebastian asked in French.

‘Perfect,’ Kurt replied, kissing Sebastian’s shoulder.

Burt walked in carrying two bowls of popcorn. He started a little at the sight of Sebastian in Kurt’s lap but didn’t say anything. It didn’t make sense to him - the kid played sports, but he sung girl songs, sat in his boyfriend’s lap and referred to himself as a ‘trophy wife’ without so much as blinking. It didn’t add up.

Carole walked in after her husband and smiled at them indulgently. She noticed her husband staring at Sebastian and cleared her throat. Burt shook himself and handed one of the bowls over to Sebastian, who thanked him, and then he sat down on the other sofa and switched on the TV.
Kurt had noticed his dad’s reaction too, and his jaw tightened. He pulled Sebastian closer and nuzzled his face into the soft material of his boyfriend’s shirt. He was no longer holding back any affection just because his dad might feel uncomfortable. It wasn’t like his dad never hugged or kissed Carole in front of him.

Watching *Cocktail* was definitely funnier now that he had learned to flairtend. Kurt and Sebastian couldn’t help but keep a steady flow of comments up while watching, ranging from appreciative cheers to disparaging sneers.

"That is really *not that* hard," Kurt scoffed, as Tom Cruise got a massive applause for a simple throw. *With* spillage.

"Hmmm, you are so much better," Sebastian agreed, kissing the side of Kurt’s face.

Kurt felt a warm glow inside that had nothing to do with the wine they’d had with dinner.

"I am," he whispered, turning his head to kiss Sebastian’s lips.

Burt watched them from the corner of his eye and then forced himself to look back at the screen. Carole reached for his hand and squeezed it softly.

"You’d better not be falling asleep at NYADA, Kurt," Burt warned him at the scene where Tom Cruise’s character started failing in college. "I mean for what that school costs…"

"I’m not, dad," Kurt reassured him. "I schedule my shifts around classes and Vogue. Joe’s very cool about that."

Burt harrumphed but pressed him no further.

“And please don’t move to Jamaica,” Carole added softly. “I want you boys close.”

As the end credits started to play, Kurt asked Sebastian if it was okay if he could go up the their bathroom first, and Sebastian agreed. He got up from Kurt’s lap and Kurt said good night to his dad and Carole. Sebastian automatically started to clear away their drinks and Carole took care of the snack bowls.

"Uh, should I help?" Burt asked from his chair as they were almost finished, his eyes still half on the screen.

Carole shot Sebastian a meaningful look and rolled her eyes a little. "It’s ok, we got it," she said, which Burt took at face-value.

Sebastian smirked. He could tell Carole was not the type of woman to take too much crap from her man, but she clearly picked her battles. Since Sebastian didn’t mind helping, Burt got off easily this time.

Sebastian walked into Kurt’s room after brushing his teeth and smiled at his boyfriend who was laying on his stomach on the bed, his feet bent up in the air behind him.

"Hey," Sebastian said, shutting the door behind him. He loved Kurt at the end of the day, hair brushed out and messy, skin soft and smooth from his moisturiser and dressed in his comfy clothes, laid out like a cat in the sun.

"Hey yourself," Kurt replied, kicking his feet up and down. He followed Sebastian through the room with his eyes. He was feeling warm and drowsy, and very pleased with the outcome of the evening.
"I think you can stop worrying now. They love you." He looked at Sebastian with heavy-lidded eyes and ran a finger over his lips. God, red wine was worse than Tequilla in some ways!

Sebastian smiled at the sultry look Kurt was giving him. His boyfriend really was unfairly sexy.

Still, he couldn’t help the jolt of doubt in the back of his mind at Kurt’s words.

"You think so? It wasn’t too much?" he asked, picking at the bottom of his t-shirt.

Kurt pushed himself up on his elbows and frowned as he considered it. "No. I don’t think so. You were natural." He grinned. "I think you had him when you invited him to the craft beer fair in New York."

He shook his head a little as he thought about the pleased look on his dad's face. Of course Kurt was going to have to go with them to make sure his dad didn’t drink too much because of his heart condition, but it would still be a great bonding opportunity for him and Sebastian.

"And I think Carole was already convinced the moment you said hello." He winked.

Sebastian blushed.

"I like them...Carole is...really something." Sebastian smiled at the thought of her. "When ever I used to picture having a mom...it was always someone like her."

He shook his head. "Sorry. I’m being stupid." He wandered over to the bed and sat down next to Kurt, stretching his legs out in front of himself.

Kurt swallowed hard, his buzz fading a little. He reached out and took Sebastian's hand.

"That’s not stupid."

He paused, deliberating. "When I was...younger...I used to pretend Julie Andrews was my mom." He bit his lip. "And now I can’t remember what my mom’s voice really sounded like."

Sebastian bit his lip and looked at a Kurt a little sadly. He had no memories of his mother at all. For Kurt to know he must have had some but had them fade was somehow worse.

"I’m sorry." He squeezed Kurt’s hand. "I didn’t mean to bring you down."

Kurt shook his head. "You didn’t. I’m okay." He sat up. "I had a good day today."

Sebastian smiled. "Me too. And you…" He raised Kurt’s hand to his lips. "You look positively edible, babe." He playfully nibbled Kurt's knuckle to prove his point.

Kurt snorted. "Well, I ate so much I’m probably 80% steak," he joked, letting himself drop back into the bed.

Sebastian grinned and moved in over him to kiss under Kurt’s jaw. He lightly bit into the skin and sucked it, running his tongue over the spot. "Mmm, tasty," he said with a cheeky grin.

He moved his face lower to mouth over the scar on Kurt’s neck, grinning at his reaction. *Works every time,* he thought smugly to himself.

Kurt sighed. It was very tempting to give in to Sebastian’s kisses, but as he opened his eyes and looked up to the ceiling over his bed, memories of lying there with Blaine resurfaced, of times they had done exactly that. Suddenly Kurt knew this wasn’t what he wanted. He longed to make new
memories.

"Ah, enough," he whispered, putting a hand on the back of Sebastian’s neck and gently drawing him away.

Sebastian looked at him questioningly.

"You made so much delicious food for me today I need a bit of a work-out before you kiss me to sleep," he joked. With a push of his hands, he rolled Sebastian over onto his back and sat up, straddling Sebastian’s legs.

Sebastian grinned up at his boyfriend. "I wasn’t exactly trying to kiss you to sleep babe," he teased. "But this works too." He felt the excitement stir inside him as Kurt’s weight pushed him into the mattress. He loved it when Kurt took control.

"Oh, I know," Kurt said, looking down on him and contemplating what to do. Sebastian’s kisses had made him far from sleepy. Suddenly, he remembered walking in on Sebastian making breakfast that morning, and he knew what he wanted.

With a sly smile, he leaned down to kiss Sebastian’s lips. As his boyfriend tried to pull Kurt down on top of him, Kurt warded off his hands and pinned his wrists on either side of Sebastian’s face.

"My room, my bed - my rules," he whispered playfully, kissing Sebastian again with more force.

‘Oh fuck,’ Sebastian moaned. Kurt’s words went straight to his cock and he felt it harden immediately. He moaned into the kiss and half-heartedly tried to free his hands from Kurt’s grip. Kurt held on tightly. Excitement coursed through him and he thrust his hips up reflexively.

Kurt pressed down into Sebastian, rolling his hips. "I’ve wanted to do this since this morning," he said, his voice a little rough. "What were you thinking dancing around like that in my dad’s house?"

He didn’t give Sebastian any time to reply, but kissed him again. He had never actually had sex under his dad’s roof, but Sebastian wasn’t leaving him any choice.

Sebastian moaned into the kiss and let out a broken whimper. He tugged against Kurt’s hands again, excitement and arousal coursing through him. "I was just dancing," he panted. ‘Oh yes, please Kurt, please…’ he switched languages mid-sentence as Kurt rolled his hips down again.

Kurt looked down at his boyfriend, lust coursing through him. It still amazed him that he could reduce Sebastian to a shivering wreck without actually doing anything. Sebastian clearly liked this, liked having him in control, calling the shots. It did wonders for Kurt’s ego.

"Please what?" he asked, bending down to whisper in Sebastian’s ear. He grazed his boyfriend’s earlobe with his teeth. "What do you want baby?"

Sebastian closed his eyes and whimpered. "You…" he moaned. "I’ll do anything, I just want you."

Kurt’s hips faltered and he pressed his face into Sebastian’s shoulder at the onslaught of images that filled his mind. "God Bas, you’re so hot," he moaned. "All I kept thinking about all day was bending you over that kitchen counter…"

"Yes," Sebastian whispered. "Oh yes…I want that. I want you to fuck me till I can’t walk straight." He tugged his hands again. "Let me touch you, please let me touch you. I’ll get you ready."

"Oh god, yes," Kurt let out, arousal sparking by the way Sebastian did not hide his desire for him. There was no false modesty between them. He knew without having to ask again that this was what
he really wanted. That didn’t mean he couldn’t tease him a little, though, (and he was definitely filing Sebastian’s reaction to being pinned like this away for a later time when they were back in New York).

Kurt grinned and held Sebastian’s hands for a second longer before finally releasing his boyfriend. He was rewarded by Sebastian practically ripping his t-shirt off his body and flipping them over so that he was hovering above Kurt.

Sebastian quickly pulled off his own t-shirt and discarded both on the floor. He bent down and started kissing down Kurt’s chest, running his tongue over his nipples, flicking them playfully before licking down in one fluid movement until he reached the waistband of Kurt’s pyjama pants.

He hooked his fingers inside and tugged them down Kurt’s legs, taking in the glorious sight that was his naked boyfriend. He didn’t think he’d ever get tired of that image.

His mouth watering, he ran the flat of his tongue up Kurt’s length before sinking his mouth over head and swallowing him down in one go.

"Oh Bas," Kurt moaned, trying to still his hips as they reflexively bucked up into the wet heat of his boyfriend’s mouth.

Sebastian shook his head and looked up at Kurt. He slid his hands under Kurt’s ass and pushed upwards, silently indicating to Kurt what he wanted.

Kurt swallowed hard. It seemed Sebastian wanted to continue their little game a bit more. He lifted himself up on his elbow to look at his boyfriend, winding his fingers into Sebastian’s hair, and started thrusting upwards, holding Sebastian’s head down.

Sebastian tightened his hands on Kurt’s backside and breathed out hard through his nose as he came up for air, but he didn’t try to pull away. If anything, he was sinking down further, taking in Kurt as deep as he could. It looked and felt amazing. After a while Kurt’s biceps was beginning to tremble from holding himself up. At the next breath, he gently lifted Sebastian’s head a little and nodded for him to take a short break.

"Lie down," he said, his voice catching. "I want to do you, too."

Sebastian moaned and pressed his face into Kurt’s pelvis. He kissed the skin there for a moment before getting up. He quickly took off his clothes and settled himself down on the middle of the bed, looking up at Kurt with a grin.

Kurt waited for Sebastian to make himself comfortable and then knelt over him facing his feet, resting his knees on either side of Sebastian’s head and his hands next to Sebastian’s hips. He waited for Sebastian to take him into his mouth again, testing the angle, and shifted a little. Then, guided by Sebastian’s hands, he slowly started thrusting, and bent down to take Sebastian into his mouth as well.

It was a bit of a challenge. He knew what Sebastian liked, but upside down like this, with Sebastian doing some very distracting things to him in return, Kurt decided to skip tricks and finesse and just take him in as far as he could in time with his thrusts.

Sebastian closed his eyes and gave into the feeling of being surrounded and engulfed by Kurt. He kept his hands on Kurt’s hips so that he could help control the pace, but other than that, he just relaxed and went along for the ride.

When he felt Kurt’s fingers slip down to brush over his entrance, he stretched out his legs in reflex,
spreading them wide. His foot hit the headboard painfully and he let out a muffled groan against Kurt’s groin.

"What was that?" Burt asked, frowning and looking up at the ceiling.

"What?" Carole asked, coming back in from the kitchen.

Burt shrugged. "Sounded like something fell over upstairs," he mumbled. "I thought they were going to sleep."

"I am sure they will...at some point," Carole said, giving him a meaningful look.

Burt made a face. "Come on, Carole. That’s not - I don’t think-"

Kurt pressed his fingers against Sebastian again, softly tapping the ring of muscle.

Sebastian kicked out his foot again, and pushed Kurt’s hips up a little so that he could retract and gasp for air. "Oh god," he sobbed. "Please...I want you so bad..."

"There it was again. Did you hear it?" Burt said, shifting in his seat.

"No, I didn’t. Maybe it was something outside?" Carole said innocently.

Kurt smiled and kept his mouth on Sebastian as he swung his leg over him, kneeling down on the mattress beside Sebastian. With only one thing to concentrate on, it was easier. He finished up slowly, swirling his tongue around as he pulled up and using his lips to create a slow dragging friction.

Sebastian was trembling by now. Kurt gave him a final open-mouthed kiss around the head of his dick and then got up to walk to his suitcase. Whatever lube might still be in the nightstand was probably dried up by now. He returned with a travel-sized pump bottle, set it down beside the bed, and squeezed some into his palm. Sebastian had settled back against the pillows and was watching his every move.

With a small, devious smile, Kurt took hold of himself, thrusting into his hand as he looked into Sebastian’s eyes, making him wait. Before he could take it too far, he stopped, tightening his hand and closing his eyes, concentrating on pushing down his need to climax. He felt himself back down from the edge and let go, taking some more lube to spread on his fingers.

Kurt made a small gesture to the side with his head, gesturing for Sebastian to turn around. Sebastian did so right away, bracing himself on his hands and elbows, arching his back. It was clear he wasn’t interested in any more fooling around. Kurt used his fingertips to spread some of the lube around and into Sebastian’s hole and followed it up by pushing two slick fingers into him at once.

"Ohhhhhhh," Sebastian moaned and pressed back eagerly onto Kurt’s fingers. He felt as Kurt scissored his fingers, stretching him open, and he whined needily.

When Kurt massaged his prostate, Sebastian let out an high-pitched cry and started fucking himself
back onto Kurt’s hand.

- 

Burt looked at Carole. She could play dumb all she wanted, but he knew she had heard that.

"Shall we put the tv back on?" Carole suggested.

Burt sighed frustratedly. "But they’re-!"

"Young and in love?" Carole finished. "Please, Burt, give them a break."

"They’re certainly not giving me one," Burt said grumpily, and took up the remote.

- 

"More, Kurt please. I need more," Sebastian begged.

Kurt bit back a moan himself and added a third - and for the first time, a fourth finger. The resultant noise that came out of his boyfriend was animalistic and Kurt had to grip himself again to stop himself from coming.

He was moving his hand in and out of Sebastian at a fast pace, causing Sebastian to let out a rapid stream of moans and noises.

"Fuck me, Kurt. Please, fuck me," Sebastian begged. His hands were gripping the back of the headboard, his face buried into his arm. "I need to feel you."

Kurt nodded to himself, biting his bottom lip. He could hardly wait either. He knelt behind Sebastian and planted one foot down on the bed, raising himself just a little higher than Sebastian, and took hold of himself to slide the tip of his erection over and around Sebastian’s entrance. He waited for Sebastian to reach down and cup himself - a thing he did when Kurt entered him, if their position allowed it, as if to hold himself out of the way and concentrate only on what Kurt was going to do.

Then, he lined up and pushed inside, gripping Sebastian’s hips with both hands. He started thrusting fast and shallow, mimicking the movement of his hand from before, and using his hold on Sebastian’s hips to stop him from pushing back further. He didn’t want it to be over too soon, and they were only just getting warmed up.

As he heard Sebastian’s sighs of frustration turn into moans, he bottomed out without warning, slamming into him a few times. Sebastian cursed loudly, bracing himself. The bed hit the wall with a thud at every thrust. Kurt pulled almost all the way out again and swivelled his hips, picking up his shallow thrusts again.

- 

"This is unbearable," Burt muttered, upping the volume on the tv.

- 

"This is torture, " Sebastian panted. "Oh god, please...again..."

Kurt smiled. "I did tell you...I wanted a work-out...I’ve hardly...broken a sweat," he said, which was a lie, but he enjoyed the frustrated groan it wrought from Sebastian’s lips. He shifted on the bed, raising himself up a little more onto his foot, and placed his hands on Sebastian’s lower back to steady himself as he started thrusting in deeper, working slowly and irregularly, feeling the burn in
his thighs as he held himself up in a deep squat. A work-out indeed.

Sebastian’s broken moans mixed with the slamming of the headboard against the wall. They’d not done it this rough in a while and it was making his head spin. "Oh yes, right there," he moaned. "Ah ah ah ohhhh don’t stop!" He reached blindly behind him and Kurt locked his hand around his wrist, linking their arms. Sebastian leant up and offered Kurt his other hand as well, letting himself just hang forward. Kurt pulled his arms taut, using them as leverage for his thrusts. Sebastian rested his face down against the mattress.

He’d never felt so owned in his life. It was an intoxicating feeling. The new angle enabled Kurt to sink even deeper into him and Sebastian felt it all the way through his body. He felt like he was going to split apart in the best possible way.

"Yes! Yes, oh god, please…"

Burt muted the tv and put the remote down. The thumping was bad enough, but this? "Ok, that’s it. I’m gonna knock on their door and tell Kurt to stop being so-" he started angrily.

"Sit. Down." Carole said firmly. "You leave those boys alone, they’ve been through enough."

"But Carole-!" Burt protested, but he sunk back into the cushions. That was when they heard it.

"Oh, oh! OH KURT!"

Burt froze and looked at Carole. That had unmistakingly not been his son. Burt swallowed. The noise went on, and now that he paid attention, he could tell it was actually Sebastian. It had been him all along?

He tried to fight the smile that spread across his face but he couldn’t.

"Don’t you even think about it, Burt Hummel."

"I’m not saying anything-"

"No, but I know what you’re thinking. Just don’t."

She glared at her husband, reached for the remote and turned the tv up as loud as was bearable.

Kurt stood up, knees bent slightly and, moving his hands back to Sebastian’s hips, started slamming into his boyfriend at a punishing pace. Every now and then he’d stop and catch his breath or adjust his angle, taking them both a notch down right before they’d hit their climax. It was something they’d been experimenting with a little, with very satisfying results. Judging from the sounds Sebastian was making though, he wasn’t going to last long even if Kurt would stop altogether.

"K-Kurt," Sebastian panted brokenly. "I-I’m gonna c-ohhhhhhhhhhh!" He let out a long drawn-out moan as he came untouched, wave after wave of pleasure crashing over him.

He continued to push his hips back, meeting Kurt thrust for thrust, refusing to stop until Kurt came too.

Kurt felt Sebastian’s body tighten and lowered himself on top of him, covering his long body with his own. He slipped his arms under Sebastian’s chest, gripping his shoulders as his hips continued to
roll down against him. He mouthed at the side of Sebastian’s throat, sucking the skin between his
teeth.

"Go on," Sebastian encouraged him, and Kurt held him closer still as he let go and finally came deep
within him. He stifled the sound against Sebastian’s skin. He was pretty sure half the neighbourhood
already knew what they’d been doing, but under his dad’s roof, as a force of habit, he came quietly.

Sebastian’s body finally gave out and he slumped down into the mattress. Kurt’s solid weight on his
back was the only thing keeping him from floating away.

For a long while, Kurt didn’t want to move at all. Their chests rose and fell in sync as they both came
down from their high. Kurt peppered Sebastian’s shoulders with kisses, whispering words of praise
into his skin and Sebastian lapped it up.

After a while their position became too uncomfortable and Kurt pulled back slowly, collapsing on
the bed next to his boyfriend. The muscles in his legs ached and he knew he’d be sore tomorrow -
they’d definitely had their workout.


Kurt smiled back at him and leant forwards for a kiss. He held it for a moment before pulling back.

"Yeah, you were," he said, cheekily turning the compliment on him. To Kurt, being allowed to do
this; being welcomed and begged to do this, was still hard to believe. In his secret fantasies, he’d
always been a good lover. It was very satisfying to know he actually could be one in real life, given
the chance.

He shivered and made himself get up before they’d get too cold. "I’ll be right back with a warm cloth
and a towel," he promised, squeezing Sebastian’s hand before letting go, and quickly tiptoed to the
bathroom.

As he passed the staircase, he could hear his parents downstairs. The television was turned up loud.
Kurt smirked. He was pretty sure they’d been overheard; no small wonder with the noise Sebastian
had been making. Instead of feeling embarrassed, he felt a little giddy with pride. Yes, he was that
good at what he did.

Kurt quickly washed himself and rinsed his mouth, and then grabbed an extra towel and wet a cloth
for Sebastian, eager to return the favour of aftercare that he loved so much when Sebastian did it for
him.

As he came back into his room, Sebastian still lay exactly as he had left him. Kurt smiled fondly.

"Hey," he greeted him, brushing the hair from his forehead and kissing him there. He rearranged his
boyfriend’s sluggish limbs and began wiping him down.

"I think my parents heard us," he said quietly.

Sebastian laughed. "Babe, I think there are people in Africa who heard us."

Kurt smirked a little. "Well, you were rather loud..." He hesitated. "I mean, I love it when you do
that. But...it might get a little awkward in the morning. My dad..."

Sebastian sighed and rolled over, facing his boyfriend. "Let your dad think what he wants, Kurt. No
parent wants to hear their kid have sex. But it’s his problem, not ours. We’re adults, and he needs to
deal with that. I just had the best sex of my life...I don’t care who heard us."
Kurt half-smiled at him and settled himself down into Sebastian’s arms, discarding the wash cloth on the floor. "You’re right. Maybe I’m worrying over nothing."

Sebastian kissed Kurt softly. "I love you Kurt. I love everything about you, including all the wonderful things you can do to me," he winked. "I will never be ashamed of us."

Kurt couldn’t express how much Sebastian’s words meant to him; how it soothed old wounds in his soul and gave him more proof that it was really going to be different this time.

"Me neither," he whispered, his voice wrought with emotion.

Sebastian heard the emotion in Kurt’s voice and pulled him closer, kissing him again. "Kurt?" He whispered against Kurt’s lips.

"I'm okay," Kurt reassured him quickly. "I am just happy." He didn't want to weigh down yet another evening with his emotional baggage.

Partly to brush it off, and partly because Sebastian's words were starting to get through to him now, Kurt added: "So...best sex you ever had, huh?"

Sebastian chuckled and kissed him again, forcing his leg between Kurt’s and reeling him in closer.

"Most definitely." He sighed against Kurt’s lips. "And something we have to try again!"

He closed his eyes, trying to fight the wave of exhaustion crashing over him.

"And I will continue to shower you with praise for your excellent skills..." he kissed him again, finding Kurt’s lips blindly. "...in the morning."

Kurt raised an eyebrow and pulled back a little.

"You’ve completely tired me out," Sebastian said with a grin, opening his eyes briefly to throw Kurt a flirtatious glance. "And I would really, really like to sleep."

Kurt could feel a glow starting to burn inside that his rational mind immediately rejected as juvenile, but he couldn't resist giving in to: He, Kurt Hummel, had given Sebastian 'I have done everything you can think of and more, twice, in Paris, before your sixteenth birthday' Smythe the best sex he’d ever had. If that wasn't an ego boost, he didn't know what was.

"Ah, your lips say one thing but the rest of you..." Kurt teased, running his hands down Sebastian’s sides. He kissed him and gave him a firm hug. "Sleep, then. But not like this-" he slipped a hand down Sebastian's butt and squeezed it, "unless you want me to wake you for round two in an hour or so." Kurt kissed him again before disentangling his legs and giving him a pointed look.

Sebastian raised his eyebrow sleepily and attempted a smirk. "Tempting," he mumbled, but then he kissed Kurt, let him go, and rolled over to his side of the bed. He reached out under the sheets and found Kurt’s hand.

"I love you," Sebastian whispered into the darkness.

'I love you too,' Kurt replied, his last thought before drifting into to sleep being how it sounded even better in French.
"Bas...Bas....Sebastian. Do you want breakfast?" Kurt stroked his boyfriend’s forehead with the back of his hand as he tried to wake his sleeping form. He had let Sebastian sleep in while he showered and got dressed, but now he really wanted to go downstairs. Kurt was famished. He sat down on the bed and kissed Sebastian's naked shoulder.

Sebastian heard Kurt's voice as if from far away and let it pull him from sleep. He blinked awake and looked sleepily at Kurt.

"He wasn't kidding when he said I tired him out," Kurt mused, smiling down at him.

"Shall I go down on my own?" he asked quietly.

"Hmm?" Sebastian asked rubbing a hand over his eyes.

Kurt caressed Sebastian's hair. It was sticking out a little wildly and made him even more appealing. Kurt smiled fondly as he remembered why it looked so messy today.

"I asked if you wanted to come down for breakfast. But it’s okay, you can go back to sleep.” He winked at Sebastian, who was clearly still grappling to catch up. He leaned over and kissed his boyfriend's forehead.

He rose and smoothed down his jeans. Time to face the music - and possibly two embarrassed parents. Kurt closed his bedroom door behind him and went down the stairs. He put on a pleasant smile and walked in to the kitchen.

Carole sat at the kitchen table reading a magazine and glanced up at him as he approached.

"Morning," he said smiling at her.

"Good morning sweetheart," she said setting the magazine down. "There is a fresh pot of coffee if
you want some.”

Kurt nodded and went to the cupboard to get himself a mug. He looked around.

"Where’s my dad?” he asked, returning to the kitchen table.

Carole smiled. "He was up early, and went to the bakery. He said he wanted to see if they had croissants.” She beamed at Kurt. "That was his own idea.”

Kurt’s jaw fell open. "Really? That’s...so sweet of him,” he said, touched by the gesture.

"He still feels really bad about Friday, you know,” Carole said softly.

Kurt bit his lip. "I know.” He poured himself a cup of coffee from the pot on the table. He wrapped his hands around it and took a sip, letting the warm caffeine flow through his veins and wake him up. They’d already said everything there was to say about that. Still, if his dad wanted to buy croissants as a peace-offering, he was not going to say no.

"There’s this bakery down the street from NYU that does great croissants,” he said conversationally. "We sometimes get them for our friends when we...hang out. Sebastian said the taste is all in the kind of butter they use.”

Carole smiled. "I hope Lima can keep up. I told Burt to go to the one by the bus station. I like their pastries a lot. Of course, I’ve never had a real French croissant...”

"I’m sure Bas will love them, thank you,” Kurt assured her.

"We have strawberry jam in the pantry, which I th-”

"Ah, umm...sorry...Bas is allergic to strawberries,” Kurt said apologetically.

"Oh the poor dear,” Carole said getting up. "I think we have some marmalade as well.”

Kurt smiled at her. "That’ll be great, thank you.”

Carole nodded and headed into the pantry.

Kurt looked after her and took another sip of his coffee. It was weird. He had expected to find his parents annoyed or uncomfortable in the wake of his and Sebastian’s nightly activities. The reality, whilst refreshing, was a little unnerving.

"Here we are!” Carole said returning to the room and holding up a jar of marmalade. Kurt smiled at her.

"Um...Carole, I’m sorry if...we were a bit loud last night,” he said, his cheeks tingling red.

"Oh hon, it’s fine, we were all young and in love once…” she smiled at him. "I’m so happy you’ve found each other Kurt, he really is lov-”

Just then, the sound of the front door opening and closing rang through the house, followed by a happy whistling sound. Carole sighed and threw Kurt an apologetic look. Kurt frowned at her sudden change in mood, but he didn’t have to wait long to find out what it was about.

"There he is!” Burt greeted happily, brandishing a brown paper bag. "Good morning, son.”

"Um...morning, dad…” Kurt said a little stunned. This was not what he had been expecting at all.
“Burt, why don’t you put the breakfast on the table? We can wait until Sebastian comes down to eat,” Carole said.

“Oh no,” Kurt said shaking his head. "We really don’t have to. He might not be up for a while.”

Burt snorted and Carole shot him a look.

Kurt frowned. "He works so hard during the week with school and shifts at the club, Sunday is our lie-in day. I’m only up because I was hungry,” he explained.

"Yeah, I bet you are,” Burt said smugly.

"Burt!”

Kurt looked between them.Carole was glaring at his dad in a silent warning. Burt was currently beaming at his son with...pride.

Suddenly, it dawned on Kurt why, and immediately he felt irritated on his boyfriend's behalf. He decided to get his dad to admit it out loud so he'd see how ridiculous it was.

"I’m sorry if we were loud last night…” he prompted.

Burt snorted again. "Loud...Jesus, Kurt, that’s a mild way to put it. I thought someone had broken in. What the hell did you do to him?” He winked.

Kurt felt his stomach drop, his suspicions confirmed.

"Oh my god, what didn’t I do to him?” he sighed, mock-exhaustedly, putting his coffee down and stretching his back leisurely. Then he let his face grow serious and he sat up. "The question is, why are you so damn pleased about it?” He crossed his arms over his chest.

"Now, come on, Kurt," Burt backpaddled, "if your boyfriend is gonna be that loud while other people are in the house, you have to consider-

"And if it had been me that was loud?” Kurt cut him off. "Would you have been standing here beaming at Sebastian, patting him on the back for a job well done? Or is our sexlife only cause for celebration when your son is the man in the bedroom?"

Burt shut his mouth at once, feeling as though Kurt had slapped him. Shame washed over him as the realisation of Kurt’s words hit him. He remembered how he had been ready to barge into the room when he had thought it was Kurt. It was a sobering thought. After all these years, he thought he’d become pretty understanding of ‘the gay thing’. But here, again, was proof that actually Burt Hummel had no freakin’ idea.

"I’m sorry, Kurt,” he mumbled, embarrassed. "I didn’t mean - I know you’re both - You are both men. I know that.” He shrugged awkwardly. "I guess...hearing what Blaine did to you, maybe I was just happy that Sebastian was different. Less…” He shook his head, unsure how to say it without making things worse. "Not less. I just mean, he can’t park….He cooks, he sits in your lap and he sings songs about being a woman:”

"Sebastian identifies as a man, dad,” Kurt said tersely. "And so do I. Even if we might do or say things that seem girly to you. I thought you knew that by now.”

"I thought I did,” Burt confessed. "But I guess I let my prejudices get the better of me.”
Kurt nodded. There was no enjoyment to be found in finding out he'd been right.

"I'm sorry you had to hear us," he offered. It was the best he could do. "But I'm not sorry for living my life the way I do. The way you raised me; as a responsible adult with a loving, long-term partner," he glanced at Carole with a small smile before driving the lesson home, "who, incidentally, just as frequently makes me beg and scream for more. And I will not apologise for enjoying that, even if it makes you uncomfortable."

Burt bit his lip and nodded dolefully. He sat down in a chair and took his cap off. "I know. And you shouldn’t have to, either. I am the one who should apologise. I know I still have a lot to learn, but it’s not your job to be my teacher. You should just be you."

He paused and offered his son a smile.

"I'm happy you’ve found someone who loves you the way you deserve."

"Thank you," Kurt said, acknowledging his father's effort. He already felt a little sorry for baiting him, but at the same time, this little follow-up of their sex talk had been long overdue.

Twenty minutes later Sebastian walked into the kitchen fully dressed.

"Morning," he greeted the family as he walked over to the table. He touched Kurt's shoulder as he passed and sat down next to him.

"Sorry I slept in."

"Not at all, darling," Carole said cheerfully. "That's what weekends are for. Kurt already told us you usually have early classes."

Kurt had his mouth full, but took Sebastian's hand and squeezed it softly. He knew his dad wouldn't be inappropriate anymore now, so Sebastian could have breakfast in peace.

As if he had read Kurt's mind, Burt kept his words to a very simple "Good morning, Sebastian."

Sebastian smiled at him. Carole poured him some coffee.

"Thanks," Sebastian said.

"Not at all dear," Carole said fondly. "Help yourself to food, there’s plenty of it."

"Thank you." He looked over the table. "Oohhh Croissants!" he exclaimed excitedly, reaching for one, holding it up to breathe in the scent before biting into it with relish.

Kurt watched him, smiling brightly at the simple pleasure his boyfriend found in good food.

"Burt picked them up from the bakery this morning." Carole said fondly. "They’re probably not half as good as the ones in Paris...or even New York but—"

Sebastian shook his head and stopped her. He finished chewing and swallowed. "They’re great, thank you so much. You didn’t have to go to the trouble."

"It’s no trouble at all, son," Burt said, shaking his head. He still felt ashamed for his earlier thoughts. Sebastian smiled at him and reached for the marmalade.
"Do you have any plans for today?" Carole asked conversationally.

Kurt wiped his lips on a napkin and put it down. "Not really, I think?"

The morning was almost over, but they had the rest of the day to relax before packing their things for their drive back the next day.

"We could go to the mall," Kurt suggested. "Summer clearance sales should still be on…? It’s about the only thing there is to do in this town."

"Hey now," Burt objected, "Lima is not that bad! There’s...we have...well, there’s plenty to do, right Carole?"

"Summer sales do sound tempting," Carole said with a smile. "I could use a few new things, and Kurt knows my colours."

Kurt beamed.

"I don’t think I ever actually went to the mall here," Sebastian mused.

"You didn’t miss much," Kurt said. "But rummaging through the sales is always fun."

"If you say so, babe."

"You’re not much of a shopper?" Burt asked, trying hard to keep his tone neutral.

Sebastian shrugged. "I don’t mind it. The girls usually drag me along because I’ll tell them my honest opinion on something, but now that we have Kurt for that, I tend to just hold the bags."

"But you look pretty doing it." Kurt grinned at him, stroking his hair back. Sebastian smirked.

Burt shook his head a little. He still didn’t fully understand the two of them, but maybe he didn’t have to.

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"...so this guy, on his seventh tequila, is convinced that he knows Sebastian from TV, and he keeps asking him, does he know Bruce Willis? Is he friends with Will Smith? What’s Scarlett Johansson like off-set?"

And Sebastian's stories get more and more ridiculous; he's telling this guy that he used to be on American Idol and that Nicole Kidman's his aunt -" Kurt tells Carole and Burt, almost unable to get the words out from laughing.

"And he’s like, yeah, yeah I can see the resemblance..." Sebastian adds, chuckling and squeezing Kurt's hand. There was a myriad of hilarious drunk-guy stories from the bar to fill any conversation, and some of them were even family-friendly.

Carole shook her head. "Well, he does look like a moviestar," she said to Kurt, loud enough for Sebastian to hear.

Kurt beamed. They were walking through the mall hand in hand, the both of them framed by Carole and Burt.

"I hope that most of them can handle their drink when they come to the bar," Burt commented. He'd been smiling throughout their stories, but Kurt could tell the cogs in his mind were turning.
"They do, dad. And we have bouncers and security, and a panic button under the bar. It's perfectly safe," Kurt assured him.

"Blaine got far enough," Burt mumbled.

"And he's blacklisted now," Kurt said decisively. "We handled it."

They reached a large department store. This was where they'd split up; Kurt and Carole wanted to check out the summer clearance, and Sebastian had agreed to join Burt on his hunt for a new fishing rod. Kurt hoped it gave the two of them some more time to talk. They'd all meet again at the store, figuring Kurt and Carole would need more time than the others would.

"Try not to buy the whole shop babe," Sebastian said fondly, laying a brief kiss on Kurt’s lips. "My car isn’t big enough."

"Ha ha," Kurt said dryly but smirked. "Don’t let my dad stop for food. No matter what he says, he can wait for lunch."

"Sure thing babe."

He backed away from his boyfriend with a wink and joined Burt. The two of them watched as Kurt and Carole entered the shop before turning about and headed in the direction of elevator.

Kurt found a few things to try on almost immediately, and nipped into a booth while Carole rummaged through the clearance baskets just outside the changing rooms.

He came out to show her a few of the items, often just in time to stop her from picking up a hideous fashion disaster. ("Honestly Carole, have I taught you nothing?")

When he came back to show her a deep red henley that left his collar bones exposed (which he couldn’t wait to show Sebastian - it was like a written invitation that said 'hiccys here'), he saw her walk briskly to a corner of the shop. Figuring she might have seen something interesting, he made to follow her, only to press himself into a rack of summer dresses when he saw where she was going.

"Are you following us around?" Carole demanded angrily.

"What? Me? I'm just,- I, eh...I'm shopping!" Blaine exclaimed. He looked nervous and pale, and Kurt could tell his nose was healing slightly crooked.

"At the children’s section?" Carole bit back. She leered menacingly and looked him over. "Well, it fits."

Blaine looked at Carole, feeling stung. He'd never heard her speak with that tone of voice before. It made him uneasy...How much did she know?

He plastered a charming smile on his face and greeted her, smoothing over his previous fumble.

"Actually, I was looking for something for my cousin’s son. I lost a bet with him yesterday about who could eat the most jelly beans in a minute and...well, he won." There, that sounded plausible. "I was thinking a bowtie, wouldn’t that be cute? Then I saw you with K-Kurt and thought I’d come and say hi."

Carole stared at him. Had he always been this full of shit? How had she never seen it before?

"Well," she said, trying not to lose her temper. "I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to ‘say hi’,
Blaine. Kurt doesn’t want to see you, and after what he has told me about you, I sure as hell don’t want you anywhere near my family.” Her last words came out as a growl. So much for not losing her temper.

"Well," Blaine said amiably, "sometimes Kurt says no, but actually-

Carole's eyes flashed dangerously. "No means no, Blaine. Under every circumstance," she reminded him. "Though I have been told you already had a hard time understanding that in high school."

Blaine's eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about?"

"I think you know," Carole replied grimly.

In his hideout, Kurt bit his lip and swallowed, feeling slightly sick.

"Look, I don't know what kind of lies Kurt has been telling you about me, but he's just trying to vilify me to justify his new relationship!" Blaine protested. "Deep down he knows how messed up it is. Kurt hated Sebastian when we were in school!"

Kurt paled. Please don't tell her, he wished fervently.

"You're a fine one to speak about lying, Blaine Anderson," Carole snapped. The things you told Burt about Sebastian! He nearly threw that poor boy out of our house!"

"He did?" Blaine asked eagerly.

"I said he almost did," Carole said, catching Blaine’s eagerness. "Thankfully he held off long enough for Sebastian to explain."

"But Carole, you can’t believe anything that comes out of that guy’s mouth!" Blaine said desperately. "He’s been manipulating Kurt and poisoning him against me. He’s using him, making Kurt sell his body to make money...he’s turned him into a sl-"

"Do not finish that sentence!" Carole said, stepping towards Blaine dangerously. "I will not stand here listening to any more of your lies. And you can call me Mrs. Hummel."

"But Ca- Mrs. H! He broke my nose!" Blaine whined.

"From what I hear, you’re lucky that’s all he did."

"I can’t believe you’re taking his word over mine! You don’t even know him! You’ve know me for years!"

"No Blaine, I don't think I ever knew you at all," Carole replied coldly. "I’ve only known Sebastian for a couple of days and in that short space of time he’s proven that he’s twice the man you will ever be."

Blaine shook his head. Things were slipping beyond his control and he wasn’t sure how to deal with it. "I love Kurt," he offered weakly. "We’re soulmates."

"If you loved Kurt, you wouldn't have cheated on him. And I don't care what you have to say about Sebastian anymore. I can see with my own eyes that he loves Kurt, and that Kurt loves him."

"He’s just confused. We're going to get married, whether you like it or-" Blaine started, but the look in Carole's eyes stopped him.
"You will never come near my son ever again, do you hear me?" Carole said in a low voice, hatred lacing each syllable. "He is happy and loved and you will do nothing to jeopardise that."

Blaine’s emotions short-circuited, and he fell back into the only outlet he knew: anger.

"Oh come on, Mrs. Hummel," Blaine said loudly, his eyes flashing. "We all know Kurt isn’t actually your son. You’re just over-compensating for the fact that you don’t have Finn anymore." He pointed at his own chest, then at hers. "I love Kurt and you have no authority over him. You can’t stop me. He is mine, whether any of you like it or not!"

Carole didn’t need to think twice. She slapped Blaine hard in the face, the impact nearly knocking him off his feet. "Kurt is my son!" she yelled angrily, tears welling in her eyes. "And don’t you dare - don’t you dare imply otherwise. I swear to god, I will -"

"Shhh, Carole, it's okay," Kurt said quietly, appearing by her side and wrapping her in his arms. He hadn't wanted Blaine to know he was there, but he had gone too far now. As soon as Blaine had spoken, he'd come running - though not fast enough to stop Carole from hitting Blaine. If she hadn't, Kurt was fairly sure he would have done it himself.

Carole covered her face in her hands and started crying against Kurt’s chest; frustration, adrenaline and grief finally taking their toll.

Kurt looked at Blaine over her head. His ex was looking shocked. A large angry red blotch was burning on the side of his face. "Kurt..." he let out, at a loss for words.

"I never want to see you again," Kurt said. "If you come anywhere near me or my family, I will get a restraining order against you."

Kurt's phone buzzed. Without taking his eyes off Blaine, Kurt answered. "Bas?...Yes, we're done here," he said, the sound of Sebastian’s voice soothing him. "Yeah, we'll be right there. I love you."

He hung up the phone and gave Blaine a hard look. "For the sake of whatever I felt for you in the past, I am giving you ten seconds to get out of here. After that, I am letting my father and my boyfriend know what just happened." He left the rest of the threat open.

Blaine understood, and without saying another word, turned on his heels - and ran.

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Sebastian hung up the phone and turned to Burt. "They’re just about done."

Burt nodded and threw his empty wrapper in the bin, standing up. "Don’t tell Kurt about the pretzel,” he said to Sebastian.

"Wouldn’t dream of it, Burt," Sebastian said with a grin, and they headed back towards the store.

Burt shoved his hands in his pockets and grinned back at him. Even if he didn’t quite understand him, he was beginning to really like this kid.

They rounded the corner and saw Kurt and Carole standing just outside the entrance to the store. Kurt had his arms firmly around his stepmum, who was sobbing into his chest. Kurt had a shell-shocked expression on his face.

Both Sebastian and Burt went into overdrive and hurried forwards.
"What happened?" they both said at the same time.

At the sound of her husband’s voice, Carole broke away from Kurt and turned towards Burt’s arms. Sebastian stepped in and took Kurt’s face in between his hands, searching it for signs of hurt.

"Baby, what happened?" he said in a softer voice.

Kurt let out a deep breath and shook his head a little, releasing himself from Sebastian’s grip. He frowned.

"We ran into Blaine," he said. "Well, Carole did." He paused, and looked at his stepmom. "He wanted to tell her more lies, but she wouldn't have it." He sounded shaky, but awed at the same time. He could count the people who had stood up to Blaine on his account on three fingers. Finn. Sebastian. And Finn's mom. His mom.

"I told him to stay away from Kurt, and he said - he said-" Carole hugged Burt and whispered Blaine's words into his ear.

Kurt quietly repeated them for Sebastian as well.

"HE SAID WHAT?!" Burt roared.

"And then Carole slapped him in the face and he ran," Kurt finished the story quickly, hoping to de-escalate the situation.

"WHERE IS HE? I'LL FUCKING KILL HIM!" Burt roared. Sebastian agreed with Burt’s sentiments and spun around viciously, scanning the packed mall for a sign of Blaine.

"Burt, please," Carole said thickly. "He’s gone…it’s over. I don’t think we’ll see him again.”

"He better not show his face ever again!" Burt said angrily, still looking like he was hoping for a fight. People were starting to stare.

Sebastian could feel his heart racing. That deep burning hatred inside that had almost had the better of him at the club, was rekindled and threatening to consume him. He took Kurt’s hand in his and curled their fingers together. "Did he touch either of you?" he asked.

Kurt shook his head.

Sebastian breathed deeply, his eyes scanning the mall furiously for a sign of hair gel and a bowtie. As Kurt looked down on his and Sebastian’s hands, he noticed how tightly Sebastian was holding him. "He’s gone, Bas," he assured him. "I’m here. It’s okay.”

Burt watched over the top of Carole’s head as Kurt gently talked Sebastian down. The sight of Sebastian getting so worked up over the threat of someone hurting Kurt - and the way he calmed at Kurt’s words and touch, solidified his new found respect for Kurt’s boyfriend. He was everything Burt had ever hoped for his son.

Sebastian finally relaxed under Kurt’s reassurance and wrapped his arms around Kurt’s frame.

Kurt buried his face in Sebastian’s chest for a moment, reassuring himself that they really were okay. He then stepped away from Sebastian, squeezed his hand softly and let go, walking over to Carole.

"Carole, I'm so sorry. He had no right to talk to you like that. I know I can never replace Finn, but-"
"Kurt," she interrupted him sharply. "I know you heard what I said to Blaine. You are my son! I loved you before Finn died and I love you now, as you are. For you. You understand?"

"Yes, mom," Kurt replied, blinking away a single teardrop that coursed down his cheek.

Carole wiped it away with tears still in her own eyes and pulled Kurt into a tight hug. He was easily two foot taller than her, but in that moment, he felt like a little boy. Her little boy. She ran her hand through his hair and held him tight.

Eventually they broke apart and Carole smiled at him warmly.

"Now, why don’t we go have a Pretzel or something," she suggested.

"Sounds like a plan," Sebastian said, exchanging a small smile with Burt.

Burt nodded innocently.

Sebastian put an arm around Kurt’s waist, ignoring the glares this got him from a couple of people around them. After everything that had just happened, those people could shove it.

Kurt put his head on Sebastian's shoulder. He had never called Carole 'mom' before, but maybe it was about time.

- "What a weekend," Kurt said softly, his head resting on Sebastian’s chest. After returning from the mall, they’d had a quiet dinner and had retired early to watch Netflix in Kurt’s room, giving Carole and Burt some privacy. Now, the end credits of a film were rolling over the screen. Kurt had slept through half of it, the short nights and emotions finally taking their toll.

Sebastian smiled down at him and ran his hands through Kurt’s hair, "It certainly has been," he said. "A good one though, overall I think."

"Yes," Kurt agreed, closing his eyes to concentrate on Sebastian's touch. "For the first time in...maybe four or five years, I feel I can be completely honest with my father."

Of course, there was the matter of his and Sebastian's shared past, but that no longer pressed on his mind, so he didn't need to tell his dad.

Sebastian kissed the top of Kurt’s head. "I’m glad," he said softly. "I can see what you meant about him now. You’re lucky to have him."

"Mmm..." Kurt murmured sleepy. "It was me and him against the world for a long time. If he hadn't stood up for me at school, I am not sure I would have made it."

He paused. "And now I have you, too. And you have us."

Sebastian smiled softly. "I’m so glad we got another chance," he whispered. "It was pure coincidence that you walked into Satire that night. Of all the bars you could have gone to in New York City, the one you chose happened to be mine. And I’m so glad you did. It changed my life...I can’t imagine my life without you."

Kurt smiled, opening his eyes and shifting a little to look at him. "You don't have to," he said. "I'm not going anywhere."

A thought struck him and he smirked. "And I have a double threat backing me up if you wanna
make a run for it. If you thought my dad was scary, you should have seen the way Carole slapped Blaine."

Sebastian let out a chuckle. "I wish I could have.” He was sure it had been satisfying.

"But I’m not going anywhere either...I want everything with you, Kurt; I want us to find somewhere to live together, I want us to adopt a puppy or two and settle into our careers. I want marriage and kids, birthdays and Christmases. I want the good days and the bad days and the boring days in between...I want all of them, every single one - with you.”

For a moment, Kurt was at a loss for words. Sebastian had told him all of this before, just after his break-up. Back then, he hadn’t been ready. But as Kurt took it all in, he realised that making plans for the future no longer scared him...because Sebastian would be there with him, every step of the way.

"Puppies and kids? Bit ambitious, babe,” Kurt teased. “And you forgot the matching sweaters." He hugged Sebastian closer. "I want that too," he added in a whisper, his eyes feeling heavy. “I wonder...where we’ll live...New York...Paris...?"

Sebastian smiled and kissed the top of Kurt’s head again. “Sleep, baby,” he whispered. “We have the rest of our lives to make plans.”

A smile settled on Kurt’s face as sleep curled around him from all sides. “Mmmkay,” he whispered before his body went lax and his breathing evened out.

Sebastian closed his eyes and rested his cheek on top of Kurt’s head. “I love you,” he whispered into the darkness. “And I always will.”

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*The sun goes down. The stars come out.*

*And all that counts is here and now.*

*My universe will never be the same,*

*I'm glad you came.*

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Chapter End Notes

“A Warbler reunion. Starchild. A road trip. An unexpected proposal...And a night at Satire that will change everything.”

GLAD YOU STAYED - COMING SUNDAY AUGUST 5th 2018
Glad You Stayed (preview)

Chapter Summary

The sequel to this story is now up! You can find it under "Glad You Stayed" - here's a little preview…

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Alex...are you okay?" Steph asked, looking at her boyfriend curiously.

He was staring at Kurt, who was finishing his third plate of ribs at Marc and Paul's table. They were sitting out on the private terrace under a glorious summer sun. Their whole group had been invited to celebrate the Fourth of July and the end of summer finals, Kurt’s summer showcase and Brody’s graduation. Everyone had finished eating by now except Kurt.

"Where does he put it all?" Alex mumbled in awe.

Steph frowned. "Like you didn't have three plates yourself," she chided him.

Alex shrugged. "Yeah, but I'm..." he gestured at himself, making a round motion with his hand. "And he's...!" He waved his hand down vertically.

Kurt looked up and blushed. "I can't help it," he mumbled. "It's all so delicious! I haven’t had anything that wasn't soy or steamed in weeks, and with all of these side dishes and sauces, I am pretty much in heaven."

Alice smiled fondly. "You sound like Seb."

"I'm glad you're all liking it. I can't take credit unfortunately," Marc said. "It's all Paul's. He won't even let me in the kitchen when he's cooking."

"You're right, I don't," Paul commented, crossing his arms over his chest. "Because you always try to eat everything before it's done. You're worse than the dogs." He moved the last of the garlic bread towards Kurt. "Help yourself, Kurt."

"I think I will, thank you," Kurt replied eagerly.

"Don’t forget that Kurt puts in more hours than the rest of us put together at the gym," Sebastian said, slipping Lola a piece of bread off his plate.

"That’s true!" Alice said.

"Mmm!" Kurt protested, putting a finger up, because he still had food in his mouth. He quickly finished chewing and added: "Right, I was gonna tell you, Alex. The NYADA gym opens for the public in summer because so many students are off on vacation. Their rates are pretty good and if you want to stay on when the semester starts you could get a discount through me..."

Alex smirked. "Is that a hint?"
Kurt licked his fingers. "If you want it to be," he replied. "The way I see it, the more calories you burn, the more pizza you can eat. That's really why I work out." He winked.

Alex grinned at him. "Thanks for the offer, but I try to avoid any kind of physical activity that resembles fitness..."

Steph rolled her eyes. "I might take you up on that Kurt...if the offer is extended?"

"Yes! Yes, of course, it's a mixed gym. I can send you the info," Kurt said, smiling happily. "The trainers aren't there in summer but I can help you get started if you like. I just told Alex because he said he wanted to, a few weeks ago."

Steph beamed at him.

Alex gave him a sheepish grin. "Ye--eah...saying something and doing it...worlds apart," he confessed.

Kurt smiled and helped himself to the rest of the garlic bread. One of Marc and Paul's dogs noticed he was the only one with food left on his plate and she came to nudge his knee. Kurt leaned down and gave her a stern look. "Lola, this is my food. I'm not such a pushover as uncle Bas."

Lola barked once and went over to Sebastian, putting her head in his lap and whining plaintively.

Sebastian chuckled and ruffled her head. "Did uncle Kurt refuse you food, baby girl?" He asked her, in a voice akin to one used when talking to toddlers.

He took a new potato from the dish in the centre of the table and held it up to her. She sat up straight and barked.

"Catch," he said, throwing it in air for her. Lola jumped up and caught the potato in her mouth.

"That's enough Seb," Marc said. "Or you can be on poop duty."

Sebastian grinned at him.

"Kurt," Alice called to him. "How was Ohio? We were all so busy with exams after that weekend, I feel like I've not seen you in forever."

Kurt smiled softly. "It was good. Mostly." He exchanged a glance with Sebastian. "My dad had a few...misconceptions about me and Bas, and Satire..." He offered Marc an apologetic look. "We cleared it up!" He added quickly. "It turned out Blaine had come to see him, filling his head with lies about us."

"And your dad believed him?" Alice let out, shocked.

Kurt shrugged awkwardly. "There was a lot he didn't know about Blaine. I hadn't exactly been honest with him." He reached for Sebastian's hand. "But we cleared the air between us, and Bas bribed my dad with crêpes and steak and pretzels." He winked.

He had known about the little deal between Sebastian and his dad from the moment the lady at the bakery asked if his dad wanted 'another one', but had kept his mouth shut to let them have their little secret.

"...and it was smooth sailing from there. Well, until Blaine showed up..."

Kurt and Sebastian braved the shocked faces of their friends and took turns talking, telling them
about the confrontation between Blaine and Carole in the mall.

Paul shook his head. "That boy seems very disturbed," he mumbled.

"He’s fucked up, that’s what he is," Marc added angrily. "I’d like to take that little punk and shove a broken bottle right up-"

"Marc."

Marc looked at his husband’s ‘not-in-front-of-the-children’ look and held up his hands in resignation.

"Where does his family stand in all of this?" Paul asked, looking at Kurt.

"Well," Kurt started, "I think he’s been twisting the narrative to his parents from the start, but...the day after we saw Blaine, his brother came to see us..."

Chapter End Notes

...to read the rest of this chapter, as well as 3 more (so far- we post every Sunday and Wednesday), please check out "Glad You Stayed"! See you there :-) 

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!